“To be someone else successfully you must be yourself”: Performing Popular Culture and Ethnicity in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*

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Pro Gradu Thesis
July 2012

Tampereen yliopisto
Englantilainen filologia
Kieli-, käännös- ja kirjallisuustieteiden yksikkö

MENTU, ELISA: “To be someone else successfully you must be yourself”: Performing Popular Culture and Ethnicity in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*

Pro gradu -tutkielma, 75 sivua
Heinäkuu 2012

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastelen performatiivisuutta sekä populaarikulttuurin että etnisyyden näkökulmasta Hanif Kureishin romaanissa *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Tutkin sitä, millaisia esityksiä populaari- ja nuorisokulttuuriin kuuluminen synnyttää ja mitä elementtejä esityksiin sisältyy. Tarkastelen myös romaanin eri etnisyyksiä edustavien hahmojen tapaa esittää oma etnisyytensä ja miten nämä esitykset poikkeavat toisistaan. Pohdin etnisyyksien representaatioita muuttuvina identiteettiin vaikuttavina kokonaisuuksina.

Tutkimukseni teoreettisena pohjana käytän kolmea eri tutkimussuuntausta. Ensinnäkin nojaudun esitystutkimuksen parissa erityisesti Erving Goffmanin teorioihin. Hänen mukaansa esityksen toteutumiseen vaikuttavat muun muassa yleisön ja esiintyjän suhde, esiintyjän suhde omaan esitykseensä, sekä esitysympäristön ja esiintyjän sen hetkiset ulkoiset ominaisuudet. Erityisesti ulkoisten ominaisuuksien vaikutukset esityksen onnistumisen kannalta tulevat useaan kertaan esiin sekä kirjassa että tutkimuksessani.

Toisen puolen teoriastani muodostavat kulttuurintutkimus ja postkoloniaalinen teoria. Stuart Hallin teoriat toiseudesta, kansallisen identiteetin kehittymisestä ja yhtenäisyyden tunteesta tukevat tutkimustani. Richard Dyer puolestaan on tutkinut valkoisen identiteetin esittämistä länsimaisessa kulttuurissa. Hänen teoriansa antavat tutkimukselleni vertailukohdan.

Ensimmäisessä analyysiosiossa keskityn populaarikulttuuriin ja sen performatiivisuuteen. Käsittelen populaarikulttuuria erityisesti kirjan päähenkilön Karimin kautta. Tarkastelen niin populaarimusiikkia, pukeutumistyylejä kuin Karimin näyttelijänuraa performatiivisuuden valossa.

Toisessa analyysiosiossa käsittelen etnisyyden representoitumista kirjan henkilöhahmojen keskuudessa. Koska hahmoista osa edustaa etnistä vähemmistöä suurimmalta osaltaan valkoisessa 1970-luvun Lontoossa, etnisyys esitetään monimutkaisena asiana ja siitä johtuen myös hahmojen etnisyyden performanssit ovat toisistaan poikkeavia. Analyysissäni käsittelen Karimin intialais-englantilaista etnisyyttä, intialaista etnisyyttä, sekä valkoista englantilaista etnisyyttä.

Asiasanat: Hanif Kureishi, etnisyys, populaarikulttuuri, performatiivisuus, Stuart Hall, Erving Goffman

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1. Introduction

The 1970s was a decade when the new revolutionary values of the 1960s were beginning to progress. The 1960s saw the rise of feminism, the sexual revolution, the public availability of the birth control pill, psychedelic music, widespread drug use and anti-war movements. All of this was a counter-reaction to the conservative values of the 1950s. As Barry Miles points out, the 1960s was also the decade when for the first time young people in Britain had money (2004, 76), which meant that they were able to do things differently than the previous generations. The hippie movement of the 1960s was not as powerful in the 1970s, but many of the new movements were still very much alive. The position of women improved, allowing women like Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain and Indira Gandhi in India to be in leading political positions. Civil rights movements and environmentalism, for example, also took great steps forward. The 1970s were therefore an important decade of change.

In my thesis I will discuss Hanif Kureishi's novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* and its main character Karim Amir's growth in the London of the 1970s. First published in 1990, the novel has been read as a *Bildungsroman* that depicts the growth and change of Karim in a multicultural city. Anu Silfverberg describes the novel's tone as humorous and full of sex, drugs and rock and roll, and yet it has a feeling of melancholy that is characteristic to Kureishi's texts (2009, 141). It has also been regarded as a "'Condition of England' novel", as Susie Thomas puts it, that describes the condition of postcolonial England from the point of view of a second generation immigrant (2005, 63). Thomas points out that *The Buddha of Suburbia* has been compared to many novels and genres, which suggests not only how difficult it is to place it into any genre, but also how rich the text is (2005, 89). On the other hand, Steve Redhead defines Kureishi as "post-love", because according to him the notion

> more accurately describes Kureishi's generation, particularly the men, influenced massively by feminism and gay and lesbian politics in a host of contradictory ways, who were borne on a wave of love, sex, drugs and

> rock'n'roll before punk, post-punk, dance culture and neo-liberalism eclipsed 1960s and 1970s hedonism and leaving behind what I have called elsewhere "hedonism in hard times" (2008, 184).

Kureishi has been seen as a postcolonial writer because his works deal with issues such as ethnicity, immigration and nationalism. Kureishi himself is also a second-generation immigrant with a Pakistani father and an English mother. Due to the topics that are very close to his own life, the novel has been read as a largely autobiographical text, which according to Kureishi himself is not true. However, some elements in the novel have striking similarities to Kureishi's own life: for example, both Karim and Kureishi himself were born and raised in the borough of Bromley in southern London and apparently the school where Karim goes to is the same school where Kureishi was a student (Redhead 2008, 181).

The Buddha of Suburbia describes the life of young Karim living in the suburbs of London in the 1970s. He is desperate to escape from the suburbs to the city, which to him seems so far away that it might as well be in another country. He lives with his Indian father Haroon, English mother Margaret and little brother Allie, until his father leaves his wife for another woman, Eva. Haroon and Eva start organizing small gatherings for wealthy middle class people looking for spirituality, and suddenly Haroon becomes a Buddha-like figure for them, although he is actually a Muslim and has never shown much interest in religion before. Haroon and Karim are able to retain a good relationship, largely due to Karim's appreciation for Haroon's new partner Eva and her son Charlie.

Karim is a self-conscious young man, who has to face name-calling and racism on a daily basis. However, his most pressing concern is his love-hate relationship with Charlie, his friend from school and Eva's son. Charlie is an idol for Karim, not only because he is very confident and from a middle-class family, but also because he is white, which allows him a different kind of freedom. Charlie eventually becomes an idol for others, as well, after starting a successful punk band. However, there are also other idols in the lives of Karim and other

young people, namely rock stars. Popular culture is something that takes a significant amount of Karim's time, because it offers an alternative reality for the uneventful life in the suburbia. Furthermore, popular music is a common experience to the generation, uniting people who would normally have nothing in common.

Karim's life changes completely when he manages to get the leading role in *The Jungle Book*, which is the start of his acting career. He moves to London, the city of his dreams, where he is able to pursue roles in different theatres and try his wings at acting. A significant part of the novel is dedicated to the complicated relationship between Karim and Charlie, who switch from being lovers to friends to brothers. However, the most important theme in the novel is growth. Not only does Karim become an adult with a career in acting, but the lives of the other characters change significantly, as well.

Popular culture, ethnicity and their meanings to the characters are recurrent themes in the novel, and therefore a relevant subject to study. The uniting factor for popular culture and ethnicity in the novel is their performative nature. Although Karim in an actor, performance is present also off the stage. Style for example is an essential part of popular music, whereas rituals and manners are associated with different ethnicities. In this thesis I will concentrate on Karim's experiences, but I will also include the other characters in my discussion. Performance studies, cultural studies and postcolonial studies will be helpful in discussing these issues. My reason for choosing this topic is that I feel that popular culture in relation to *The Buddha of Suburbia* has not been very thoroughly researched. It is mentioned in the majority of studies, but ethnicity has always been the topic that has gained the most attention because it is the most obvious theme in the novel. However, I will also discuss ethnicity, because it is one aspect of performing one's identity and an important part of the characters' lives. Class is also an issue that cannot be completely ignored, although I will not particularly focus on it. It is constantly present in the novel, and although it is not focus of attention.

However, the fact that Karim is lower middle class is partly the reason for his feelings of inferiority. On the other hand, some of the other characters are very much focused on social climbing and meeting the right people. Therefore the question of class will be mentioned in the thesis, but only in relation to other issues.

My research questions are: How do the different aspects of popular culture affect the lives of Karim and other young people? How is ethnicity represented in the novel and how do different ethnicities affect the lives of the characters? I will also look at both popular culture and ethnicity as a performance: are subgroups and ethnicities a part of one's identity or are they a performance? What is the role of theatre and acting in Karim's life in relation to the performances that occur off the stage? My hypothesis is that both experiencing popular culture and ethnicity is to a large part a matter of following a particular etiquette and therefore a performance that executes these rules of behaviour.

My theoretical framework will consist of performance studies, cultural studies and postcolonial theory. Erving Goffman's theories about performance will be useful for my analysis, as well as Marvin Carlson's performance studies. Richard Dyer's *White* is also important in my analysis on how ethnicity and especially whiteness is represented in the novel. Stuart Hall's ideas about ethnic identity as an act that is constantly evolving is also useful for my thesis in analyzing ethnic identity as well as in analyzing how different forms of culture affect the characters. Furthermore, Hall's theories are also relevant in analyzing identity as a performance.

I will begin my analysis by discussing popular culture in relation to *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The first section concentrates on popular music, style and fashion, and the role of acting in Karim's life. I will discuss the performative nature of all these issues. In the second analysis section the focus is on the different ethnicities that are represented in the novel, the different roles that are related to them, and the characters who perform these roles.

2. Theoretical Frame

This section is divided into two sections discussing three areas, namely performance studies, cultural studies and postcolonial theory. In the first section I will discuss performance studies and focus on the notion of performance from different aspects. The term performance is important for the understanding of the novel and therefore it is crucial to explain it. Especially the theories and studies of Erving Goffman and Marvin Carlson will be useful for my thesis. In the second section I will focus on cultural studies and postcolonial theory. I will discuss the notion of ethnicity and its problematic nature. The theories of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha and Richard Dyer will be helpful in defining these themes. These two sections will provide a basis for the analysis of the novel.

2.1 Performance Studies

The word performance is most likely to create images of theatre or acting. As Henry Bial puts it, "[t]he term 'performance' most commonly refers to a tangible, bounded event that involves the presentation of rehearsed artistic actions. We may, for example, attend *a* performance of a play, a dance, or a symphony" (2004, 57, original emphasis). However, the word is also used so that it may include the acts and performances that take place every day in everyone's life. The idea is nothing new: already in Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* there is a monologue beginning "All the world's a stage/And all the men and women merely players" (2.7. 139-140). Stephen Chinna quotes Richard Schechner's 1987 definition for performance:

> Performance is an inclusive term. Theater is only one node from the ritualizations of animals (including humans) through performances in everyday life – greetings, displays of emotion, family scenes, professional roles, and so on – through to play, sports, theater, dance, ceremonies, rites, and performances of great magnitude (2003, 44).

Performing something is not therefore restricted to acting on the theatre stage, but is

something that happens every day. According to this interpretation, performances are not necessarily special occasions that have been planned ahead, but are in fact present in everyone's life.

Marvin Carlson argues that because our lives are structured around different modes of behaviour that are repeated over and over again, everyone must be conscious of “playing a role” socially at some point or another (2004, 4). Therefore, it can be argued that at least a part of our actions can actually be conscious roles that we have learned to play according to the social rules. For example, the roles played at work or school are very different from the roles that are played at home, and the role of a doctor is very different from the role of a patient. In other words, there is always a “pre-existing model, script, or pattern of action” behind every performance that define how people behave in different situations (2004, 12).

According to Carlson, what makes everyday behaviour a performance is that there is some sort of audience that sees the act (2004, 5). He uses Richard Bauman’s notion, according to which “all performance involves a consciousness of doubleness, through which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of that action” (ibid.). What is interesting is that in Bauman’s opinion the audience can be the same person who is performing: an athlete may have a mental image of another athlete’s successful performance, so if they perform as well as the other athlete, they will know that they have been successful (ibid.). In Bauman’s opinion, the fact that the performance is done for someone is what makes it important and validates it as performance (2004, 6).

Erving Goffman is one of the scholars who have emphasized the meaning of the relationship between the performer and the audience, as is also pointed out by Carlson (2004, 35). According to Goffman, a performance happens when the performer is incessantly present in front of a group of observers and affects them in some way. He accents the role of the

audience, or the members of society, as the active parties in attempting to understand the work of the performer. When all the external factors, such as appearance, clothing, movements, sound and voice, are in order, the emphasis is not so much on the task of the performance but on communication (ibid.). According to Goffman,

> [w]hen an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. In line with this, there is the popular view that the individual offers his performance and puts on his show "for the benefit of other people" (Goffman 2004, 59).

In other words, the performer sends a message that asks the audience to believe in what the performer is saying. Dell Hymes has combined Goffman's theories into a definition according to which performance is cultural behaviour, which is why the performer has a responsibility towards the audience (Carlson 2004, 40). In other words, the people themselves are responsible for their actions and how they are perceived by other members of society.

According to Goffman, the performer's own belief in the role that they are playing has a great significance in whether the observers will be convinced by the part (Goffman 2004, 59). If the performer is convinced, usually the observers are convinced as well. However, if the one performing does not believe in the role and is not interested in convincing the audience, the performer can be called "cynical" (ibid.). Goffman assumes that some of these cynical performers may find pleasure in the idea that they would be able to mislead their audience at will. By this Goffman does not necessarily mean that all cynical performers want to delude their audience for selfish reasons. For example doctors who give their patients placebos are not doing it for purposes of private gain, but for the eventual benefit of the patient and possibly other patients, as well (Goffman 2004, 60). In *The Buddha of Suburbia,* Haroon invents himself a role as a Buddhist speaker who through his appearances gives

advice to his gullible audience. Although at first it is quite obvious that Haroon's guru performance is not sincere and that "[h]e was going to wing it" (BS 13), he gradually becomes more "professional" in his act and perhaps even helps some members of his audience. The observers' reaction to the performer's behaviour is thus very important in Goffman's theory.

Carlson cites the famous Russian researcher and playwright Nikolai Evreinoff, who has claimed that as members of society, we are playing the parts that have been given to us (2004, 33). With this, he refers to fashion and make-up, the actions of everyday lives and the social roles of such figures as politicians, businessmen, priests and doctors. Evreinoff also sees every city, country and people as the creation of an invisible "stage manager" (ibid.). Although Evreinoff describes the world of performance in rather imaginative terms, Carlson points out that the basic idea is very similar to other theories about performance, where citizens are the actors in a play conducted by society (ibid.). Carlson quotes Milton Singer, who coined the expression "cultural performance", referring not only to theatre and dance but also to such events as concerts, religious festivals and weddings (2004, 13). These are not examples of everyday performances, but represent an important part of human culture. All of these "cultural performances" are similar in that they are limited in time, have a clear beginning and ending, have an organised programme and a place of performance, and the performers and audience are clearly divided into groups. What unites these performances is that the structure is clearly defined. The agents and the frame are thus more or less the same, but the situation and the performance itself varies.

Erving Goffman also emphasizes the importance of setting and other external factors in the outcome of a performance. He uses the term "front" to describe the "part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the situation" (Goffman 2004, 62). It is something that the

performer uses either intentionally or inadvertently (ibid.). This includes the setting that refers to the physical surroundings, namely the furniture, décor and the scenery that is involved in the performance. The front also includes what Goffman refers to as "personal front" (ibid.). This can be anything from "insignia of high office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristic; size and looks; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like" (ibid.). Some of these, such as racial features, are fixed and follow the person from one performance to another, but other elements such as clothes can vary from one moment to the next. In the novel, many of the characters change their appearance from one scene to the next. Charlie for instance changes drastically from the confident hippie boy he is at the beginning into an angry punk, which of course also changes how others react to him. These are all in what in Goffman's opinion affect a performance to a great deal. It is also a relevant idea in relation to the novel, because racial features as Goffman puts it are fixed and cannot very easily be changed. They therefore affect the performances and the reaction of the audience in the novel, as well.

Elin Diamond points out that every performance carries with it characteristics from previous performances and they can be anything from gender conventions and racial histories, to aesthetic traditions (1996, 1). She goes on to say that performances are "political and cultural pressures that are consciously and unconsciously acknowledged" (ibid.). Therefore, all performances have some references to past events and learnt habits, be they conscious or unconscious. However, it is not only the performance that refers to the past but also its interpretation by the audience. According to Diamond, this is what creates such terminology as "resignify" and "reembody", for example (1996, 2). It means that for the onlookers the performance maintains their notions about society and the customs according to which society functions. Performances and perceiving them maintain the structures that have been built in societies and create the feeling of belonging to society and the importance of sustaining the

structures.

As Diamond points out, performance and performativity can refer to much more than theatre (1996, 2). The various forms of cultural activity fluctuate between popular entertainment, rituals, conference behaviour and everyday life. According to Diamond, the different modes of behaviour in these examples are all instances of performance. Furthermore, gender, national identity and class are also aspects of human life that can be argued as forms of performance (ibid.). Judith Butler is one of the critics who has claimed that gender is only real because we perform it. Butler describes how gender becomes an act:

> [T]he action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this "action" is a public action. . . . the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaing gender within its binary frame (1999, 178, original emphasis).

Thus, gender can also be read as an act or a performance that is merely the reenactment of certain learned habits and social rules. Diamond interprets Butler's view on gender as an act so that it is both doing, "a performance that puts a conventional gender attributes into a possibly disruptive play" and something that is done, "a pre-existing oppressive category" (1996, 5). Gender is therefore seen as the execution of the roles that have been cast upon people and which they execute without necessarily realizing that they are in fact acting a role. Furthermore, Butler argues that it is not the acts constituting gender that express reality, but instead reality is constituted by the acts through their performance (2004, 162). In other words, performances of gender create reality instead of reality being interpreted in performances of gender. However, in a world where genders are very much polarized, performing one's gender "wrong" leads to marginalization and questioning that person's role in society (ibid.).

As was previously indicated by Diamond's definition of performance, ethnicity is also

something that can be considered as a performance. Homi K. Bhabha describes the experiences of those whose cultures were colonized by British invaders (2004). He uses the term “mimicry” to describe the way the colonized peoples were expected to behave like the colonizers, but at the same time it was made clear that they would never be equals (2004, 280). Bhabha criticizes the effects of mimicry and the signs it sends:

> Mimicry is thus the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both ”normalized” knowledges and disciplinary powers (ibid., original emphasis).

In other words, mimicry only emphasizes the power status of the colonizers, because the colonized imitate the habits of the colonizers as though to admit that they are inferior to the colonizers. Furthermore, although mimicry is supposed to make the colonized act like the colonizers, it also underlines the fact that they will never become exactly like the colonizers. In Bhabha’s terms, they are “‘partial’ presences”, “almost the same, *but not quite*” (2004, 280, original emphasis). There are thus performances that, although they are done consciously, are not executed at the performer’s own will, but because the roles are more or less forced upon them. Mimicry is unquestionably present in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, as well, and therefore relevant to my thesis.

In this section I have discussed the notion of performance and its many meanings. It has become clear that performance refers not only to planned artistic events but also to unconscious everyday actions that are repeated endlessly. Everyone takes part in performances whether it is voluntary or not and actions are never one-way. They are always influenced by and have an effect on their surroundings. The role of audience is important for performance because there cannot be a performance without observers. Simultaneously the observers reflect their own roles with respect to the performances that take place in their surroundings.

2.2 Cultural Studies and Post-colonial Theory

Ethnicity is something that has determined the lives of billions of people. It has been the cause of wars and genocides and an excuse to justify someone's power over another. Even now there are still people who believe that some ethnicities are better than others. However, many studies have proved that there are no significant differences between ethnicities and that race is not an excuse to put people in rank order. For example, Keith Cheng and his research group discovered that differences in human skin colour are due to a change in one amino acid in one gene (2007). Furthermore, the study shows that light skin is originally due to a mutation in the human genes. According to the study skin colour is only a matter of variation in genes and supposedly occurred to help humans adapt to different environments.

Ethnicity is a term commonly used to describe a person who identifies themselves as belonging to a certain group of people because of their shared language, culture and nation, and possibly some of these factors. Other matters such as religion may also be included in this definition, depending on what each group of people sees as things influencing their ethnic identity. In areas where a certain religion affects the everyday lives of the majority of people it would most likely be an essential part of their ethnic identity. On the other hand, in countries such as the United States where there are several religions and the freedom to acknowledge the religion of one's choice, ethnic identity is likely to not be built around religious matters.

The word race has been widely used in the past to classify people according to their ethnicity, geographical ancestry and physiological features. However, classification based on race has become problematic, because all humans belong to the same subspecies, which makes the division into different races questionable. Therefore the use of the word race is often avoided. Ethnicity is sometimes considered as the replacement for the word race, but as Catherine Evans Davies points out, ethnicity subsumes and transcends earlier notions about race, as well as includes other relevant aspects of cultural background (2006, 5). She adds that

rather than being a synonym for race, ethnicity is something that very well may be a part of everyone's identity. The notion ethnicity is thus more multifaceted, although ethnicity too carries with it some problems. Valérie Amiraux discusses ethnicity and multiculturalism from the French point of view and argues that ethnicity is not in any way a more acceptable term, because classifying people according to their ethnicity is only a form of racism without mentioning the word race (2010, 84). There is therefore no consensus in determining which expression to use or whether to use any expression at all. Furthermore, there has also been confusion concerning the word 'race', because it has been used both in relation to groups of people from the same country but also in referring to religious groups like Jewish people. In my thesis, I have chosen to use the expression ethnicity instead of race, because this expression seems more adequate in the discussion about families and societies where there are people with heterogeneous cultural backgrounds.

Even if the problems that arise with determining which expressions to use are left aside, Ayse S. Caglar points out that it is not a completely straightforward task to define a person's ethnic identity when the borders between different nations have been crossed and people move from one country to another. Therefore, new notions such as "plural" or "fluid cultural identities" have come to be used (1997, 169). These definitions about ethnicity create the notion of ethnic identity as something unstable and changing. It must be taken into consideration that because immigration is increasing around the world, more people are also born whose ancestral origins are in a different country and are ethnically "different" from the majority of the citizens, but who identify themselves more clearly as belonging to their birth country rather than the birth country of their parents. The old expressions can no longer be applied to those whose ethnicity does not fit into a simple mold.

Caglar argues that people who have moved from one culture to another rarely "imagine themselves as belonging to spatially bounded, culturally separate social entities or

'communities"' (1997, 170). It is therefore natural that their children do not identify themselves with these communities either, but construct their ethnic identities on both their origins and their environment. According to Caglar, then, cultural identity can no longer be defined only on the basis of the borders of a nation, but instead it should be seen as a more fluid concept. Furthermore, Wenonah Lyon argues that ethnicity refers to the way a person classifies herself and others, but it is also a way of including and excluding people (1997, 187). Lyon also quotes Smith who argues that ethnic identity comes from shared elements and commitment to the group (1997, 201). It could thus be argued that the group a person feels they belong to is the group on which they build their identities. There is therefore reason to assume that a person who has lived in a "foreign" country all their lives will most likely feel included in the environment where they have grown up rather than in the country of their ethnic origins. As Hall notes, the cultures we are born into are not coded into the genes, and when people refer to themselves as for instance British, they are in fact talking metaphorically (1999, 45). Ethnic identity is therefore not inherently a part of human nature.

According to Homi K. Bhabha, the idea of nation as something permanent and powerful is largely unrealistic (1990, 1). In Bhabha's opinion nations are temporal and ambivalent and create a "transitional social reality" for those who live in them (ibid.). According to Bhabha,

> The focus on temporality . . . provides a perspective on the disjunctive forms of representation that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture. . . . It is the mark of the ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy – and an apparatus of power – that it produces a continual slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories, like the people, minorities or 'cultural difference' that continually overlap in the act of writing the nation (1990, 292).

If the nation is a temporal, artificial creation like Bhabha argues, it may be a valid question to ask whether national identities or ethnicities are artificial constructions as well. After all, it seems that one would need a nation in order to be able to create a national identity. Therefore, in this context, the behaviour that is related to a certain country can be considered a theatrical

performance.

Nations can also be seen as having attributes that unite its citizens. Hall argues that cultures create identities by attributing specific meanings to a nation with which its citizens can identify themselves (1999, 47). These meanings are stories related to the nation's history and experiences, which bind together the past and the present (ibid.). These stories, then, include the history, the origin, the traditions, the myth of origin and the indigenous people of the nation (1999, 48-50). In fact, we only know how to be "English", for example, based on how "Englishness" has been represented in the English culture as a specific group of meanings (Hall 1999, 46). Therefore, when people behave according to the qualities that are associated with the ethnic identity of a particular culture, they are in a way acting out their ethnicities and executing the behavioural models that have been created in the culture. Hall also argues that ethnicities and national identities are considered as different from something else and thus for example "Englishness" is not-Indian, not-French and so forth (1997, 234-235). Being different therefore carries a meaningful message of deviating from the rest and not being something. Caglar also points out it is also important to remember that different cultures are not "internally homogenous", but in fact there is great variation inside all cultures (1997, 175-176).

Because theoretical writing concerning ethnicity and multiculturalism mostly concentrates on the portrayal of darker skinned ethnicities and their experiences I also wanted to have another perspective to be able to compare the representations. Furthermore, *The Buddha of Suburbia* presents ethnicity as a complicated matter and it is not only the characters with a background outside of Britain that are confused with their ethnicity. Therefore, I decided to include another perspective on ethnicity as a part of my theoretical framework in order to be able to compare the performances and representations of different ethnicities in the novel. Richard Dyer's *White* discusses the representation of whiteness and white people in

Western culture and how whiteness is portrayed in relation to other ethnicities. Because the majority of Western culture is to a large part a white creation, Dyer's book thus emphasizes that white people's representation is to a great extent a representation that they have created for themselves about themselves. The largely white media represents the white population as they would want to be represented themselves.

For a long time whiteness has been seen as the norm against which everything and everyone else is compared. When the word race is mentioned, white is not the race that first comes to mind. As Dyer points out, race is a word that is not attributed to white people. In his words, "[o]ther people are raced, we [the white people] are just people" (1997, 1). This sort of thinking leads to the conclusion that being white means being normal and being something else means being somehow deviant or different from the norm. This is visible in the novel as well, in Karim's struggle to fit in a society that constantly positions him in the role of the Other. Another point Dyer makes is how we have tried to coin polite words to speak about for example black people. The expression "people of colour", for example, has been considered neutral and been widely used to refer to other than white people. However, as Dyer argues, "people of colour", if used in the way that it usually is used excluding white people, implies that white in fact is not a colour (1997, 2). This again implies that white is the normal and neutral background against which all other colours are compared.

It is often forgotten that the colour white has different hues just like other colours. In fact, it is often regarded as colourless, not necessarily as a hue at all (Dyer 1997, 46). If someone, especially if the speaker is white, mentions a white person they never say that the person in question is white. The same can be extended to our everyday lives. When one thinks of all the white objects that surround us, it becomes clear that they are neutral compared to other colours: white light is just light and white paper is blank. Black, on the other hand has probably never been a neutral colour. In art, for example, there is always an ethnic or

symbolic significance in a black object. As Dyer points out, black and white are seen as opposites, which is not true with any other colours (1997, 48).

The colours black and white are also symbolically opposite (1997, 58). White has traditionally been seen as the symbol of goodness and light and black a symbol of evil and dark. In Western culture, whiteness is beautiful because it is seen as the sign of virtuousness (Dyer 1997, 74). This traditional juxtaposition is still used and familiar examples can be found in popular culture (1997, 57). In *Star Wars* the jedi warriors like Luke Skywalker who fought the evil forces were dressed in white clothes, whereas the evil Siths like Darth Vader wear long black capes. Also in Harry Potter the dark lord Voldemort always wears a long black cape, whereas Dumbledore, the school headmaster who represents the good, wears different colours, but they are always rather light and never black. A further example is the wizard Gandalf the Grey, who later becomes Gandalf the White in *Lord of the Rings*. He fights the evil powers with the bearers of the ring. It is also worth noting that in none of these works of fiction and film are there black characters in any significant roles and the heroes are always white.

What is also an important observation in relation to the novel is that skin colour and film cameras do not always work well together. Because the hues of skin vary between different people, it may be challenging to find a suitable lighting that fits everyone's skin tone (Dyer 1997, 89). However, Dyer reminds that although "photo and film apparatuses have seemed to work better with light-skinned peoples, . . . that is because they were made that way, not because they could be no other way" (1997, 90). Film lighting is therefore another example of how whiteness has been used as the norm and how it complicates work for other ethnicities.

Dyer also discusses the concept of passing as white. Presumably it was the time of racism, oppression and slavery in the United States when it was the most common for black

people to pass as white. When one's future depended on the colour of one's skin, it was an advantage to be able to hide one's true colour. Skin tone of course is not the only marker of someone's ethnicity. As Dyer points out, features like hair, nose or lips may also be things that reveal a person's ethnicity (1997, 42). What is interesting is that although Western countries have to a large part been able to build democratic societies where all people regardless of their gender or ethnicity can live freely and have similar possibilities in life, it is still common in Great Britain for example for the darker skinned girls to use products that lighten their skin. A lighter skin tone is considered an asset and something to pursue. Furthermore, if one looks at the popular black female singers or actors, it seems that most of them have straightened their hair and had plastic surgery procedures on their noses, which considerably diminish their ethnic features. They all look more or less the same, regardless of their ethnicity.

On the other hand, during the past decades tanning has become popular among white people, and especially among young women. As Dyer points out, the traditional setting has been that the working classes have been darker skinned than the upper classes, because they have become tanned working in the fields (1997, 57). According to Dyer, the notion was that "to be a lady is to be as white as it gets" (ibid.). Nowadays tanning is not a mark of lower class, and there is also no loss of prestige in tanning. Furthermore, if a darker skinned person uses skin lighteners, it is often interpreted as an attempt to pass as a member of another race, whereas a tanned white person is only a tanned white person: someone who has been fortunate enough to enjoy the lifestyle and wealth that is to a large part a white privilege and used his or her right to vary their appearance (Dyer 1997, 49). Changes in skin colour are thus regarded more acceptable for white people than they are for non-white people.

This section has discussed the problematic nature of ethnicity. The notion itself raises objection from those who feel that classifying people on the basis of skin colour or ethnic origins is a form of racism. On the other hand, it is also seen as a more multifaceted

substituent for the word race. The fact that whiteness is often seen as the norm against which all other ethnicities are compared causes further confusion and problems. However, discussing ethnicity is essential for the analysis of the novel and the understanding of the plot and characters.

3. "A kid's crusade": Popular Culture and Theatre

The Buddha of Suburbia is set in the London of the 1970s, which means that the political and sexual revolution of the 1960s have just taken place. According to Steven Connor, this is a period when "for post-war children, the succession of popular-cultural moments or periods has become an authoritative and shared common language for linking personal and generational memory" (1996, 95). Furthermore, it is a time when the notion of generation "acquires its full explanatory and organizing force for the first time" (ibid.). Thus, it is important to notice the meaning of popular culture for the whole generation in relation to the novel. Iain Chambers also points out the importance of consumerism for the development of popular culture:

> To buy a particular record, to choose a jacket or skirt cut to a particular fashion, to meditate carefully on the colour of your shoes is to open a door onto an actively constructed style of living. . . . In contrast to the anonymous drudgery of the working week, selected consumer objects provide the possibility of moving beyond the colourless walls of routine into the bright environs of an imaginary state (1985, 16-17).

According to Kari Kallioniemi, the term popular culture is not a neutral expression, because it has never been seen as a proper form of culture, but as something that the majority of people living in the cities have created for themselves (1990, 16). Popular culture has been contrasted with high culture and considered the lower, less significant form of culture. However, Alistair Davies and David Sinfield note that due to rising prosperity and a growing interest in both high and popular culture in Great Britain, arts and culture received a considerable amount of funding in the 1960s and 1970s, (2000, 141). Furthermore, the status of high culture was questioned: why should opera receive funding if funding is not granted to popular music, "the distinctive achievement of postwar British culture"? (2000, 142). As Bart Moore-Gilbert points out, Kureishi has been popular among young readers, "because he has been one of the first 'serious' writers to take [Britain's] sub-cultures seriously" and together

with writers such as Nick Hornby depicted the lives of teenagers plausibly (2001, 10). Furthermore, it can clearly be seen in Kureishi's work that he wants popular culture to be recognised in merit as much as forms of "higher" culture (ibid.).

Popular and youth culture began emerging after the Second World War as a counterreaction to the values and morals of the previous generations. The youth culture in the 1950s was more of a unified rebellious front than a group of different subcultures, because as youth culture began to form, it was inspired by a new form of music, rock and roll. In the novel, youth culture has already started to divide into smaller groups that express themselves through music and style. In addition to mainstream culture, subcultural groups wanted to distinguish themselves from each other, and some of the groups even became enemies. The division into different subgroups can be seen in the novel, but the hostility between different groups has been left out. However, although the generation may not be considered as a unified group anymore, the smaller groups are equally, if not more important in functioning as the basis of one's identity formation. In a subgroup like the punks, other defining factors such as class or ethnicity fade away and the only defining factor is being a punk. As Kallioniemi notes, belonging to a group gave young suburban people fascinating new experiences, because most of them did not have experiences of belonging to communities other than their families or schools (1990, 137). The importance of popular and youth culture cannot therefore be disregarded.

In this section I will discuss the importance of popular culture and its influence on the young characters. I will discuss rock stars and music, the styles of youth subcultures and Karim's acting career. The performativity of popular culture will be included in the discussion.

3.1 “Heard anything good lately?” Popular Music and Youth Culture

Especially important in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is the popular music of the time. Music is a way for the young people to express themselves and it is also something that unites them. They follow the trends and their appearance is very different from the previous generations. As Bart Moore-Gilbert notes, the novel covers the music styles of the 1960s and 1970s from hippie music to punk, which reinforces its credibility as a “condition of England” novel (2001, 115). According to him, pop is on the one hand associated with pleasure, and experimentation with sex and drugs, and on the other hand with political protest (ibid.). Kureishi himself has said in an interview that the music of the time was not linked only to fashion but also to politics and events that were taking place (Yousaf 2002, 18). In the novel, the political aspects of popular culture are not emphasised, but their effects can be seen in the changing mood of music and society, especially towards the end of the novel. Furthermore, Robin Denselow notes that Great Britain did not witness the sort of battles for civil rights or demonstrations for peace that took place in other countries, but was in fact a relatively unexciting home for the British bands (1989, 92). The uneventfulness can also be seen in the novel in Karim’s desperate descriptions of his tedious suburban life.

At the beginning of the novel, the hippie culture of the 1960s is gradually making way for glam rock and punk. The young characters are listening to artists and bands like Pink Floyd, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and David Bowie. The school Karim goes to is the same school David Bowie had attended some years before and it is common to see the boys kneeling under his picture, “praying to be made into pop stars and for a release from a lifetime as a motormechanic” (BS 68). Rock stars are their heroes and idols in the same way that for example war veterans might have been for previous generations. Their performances affect how the characters behave and what they find interesting. For the youth in the novel these

performers offer models which define their behaviour. If previous generations had aimed at honourable professions and providing for their families, the youth of the 1960s long for the excitement that popular culture offers. In his autobiography Kureishi compares his own youth to Karim and Charlie's youth and describes himself as having been brought up on pop, "so that Lennon, Dylan, Jagger, and Hendrix were [his] masculine ideals" (2004, 172). The hero worship in the book is thus based on Kureishi's own experiences.

Karim is one of the young people in the novel that live and breathe popular music. Nick Rennison notes that Karim believes himself shaped not so much by his ethnicity as by the popular culture that surrounds him (2005, 101). It "gives him a shared generational language with others from very different social groups" (ibid.). In other words, popular culture gives Karim something to identify with. It can be said that popular culture for Karim is a way of living, but it also defines very precisely how he should act and behave. There are scripts according to which Karim and the other teenagers must behave in order to taken seriously by their peers, and being taken seriously is one of the most important things for a boy Karim's age. Therefore, the execution of Karim's role as the representative of youth culture is a continuing performance which he can only forget when he is alone. His behaviour is a conscious role, in Carlson's words a social performance (2000, 4).

Music in the 1970s handled the "normality" and banality of life in the suburbs, which is what Karim is determined to flee from. He wants to leave the suburbs and move to the city where he thinks everything will be different and better. He even imagines the sound that London has and how the people there are dramatically different from the people in the suburbs:

> 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 Doors's 'Light My Fire'. There were kids dressed in velvet cloaks who lived free lives; there were 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 (BS 121).

But before Karim is able to escape from the suburbs, he spends a considerable amount of his time in his room and dreams about the world around him. He "sipped spicy tea and listened to records all night", "read Norman Mailer's journalism", watched TV, and "read *Rolling Stone* magazine" (BS 62). He "felt the whole world was converging on this little room" (ibid.). In fact, the only parts in the novel when Karim seems to be completely at ease with himself are the parts when he is alone, reading or listening to music. Books, magazines and records thus function as an escape to an alternate reality, where Karim does not have to think about what he does or behave according to a "pre-existing model, script, or pattern of action" (Carlson 2000, 12). For Karim, music offers "emotional alliances with the performers and the performers's other fans" (Frith 1996, 121). Although he spends a considerable amount of time alone in his room, he can feel a connection with others who enjoy the same music.

However, the ease with which he is able to spend time in his room is cast aside every time he encounters Charlie. Karim becomes very self-conscious, because to Karim Charlie is everything any boy his age would want to be. He is not only Karim's friend but another icon for him to worship. At the beginning of the novel, Charlie is already admired by the students at their school. He thinks he knows what is "in" at the moment, and others seem to agree with him. He is the singer in a band called Mustn't Grumble and because the band has appeared on the front page of a local paper after an open-air concert in a sports ground, he has adopted all the manners of a real star. He performs his rock star role well because those around him do not question his opinions or behaviour. According to Karim, Charlie's "sudden fame impressed and disturbed the whole school, including the teachers" (BS 69). He seems to have done what they all dream of: he is on his way out of the suburbia. Charlie is certainly able to convince his audience with his performance, because they believe in the role he is playing. Goffman's notion of "personal front" is thus applicable to the role Charlie is performing,

because to his audience to role is credible (Goffman 2004, 62).

Karim is one of Charlie's most faithful admirers and believes that he cannot do anything wrong. As Bradley Buchanan points out, Karim treasures Charlie's guidance because he is from a higher class than the Amirs (2007, 45). This, however, also means that Karim will never reach the kind of attitude that Charlie has, because he feels inferior to Charlie due to his social status and skin colour (ibid.). Furthermore, Charlie does not try to change how Karim feels about himself or Charlie, but strengthens his own ego and rock star status by making others think he is more intelligent than they are. An example of this can be seen when Charlie and Karim are in Charlie's room and Charlie asks, whether Karim has heard any good music recently. Karim responds that he had played the new Rolling Stones album to his friends and that they had been so excited about the music that they had danced on the tables. Charlie is not impressed and Karim notices this: "I knew immediately from the look on Charlie's face that I'd been an animal, a philistine, a child" (BS 14). He has forgot that he has a certain role to perform and now he thinks that his audience is disappointed. Charlie's approval seems to mean more to Karim than his own opinion. He realises this himself, because he admits that he "preferred [Charlie] to [himself] and wanted to be him" rather than loves or appreciates him as a friend (BS 15). Their relationship is therefore not based on caring, but rather on admiration and envy and the yearning of being transformed into something else. This, I would imagine, is a common phenomenon when a person idolises someone else. Thus, Karim is the performer in this situation and his audience Charlie questions the validity and credibility of his role. This results in Karim thinking that he should change his behaviour.

Gradually Karim begins to realise that Charlie might not be all that talented and special and in fact much of his popularity is due to his well-designed surface. Karim thinks that Charlie's band does not have an original sound and that "[t]heir bauble was this striking singer-guitarist with exquisite cheekbones and girl's eyelashes, who was being asked to model

clothes for magazines but not to play at the Albert Hall" (BS 118). Furthermore, Charlie "led others to believe that soon world-dazzling poetry would catapult from his head as it had from those of other English boys: Lennon, Jagger, Bowie" (ibid.). He seems to believe in his own role as a performer and rock star because he is able to convince everyone apart from Karim. Charlie's facade is so convincing that it is surprising to Karim to realise how poor his songs really are. For some reason, he still wants to be the rhythm guitarist in Mustn't Grumble, but Charlie only allows him to be the roadie. As a revenge, Karim finally tells Charlie what he thinks of the band's music:

> 'You're not going anywhere - not as a band and not as a person.' . . . 'To go somewhere you gotta be talented, Charlie. You got to have it upstairs.' I tapped my forehead. 'And on present evidence a backdoor man like you hasn't got it up there. You're a looker and everything, a face, I'll concede that. But your work don't amaze me, and I need to be amazed' (BS 121).

Charlie quickly passes over Karim's remark by saying: "I don't know about that. I'm breaking up the band anyway. What you've said is irrelevant" (ibid.). He pretends that Karim's remarks do not affect him and that it was in fact his intention to quit the band. Charlie cannot let Karim be the more powerful one, when he has been the one with the power all his life.

After this incident Charlie changes drastically, although he tries to convince Karim that his comments are of no importance. Apparently realizing that there is someone who is not so convinced about his rock star performance makes him doubt his role. However, he soon finds a new direction for his career. After Karim and Charlie move to the city into Eva and Haroon's new apartment, they spend much of their time in the pubs and clubs of London. A punk band that performs at a club changes Charlie's future. At first, Karim and Charlie are not convinced about the band's skills and are apprehensive about its aggressive attitude. It is different from anything they have ever heard before:

> This was no peace and love; here were no drum solos or effeminate synthesizers. Not a squeeze of anything 'progressive' or 'experimental' came from those pallid, vicious little council estate kids with hedgehog hair, howling about anarchy and hatred. No song lasted more than three minutes, and after

each the carrot-haired kid cursed us to death (BS 130).

Despite his initial attitude towards the punk band and its music, Charlie is convinced that it is the kind of music that he should be playing, as well. He feels that "[t]he sixties have been given a notice" and the music they saw is the future (BS 131). Karim points out that it is artificial to change into something that they are not, but Charlie does not care about Karim's opinion. To him the only thing that matters is creating a new identity for himself to perform and accomplishing fame by doing it. Eventually Charlie re-names himself Charlie Hero and his band becomes a punk band called The Condemned. The band is very successful and *The Daily Express* calls it "a phenomena" [sic] (BS 152). Charlie was therefore right in his claim that punk the future of popular music. He realised that what is "in" in popular music changes constantly and in order to stay "in" one has to stay open for change instead of clinging to what was popular before. However, Kotarba and Vannini argue that punk is autonomy, rebellion and independence and to be considered a plausible performer, one must convey all of these attributes to the audience (2009, 109). Their discussion concentrates on contemporary artists and their role as credible, authentic rock stars, but it is applicable to Charlie because although the general public is enthralled by his performance, Karim questions whether he really possesses all of these qualities.

As was already mentioned, there is a power relationship between Karim and Charlie, because Charlie is from a higher social class than Karim. Therefore, it is interesting how Charlie attempts to push Karim to a more "middle class" direction by suggesting what sort of music to listen to and what clothes to wear. The Rolling Stones, for example, are easy to identify with, because they are English working class, but have managed to succeed in the music business. However, Charlie guides Karim "towards Pink Floyd, a more sedately middle-class band" (Buchanan 2007, 45) and likes Bach (BS 11), and yet he has to hide the traces of his own middle-class past to gain credibility as a punk singer. This is interesting

considering the fact that popular culture is generally seen as a classless form of culture (Billington et al, 1991, 113). Apparently, seeing Karim in a more middle class role would please Charlie more. As the rest of the characters are trying to climb the social ladder by pretending to be "better" and more cultured than they are, Charlie is doing the same but his methods are completely opposite. He is earning a fortune by pretending to be working class. The characters are thus trying to perform roles that do not have much to do with reality, which echoes Diamond's argument about class as a performance (1996, 3).

For many of the characters in the novel popular music seems almost like a substitution for a religion. As the older characters are seeking spirituality in Haroon's lectures, the younger generation find common experiences in music. Perhaps the impact of popular music in the lives of the characters has increased because it was initially developed to rebel against antiquated moral conceptions that were largely based on Christian values. When these values have been forgotten, music and popular culture have taken their place. Music seems like a comprehensive experience that captivates its listener. An example of this is when Karim plays a Rolling Stones album to his friends and as a result "the lads went crazy. They threw off their jackets and ties and danced. [Karim] was on top of [his] desk! It was like some weird pagan ritual" (BS 14). This is a description of the adoration and hysteria related to popular music, which can be seen as having even religious dimensions. However, it is also worth noting that popular music performers such as The Beatles became interested in eastern religions and philosophy, which caused their fans to investigate these matters, as well (Miles 2003, 251). Popular music can therefore be seen as functioning as a form of religion but also as a gateway to ways of thinking that are different from those in the western world.

Popular music has a significant part in the lives of the young characters. It is a comprehensive and passionate experience, which has come to the place of religion in their lives. At the same time, however, the pressure to follow the changing phenomena in music can

be a strain. Keeping up with the times is mandatory in order to be taken seriously by the other music enthusiasts. The role of teenager interested in popular music must be performed with care in order to be taken seriously by the other peers and to be accepted in groups. The role of popular music cannot therefore be disregarded or underestimated.

3.2 Levi's, Kaftans and Safety Pins: Style and Popular Culture

> I glimpsed myself in a shop window and was pleased with what I saw. I had no job, no education, and no prospects, but I looked pretty good, oh yes (BS 99).

Dressing is a crucial part of popular culture and music. Like today, the young people in the novel are concerned whether the way they dress impresses other people and sends the right message. As Hebdige points out, all outfits signify something: taste, preference and the amount of income are things that can usually be seen from a person's outfit (1988, 101). However, according to Hebdige, subcultures also aim at underlining their difference from other groups by their style (1998, 102). Therefore, the styles of different subcultures express not only separation from others, but also belonging to a certain group. In Goffman's terms the features mentioned by Hebdige would be called "personal front" (2004, 62). Furthermore, John Clarke points out that when a group borrows traditional outfits associated with for example upper class and combine them with new items, the traditional pieces carry a new meaning with them (1975, 178). Good examples of this can be found among the Mods, one of them being the military parka combined with an expensive suit. An interesting example in the novel is how Karim wears an Indian waistcoat as a symbol of hippy culture, although one might assume that wearing an Indian garment would be something that refers to his ethnic background.

In the 1970s it was common to experiment with clothing and wear outfits that before the

1960s would have been out of the question. As Miles points out, "[i]n Britain, the male put on a cheap suit the day he left school and shirts and ties were essential" (2004, 16). In the novel it can be seen that the outfits have changed drastically, although Shadwell the theatre director is depicted as wearing an old-fashioned corduroy suit. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is filled with descriptions of what the characters are wearing. The outfit descriptions reveal something about the personality of the character in question, but they also emphasise the differences between characters. Goffman's theory of a personal front is applicable here: the characters signify certain things with their clothes, such as their age or sex (2004, 62). Karim and his friends look similar, because their interests lie in the same fields, whereas Karim's brother Allie, although roughly the same age, looks very different. He is described as a girlish boy, because he wants to be a dancer and "dresses up a lot" (BS 103). He even travels to Milan "with his smart friends from school, looking at clothes" (BS 144). His posh style is far from the casual clothing most boys and girls his age are wearing. He can be said to be shifting the gender markers, or bending gender roles, which was rather common in the popular music scene of the 1970s: for example one of Karim's idols David Bowie was known for his changing roles and androgynous appearance. This also fits Judith Butler's idea about gender as an act:

> Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them (1990, 40).

Bowie is an example of a character – and character here is a deliberate choice of words because of his constantly changing roles – who bends the idea of gender, refusing to act according to Butler's view of how the two binary genders are performed. It is therefore interesting how reluctant Karim is to accept Allie's style, when he is in fact experimenting with his appearance like one of Karim's most important role models.

The majority of the depictions of outfits are dedicated to the young characters, who

belong to different groups. As Clarke points out, one of the most important functions of style "is to define the boundaries of group membership", meaning that a shared style creates and sustains a powerful group identity (1975, 180). Karim's friends from school are described in the following way: "Most of the boys, so nondescript during the day, now wore cataracts of velvet and satin, and bright colours; some were in bedspreads and curtains" (BS 8). Because the boys have to wear "decomposing school jackets" and uniforms during the day, clothes that distinguish them from others are a way for the boys to express themselves outside of school. Fashionable music styles change with time, and therefore the trends that are attributed to these music styles change regularly, as well. Nevertheless, the characters adopt the different and changing styles quickly and express their loyalty to their group through their outfits. What is interesting is Karim's description of the college he briefly attends in order to get his A levels. It is a liberal school where the "teachers looked the same as the pupils and everyone was equal" (BS 94). This describes the era well, because it shows that even teachers, the people who are supposed to educate and discipline the children have changed so much with the time that they look like the pupils.

However, the depictions of a person's outfit may also reveal one's social class. For instance, Karim's Auntie Jean is described as "straight-backed and splendid in high heels and dark-blue dress with a diamond brooch in the shape of a diving fish" and she looks like she is "ready to attend one of those cocktail parties" (BS 103). Eva on the other hand is a character who changes her appearance to a more sophisticated style. When at the beginning of the novel she opens the door wearing "a full-length, multi-coloured kaftan" (BS 8), apparently to emphasise her spirituality at Haroon's first lecture, by the end of the novel she has become a business woman appearing on the pages of a decoration magazine "in a short skirt, black stockings and flat shoes" (BS 261). There is "nothing suburban about her", which means that her social climbing has been successful (ibid.). The social class of these women is easy to

detect by observing their clothing, in the same way that a younger character's clothing and music taste hints towards the subculture he or she belongs to. As Goffman argues, a person's personal front affects the way he or she is perceived, and these characters consciously want to change their reception (2004, 62).

Clothing can also depict change, as it does in the case of Karim's mother Margaret. Before her divorce, Margaret is described as "a plump and unphysical woman" whose body Karim believed to be "an inconvenient object surrounding her" (BS 4). She is not someone who pays much attention to the way she dresses. Understandably, her unhappiness grows when she separates from her husband. Gradually she begins to heal, which is reflected in her outfits: "She started to wear trousers for the first time, dieted, and let her hair grow" (BS 144). By the end of the novel, the "woman who never used to have more than one bath a week" has a boyfriend and she spends ages preparing herself (BS 269-270). The outfits therefore have an important meaning representing change, as well.

Karim himself is a character who sacrifices a great deal of his time choosing the right outfit to wear. One of his concerns is that he fails to notice the changes in style. It takes him "several months to get ready" (BS 6) and he has "to study the *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* to keep up" (BS 8). He is quite self-conscious and questions even the outfits that he has carefully picked. When Charlie tells him that he needs "to wear less" and suggests him what to wear instead (BS 16), Karim takes it very seriously:

> I tattooed his words on to my brain. Levi's with an open-necked shirt, maybe in a very modest pink or purple. I would never go out in anything else for the rest of my life. . . . I contemplated myself and my wardrobe with loathing, and would willingly have urinated over every garment (BS 17).

Furthermore, when Charlie dyes his hair silver, Karim keeps asking himself: "Why had he gone silver? Were we entering a new hair era that I'd completely failed to notice?" (BS 37).

However, although Karim does not want to be distinguished from the crowd, he is not willing to change his appearance and behaviour completely, which is what Charlie does. It is

said in the novel that Charlie gives up being a hippie, like he has merely changed his shirt or bought new shoes (BS 88). It therefore seems obvious that for Charlie there really is nothing ideological behind his outfits. To him, they are just clothes that enable him to perform the sort of image that he is after at a given moment. By changing outfits he is able to switch from one role to another.

However for Charlie, giving up being a hippie is not enough and he goes further with his transformation. After seeing their first punk concert, Charlie thinks that they have to change along with other people, and that Karim is "facing in the wrong direction" (BS 132). Karim, on the other hand, realises that "[i]t would be artificial": "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" (ibid.). Karim, although a person who is obsessed with keeping up with the times, refuses to adapt a style that clearly is not what he is. His only "concession to the New Wave" is wearing black clothes to Charlie's punk concert, but he knows his hair is uninteresting compared to the others (BS 152).

Charlie's transformation into a punk is a tremendous change from his previous style. Although punk style no longer has the same shock value it had in the 1970s, it is obvious that at the time seeing someone wearing something completely different from the norm would upset people. According to Hebdige, the dress code of punks was "if the cap doesn't fit, wear it", meaning that the more inappropriate it was to wear something, the more likely it was for punks to wear it (1988, 107). Kallioniemi notes that the modern style changed from emphasizing naturalness to artificial exaggeration, punk style being a good example of the latter with clothes made of garbage bags, designed to irritate and estrange the outsider (2006, 104). In the novel the punks are described as having a very different style from the regular clientèle of the club:

> [T]he clothes were full of safety-pins. Their hair was uniformly black, and cut short, seriously short, or if long it was spiky and rigid, sticking up and out and

> sideways, like a handful of needles, rather than hanging down. A hurricane would not have dislodged those styles. The girls were in rubber and leather and wore skin-tight skirts and holed black stockings, with white face-slap and bright-red lipstick (BS 129).

The description fits Hebdige's definition of punk style in the sense that safety-pins and holed stockings are rarely a part of a more conservative consumer's wardrobe. As with all subcultures, punks want to separate themselves from the mainstream and signal their deviation from other groups with their clothing.

Charlie quickly adapts to his new role as a punk and changes his appearance dramatically. When Karim sees him for the first time after the punk concert, he looks so different that Karim does not recognise him. His hair is spiky and it is dyed black, like the hair of the punks they had seen at the club. His outfit is very different, as well:

> He wore, inside out, a slashed t-shirt with a red swastika hand-painted on it. His black trousers were held together by safety-pins, paperclips and needles. Over this he had a black mackintosh; there were five belts strapped around his waist and a sort of grey linen nappy attached to the back of his trousers (BS 151).

The rebellion that the punks represented can be seen in the scene when Eva asks Charlie to take off the swastika he has on his shirt, saying that it is all she wants him to change about his appearance. To this Charlie responds: "In that case I'll keep it on" (BS 152). It seems that whatever upsets others is the right thing to do and underlines the rebellious performance of a punk that he now is.

Charlie's transformation may seem believable to some, but because Karim has known him for a long time, he naturally knows what Charlie really is like. As Hebdige points out, punks underline "working-classness" with their music and behaviour (1988, 121). Rita Felski argues that being part of the lower middle class is tedious, a non-identity, because it does not have radical roots or elegance (2000, 34). This must be one of the reasons why Charlie creates a working-class image for himself. What is interesting is that he is able to sell it to the people who do not know him. Karim, however, finds it amusing for someone who had cried at school

after being mocked for talking so posh to suddenly use cockney accent (BS 247). Another detail standing in the way of his credibility are “his milky and healthy white teeth”, which in Karim’s opinion “betrayed everything else” (BS 154). As Buchanan points out, it is Charlie’s artificiality that makes the band so successful: it may not be authentic, but punk works as a tool for Charlie's success (2007, 46).

Even when the band is successful and Charlie lives in New York in a large apartment, Karim is not convinced of his rock star status. To Karim, “[i]t didn’t seem of his essence, but a temporary, borrowed persona” (BS 246). In Karim’s opinion, Charlie was more of a star as an impertinent boy in the suburbs than as a celebrity, who “wore black leather, silver buckles, chains and chokers, and by the end of the performance he was bare-chested, thin and white like Jagger” (BS 247). In fact, Karim has believed that “Charlie’s glory in South London was the most he’d ever get” because in London people “dressed and walked and talked like gods” and they would never be like Londoners (BS 127). Now that he has been proven wrong, he still does not believe in Charlie’s role. Perhaps Charlie’s suburban roots stand in the way of his credibility in Karim’s eyes. The most surprising side to this is that Charlie knows he is “no Bowie” and that there are better musicians than he is (BS 247). He has become humble enough to admit that the costume he is wearing does not necessarily make him the most talented rock star there is. Perhaps it can be said that they have both grown enough to see Charlie’s weaknesses and imperfections.

The passing of time can clearly be seen in the novel also in the outfits. At the beginning the majority of the young people still rely on hippie style with flared trousers and colourful blouses. As the story evolves, other subgroups, such as punk rockers, begin to emerge with their different outfits and change how the masses dress. Towards the end of the novel the English society has changed considerably and “the fractured country was in turmoil: there were strikes, marches, wage-claims” (BS 259). The changes in society can instantly be seen in

people's appearance. Karim sees that there are "no hippies or punks: instead, everyone was smartly dressed, and the men had short hair, white shirts and baggy trousers held up by braces. It was like being in a room full of George Orwell lookalikes, except that Orwell would have eschewed earrings" (BS 270). Karim also thinks that the ugliness of the new buildings that are being built has spread to the people as well and "Londoners seemed to hate each other" (BS 258). The general atmosphere has therefore changed considerably and affected people's appearance as well.

Goffman's idea of personal front affecting the outcome of a performance can clearly be seen in the novel. The characters adapt to different situations by changing their style, some of them are even willing to change their style quite radically as in the case of Charlie or Haroon. As was already pointed out in the section discussing music in the novel, popular culture and the phenomena relating to it change regularly. However, the changes in style can be detected instantly, whereas in music the process of change is usually done in stages. Charlie's transformation happens almost overnight, whereas the development of popular music into punk rock has taken many years. Although Karim seems like a self-conscious man, who lets others' opinions affect his appearance, he is ultimately not the one to change completely. He is an example of finding his own style and refusing to surrender to every trend in fashion if it conflicts with who he is and where he comes from. He is therefore not willing to adapt to roles he is not comfortable with, at least not off the theatre stage.

3.3 Actor or an Exhibitionist: The Roles on and off the Theatre Stage

This section discusses Karim's experiences working in the theatre and later in a soap opera. Theatre is usually considered a part of the "high culture", but in this case I decided to include it in the popular culture section, because firstly the theatre pieces Karim works in are rather

experimental with peculiar rehearsals and odd work methods, typical of avant-garde theatre which according to Carlson became popular among the general public in the 1970s (2004, 110). Furthermore, Carlson also points out that many avant-garde theatre artist sought inspiration in popular and folk theatre (2004, 83). Secondly, because *The Jungle Book*, for example, is not the most complicated play, especially the production that Karim is in, makes it more applicable to the discussion on popular culture. The fact that Karim goes from the theatre to a soap opera on television was also one of the reasons why I chose to include my discussion of Karim's acting career in the popular culture section. However, what is most important is that it is not Karim's passion to become a respected actor. In fact, Haroon has once suggested that Karim should become an actor because "it was a good life, he said, and the proportion of work to money was high", although the reality must be much work for little money (BS 23). Haroon's comment is due to his own youth in Bombay, where he went to parties with film-stars and kissed actresses (ibid.). However, in reality he wants Karim to be a doctor or a lawyer, and others have suggested careers in customs and the navy (ibid.). A lawyer or a doctor would be very typical choices for someone of Asian descent, because in Asian families it is usually important to have a respected profession in which one can earn a decent living. In fact, Haroon and Anwar have both come to London to acquire a respectable occupation, but neither one of them executed their intentions. However, Haroon can accept Karim being an actor, because he thinks that acting too can be a well-paid profession, and even respectable if one is talented. What is interesting is that Haroon is a sort of actor himself, because he has led people to believe his role as a spiritual Buddhist speaker.

Karim himself does not know where he wants to work:

> There was nothing I particularly wanted to do. You didn't have to do anything. You could just drift around and hang around and see what happened, which suited me fine, even more than being a Customs Officer or a professional footballer or a guitarist (BS 63).

Furthermore, when he hears the news that he has been accepted in a new soap opera, Karim

takes the role even though he initially considers the producers trashy and boring, because "[m]illions watched those things. I would have a lot of money. I would be recognised all over the country. My life would change overnight" (BS 259). Acting therefore is not a very serious matter to Karim, but it is something that allows him to change his life and make something of himself. However, it could be any other career, because Karim does not seem to care much about his future:

> But the spirit of the age among the people I knew manifested itself as general drift and idleness. We didn't want money. What for? We could get by, living off parents, friends or the State. And if we were going to get bored, and we were usually bored, rarely being self-motivated, we could at least be bored on our own terms, lying smashed on mattresses in ruined houses rather than working in the machine. I didn't want to work in a place where I couldn't wear my fur coat (BS 94-95).

To Karim, fashion choices seem more important than livelihood, which of course can be explained by his young age, but perhaps some of it can also be due to the depression of the 1970s. His opinion also reflects the need to be independent and able to make one's own choices. It is important for Karim to avoid a career where one is forced to wear a suit and not be able to express one's freedom. Perhaps it is also partly an act of separating oneself from the Indian culture by choosing to do and wear something completely different than what is the norm.

Karim's acting career begins when Eva introduces him to a director she knows called Shadwell. He is offered the role of Mowgli in *The Jungle Book* in a small theatre group. Karim doubts whether the role is right for him, but he also "loved the hard work and being with the ten other actors, in the pub, in the café, belonging to a group" (BS 145). Again, belonging somewhere becomes important, especially for someone whose family has gone through significant changes and who so far has not known what to do with his life. Among a mass of culture the other actors are like a safe subgroup among with which it is easy for Karim to identify. Many of the other actors are inexperienced as well, so it is less complicated

for Karim to feel like a part of the group.

Although Karim is eager to become an actor, his views clash with the views of the director, Shadwell, who makes Karim "wear a loin-cloth and brown make-up, so that [he] resembled a turd in a bikini-bottom" (BS 146). Shadwell also decides that Karim should be more "authentic" and adopt an Indian accent (BS 147). This is humiliating for Karim and he is upset with the other actors for not defending him. Performing Mowgli in a loin-cloth smeared with brown bodypaint and adopting an Indian accent is not what he expected his first professional role to be. However, Karim soon learns to ignore Shadwell's demands and starts to make special requests himself. His actor colleague Terry is a supporter of communist ideology and therefore passionate about equality. Karim who hates inequality, does not want "to be treated like everyone else": he has noticed how people treat his father and Charlie and "liked the power they had and the attention they received" (BS 149). He wants to be "the pivot of the production" and receive all the possible attention (ibid.). For once Karim is the one getting all the attention and he loves it. He is also eager to show it to his family and friends, who have mixed reactions to it. His mother is very proud and apparently "surprised that [Karim] could be involved in anything that wasn't a total failure", although she and Auntie Jean seem mostly interested in the other actors who have been on television (BS 156). Haroon is not impressed with what he sees and lets Karim know it. Furthermore, Karim's family and friends do not mention the play again, which Karim thinks is due to the fact that they are not "ready to see [him] as an actor, but preferred [him] in [his] old role as a useless boy" (BS 158). Thus, he concludes that his sudden new role is so far from his previous role as an idler that those around him are not used to it yet. It is also a very different role than what Haroon for example had pictured for his son. Karim's first theatre play is not an immense success, but it acts as a springboard for his career and brings him his next role in another production.

Buchanan calls Matthew Pyke, the director of Karim's second play, a representative of "the world of radical chic" (2007, 47). By this he is referring to an expression coined by Tom Wolfe in the 1970s, by which he means the adoption of radical leftist political causes by high society and celebrities in order to polish their public image at the same time. The fashionable people who attend Pyke's plays are dressed like they are playing a role themselves, wearing outfits that "resembled Chinese peasants, industrial workers (boiler suits) or South American insurgents (berets)" (BS 160). Because Pyke is so popular among the audience, he is also a director that every actor wants to work with. Pyke wants his next play to be about "the only subject there is in England . . . Class" (BS 164), although it turns out that he, too, is in fact more interested in Karim's ethnic identity than class. For some of his acting colleagues Karim getting a role in Pyke's play seems to be a problem and they let him know it: "Obviously mere talent gets you nowhere these days. Only the disadvantaged are going to succeed in seventies' England" (BS 165). Apparently, what makes Karim interesting to the directors makes the other actors bitter and they let him know that he in fact only gets the part because he is different. The group that he is used to no longer feels comfortable.

Pyke's way of working is very different from Shadwell. He has assistants, who take care of his pens and orange juice and arrange dates with women (BS 167). He also makes the actors play all sorts of games that are supposed to make them bond with each other. Karim is even more enthusiastic about this play than he was about *The Jungle Book*, although he still does not know what the play will be like. Soon he becomes interested in an actor called Eleanor, who dresses in shabby clothes but is in fact from a very wealthy family. Her mother is a friend of the Queen Mother, and the family has country houses and good education. Like Charlie she is therefore performing a working class role although simultaneously she is dining with royalty and socialising with her friends from high society. Karim is surprised by how the wealthy people "lacked all understanding of how much more than anyone else they had" (BS

174). However, they are also "polite and kind and attentive to [Karim], far more pleasant than the supercilious crowd Eva drew to her place" (ibid.). Although Karim feels rather comfortable with Eleanor's friends, he starts to realise how different they really are and recognises that he is ignorant. He and the other pupils never bothered to learn anything at school, which now annoys Karim, who also becomes self-conscious embarrassed about his accent, his "street voice" and decides to get rid of it (BS 178). Perhaps without realising it, Karim is trying to fit into another role that is different from his roots in the lower middle class suburbs. Furthermore, it is interesting how Karim is going into a completely different situation from most of the other actors, who emphasise the situation of the working class and pretend to be part of it.

No matter how much Karim enjoys working for Pyke, it is not a completely straightforward task. Like the other actors, Karim appreciates and admires Pyke for his work, but he is also sceptical. Karim explains his scepticism with his roots in South London

> where it was felt that anyone who had an artistic attitude – anyone, that is, who had read more than fifty books, or could pronounce Mallarmé correctly or tell the difference between Camembert and Brie – was basically a charlatan snob or fool (BS 189-190).

When Pyke informs Karim that he is interested in Eleanor and that his wife is interested in Karim, it confuses Karim, but he has no choice but to accept Pyke's invitation to join them at their mansion. After all, it would be rude to decline, when Pyke offers his wife as a "very special present" (BS 191). After they spend an evening with Pyke and his wife, Karim and Eleanor become more distant and Karim does not know how to deal with Pyke. Karim is "sick of the theatre people and the whole play" (BS 227) and yet manages to impress the audience and critics. Although Karim's personal life is once again in turmoil, he manages to play his part well - despite some of the actors' complaints about his inexperience – and the production is taken to New York. The play is successful in New York as well, but it only lasts there a month. After spending ten moths in the city with Charlie, Karim has had enough of him and

returns to London.

When he returns to London he finds that the country has changed. His friend Terry analyses the state of the country in a gloomy way: “England’s had it. It’s coming apart. Resistance has brought it to a standstill. . . . It’s either us or the rise of the Right” (BS 258). This depicts the end of the 1970s when the Conservative party and Margaret Thatcher came to power. However, the depressive state of the country does not prevent Karim’s career from flourishing. Buchanan points out that Karim’s success is “both a symptom of and a self-conscious commentary on the social problems that afflict Britain” (2007, 56). Although he is not at first that enthusiastic about his new role in a soap opera, his brother Allie is very excited for him. Allie, who hates “whingeing lefties” and thought Pyke’s play was good but a little too “hippie” goes on about how exciting it is for Karim to get a role in a television series: “A soap opera, that’s something to crow about. Television’s the only media I like. . . . Karim, I hate the theatre even more than I hate the opera” (BS 268). Karim, although confused with what he is saying, is also flattered by his compliments and slowly starts to accept the new phase in his life. He also finds that he actually likes Allie now, which is slightly comical: when Allie agrees with him and compliments his achievements he suddenly becomes a likeable brother who Karim wants to know better.

Although Haroon is not immensely impressed by Karim’s role in a soap opera, he is happy that he is “doing something visible at last and not bumming” (BS 280). This is not the praise that Karim wants to hear, but he concludes that feeling forever like a child in front of one’s parents is probably inevitable. More importantly, Karim is now able to offer his whole family an evening at a restaurant, which gives him a new kind of feeling of power. He finally feels that they have stopped seeing him as a failure and that he had discovered something he was good at. It is as if his growth into the role of an adult is finished, or at least he feels that he has found a road that will take him into adulthood.

Moving to London and receiving a role in *The Jungle Book* offers Karim the excitement and meaning he has been looking for in the suburbia. Although it liberates him from his suburban life, it is also a symbol of the reality, where the characters adjust themselves to the roles and expectations placed upon them. Karim is not able to decide how he interprets a role in the theatre which leads to him being uncomfortable acting something that does not come naturally. Schoene has called the Mowgli part "Karim's ethnic drag act" (Thomas 2005, 71), which can also be compared to Butler's idea about gender as an act. Karim is put into the role of an Indian boy and made to behave in a certain way, to repeat a certain set of meanings that are usually expected from someone who is Indian, such as the right accent and colour of skin. Therefore, in the same way Butler argues that gender is the re-enactment of social rules and learned habits, Karim in his Mowgli performance re-enacts the ethnic role of an Indian boy by repeating the behaviour that is expected of him. Also in his later role in Pyke's play, Karim is asked to study his surroundings and choose a character "from his own background . . . someone black" (BS 170). When Karim decides to play Anwar, Haroon's old friend who has started a hunger strike to force his daughter into marriage, it is received "as a representation of fanatical black people", as Jena points out (Thomas 2005, 68). However, when Karim then switches his role to an interpretation of Changez, Anwar's son-in-law, it is welcomed enthusiastically. It is therefore not straightforward what is welcome in the theatre world and what is judged as politically incorrect.

It becomes clear in the novel that the theatre world outside the stage is also full of different roles that need to be filled. The director is almost like a king, whose every command must be fulfilled. The actors are the faithful subjects of every director they see, but there is rivalry between actors on who gets the best parts with the most respected directors. Also the political side of acting is interesting. Although many actors like Eleanor actually come from wealthy families, most of them emphasise that they are on the side of the working classes.

They pretend to be less fortunate than they actually are by wearing old and frumpy clothes, which for a social climber like Eva is incomprehensible: why would someone want to conceal their noble origins? The roles that are played outside of the stage and how well they are played are thus at least as important as the ones that are played on stage.

Although acting is not an obvious choice for Karim, it does offer him both a career and the confidence that he has been lacking. In Sukhev Sandhu's words, being an actor is "a job which involves the repeated donning and casting aside of costumes and personae" (Ross, 2006, 236). The acting career therefore offers him changing roles under which he is able to hide in search for his own role in life. Furthermore, now that he is an actor he will become the idol like the ones that he has been looking up to in his room in the suburbs. He has therefore managed to turn his whole life around and rejected the role of the failure that he used to impose on himself. He no longer takes part in the general spirit of "drift and idleness" that has taken over the generation (BS 94-95). Instead of watching other people live their dreams Karim has finally started to do the same.

4. Performances of Ethnicity in *The Buddha of Suburbia*

London is and already was in the 1960s a multicultural city with hundreds of different ethnicities. In fact, Maleiha Malik points out that contrary to the common notion Britain has always been a country with various ethnicities, languages, religions and cultures (2010, 34). It consists of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and has always been under the influence of other cultures such as the Romans (ibid.). The British were therefore hardly ever a homogenous people. However, the conversation about multiculturalism focuses often solely on the post-World War II migration and therefore leads to the impression that cultural diversity in Britain is a new phenomenon.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia* multiculturalism is represented by the diversity of ethnicities. Karim's mother is English and his father is originally from India, but Karim himself does not seem to know what his ethnicity actually is. In addition, there are many representatives of both Indian and English ethnicities, but this of course does not mean that these ethnic groups are somehow similar or homogenous. On the contrary, there is much variation in cultural and religious aspects and also differences caused by class. Some of the characters want to emphasize their ethnic background, like Anwar who came to London with Haroon and represents a more traditional Indian, who for example wants his daughter to marry the Indian man he has chosen for her. Haroon on the other hand has always tried to blend to the British society and has not brought his Indianness forth. As Susie Thomas puts it, "[n]ational identities in *The Buddha* are invariably presented as a matter of cultural performances, rather than essential or inherited characteristics" (2004, 64). In addition, Mark Stein plays with the concept of postethnicity by turning it into posed-ethnicity, a concept that surely fits the performance of ethnic identity in the case of many of the characters (2004, 115). There are thus several ways of practicing ethnicity in the novel and it can also be read as

introducing new ways of being British.

In this section I will discuss the role of ethnicity in the novel and how the different ethnicities are acted out. Because all of the characters have a very different attitude towards both their own and on the ethnicity of others, the performances of these ethnicities are also very different. Furthermore, the roles that the characters are expected to perform conflict at times with the view they have of themselves. My analysis is divided into three different sections, the first focusing on Karim's mixed race ethnicity, the second on Indianness and the third on white Englishness.

4.1 "Englishman I am, almost": The Difficulty of Standing Out

The Buddha of Suburbia begins with Karim describing himself:

> My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often 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. 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 (BS 3).

Already at the beginning of the novel it is made clear that Karim's relationship with his ethnicity is complicated. Being the son of an Indian father and an English mother does not give him a stable ethnic identity, especially when neither one of these ethnicities have not been emphasized more than the other or been forced upon him. However, Stein points out that although the opening words suggest that it is difficult for Karim to describe himself or define his ethnicity, he mentions three times that he is an Englishman (2004, 116). It can therefore be deduced that being English is how he sees himself although he also feels the need to explain that he is not the typical Englishman (ibid.).

Apart from being able to flee from suburbia Karim wants nothing more than being able to blend in with the other English. At one point he has even wanted to be "the first Indian

centre-forward to play for England" (BS 43). He knows that his semblance differs from the norm, but will not stop trying to be just like the other boys his age. His main role model in being British is of course Charlie, the boy Karim wants to be. Charlie is admired by everyone around him, which makes him a logical ideal for Karim as well. In fact, Karim "who wanted only to be like Charlie – as clever, as cool in every part of his soul" (BS 16) initially chooses to play Charlie in Shadwell's play, but is told to pick another character, "someone black" (BS 170). Feedback like this inevitably makes Karim even more conscious of his ethnicity.

Not only is Charlie the perfect English boy, his family is also wealthier which is another issue Karim envies: "The Kays were much better off than us, and had a bigger house, with a little drive and garage and car" (BS 8). To Karim it seems that their family stands out from everyone else because of the size of their house in addition to the fact that they are a multicultural family (BS 39): "Everyone I knew, Charlie and the rest, seemed to live in big places, except for us. No wonder I had an inferiority complex". Although class is not directly connected with ethnicity it seems that being lower class than his friends makes Karim even more aware of standing out from the others. Furthermore, when Karim meets Eleanor, the upper class actor to whom he is attracted to and she comments on his accent, Karim once again becomes self-conscious:

> 'You've got a street voice, Karim. You're from South London – so that's how you speak. It's like cockney, only not so raw. It's not unusual. It's different to my voice, of course.' Of course. At that moment I resolved to lose my accent: whatever it was, it would go. I would speak like her. It wasn't difficult (BS 178).

These remarks made by Karim himself and others about his background and class only make him more conscious of the role he is playing and the company he is in. He is determined to change the way he speaks, to create another role for himself in order to be considered as a part of the posh group of people around Eleanor. The comment about his accent suggests that once again he is seen in a different light than how he would like to be seen, although Eleanor's

comment also suggests that he is like any other Brit from South London. In a way he is thus seen as an Englishman, which is what he has always wanted, but he is also made aware of his lower class status. Being perceived as a boy from the South London suburbs is not what he aims at in his pursuit to fit in among the English.

Especially in a place such as Bromley where "there were so few Asians" it is even harder for Karim to not stand out (BS 64). In addition to giving him the excitement he desires "there were also thousands of black people everywhere [in London], so [he] wouldn't feel exposed" (BS 121). The city would therefore offer him a place where he would not be the peculiar sight he seems to be in the suburbia. As Thomas argues, the novel not only shows that the homogenous Englishness does not exist, but also that England is not as tolerant as it is considered (2004, 64). This is what also Caglar means when she argues that there is variation inside every culture (1997, 175-176). Therefore, in a multicultural society such as Great Britain it is certain that not everyone represents the same culture and that not even the same ethnic background guarantees a shared conception of culture. Thus for Karim who is eager to only be a person in the crowd and not the only darker skinned boy in the neighbourhood, a large homogenous city would be ideal.

Karim's skin colour results in not only racism but also in expectations that are based solely on how he looks. Even a South African dentist has to check whether or not Karim speaks English (BS 258). Shadwell, the director Karim works with, assumes that Karim speaks another language in addition to English:

> Instead of talking about the job he said some words to me in Punjabi or Urdu and looked as if he wanted to get into a big conversation about Ray or Tagore or something. To tell the truth, when he spoke it sounded like he was gargling. 'Well?', he said. He rattled off some more words. 'You don't understand?' 'No, not really.' What could I say? I couldn't win. I knew he'd hate me for it. 'Your own language!' . . . 'But your father speaks, doesn't he? He must do' (BS 140).

Shadwell continues by telling Karim that he should go to India, "as if nobody had ever been there but him" (BS 141). He seems disappointed that Karim is not the Indian he has expected

him to be, but is also reluctant to admit it, because to him Karim represents an authentic Indian. In Hall's terms, Shadwell is stereotyping Karim, making him aware that he is "beyond pale" and that he should represent something that his appearance seems to promise (1997, 258). Stein argues that Shadwell excludes himself from those who see Karim as an exotic creature (2004, 118). Shadwell is not successful in hiding his disappointment, because he says to Karim: "Everyone looks at you, I'm sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we'll hear now from him. And you're from Orpington" (BS 141). Karim's looks are misleading to Shadwell, but he turns his disappointment into a discussion about other people's expectations. What Shadwell is trying to signal is that it is not him but other people who have these stereotypical expectations from Karim who has Asian features (Stein 2004, 118). Shadwell does not want to be included among people who expect something from someone solely on the basis of their looks, although clearly this is exactly what he does.

Karim's ethnicity is emphasized in the theatre even after the casting with Shadwell. For his role in *The Jungle Book* Karim is made to wear "a loin-cloth and brown make-up" and speak with an Indian accent, because after all he has "been cast for authenticity and not for experience" (BS 146-147). Apparently Karim is not authentic enough as he is, since his appearance must be enhanced in these ways. Perhaps this is Shadwell's way of showing his disappointment in Karim who he thought was a "real" Indian and betrayed his expectations. However, after becoming comfortable with the role, Karim is able to teach Shadwell a lesson by "relapsing into cockney at odd times" (BS 158). As Ross argues, by doing this Karim both defends his street voice and flaunts with his disengagement (2006, 240).

In the next project Karim works with the actors are supposed to create a character by watching the world around them. When Karim presents his interpretation of Anwar it is received as a mockery of his own people. Especially Tracey seems like she has been

personally insulted by Karim:

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

As a black woman Tracey seems to think that everyone who is not white is automatically black and thus share the same culture as her. Therefore, the idea of Karim performing as an old Muslim man would in her mind make all non-white people including her seem like they accept all the prejudice and racist thinking that is directed against them. She seems to have adopted the view that these cultures are similar because the dominant culture treats them as if they are the same, namely non-white or the Other (Hall 1999, 69). Furthermore, Karim wants to make a distinction between Indian culture and black culture in general. When Tracey expresses her worries about Karim's character being stereotypical from the white point of view she uses the words black and Asian, which Karim does not consider the right terms and corrects her by saying that the character is actually Indian (BS 180). As Dyer points out, using the concepts of black and white as binary oppositions is problematic because the notion of black excludes a wide range of ethnicities that are neither black nor white, such as Indians (1997, 11). This why Karim does not feel comfortable under the term black either, although black is a word he is likely to hear every day.

Ironically however, Karim's later decision to perform Changez as a crippled Indian with an accent and thinking "that you merely had to whisper the word 'undress' in England and white women would start slipping out of their underwear" is not critiqued at all and is made a part of the play (BS 189). It is therefore not straightforward what is acceptable and what is not in the world of professional performances. Karim's "personal front" defines how others see him, how his performance is received, and sometimes it is even enhanced in order

for it to be more believable (Goffman 2004, 62). Because he is not able to escape his ethnicity, the roles he plays are inevitably those of Asian characters. Therefore Karim's experiences acting "the Asian boy" do not end with the Changez/Tariq character. He takes the role of a "rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper" in a "soap opera which would tangle with the latest contemporary issues: they meant abortions and racist attacks" (BS 259). Karim thus gives his face to the Indian that the whole nation would identify.

Because Karim sees himself as an Englishman above anything else he is not that interested in his Indianness. It is not particularly surprising that he does not feel connected to his Indian heritage – after all, he has never even been to India. This is what Caglar means by arguing that people who have moved to another culture and especially their children do not necessarily feel that they belong to any cultural entities or communities (1997, 170). Thus it is not India that Karim perceives as the community he belongs to – he is still rather oblivious of what his community actually is. Karim does not see his Indian background as a very significant part of his life because it has never been forced upon him. Not even Haroon has taught Karim to behave in a certain way, but has wanted to blend in with the suburban lifestyle. Haroon is not "proud of his past, but he [isn't] unproud of it either; it just existed, and there wasn't any point in fetishizing it, as some liberals and Asian radicals liked to do" (BS 213). Haroon is thus not trying to hide his past but does not emphasize it either. However, it is also interesting that sometimes Haroon comments on Karim's friends. According to Karim, Haroon does not mind who he goes out with "as long as they were not boys or Indians":

> 'Why go out with these Muslims?' he said once, when I brought a Pakistani friend of Jamila's home with me. 'Why not?' I asked. 'Too many problems,' he said imperiously. 'What problems?' I asked. He wasn't good at being specific; he shook his head as if to say there were so many problems he didn't know where to begin. But he added, for the sake of argument, 'Dowries and all' (BS 73).

Haroon's conflicting opinions about ethnicity are things that confuse Karim even more. How

can he be comfortable with his own ethnicity if his father, an Indian man, does not like Karim spending time with other Asians and yet invents himself a role as the guru of suburban middle-classes? Even Karim himself tries to hide the ethnicity of Changez when he takes to a football club and forces him "to wear a bobble-hat over his face in case the lads saw he was a Paki and imagined I was one too" (BS 98). It is therefore no wonder Karim is not sure how performing his Indian ethnicity will affect people.

Some of the white characters in the novel, although not racist or malevolent, cannot see beyond Karim skin colour. Indeed, Karim's ethnic identity seems to be important and exciting for people who do not know him. He is seen as an exotic figure, the embodiment of the notion of an Indian. Dyer argues that "being visible as white is a passport to privilege" (1997, 44) but in Karim's case being Indian in a white gathering seems to be an asset. For example Eva treats both Karim and Haroon like they are the most interesting things she has ever seen and says to Karim: "you are so exotic, so original! It's such a contribution! It's so you!" (BS 9). As James Procter argues, Haroon and Karim are chosen for the roles of "authentic Indians" (2006, 109). Their ethnicity does seem like a performance to some, as if it is a conscious choice to have a darker skin among a room of white people. Yousaf also points out that many of the white characters in the novel believe that because Karim and Haroon are "foreigners", they should behave and act in ways that are authentic to them and different to the white culture (2002, 48). What is expected of them is a performance of what it is like being an Indian.

Karim himself cannot see the excitement of being "exotic" when his exoticism is also used as an excuse for racist assaults. Although some might find ethnic minorities fascinating, there are always those who expect others to blend in and yet refuse to let them do so. Karim says that "we were supposed to be English but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it" (BS 53). This echoes the theories of Bhabha who argues that

colonized people are expected to act like the colonizers and when they do they are punished and it is made clear that whatever they do they will not become equal with the colonizers (2004, 280). Whenever Karim attempts to act like the white English majority, his reward is a racist insult. When Karim's girlfriend Helen's father Hairy Back learns that the two of them are dating, he releases his dog after which Karim "went white, but obviously not white enough", because Hairy Back announces (BS 40): "However many niggers there are we don't like it. We're with Enoch [Powell]. If you put one of your black 'ands near my daughter I'll smash it with a 'ammer! With a 'ammer!" In the light of these violent incidents, it is interesting that Karim seems to be ashamed that he rarely dares to say anything back to people who physically or verbally attack him. In a situation where most people would be happy to escape in one piece, Karim feels bad for not defending himself more. He says that "[i]f people spat at me I practically thanked them for not making me chew the moss between the paving stones" (BS 53). However, when he thinks about the attacks in privacy, he is not as serene and thankful anymore:

> One kid tried to brand my arm with a red-hot lump of metal. Someone else pissed over my shoes, and all my Dad thought about was me becoming a doctor. What world was he living in? Every day I considered myself lucky to get home from school without serious injury (BS 63).

To Karim, racist attacks are thus more or less everyday life, which understandably makes the exoticism of his appearance hard for him to understand.

Although Karim states that he is an Englishman and wants to blend in among the English, Stein points out that often when he speaks about English society Karim takes an outsider's view (2004, 122). He is thus unable to fully see himself as a part of the English society. When he describes his father, he says that compared to him "most Englishmen looked like clumsy giraffes" (BS 4), and when he is on stage he is suddenly aware that there are "four hundred white English people looking at me" (BS 228). Thus, although the stage is the place where he is most comfortable and where he can act something that he is not, it still seems

daunting to him to realize that all these white people are looking at him. Furthermore, it seems that compared to the English Karim is even proud of how his father looks like, although his ethnic identity still is unstable.

After all the confusion about his ethnicity and not wanting to be seen as a dark-skinned Indian one would assume that Charlie's comment about Karim being "so English" would mean the world to him (BS 254). However, Charlie continues his depiction of the English as being "so shocked, so self-righteous and moral, so loveless and incapable of dancing. They are narrow the English" (ibid.). His depiction is of course interesting considering the fact that he sells his band with his English working class identity. The result of this comment is that Karim leaves Charlie in New York and returns to London to find himself "surrounded by people [he] loved, and [he] felt happy and miserable at the same time" (BS 284). Already at Anwar's funeral he has realized that maybe he has some sort of a connection with the Indians around him:

> But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now – the Indians – that in some way these were my people, and that I'd spent my whole life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them. . . . So if I wanted the additional bonus of an Indian past, I would have to create it (BS 212-213).

Karim thus sees that he in fact is a part of the Indian culture even though he has been relentlessly fighting against it. Stein argues that Karim, "the outsider within", realizes that he belongs not only to "these strange creatures – the Indians" but also to British culture, a thought which he already introduced at the very beginning of the novel, but which he seems to fully accept now (2004, 121). Furthermore, he feels like he has to invent yet another Indian role for himself, because he does not have the past to support his ethnic identity.

Karim sees his ethnic identity as something that is constantly evolving and something that needs to be invented. Hall argues that people are not born with national or cultural identities, but they change and evolve in relation to its representation (1999, 46). This is how

Karim also sees himself and his ethnicity: not as a complete agent but as something that is susceptible to changes and influences. Because of the fact that his ethnic background "emerged from two old histories" (BS 3), it is not a straightforward task for him to determine how he should react to his own ethnicity, especially in a world which does not automatically consider all colours as equal. In his search for an ethnic identity, Karim performs a number of roles both on and off the stage acting as the authentic Asian. By the end of the novel Karim seems to reach some sort of a truce with himself and allows himself to think that despite all the mess that there had been "it wouldn't always be that way" (BS 284).

4.2 "The everyman of the twentieth century": The Indians in *The Buddha of Suburbia*

The Buddha of Suburbia has many Indian characters in it, but Haroon is unquestionably the most important one. He is also the buddha after whom the novel is named. Haroon is the son of a doctor who grew up in Bombay and led a comfortable life. In fact, Margaret is so proud of her husband's family that she often tells people that "[t]hey're higher than the Churchills" (BS 24). Haroon has come to London as a young man to become a lawyer with the intention to "return to India a qualified and polished English gentleman lawyer and an accomplished ballroom dancer" (ibid.). However, after meeting Margaret and his family cutting off his money after finding out "that he was being called to the Bar only to drink", he has ended up "working as a clerk in the Civil Service for £3 a week" (BS 26) and is convinced that he will never be promoted, because the whites will not promote "an Indian while there is a white man left on the earth" (BS 27). His comfortable life of not having to do anything for himself has thus become a dreary suburban existence of having to manage everything himself. An aspect he has not learned to manage is over twenty years in London is how to navigate around town. He still

> stumbled around the place like an Indian just off the boat, and asked questions like, 'Is Dover in Kent?' [Karim]'d have thought, as an employee of the British Government, as a Civil Service clerk, even as badly paid and insignificant one as him, he'd just have to know these things (BS 7).

Although Haroon has become a part of English society by marrying an English woman and working for the government, he is thus still somewhat lost in the city. Whether it is a part of his performance of an oblivious Indian man who is in need of guidance or actually needs help is left for the reader to decide.

Gradually Haroon has started to become interested in spiritual things and Eastern philosophy, but no-one shares his interest until Eva comes to the picture. Her sudden interest in what Haroon thinks makes him feel special, unlike her wife who in Haroon's opinion "doesn't join in things" (BS 8). It is therefore no wonder that when Eva asks her "good and deep friend" to speak to her friends about Oriental philosophy, to "show [them] the Way. The Path", Haroon feels like he is finally appreciated (BS 13). Apart from Eva the audience in his appearances seems rather skeptical about his skills and teachings which include yoga practices and a collection of different Oriental philosophies. However, his performance must be credible to some for he is asked to appear again. Karim, however, is not convinced about his father's, or God's as he now calls him, act. He notices that Haroon is trying to exaggerate his role as an Indian: "He was hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent. He'd spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads" (BS 21). Haroon is thus trying to become a more credible Indian in front of his white crowd. He is trying to perform the role they expect him to play as the Indian buddha in the suburbs of London, who will tell them the right way to live, although Ross argues that as "a lapsed Muslim improbably posing as a Buddhist guru" he is hadly authentic in any way (2006, 239). However, Haroon delivers what his white audience expects him to: an experience with a wise man from the Orient.

Apparently Haroon himself believes in his role as the buddha because he manages to

convince his audience with his appearances. He emphasizes his personal front (Goffman 2004, 62) by exaggerating his accent and wearing clothes that make him look like "a midget toreador" (BS 29). To his audience this creates a convincing performance of a Buddhist speaker. However, his family is not as easily convinced. Karim is the only one of them to join his father in the gatherings and sees the sort of impact he has on people. However, even Karim has his doubts. He is impressed that Haroon is able to convince even Charlie, but he is still not sure if Haroon "was a charlatan or if there was anything true in what he was doing" (BS 22). He wants to see if Haroon is worthy of the 'God' moniker and "whether, as he started to blossom, Dad really did have anything to offer other people, or if he would turn out to be merely another suburban eccentric" (ibid.). After all, he has never been a religious man before, and suddenly he has become "a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist" (BS 16). It is therefore quite understandable that Karim should have reservations about his father suddenly becoming the spiritual leader of South London, although he is impressed by his performance and how well Haroon is able to act the role.

Hall points out that because there is the concept of whiteness behind the notion of Britishness, someone who is not white will be different and stand out as the Other (1997, 235). This is how Haroon is perceived as well. Although Haroon has been eager to learn the English culture and habits and has never emphasized his Indian ethnicity, he is also aware that outside India he will not be seen as anything other than an Indian. Therefore he has attempted to act more like an Englishman and adapt to his new role in London. Yousaf points out, Haroon's ethnic identity and otherness is different from Karim's (2002, 46). According to Yousaf, "Haroon's generation either attempted to disregard a projected "negative identity" or learned their Otherness in Britain" (ibid.). Because Haroon has not lived in Britain for his whole life, he has not had the otherness experience until he moved there and has therefore had to live with it. He seems to be well aware of this: "I have lived in the West for most of my life,

and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian" (BS 263). However, Yousaf argues that because Haroon has not pushed any identity on Karim "he refuses to act like those whites who position him in a particular way" because he has not accepted the role of another immigrant Indian in London who acts in a certain way and raises his son to be like him (2002, 49). Therefore, Haroon's silent protest against stereotyping him as just another Indian has resulted in him refusing to raise his son in the way he is expected.

Especially to some white characters in the novel, such as Margaret's sister Jean and his husband Ted, Haroon being Indian is hard to understand and accept. For them "[i]t was bad enough his being an Indian in the first place without having an awkward name too. They'd called Dad Harry from the first they'd met him and there was nothing Dad could do about it" (BS 33). Yousaf argues that with his appearances Haroon liberates himself from the expectations and identity that his work and his family, particularly Jean and Ted, have inflicted on him (2002, 48). He thus escapes the role that he has been performing all these years and invents another character for himself. However, the way some of the characters react to Haroon and the other Indians is made to seem comical to the reader. Karim's girlfriend Helen is so enthralled by Haroon that when he sadly reflects how he likes the modern England less and less she reacts by replying: "'But this is your home', she said. 'We like you being here. You benefit our country with your traditions'" (BS 74). Although she means well and wants to make Haroon feel at home, she also puts him in the place of the Other. It is unclear whether Helen wants Haroon to feel like a part of the British society or if she wants him to act like members of his "own culture" in order to foreground his difference. Comments like this and the remarks made by people like Jean and Ted are what make Haroon continuously aware of his ethnicity.

It is not only Karim in the novel who has theatrical roles to perform. Stein argues that

both Karim and Haroon have similar career, because they both fabricate an Asian personality in order to entertain their audience (2004, 117). Haroon performs his Indian role so well that it allows him to build a new life around it. With the help of Eva he starts to do "guru gigs" every week (BS 115). Haroon

> had a regular and earnest young crowd of head-bowers – students, psychologists, nurses, musicians – who adored him, some of whom rang and visited late at night in panic and fear, so dependent were they on his listening kindness. There was a waiting list to join his group. . . . Eva knew a man on the local paper, the same co-operative journalist who got Charlie on the front of the *Bromley and Kentish Times*, and he interviewed Dad. Dad was photographed in his red waistcoat and Indian pyjamas sitting on a gold cushion. His commuter companions were impressed by his sudden fame, and Dad told [Karim] delightedly how they pointed him out to each other on Platform Two (ibid.).

Not all the reception is good, however. At the office "where he was an unelevated lazy Indian who had run away from his wife and children" he is ridiculed: "On the picture in the newspaper a bubble was drawn protruding from his mouth saying, 'Dark mystery of life solved by dark charlatan – at taxpayers' expense'" (ibid.). His new role is thus not accepted by those he works with, presumably because this conflicts with the role that his colleagues are accustomed with.

Ross argues that the label faux-Indian applies to Haroon, because after camouflaging as an indiscernible Britisher he suddenly adopts the role of an Eastern mystic for his own benefit (2006, 239). According to Ross, he has "a performative concept of ethnicity, enabling him to shuttle fluently from one persona to another" which makes him both "droll and formidable" (ibid.). Buchanan argues that when one represents a false version of oneself it may be a more enjoyable, productive or practical way of being (2007, 44). It is true that initially Haroon's performance as the guru of the suburbs is a conscious role the only purpose of which is to make the audience to believe him. The effect is enhanced by his costumes and by Eva who not only is enthralled by Haroon but also wants to emphasize her own role as the hostess in these gatherings. Perhaps she would like to see herself as the mediator who not

only saved Haroon from a dreary marriage and gave him a new direction in his life but also made his audience aware of him. However, I would also argue that because for over twenty years Haroon has been balancing between being an Indian and being a Britisher, this new role has also given him a new identity and he does not have to hide his ethnicity anymore. After all, now he is not mimicking the English and fading his ethnicity.

The other Indian characters in the novel are quite different from Haroon and more unwilling to hide their ethnicity in order to adapt to British society. Haroon's old friend Anwar, who came to London at the same time as Haroon is a good example of a different approach to being an Indian in London. He also came to London to study with the intention to return to India, but has stayed in London instead. He is married to Princess Jeeta and they have one daughter, Jamila. They run a grocery shop and only have a week off each year. Suddenly he decides that it is time for Jamila to get married and with the help of his brothers in India he arranges a man for her to marry. However, when Jamila objects to the arranged marriage she is about to be forced into, her father starts a hunger strike in order to either force her daughter to marry the man he has chosen for her or to starve himself to death because she refuses to do so. All this is highly unexpected and it bewilders Karim as well as the other characters:

> It was certainly bizarre, Uncle Anwar behaving like a Muslim. I'd never known him believe in anything before, so it was amazing novelty to find him literally staking his life on the principle of absolute patriarchal authority. . . . Maybe there were similarities between what was happening to Dad, with his discoveries of Eastern philosophy, and Anwar's last stand. Perhaps it was the immigrant condition living itself out through them. For years they were both happy to live like Englishmen. . . . Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least resisting the English here (BS 64).

According to Thomas, Anwar's "retreat into ethnic enclaves, as a survivalist tactic when under threat, is as likely a response to the experience of migration as a playful picking and mixing of cultures" (2005, 73). Anwar is behaving with the artificial creation of India in his

mind. He is attempting in his mind to save a piece of the India that he left behind over twenty years ago and bring it to this day. He would like to see his daughter performing the role of a traditional Indian wife. This clearly shows what Caglar also points out that there is great variation inside different cultures and not all representatives of a culture will have the ideas about marriage, for instance, as is the case in the novel as well (1997, 175).

Yousaf argues that Anwar is Kureishi's way of showing that the old habits that migrants cling to are outdated and unnecessary (2002, 44). By resolutely insisting that his daughter marries a man neither one has ever met Anwar is, in Hall's words, acting out the ethnic identity he has never shown before (1999, 49). Under extortion Jamila feels she has no other choice than to marry the man in order to save her father's life. Anwar immediately starts to plan their life for them and how "Jamila would become pregnant immediately, and soon there would be little Anwars running all over the place. Anwar would attend to the kids' cultural upbringing and take them to school and mosque" (BS 80). He is trying to make sure that after he is gone there will be someone who still appreciates the same cultural values with which he grew up. In Karim's view, Anwar's "Muslim fatalism" is depressing:

> Like many Muslim men – beginning with the Prophet Mohammed himself, whose absolute statements, served up piping hot from God, inevitably gave rise to absolutism – Anwar thought he was right about everything (BS 172).

However, his wife and daughter do not forgive him his stubbornness and Anwar becomes very lonely, "smoking and drinking un-Islamic drinks and thinking portentous thoughts, dreaming of other countries, lost houses, mothers, beaches" (BS 208). Changez, the man whom Anwar chose for his daughter is not the muscular man to continue the store Anwar expected him to be, but a comical character with a crippled hand. Ironically, when Anwar attacks Changez in his frustration, Changez accidentally knocks him unconscious with a dildo and Anwar dies a week later after suffering a heart failure.

Anwar's attempt at performing the role of a good Muslim thus fails in all possible

ways: he has resorted to drinking, his family has rejected him, the son-in-law that was sent from India does not match the image he had of him and he dies in a ridiculous accident caused by himself. According to Ross, "[t]he mode of Anwar's death is one remote from his own parched field of certainties; his fears have been too narrowly channeled by his Islamic rigour to prepare him for the fate he meets in polymorphously perverse modern London" (2006, 239). What begins with a man trying to live the role he thinks he is supposed to perform, the role of a Muslim trying to preserve some of the traditions he has grown up with, comes to an end with him literally getting hit in the head by the impossibility of forcing others into roles they do not want to take.

Jamila is very different from both her father Anwar and Haroon. She has been born in London and is therefore a second generation immigrant. Her mindset is rather liberal and influenced by western culture. She has been lucky enough to be taken under the wings of the librarian next door, Miss Cutmore, who has introduced her to literature and equality, fraternity and freedom. Unlike Karim, Jamila is very brave when she confronts racism. When "a greaser rode past us on an old bicycle and said, as if asking the time, 'Eat shit, Pakis.' Jammie sprinted through the traffic before throwing the bastard off his bike and tugging out some of his hair, like someone weeding an overgrown garden" (BS 53). Jamila is therefore a politicized character who is not afraid to fight for her rights. She also refuses to accept the role where she would have to mimic the English culture only to be made aware that she is "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 2004, 280).

Although it would be easy to see Jamila as a traditional representative of an Asian family, she is in fact a very strong woman with opinions of her own. Accordingly Yousaf argues that:

> In Jamila and her mother we have two very strong women who are conscious of the roles assigned to them within a traditional working-class family unit, be the family black or white. I would argue that they choose to uphold a patriarchal structure that they know to be crumbling. Furthermore, it would be

> grossly inaccurate to see Jamila as an uncomplicated victim of her parents, when she is, in fact, given a great deal of freedom to pursue her own interests, in contrast to the stereotypical image that would have her at the parents' beck and call, dressed in salwar kameez, head bowed and acquiescent (2002, 42).

She is therefore a strong minded woman, who may seem like she obeys to the rules and acts like she is supposed to but who decides for her own actions instead. Furthermore, Karim thinks that "she was marrying Changez out of perversity . . . Marrying Changez would be, in her mind, a rebellion against rebellion, creative novelty in itself" (BS 82). There is therefore no reason to think she is someone who has surrendered to her role as the typical Asian woman. Stein interprets "Jamila's 'theatrical' arranged marriage" so that she pretends to be compliant to marriage, but only to her own advantage (2004, 119). Therefore, if Anwar is Kureishi's way of saying that old habits are useless as Yousaf argues, perhaps then Jamila represents Kureishi's view of how new generations should leave the old habits behind and take matters to their own hands.

These three characters represent very different ways of acting out their Indian ethnicity. Haroon and Anwar have both assimilated into the British society and covered up their ethnicity, but now they have started to feel the need to express their cultural traditions, although in very different ways. What makes the ethnicity of both of these characters feel like a performance is the fact that they suddenly change their behaviour in a completely unexpected direction and insist that it is the natural thing for them to do. This is what makes their behaviour seem artificial. Jamila on the other hand is not afraid to express neither her ethnicity nor her modern and radical opinions. Her only concession to the traditions her father suddenly wants to follow is marrying Changez, but this does not mean that the marriage is anything other than an agreement on paper. It can be concluded that there is no one way of being an Indian in the novel and the different interpretations of Indian ethnicity question the traditional way of representing Asian characters.

4.3 "What would the Queen say?" Depictions of White Englishness

Despite the fact that the novel revolves mostly around Karim and his father and discusses Indian ethnicity, the majority of the characters are nevertheless white Englishmen and women. However, not nearly all of the characters are the sort of Britons Karim would want to identify with. Although Karim's mother Margaret is English, she does not represent the life Karim is after: "She was tired. She reminded me of the real world. I wanted to shout at her: Take that world away!" (BS 18). He feels sorry for her, but is also mad at her for not standing up for herself: "Why couldn't she be stronger? Why wouldn't she fight back?" (BS 19). She works in a shoe shop, cooks dinner and does what every suburban mother does. She only has control over the television, which is her companion in the evening. For her, "the Second World War was still present in the streets" (BS 73). Margaret thus represents all the things that Karim wants to flee from. As Thomas argues, Margaret is the epitome of "an utterly defeated sense of suburban Englishness" (2005, 65). In a scene after Haroon's first appearance the family is having supper and suddenly Margaret:

> burst into tears and banged the table with the flat of her hand. 'My life is terrible, terrible!' she cried. 'Doesn't anyone understand?' We looked at her in surprise for a moment, before carrying on with our food (BS 19).

Her desperate cry is thus passed with a shrug, either because no-one knows what to say and how to react or because they know she is right and do not know how to help her.

Margaret's defeated spirit is underlined even more when Haroon is leaving for his first appearance. He asks Margaret join him, but she replies that she does not want to see Eva, because "She treats me like dog's muck, Haroon. I'm not Indian enough for her. I'm only English" (BS 5). Haroon teases her by answering: "I know you're only English, but you could wear a sari" (ibid.). However, Margaret is not receptive to humour, especially when it involves her. Furthermore, she must know that her husband is having an affair with Eva, a fact which rarely increases anyone's warm feelings for the mistress. Her depressed spirit deepens

when Haroon leaves her to be with Eva. If she was a shy and discontent woman before, her frustration and melancholy after the separation make Karim fear that he will be infected with her unhappiness:

> If other people's unhappiness couldn't cheer her up, nothing would. Her mind had turned to glass, and all life slid from its sheer aspect. . . . I didn't want her to give herself over to the view of life that underlay all this, the philosophy that pinned her to the shadow-corners of the world. For Mum, life was fundamentally hell. You went blind, you got raped, people forgot your birthday, Nixon got elected, your husband fled with a blonde from Beckenham, and then you got old, you couldn't walk and you died. Nothing good could come of things here below. While this view could equally have generated stoicism, in Mum's case it led to self-pity (BS 104-105).

Her divorce has caused her to constantly feel sorry for herself. She also feels that she is not appreciated enough, and perhaps also that Haroon has taken all the attention from her. She seems to think that not even Karim acknowledges his English side: "But you're not an Indian. You've never been to India. You'd get diarrhoea the minute you stepped off that plane, I know you would. . . . Who gave birth to you? You're an Englishman, I'm glad to say" (BS 232). She is therefore not convinced that her role as a mother is appreciated.

Although Margaret seems as if she might lie in the bed forever pitying herself, she manages to get her life together. She leaves her work in the shoe shop and starts working at a doctor's practice as a receptionist. Karim has never seen her mother dance, but after the preview for *The Jungle Book* they go to a night club together. Karim remarks that he had "forgotten how happy she could be" (BS 156). Margaret is thus able to change her utterly defeated attitude towards life and is even able to enjoy herself.

Contrary to Margaret Eva is not shy or abstemious in the least. Before Haroon's first lecture Eva is depicted as looking "like a panda" with her darkened eyes, "pumping out a plume of Oriental aroma" so that she resembled "a kind of human crop-sprayer" (BS 9). Karim wonders whether she is "the most sophisticated person [he]'d ever met, or the most pretentious" (ibid.). In a way she is mimicking a culture that she feels is more exotic than her

own. Although Margaret thinks that Eva is “a vile show-off and big-mouth” and Karim agrees that she “was slightly ridiculous”, she is also “the only person over thirty” Karim feels he can talk to: “She was inevitably good-tempered, or she was being passionate about something. At least she didn’t put an armour around her feelings like the rest of the miserable undead around us” (BS 10). She is thus someone Karim can confide to and trust.

Eva is a middle-class woman, who is more than willing to be seen as a more sophisticated person than she actually is. Her group of friends consists of other middle-class, middle-aged people in “almost artistic jobs” (BS 12) who like Eva are rather liberal and eager to learn from other cultures and think that “there are two sorts of people in the world – those who have been to India and those who haven't” (BS 30). Eva is determined to get to London and take not only Charlie and Haroon, but also Karim with her. Eva seems to think that the exotic Haroon is an asset in her circles: with the help of his lectures they might all be able to move to a comfortable house in the city and become something. Her plan works better than presumably any one of them expected. Haroon gains more popularity and she is able to sell her old house and buy a new “formerly elegant” flat in West Kensington which she intends to renovate (BS 125). All this is a part of her plan to climb her way up the social ladder. Like Karim, she wants to forget her life in the suburbs, although her status as a middle-class woman was better than the status of the Amir family.

An example of Eva’s expedition in the world of social classes is the flat-warming party to which she invites “every theatre and film person she’d run into over the past few years, and a lot she hadn’t” and which Karim interprets as “her launch into London” (BS 134). She has given Haroon the permission to invite only two members from his meditation group, because according to her “the future shouldn’t contain too much of the past” (BS 133). She also “didn’t want the new smooth crowd to think she was mixing with a bunch of basket-weavers from Bromley” (ibid.). Karim sees what she is trying to do by carefully handpicking

the guests:

> I saw she wanted to scour that suburban stigma right off her body. She didn't realize it was in the blood and not on the skin; she didn't see there could be nothing more suburban than suburbanites repudiating themselves (BS 134).

Her party is thus not meant to be an opportunity to have fun, but as a venue for networking with people of importance, and to this crowd her old friends are not glamorous enough.

To Eva's credit it must be said that her attempts at social climbing succeed. By the end of the novel her house renovating business has become successful and she "looks fresh and businesslike", not suburban at all (BS 261). What is interesting is that Eva has now adopted ideas that sound rather Thatcherite compared to the liberal hippie she was at the beginning of the novel. In an interview she says to a reporter that "with the aid of techniques like meditation, self-awareness and yoga" she feels that she can do anything and that she has started to believe in self-help (BS 262). Furthermore, she continues:

> We have to empower ourselves. Look at those people who live on sordid housing estates. They expect others – the Government – to do everything for them. They are only half human, because only half active. We have to find a way to enable them to grow. Individual human flourishing isn't something that either socialism or conservatism cater for (BS 263).

Her spiritual awakening has thus led to a world view of self-help. As Thomas puts it, her new belief in self-help is easily transformed into (2005, 77). She has thus managed to create a new life for her and her family by first selling Haroon's expertise in eastern philosophy, by arranging publicity for Charlie's band, by finding an acting job for Karim and finally by creating a new profession for herself. She has thus certainly helped herself and others in finding a new path for their lives.

Although Englishness is not represented as a homogenous concept in the novel, one of the issues that connect the ethno-English characters is class. When the colour of one's skin is not an issue or a factor which might complicate everyday life, money and class become the things according to which people are judged. Both Margaret and Eva are very much aware of

their social standing and so is Charlie, the golden boy from Beckenham who suddenly adopts cockney accent in order to become a more credible punk and a voice for the working classes. Eleanor also pretends to be less middle class than she really is by adopting a Catford accent, that is to say an accent spoken in the suburbs of South London. Furthermore, Ted and Jean mostly concentrate on the amount of money others have and are rather wealthy themselves. Because the novel does not directly focus on the ethnicity of the white English characters but draws the reader's attention to their class instead, the impression that comes across is that perhaps these characters are not particularly interested in how they perform their ethnicity or that they do not even comprehend that they have an ethnicity. As Dyer argues, in the western world being white is usually not a conscious part of a person's self-understanding, because it is not something that is constantly brought forth (1997, 5). When one's ethnicity is similar to the vast majority, the factor that differentiates the characters from one another is class and how well you succeed. As with ethnicity, it is possible to exaggerate the performance of class by for example changing appearance or manner of speaking. Goffman's idea of personal front affecting the reception of a performance is thus relevant in this concept, as well. To conclude it can be said that in the novel white Englishness is depicted not so much through depictions of ethnicity but through descriptions of class.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed the different types of performances depicted in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*. I have analysed aspects of popular culture and different ethnicities and discovered that performativity is an important part of them both. Through different performances one is able to affect how one is perceived by others. Furthermore, performances also make it possible to create an entirely different identity, which allows one to change the direction of one's life. This is what happens in Haroon's case who adopts the role of a Buddhist guru, and also to Charlie who starts selling an English working class image with his punk band.

As the section on performance studies in the theoretical framework shows, a performance can be much more than merely a show on a theatre stage. Instead, in can be almost anything from musical performances and wedding rituals to actions of everyday life. Furthermore, according to Carlson, performances are always based on a model or script that is applied to different situations (2004, 12). It can therefore be argued that at least a part of performances are unconscious repetitions of previously learned behavioural models. For example Haroon acting as the mysterious speaker is based on some previous notions he has of how gurus convince their listeners. On the other hand, many performances are conscious choices to impact on how the audience perceives the performer. As has been shown in this thesis, the novel has several examples of this, such as Karim and the other young people expressing their taste in popular music by what they wear.

Another important aspect in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is ethnicity and performativity of different ethnic identities, which I have analysed using cultural studies and postcolonial theory. Stuart Hall's theories about ethnic identities as unstable and performative have been especially helpful in my study. The characters represent different ethnicities, and therefore the

representation of these ethnicities in the novel have been different. Especially interesting is the representation of Karim's multicultural identity and how it develops in the course of the novel.

As was pointed out in the section on popular culture, youth culture does not comprise of only the music, but also other aspects such as style and subgroups. As the novel is set in the 1970s and Karim is a teenager, it would be quite impossible to avoid having any references to the phenomena of popular culture. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* the references continue throughout the novel. Especially at the beginning of the novel it seems that Karim is not so much interested in his ethnicity – or anything else for that matter – than he is about popular music and youth culture. He sees his friends at school who are equally as enthralled by the new music idols and dream of being like them. Charlie is one of the few who succeed in achieving his dreams and becomes a famous rock star. The way he does it is an excellent example of performativity in the novel: the middle class boy from the suburbia of London creates the role of a working-class rock star and performs it so well that he becomes world famous.

Another aspect of popular culture is style and clothing. There is a countless amount of depictions of styles and outfits in the novel, describing the styles that are related to the characters' lifestyles and interests. Karim is described as having a rather neurotic attitude towards what he is wearing and whether he knows the right outfit to wear. On the other hand, changing styles are also used to describe a change in the life of the character, whether it is a mark of social climbing or an attempt at looking more authentic as a Buddhist speaker. It is clear that these styles are crucial to how the characters want to be perceived and what they want to signal.

In a way, theatre comes to Karim's rescue, because he does not have a direction in his life. He finds a place for himself and through the performances he acts on stage he is able to

process the sort of role he wants to perform in reality. So far he has seemed to be trying on different identities in his confused search for who he is. Although the roles he is given are rather stereotypical and Karim feels like he is being ridiculed, he manages to turn the roles into his own advantage by mocking especially his first role as Mowgli and create a career for himself. The theatre is therefore a safe haven for Karim, who has been certain that he is "going somewhere" (BS 3).

Ethnicities are represented in the novel as complicated issues that can evolve as parts of identity. As Caglar argues, ethnic identities cannot be defined as forming on the basis of a nation's borders, but are a more fluid concept that can be affected by many factors such as cultural heritage and environment (1997, 170). This can be seen in the case of Karim, whose ethnicity as the son of an English mother and an Indian father living in London is struggling to define his ethnic identity. Furthermore, when his ethnic identity is different from the majority, he faces discrimination frequently, which of course does not encourage him to emphasize his "difference". However, it is not only Karim whose ethnic identity is in turmoil. Haroon for example has his own theatrical career as the guru of suburbia. The man who has not brought his cultural background forth unexpectedly turns into what first appears to be only the act of a charlatan but what eventually changes into a way of life. Haroon's lifelong friend Anwar on the other hand resorts to forcing his daughter into marriage in a desperate effort to bring a piece of his homeland to England. Ethnicity is thus not represented as a straightforward part of a person's identity, but as an essential part of life that is constantly evolving. Especially those whose ethnicity is not white English are depicted as having difficulty deciphering who they are.

In conclusion, I would argue that *The Buddha of Suburbia* offers a wide perspective into how performativity and performances can affect different areas of life. In the field of popular culture performativity can be seen in how the young characters in the novel behave and how

important it is to follow certain behavioural models, as well as how they dress. Furthermore, it also brings new role models whose footsteps these young teenagers want to follow into professions completely different from those of their parents. For example Karim's acting career in rather experimental theatre groups and in a soap opera is very different from what his parents would have expected. On the other hand, ethnicity is also portrayed as a performative area of life both because Karim and Haroon are put in the role of authentic Indians and the performance is expected of them, but also because the characters all have a different outlook on their ethnicity and therefore a different notion on how they should perform it. Performativity is thus a very significant factor in the novel, shaping the characters' lives in many ways and resulting in various interpretations about the others' performances.

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