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Fragmented, Hybrid, and Diasporic Identities in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

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Abstract

The processes of cultural transformation in Britain in the second half of the 20th century, the fall of the Empire, immigration from former colonies and the expansion of the multiculturalism, have influenced new ways of looking at the conceptions of identity of diasporic subjects within Britain. Examining these experiences, diasporic novelists write about the second generation immigrants in contemporary Britain who accentuate hybrid existence and complex identities. Hanif Kureishi in *The Buddha of Suburbia* delineates the formation, the existence, the refashioning of the conceptions of cultural identities of predominantly the second generation immigrants, British born migrants of his own generation and the challenges

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the perceptions of such identities as essentialist and fixed concepts. The novel depicts a protagonist whose cultural identity is fragmented and far from homogeneous. London with its heterogeneous character is symbolized as a place of social encounter and cultural intermixture, a decentered place that stimulates the exploration of transnational models of identity. Kureishi's writing can be seen as an example of the fact that many conceptual binaries, such as centre and periphery, self and other, inside and outside, have been challenged and have given way to more mutable concepts of hybridity, transculturation, border lives and 'in-between' space.

Key Words: Hybrid, Diasporic Identities, Hanif Kureishi

During the second half of the twentieth century Britain has experienced a process of cultural transformation. This included the demise of the Empire, immigration from former colonies, and multiculturalism, respectively. The appearance of the British society has increasingly changed. In the postcolonial era, the notions of identity and national affiliation become indistinct, ambiguous and complex. "As London is 'colonized in reverse' by migrants from former colonies, it becomes a particularly complex contact zone where transcultural encounters exist" (Ball, 2004, p.15). In the period after the Second World War, Britain experienced the arrival of migrants from former colonized countries. These people came to Britain which, for many of them, symbolized the 'Mother Country', the old colonial centre that constituted opportunities for establishing new homes. The reasons for the migrants' arrival in Britain were varied. Some of them were recruited by the British government to solve labor shortages, for example West Indians who were employed in public services like transport and health care. Others arrived to gain education, or run away from economic or political difficulties that they faced in their native lands. A large number of migrants came to Britain to follow their family members who migrated before them in order to seek employment opportunities. The result of all these migrations is Britain that, at the turn of the millennium, boasts a diversity of diaspora communities that originate from various parts of the world, from locations such as Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean, among others (Ball, 2004, p. 14).

The diaspora communities became a recurrent and vivid part of the recent history in Britain. Robin Cohen (1997) describes them in his book *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* as groups of people who live together in one country and who “acknowledge that the ‘old country’ - a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore-always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions” (p. ix).

Migrancy and the experiences of diaspora communities have inspired recent postcolonial literature but also theoretical and critical writing. John McLeod (2000) asserts that postcolonial literature produced by what he calls ‘diaspora writers’ such as Buchi Emecheta, Amitav Gosh, Hanif Kureishi or Caryl Philips “has approved immensely popular in Western literary criticism” (p. 208). He also notes that the new possibilities that the experiences of migrancy and life in a diaspora engender, have been examined by the writing of theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, Avtar Brah, Paul Gilroy or Stuart Hall. In McLeod’s view “these possibilities include creating new ways of thinking about individual and communal identities, critiquing established schools of critical thought, and rethinking the relationships between literature, history and politics” (p. 208).

For this generation, cultural identification is a problematic concept. Whereas the generation of writers that precedes them has a rooted imagination of the notion of home and belonging, even after many years of dwelling in Britain, the second generation’s attempts to construct their cultural identities is much more troubled and problematic. They do not embrace the essentialist view of cultural affiliation but demonstrate a flexible relationship to concepts such as ‘home’, ‘nation’ or ‘culture’. The texts of these diasporic novelists are British but they are so in a specific way. They redress the notion of Britain and Britishness and redefine British literature. In his work, Hall views cultural identities as originating in history, “but insisting that ‘far from being externally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (as cited in Ball, 2004, p. 14). Hall argues that cultural identities must be understood as “‘unstable points of identification or suture’ and thus as processes of ‘positioning’ rather than ways of being” (as cited in Ball, 2004, p. 14). In this sense, binary opposites such as ‘black’ and ‘white’

are no longer applicable but are dismantled and give place to more complex models of identity. Hall suggests that cultural identity is always hybrid and perceives hybridity as operating on two levels, as Papastergiadis points out: "[...] it refers to the constant process of differentiation and exchange between the centre and the periphery, and between different peripheries, as well as serving as the metaphor for the form of identity that is being produced from these conjunctions" (p. 190). Hall reveals cultural identity as an anti-essentialist concept which he presents as incomplete. In this way, he emphasizes not the aspiration to a whole and finished product but stresses the importance of an ongoing process. Hall provides an explanation of his understanding of cultural identity as an anti-essentialist notion:

The concept of identity deployed here is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one. [...] this concept of identity does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; [...] Nor [...] is it that "collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall, 1997, p. 3)

It cannot stabilize, fix or guarantee an unchanging 'oneness' or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences. It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (Hall, 1997, p. 3-4). Hall argues that identities, despite the fact that they seem to "invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond", are about questions of using "the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being" (p. 4). In this sense questions such as 'who we are' and 'where we come from' are less relevant than "what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (p. 4). As Hall suggests, identities are constituted within and not outside representation (p. 4). Here, Hall provides a link to Paul Gilroy's conception of 'roots' and 'routes', present in his *The Black*

Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (1993). Hall claims that identities “relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, which they oblige us to read not as an endless reiteration but as the ‘changing same’ [...]: not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our ‘routes’” (p. 4).

It is mainly the metropolis of London that represents a transnational space which undergoes processes of ‘postcolonializing’. The less it is constituted by its past as the centre of Empire, the more it comprises a ‘world’ which it formerly ruled and which is in the present day getting hold of it. By many postcolonial migrants it may still be considered a symbolic place which reflects England’s former imperial hegemony but it can be also seen as a kind of post imperial “contact zone” (Ball, 2004, p. 15). The contemporary Western metropolis has become a place in which people, who were once separated by geography, ethnicity, race, or nationality, are rearranged and concatenated (Ball, 2004, p. 25). London exemplifies a metropolis which is a place of social mixture and encounter, a site which is saturated with possibilities and potential for intermixture of cultures. Iain Chambers (1993) comments on the disorder which is engendered by the cultural complexity of the modern metropolis. “It is a reality that is multiformed heterogeneous, diasporic. The city suggests a creative disorder, an instructive confusion, an interpolating space in which the imagination carries you in every direction, even towards the previously unthought” (p. 189). London has always been linked to different places and has always constituted a site with multifarious interconnections with numerous ‘elsewheres’. The heterogeneous shape of London with its diasporic communities and hybrid cultural forms prompts and stimulates the negotiations of identity and place. As diasporic people negotiate their cultural identities through what Paul Gilroy (1993) calls “the tension between roots and routes” (p. 133), old perceptions of home, nation and homeland must be continuously revisited. The encounters and meetings of diverse groups of people prompt a multiple and impure shape of London. Consequently, the heterogeneous character of the metropolis stimulates the creation of cultural identities that are neither fixed nor stable. Rather, these identities are constantly in the process of transformation and never complete.

The present paper addresses the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) by Hanif Kureishi. Kureishi is often labeled by the term 'postcolonial writer' due to his cultural and national position. The issues connected to the concepts of postcolonialism form only a part of the novels' concerns and should not be seen as the one and only preoccupation of Kureishi's writing. He portrays an 'in-between' experience in his novel, aware of the changes needed to be wrought on traditional notions of British identity in order to involve the migrant's experience and recognize the new British ethnic mix brought about by the post-war diaspora (Childs, 1997, p. 21-22).

The Buddha of Suburbia depicts the multicultural reality of contemporary Britain and predominantly London. It pictures diaspora communities in contemporary London and provides references to the British imperial past and the immigration of the postcolonial subjects into Britain. The idea of immigration, as Willimas (1999) asserts, "violates Britain's sense of its secure national borders." Willimas asserts that the presence of the diasporic subjects in Britain challenges the perception of the White Englishman's cultural identity as "being homogeneous and unitary" ("A State of Perpetual Wondering"). In his essay "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity" Stuart Hall states that the dominant culture's reaction to the immigration of postcolonial subjects into Britain is an example of a "defensive exclusivism [...] an embattled defensiveness of a narrow, national definition of Englishness, of cultural identity" (p. 177). Kureishi places his characters predominantly in the metropolis of London which, can be seen as a transnational and heterogeneous 'contact zone' which stimulates the creation of new possibilities and the perception of cultural identities as hybrid, multiple and relational concepts that are liable to transformation and change. Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* addresses the realities of contemporary diasporic communities in London which, as a transnational space, helps to construct unstable, fluid and incomplete cultural identities. The novel deals with what Steven Connor calls "the conditions of divided or ambivalent ethnic belonging in Britain" (p. 94).

The 'new way of being British' and the intermediate position of a young person growing up in London, are themes developed in Kureishi's novels *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Here, Kureishi shows the picture of

contemporary British culture that is hybridized. In the novel the ambiguities of identity and its complexity as defined by immigration, culture and color stand central, similarly as in other of Kureishi's writing. What Kureishi imagines, is the hybrid, dynamic and heterogeneous society that is not hindered by concepts of racial and gender stereotypes. Kaleta (1998) asserts that "Kureishi flaunts a new national identity. Proclaiming that postcolonial immigration and mass communication have altered homogeneous English demographics, this insider-outsider confronts contemporary hybridity" (p. 37). In his view, Kureishi's novels "trace the redefinition of a generation's identity" (p. 79). *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a politically-nuanced and a comical story about contemporary Britain that is ahead of its time: "Its British protagonist of biracial heritage only found a category to tick on the national census form in 2001, and the appellation 'mixed race' still conveys little of the complex history of ethnic encounters in the UK with which Kureishi engages" (Yousaf, 2002, p. 27). Yousaf suggests that *The Buddha of Suburbia* uncovers many of the ironies that underlie the British people's "recognition of Britain as a multicultural society and of Britons as racially diverse and culturally heterogeneous citizens" (p.27). As Yousaf points out, the novel portrays mainly life in Britain and reworks Disraeli's "two nations" of the "Victorian rich and poor as centre and margin, metropolitan and suburban" (p. 28). Kureishi shows his interest in multiple conceptions of Britain and distances himself from the static and pure views on nation and belonging. As stated above, Kureishi portrays the hybrid reality of contemporary London which can be observed in his characters. Karim Amir's description of "a proper Englishman – almost" (p. 3) evidences this hybrid existence and emphasizes the condition of "an ambivalent cultural attachment" (Stein, 2004, p. xii). Kureishi has described the source material of the novel as "south London in the 1970s, growing up as semi-Asian kid; pop, fashion, drugs, sexuality" (as cited in Childs, 1997, p. 143).

The narrator Karim, like Kureishi, comes from a mixed cultural background and is not inclined to embrace one rooted view of existence. In this sense, the notion of hybridity is constantly present in the novel. The characters in Kureishi's novels, and most notably the second generation of immigrants to Britain such as Karim Amir experiences life in the 'in-between' space which can be painful and marginalizing. As compared to the

'white' identify with the dominant culture's value and traditions, these young individuals feel often displaced and rootless. (McLeod, 2000, p. 216). Kureishi's experiences with racism imply that he, as a half English and a half Pakistani, was expected to deny his self and assimilate with the dominant British 'white society. In the "Rainbow Sign" he suggests that many times throughout his life, he did not want to be himself but desired to become someone else. This kind of denial is present in *The Buddha of Suburbia* where Karim experiences similar negative views from the side of 'white' British society and is therefore inclined to deny his own self.

Kureishi divides his novel into two sections, "In The Suburbs" and "In The City," setting up a binary construction that seems to privilege the city as the more authentic cultural site. From the first page of the novel, the suburbs of South London are frequently depicted as boring, conformist and consumerist. Phillip Whyte (2000) reads Karim's suburban environment as "mediocre lower-middle class" (p.153). Karim's mother, Margaret, a white Englishwoman, is a typical suburban housewife - bored, depressed, and neglected. Margaret works in a suburban shoe store, but is usually depicted at home, where she engages in domestic chores, watches hours of television each evening, wears "an apron with flowers on it" and repeatedly wipes her hands "on a tea towel" (p. 4). Karim claims his parents would not consider getting divorced, because "in the suburbs people rarely dreamed of striking out for happiness. It was all familiarity and endurance: security and safety were the reward of dullness" (p. 8).

Although Karim clearly equates suburbia with boredom, he recognizes that his physical and social environment is not entirely to be blamed, and posits that the real cause may be his hybrid cultural and ethnic background: "Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored" (p. 3). Karim links boredom to a lack of excitement: "I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family" (p. 3). Although one could read Karim's yearning for action and excitement as another stereotypical characteristic of suburban teenagers, Karim attributes the lack of excitement to his family situation. The extent to which suburbia causes his family's

unhappiness is a matter open for interpretation. Karim repeatedly expresses his desire and intention to flee the suburbs for the city, stating "I always wanted to be somewhere else" (p. 5), again, "It would be years before I could get away to the city, London, where life would be bottomless in its temptations" (p. 8). For Karim, central London represents excitement, opportunity, glamour and freedom, whereas he equates the suburbs with materialism, conformity, racism, dullness and low expectations. Although Karim is not able to leave the suburbs until halfway through the novel, his surroundings constantly inspire him to do so: "it did me good to be reminded of how much I loathed the suburbs, and that I had to continue my journey into London and a new life, ensuring I got away from people and streets like this" (p. 101). Childs and Williams (1997) claim that most English novels set in suburbia contain plots driven "by fears of incorporation, stagnation, and resignation that turn on the yearning of one or more characters to flee to the city" (p. 97).

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim, Haroon, Eva and Charlie all dream of fleeing the suburbs. Karim believes that escaping from the suburbs into the city will solve his problems and bring him happiness. Before Karim migrates into the city, he notes that Eva and Haroon have been frequenting London, "going to dinners and parties with all kinds of (fairly) important people – not the sort we knew in the suburbs, but the real thing: people who really did write and direct plays and not just talk about it" (p. 113). Clearly, Karim sees London as the cultural centre, and perceives the city-dwellers as a separate and unique group of people who are not just more sophisticated, but more proactive. In the last paragraph of the first section of the novel, before Karim moves out of the suburbs into the city, he lies in bed fantasizing "about London and what I'd do there when the city belonged to me" (p. 121). Undoubtedly, Karim believes that the city will give him opportunities for happiness and excitement that suburbia cannot.

Despite the fact that *The Buddha of Suburbia* conforms to traditional British literary representations of suburbia in numerous ways, close reading of the novel reveals that Kureishi's depiction of suburbia is rather complex and not entirely negative. Just as negative and stereotypical depictions of suburbia are present throughout the novel, so are more complicated and

nuanced portrayals. The narrative begins with Karim recounting the prelude to an unusual and exciting evening at Eva's house, where Haroon appears for the first time in his role as "the Buddha of suburbia." When Haroon arrives home from work, Karim states, "I could smell the train on him as he put his briefcase away behind the front door" (p. 3); however, this mundane ritual of suburban life is followed by a deviation: Haroon kisses his wife and sons with enthusiasm, and then strips to his underwear and practices meditating. As the evening unfolds, Karim watches his father successfully perform as a spiritual leader to a roomful of bohemian suburbanites, witnesses his father having sex in the garden with Eva, and initiates a homosexual encounter with Eva's son, Charlie. Thus, in Kureishi's suburbia, an evening may contain Eastern mysticism, an extramarital affair, interracial sex, homosexual experimentation, and the consumption of both drugs and alcohol; this is hardly boring, conformist behaviour. Nahem Yousaf argues that because the protagonist wants to escape from the suburbs, Kureishi has to portray them as "sufficiently banal," yet he also claims, "some of the most surreal scenes take place in Karim's neighborhood. In suburbia, Karim undertakes an apprenticeship in how to be transgressive" (p. 40). Thus, beneath the seemingly boring and predictable surface, Kureishi's suburbia contains an overabundance of exciting and transgressive possibilities.

In opposition to traditional British literary representations of suburbia, Kureishi depicts the South London suburbs as a location of culture. Not all suburbanites spend their evenings watching television, like Margaret; many are engaged in the production and consumption of culture. Haroon and Eva meet at a "writing for pleasure" class in Bromley (p. 7). The popularity of Haroon's "performances" is evidence of an openness and appreciation amongst suburbanites of both spirituality and foreign cultures. During their journey across the South London suburbs to Eva's house, Karim and Haroon stop at the "*Three Tuns*" pub in Beckenham. Rather than lower-middle class after-work culture-deficient drinkers, Karim and Haroon find that the pub was full of kids dressed like [Karim] ... the boys, so nondescript during the day, now wore cataracts of velvet and satin, and bright colours; some were in bedspreads and curtains. The little groovers talked esoterically of Syd Barrett. To have an elder brother who lived in

London and worked in fashion, music or advertising was an inestimable advantage at school. I had to study the *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* to keep up. (p. 8)

Although the suburban boys perceive London as the cultural centre, they are aware of the trends and participate in the culture from suburbia. Karim's fellow suburban teenagers are so culturally engaged and aware that he feels ignorant in comparison. Thus, suburbia, which may seem uniform and boring, reveals much beneath the surface. Clearly, the suburbs are not devoid of cultural opportunities and pursuits. Webster argues that suburbia's homogeneity is a "superficial myth" obscuring behaviour ranging "from the discordant and bizarre to the comic and tragic" (p. 2). Moreover, most of the suburban characters in the novel are cultured and educated. Haroon and Eva are both avid readers and amateur writers. Charlie becomes an international rock star and cultural icon. Even as a suburban schoolboy, Charlie possesses a confidence and sophistication usually and falsely associated with the city. Karim's younger brother, Allie, is also quite sophisticated, reading fashion magazines in bed while wearing "red silk pyjamas" and "a smoking jacket" (p. 19). Further, Allie intends "to become a ballet dancer and ... [attends] an expensive private school" (p. 19); he eventually finds work in the fashion industry. Two minor characters in the novel, Carl and Marianne, the hosts of one of Haroon's performances, live in a suburban home filled with "books and records" and take "trips to India" (p. 34). Kureishi's suburbia is a long way from Orwell's. Although Karim clearly takes his cultural cues from London, especially in terms of music and fashion, it is in suburbia, at Eva's house, that he has an epiphany regarding how he wants to live: "I could see my life clearly for the first time: the future and what I wanted to do. I wanted to live always this intensely: mysticism, alcohol, sexual promise, clever people and drugs. I hadn't come upon it all like this before, and now I wanted nothing else. The door to the future had opened: I could see which way to go" (p. 15). Ironically, Karim mistakenly believes that he has to escape suburbia to obtain the kind of life he has glimpsed there. It is not until late in the novel that he realizes that the city does not have a monopoly on culture and excitement and that they have always been present in suburbia.

Although they reside in suburbia, Karim and his father mock other suburbanites and their shallow consumerism. Karim notes that his Aunt Jean

"always made everyone take off their shoes at the front door in case [they] ... obliterated the carpet by walking over it twice. Dad said, when we went in once, 'What is this, Jean, a Hindu temple?'... They were so fastidious about any new purchase that their three-year old car still had plastic on the seats" (p. 41). Head (2000) argues that Haroon's mocking of Jean is an example of his exposure of "the spiritual emptiness of the suburbanites" (82); however, while Head may be correct here, not all of the suburbanites in the novel are spiritually empty. Haroon is obviously a spiritual leader of sorts, and his followers attempt to add a spiritual dimension to their suburban lives. (p. 3)

The first section of the novel, "In The Suburbs, " contains a descriptive passage that some readers may interpret as evidence of suburbia's monotony and conformity. Karim, Helen and Jamila walk past "neat gardens and scores of front rooms containing familiar strangers and televisions shining like dying lights" (p. 74). Such a description may be read as evidence of suburbia's homogeneity and consumerism; alternatively, it may be read as confirmation of suburbia's multiplicity. Karim goes on to describe some of the inhabitants of his suburb in detail:

Here lived Mr Whitman, the policeman, and his young wife, Noleen; next door were a retired couple, Mr and Mrs Holub. They were socialists in exile from Czechoslovakia ... Opposite them were another retired couple, a teacher and his wife, the Gothards. An East End family of birdseed dealers, the Lovelaces, were next to them ... Further up the street lived a Fleet Street reporter, Mr Nokes, his wife and their overweight kids, with the Scoffields – Mrs Scoffield was an architect, next door to them. (p. 74)

Karim's description reveals a tremendous amount of variety amongst the residents of a single street. At least five different occupations are present, as are three distinct age groups and a family from Czechoslovakia; such a community is hardly homogenous or boring. Kureishi's representation of suburbia does not simply replicate the negative stereotypes repeated throughout British literature since the nineteenth century; instead, Kureishi create a suburban environment filled with culture, complexity and variety.

The second section of the novel, "In The City," begins with Karim moving to West Kensington to live with Haroon, Eva and Charlie in a flat Eva has purchased after selling her suburban home. Isaias Naranjo Acosta argues that Karim's journey into London is a kind of pilgrimage (p. 54). Indeed, Karim has long fantasized about travelling into the city and making his home there. However, he soon finds that the reality of the city is less appealing than the fantasy. Eva's flat "was really only three large, formerly elegant rooms," like "a derelict cathedral," with "ancient crusty mouldings" and "sad walls"; "It was like a student flat, a wretched and dirty gaff" (p. 125). Not only is the flat run-down, there is no bed for Karim and he must sleep on the sofa.

Karim's migration from suburbia into the city is interpreted by Ball as "an escape from the inhibitions of adolescence to adult freedom" (p. 23). However, before leaving Bromley, Karim led a carefree life with few responsibilities, and soon finds that life in the city is more difficult. Although London does prove to be different from the suburbs in many ways and provides exciting experiences, it certainly does not provide Karim with fulfilment or a strong sense of belonging. Almost immediately after arriving, Karim feels "directionless and lost" (126), "depressed and lonely" (p. 128). Karim finds that the city is intimidating and occupied by "piss-heads, bums, derelicts and dealers" (p. 131); crime and violence are more prevalent in the city than suburbia. Ball claims that London "represents all that is English" and "continues to project and to be associated with images of the old imperial city at the fulcrum of world culture and political influence ... even as its infrastructure declines, its Empire vanishes, and its global stature withers" (p. 15). The traditional notions of Englishness represented by London contrast with the emerging hybrid British identity represented by Karim, who finds that he is an outsider due to his suburban upbringing and race. Karim's self-perception as an outsider is emphasized by the difference between himself and the kids from London, whose appearance Karim describes as "fabulous; they dressed and walked and talked like little gods. We could have been from Bombay. We'd never catch up" (p. 128). Ball argues that both Karim and Charlie suffer from an "inferiority complex ... [with] roots in a centre-envy they felt in the suburbs" (p. 21).

The Buddha of Suburbia concludes with Karim accepting an offer to “play the rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper” on a soap opera (p. 259). When considering the offer, Karim notes that the show would have an audience of millions; he “would have a lot of money” and “be recognized all over the country” (p. 259). Head (2000) notes that the soap opera represents “popular suburban culture” which is able “to adapt itself; to engage with issues of ethnicity and opportunity” (p. 87). It is appropriate that Karim, representative of the new hybrid British identity, should have the opportunity to become a household name through a suburban medium. Head concludes that Karim is “the embodiment of suburban multicultural identity” (p. 87). Kureishi’s representation of British nationality is, according to Ilona (2003), “in direct contrast to essentialist notions” (p. 89). Thus, Kureishi not only breaks British literary tradition by producing a complex and cultured suburban environment, he also eschews traditional, deeply rooted notions of British national identity and presents a model for a new hybrid British identity.

The processes of cultural transformation in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, such as the fall of the Empire, immigration from former colonies and the expansion of the multicultural population, have influenced new ways of looking at the conceptions of identity of postcolonial subjects within Britain. These experiences are scrutinized in the body of writing of the diasporic novelists who, among other things, accentuate the hybrid existence and complex identities of the second generation immigrants in contemporary Britain. The discussed novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi exemplifies a body of writing that reflects these changes in contemporary British society. Writers like Kureishi are not, to use Williams (2007) words, writing about “postcolonial subject displaced in Britain” but as the “British subject in a postcolonial world trying to contest and displace the dominant narrative of nation” (“A State of Perpetual Wondering”). Kureishi addresses the possible refashioning of the conceptions of cultural identities of predominantly the second generation immigrants. Such refashioning and rethinking of cultural identities has become the focus of a number of theorists and critics, such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall or Homi K. Bhabha, among others. These theorists, who began writing predominantly in the late 1980s, are interested in conceptions of

hybrid cultural identities and in the dynamics of hybridities and marginalities. In their view, cultural identities contemporary 'postcolonial' subjects cannot be perceived as essentializing concepts and as pure, stable and unchangeable notions. In the discussed novels, Kureishi tries to map out the formation and existence of cultural identities of British born migrants of his own generation and challenges the perceptions of such identities as essentialist and fixed concepts. He moves away from the limitations of categories and presents identities that are more ambiguous and complex.

This paper has attempted to show that the characters of Kureishi's novel, more precisely the characters of mixed cultural background, become aware of the fact, that the creation of cultural identities of people like themselves should be understood as a dynamic process of constant development, negotiation and change. Hence, cultural identities of the 'postcolonial subjects' in contemporary Britain, as exemplified on a number of Kureishi's characters, do not rely on fixity and stability but embrace ambiguity and plurality. Although the importance of roots is for them still significant, they do not pivot on rigid borders and do not confine themselves to one possibility in life. Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* exemplifies protagonist whose cultural identity is fragmented and far from homogeneous. In this sense, it is difficult to situate him into strictly defined groups and see them in terms of binary oppositions which are not applicable to their multi-formed and hybrid existence. They find themselves in a position which is closer to what Paul Gilroy calls 'routes' rather than 'roots'. Their possibilities are open, multiple and there is an emphasis on possible transformation and change. The cultural identities of these young individuals, then, cannot be perceived a static and fixed but rather as being liable to development and change. The understanding of such cultural identities is, therefore, comparable to an ongoing process rather than an inert condition. The migrants' position in contemporary multicultural metropolis can be seen as an active and conflictual process. Here, the metropolis of London, which symbolizes a place of social encounter and cultural intermixture, stimulates the understanding of cultural identities as relational concepts. London can be viewed as a decentred place which, with its heterogeneous character, stimulates the exploration of transnational models of identity. Kureishi's writing can be seen as an example of the fact that

many conceptual binaries, such as centre and periphery, self and other, inside and outside, have been challenged and have given way to more mutable and ambiguous concepts of hybridity, transculturation, border lives and 'in-between' space. These concepts suggest that notions such as 'belonging', 'home' and 'nation' can be perceived in terms of ambivalence and fluidity and reveal a new way of thinking about cultural identities of the postcolonial subjects within contemporary Britain.

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