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**"Cultural Hybridity in *The Buddha of Suburbia*"**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this academic paper is to analyse the conflict of identities, what is known as cultural hybridity, in the contemporary novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The article examines different situations the main characters experience and that influence his identification with one culture or with another. First, it clarifies relevant post-colonial concepts, such as *Hybridity*, *Diaspora*, *Englishness* and *Britishness*, that enable the understanding of the further analysis. Secondly, it explains the immigration phases to the United Kingdom and the conflicts and racism derived from them, in order to understand how the current British society has been constructed. Thirdly, a biographical approach of the novel has been carried out to reveal the parallelisms with the author's life and finally, the analysis of the novel applies the concepts explained to show the conflict of identities. The results reveal that the influence of cultures to which an individual is exposed derives into a hybrid identity. I came to the conclusion that the conflict of identities and hybridity arises from the prejudices and discrimination of the British society which does not accept the main character, Karim, as an equal for being descendent of an Indian. Therefore, hybridity emerges as a new form of identity in multicultural societies and it is characterised by a multi-origin.

**Keywords:** Cultural Hybridity, Identity, Diaspora, Racism, Migration, Bildungsroman, Mimicry, Englishness.

## Patricia VÁZQUEZ GONZÁLEZ

### Cultural Hybridity in *The Buddha of Suburbia*

#### O. Introduction

Multicultural societies have emerged from diverse migration waves of people, frequently related to the colonialist expansion of empires. The conquest of new lands, that generally implied the imposition of the colonizer's culture, provoked cross-cultural exchanges. If we examine the expansion of the British Empire over history, the colonized territories as well as the contemporary Great Britain have been clearly affected by the decay of the empire, sociologically speaking.

As a result, the idea of 'being English' acquires a remarkable complexity since it is no longer a term that describes a homogeneous ethnic society but a multi-ethnic society, emerging from the colonization processes. The conquests and invasions of the British Empire had an outstanding impact. They derived into migrations to Great Britain, creating a postcolonial society where individuals struggle to come to terms with a new bi-culture to which they belong. In the British multicultural society, this conflict of belonging to one culture or another, known as *in-betweenness* or *cultural hybridity*, is portrayed in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, a postcolonial novel by the mixed-race English writer Hanif Kureishi.

In this research paper, first of all, I will explain in depth what the concept of *hybridity* is and why it is relevant to understand multiculturalism and the conflict of identities in the British postcolonial society. Secondly, I will carry out an analysis of the meanings of "Englishness" and "Britishness", and I will moreover explore the different phases of the immigration process from the former colonies to the United Kingdom. Then, I will make a biographical approach to observe the parallelisms between the writer's life and the novel. Finally, I will consider the main thematic concerns in the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, focusing on those that reflect the cultural hybridity of the main characters, in relation to some other postcolonial terms.

#### 1. Building the Cultural Identity

First of all, I will clarify the post-colonial terms, *hybridity* and *diaspora*, that are employed in this critical work in order to understand how the cultural identity is built. The concept of *hybridity*, which generally refers to the result of the mixture of two species or elements, was acquired in postcolonial studies to allude to a person of mixed racial or cultural origin (Wolshein, 5). However, the term not only points to a dual origin but it also carries negative connotations that are related to the imperialist theories about the purity of race and culture. In colonial times, the categorization of people as *hybrid* was a distinctive feature for division. In this way, the colonizer was notably distinguished from the colonized. However, this negative meaning starts to change in the post-colonialist period when *hybridity* becomes more ordinary, particularly in the urban life although not exempt from cross-cultural

conflicts. Therefore, there is a shift on the conception of *hybridity* that not only refers to racial and colonial issues but also to a post-colonial cultural identity.

One of the most remarkable post-colonial theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is Homi Bhabha to whom the concept of *cultural hybridity* is associated. According to his own words, since he was a child, he witnessed the Indian struggle for independence. He explored the "unresolved tensions between cultures and countries" (Bhabha, 3) that have influenced his life and work. Bhabha pointed out that *hybridity* is not a concept to solve these tensions but a way to highlight the existence of a new hybrid culture that is built in a post-colonial environment.

In relation to *hybridity*, some other post-colonial terms acquire relevance such as the notion of *diaspora*. Communities that acknowledge the culture of the country they live in as well as the culture of the country from which they come (or their families) are considered *diasporas*. John McLeod remarks the importance of the community as a group that shares traditions, language and religion, for instance, and that has "a sense of living in one country but looking across time and space to another." (McLeod 207) The term should not be confused with *migrant* since the former refers to the emotional connection to the traditions of country that may be inferred by the family whereas the latter implies a physical displacement from a given country.

In order to understand the cultural identity of migrants in Great Britain it is essential to clarify the concepts of *Englishness* and *Britishness*. The term British is connected to the unity of the Empire which encompasses the political union of England with Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. *Britishness* represents the power and the conquest of new territories under a common flag where the metropolis was the referent of identity for the colony. However, the term *Englishness* is much more specific since it only refers to England, its race and culture as a way of national identity. Conservative politicians claimed that "the English identity was threatened by the people living in former colonies." (Wohlsein 21) The figure of the politician Enoch Powell is particularly remembered by his famous and controversial speech known as 'Rivers of Blood' (The Telegraph, online source) given in Birmingham on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1968. He criticised the corruption of the English society blaming immigrants, who were not regarded as English. He pointed out that "they [the existing population in England] found themselves made strangers in their own country." (Powell n/p) *Englishness*, apart from remarking the cultural national identity that has to be preserved from immigrants, is also seen as a way of detaching themselves from the concept of *Britishness* linked to the loss of territories after the end of the empire.

## 2. The Immigration Process

Immigration is a very important issue from which *cultural hybridity* is derived. For this reason, we have to consider the causes and the different phases that motivated the immigration process from the colony to the metropolis. After World War II, during the 1950s, the United Kingdom was in need of several workers, especially in unpopular and poorly paid positions "those which the white workers did not want [...] unskilled jobs involving

unsociable hours of work, poor working conditions and low wages." (Brah 21) The government decided to start campaigns in former colonies such as India and Pakistan to fill the positions. These colonies were experiencing the lack of resources due to the previous exploitation of the metropolis and they did not have enough means to make their abundant labour productive. In 1948, the British Nationality offered unique conditions for the Commonwealth immigrants. The purpose of the campaigns was only to obtain cheap workforce. This situation can be seen as a consequence of colonialism "migration of labour [...] was largely a direct result of the history of colonialism and imperialism of the previous centuries" (Brah 21), since the colonies were first regarded as a source of materials and then, after the end of the colonialism, as a source of labour. This new form of 'colonialism' is called *domestic colonialism* in which the New Commonwealth immigrants from the former empire were part of the subordinated minorities within the contemporary British society. (Moore-Gilbert 3)

Soon after the arrival of the immigrant workers, conflicts started. Lower British social classes were in fight with the immigrants and made them responsible for the problems of unemployment and the lack of housing. The *Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962* was designed to control the entrance of immigrants coming from the former colonies (Spencer 129). It regulated the conditions in order to be able to settle in the United Kingdom among which we can remark the necessity of having a previously arranged job position to fulfil, the possession of special skills as well as not exceeding the number of labour required in the United Kingdom. Since that moment, immigrants were discriminated politically as well as socially. In addition, the attempt to make them abandon their 'archaic cultures' provoked a very marked separation and distinction from the British society. Hostility increased, and some of the theories about the cultural assimilation of the Western life not only failed but highlighted the differences between immigrants and the British citizens. Racial abuse made "issues of cultural identity" (Brah 23) begin to assume importance and strategies were designed "to foster positive cultural identities." (Brah 25)

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the process of assimilation of the culture was not successful for large communities, therefore, 'integration' was suggested as a new approach to equal opportunities. (Brah 25) However, we have to remember that before the arrival of immigrants in Britain, crucial social and economic differences existed among the native citizens. The attempt for equality was not only hard to achieve but it even motivated the increase of racial discrimination (Brah 26). Moreover, the 1968 Act emphasised the inequality and "racial discrimination in law by removing the right of entry of British passport holders to Britain unless they had at least one parent or grandparent born [there]" (Brah 33) and many immigrants were excluded. As a reaction to the constant barriers, immigrants grouped themselves creating associations (like the Indian Workers Association) and began to gain knowledge about the rights, for example, at the workplace in order to "react against their subordinate position as workers from the ex-colonies." (Brah 28)

The following table Spencer reflects the immigration process of men and women before and after the *Commonwealth Immigration Act* of the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1968.

**Asian and black immigrants: date of settlement in Britain (percentages)**

	<i>Before 1960</i>	<i>1 Jan. 1960–30 Jun. 1962</i>	<i>1 Jul. 1962–1982</i>
<b>West Indian men</b>	40	33	26
<b>West Indian women</b>	28	30	43
<b>Indian men</b>	14	11	75
<b>Indian women</b>	8	7	85
<b>Pakistani men</b>	11	20	69
<b>Pakistani women</b>	2	3	95
<b>Bangladeshi men</b>	10	9	81
<b>Bangladeshi women</b>	0	0	100

(Spencer 130)

It is significant to comment on the increase of the asian and black immigrants in Britain after the 1968 Act. In only two years, between January 1960 and June 1962, about a quarter of million of workers from the former colonies went to Britain. The labour demanded, as well as the last-chance opportunity promotion made by many travel agents in their countries of origin, lead to this massive immigration. Such amount of migrations explains the urgency for the government to create the 1968 Act, after which we see the clear decrease of migration rates in Britain.

In the following decades, the 'myth of return' actually became accepted as such. Migrants, whose first intention was to return to their countries of origin, realised that the investments in their businesses and housing as well as the fact that their families were reunited in England made them consider a permanent stay. (Brah 35) The settlement acceptance between 1970 and 1990 was massive. Considering this massive response, especially after the census of 1981 that revealed the increase of 2.1 million of people settled (Spencer, 146), new immigration acts were created to expand the control over the British frontiers such as the British Nationality Act of 1981 which restricted the settlement and entry to the United Kingdom. Despite the controls, the descendants of the immigrants who settled in those decades formed the multicultural society that we know at the present time in which cultural conflicts of identity occur.

### **3. *The Buddha of Suburbia***

*The Buddha of Suburbia* is a novel that shows the conflict of identities that emerges in societies where different cultures coincide. Karim is the narrator and the main character in the novel who presents his particular view of the society in which he lives. He is a seventeen years old mixed-race teenager from an English mother, Margaret, and an Indian father, Haroon. He has a little brother called Amar. His father decides to start to practice yoga exercises and meditation motivated by her British friend, Eva Key, who is interested in oriental philosophy. Margaret feels displaced being too English for Indians and does not seem to have Eva's fascination towards the Indian culture. Haroon begins to be attracted by the

latter and has an affair with her. Karim is, at the same time, captivated by Eva's son, Charlie, and his life in the music world and drugs. They have a sexual encounter that confuses Karim. Anwar, Haroon's friend from India and owner of a shop in the London suburbs, has a daughter, Jamila, for whom a marriage with a thirty-years-old man has been arranged. Karim and Jamila are really close friends and sometimes they have sporadic sexual encounters. He explores sexuality with both sexes and with people from different cultures and he moreover acts in a theatre company looking for his place in the British society while he tries to construct his own identity and life.

After this brief summary of the plot, I consider a biographical approach to the novel indispensable, for the reasons I will explain below. Every novel points to its creator and it is very complex to escape from biographical approaches. In this case, we can observe a marked parallelism with the writer's life that can be relevant to approach the novel. Hanif Kureishi, as it has been mentioned previously, was a mixed-race writer who was born in London. His father was an affluent Muslim Pakistan whereas his mother was English. If we compare his life to *The Buddha of Suburbia* we can see that the main character, Karim, has a dual background as well: an Indian father and a British mother. As a reflection of his own life, we can see the importance of the father and son relationship which "is a central theme of Kureishi's work, partly reflecting his own complex relationship to Rafiushan (Kureishi's father), himself a frustrated writer of fiction." (Moore-Gilbert 13) The distant relationship in the writer's life could explain the emphasis in the novel on the necessity of union between son and father.

The understanding of Kureishi's life makes much more accessible the approach of his work since the novel, somehow, comprises some of the most relevant aspects and interests in the writer's life. A parallelism with the author can also be seen in the character's (Moore-Gilbert 14) "trajectory towards a new life in the inner city [that] reflects Kureishi's own similar journey." His work shows his interest in performances particularly in theatre and cinema. Bombay's film industry<sup>1</sup> "reflects at length on Kureishi's near decade-long involvement in 'fringe' theatre." (Moore-Gilbert, 14) He is a supporter of artistic productions and we can find several allusions to the pop culture which "is valued by Kureishi because it articulates both the political protest and the 'sexual revolution' associated in the 1960s." (Moore-Gilbert 9)

Some critics considered that Hanif Kureishi was not the suitable immigrant to portray the conflict of identities of Indians because he was very well integrated, at least, economically in the British society. He was educated unlike many immigrants (Moore-Gilbert 3) "in the affluent suburbs to the south of London". However, he claimed that he experienced racist abuses that made him, at some point in his life, being aware of his hybridity as the main character in the novel, Karim. (Wohlsein 103)

Kureishi's novel reflects many identity issues that are essential to remark. In a heterogeneous city like London, where different cultures are involved, situations of hybridity

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<sup>1</sup> *The Buddha of Suburbia* "Bombay was the home of the Indian film industry and one of Dad's elder brothers edited a movie magazine" (23)

take place. When people, whose background differs from the English, move to a place like London, the conflict of belonging to one culture, to another or to both at the same time creates the so-called *in-betweenness* or *hybridity*. In the analysis of Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, I will study the hybrid situation foreigners and their relatives (some of them born in London) experience when being in contact with a completely different culture.

Being born in a country does not mean sometimes to be considered as part of it and its culture. "Children born to migrant peoples in Britain [who] may automatically qualify for a British passport, but their sense of identity borne from living in a diaspora community will be influenced by the 'past migration history' of their parents and grandparents." (McLeod 207) Karim, the main character in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, says that he has (BS, 3)<sup>2</sup> "emerged from two old histories" referring to his parents, his Indian father Haroon and his British mother, Margaret. Due to the influence received by his father, Karim would be considered to be a *diaspora* rather than a *migrant* since, physically, he does not come from India but he feels the emotional connection with the country induced by his progenitor. He is also very influenced by his father's close friend, Anwar, and his family, especially Jamila, their daughter that are "like an alternative family" (BS, 52) for Karim. As a result of this cultural *in-betweenness*, people of his Indian environment, such as Shadwell, the cinema producer, assume that Karim is able to speak Punjabi or Urdu, Indian languages "He said some words to me in Punjabi or Urdu" (BS, 140) but he is not even able to identify the language to which he listens. Shadwell insists on saying "you don't understand? [...] *your own language*" (BS, 140), pointing out that the Indian language is 'his' language. The fact of being monoglot characterizes most of Kureishi's culturally hybrid characters which show his own personal situation. Shadwell also describes how Karim is supposed to be regarded by people "an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we'll hear now from him." (BS, 141) His positive words towards his exotic Indian background seem to attract Karim and intensify his conflict of identities, whether to feel English or Indian.

*The Buddha of Suburbia* can be considered a Picaresque novel in which Karim grows and matures, while searching for the meaning of his life. The novel could actually be described as a "*Picaresque Bildungsroman*." At the beginning of the book, we can find Karim's revelation, i.e. what he wants to become, "I had an extraordinary revelation. I could see my life clearly for the first time: the future and what I wanted to do. I wanted to live always this intensely: mysticism, alcohol, sexual promise, clever people and drugs." (BS, 15) From this moment, he starts constructing his life exploring the aspects for which he feels attracted.

His need to discover his identity, which is inevitable connected to the past of his family, leads him to experience opposed situations: some in favour of the Indian culture and the other ones in favour of the British. The critic Stuart Hall (1990) explains how identities are constructed:

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<sup>2</sup> The initials BS that I will be using throughout refer to Kureishi's novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*



There are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened - 'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side - the ruptures and discontinuities [...] Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (Hall 394)

Past experiences influence and mark our projection to the future and the way in which we construct our cultural identity. Stuart Hall points out that these cultural identities are not fixed but mutable. We can have many experiences that can transform what we are. Karim attempts to construct a concrete identity (*being*) but we observe it is more fragmented than fixed, he needs to go under a process of *becoming*, where the influence of both, the British and Indian cultures, is the key aspect. In the opening of the book, Karim introduces himself as "an Englishman born and bred" but he adds afterwards "though not proud of it" (*BS*, 3) since he does not really see himself completely identified with British culture. Another relevant fact that shows this fragmented identity is when Karim meets his mother's boyfriend "her father's replacement." (*BS*, 270) He is disappointed by her choice since he was expecting an Indian not "a pale man and an Englishman" (*BS*, 270) but he thinks she "must have had enough of Indians" (*BS*, 270) in a bitter tone including himself as part of them and, somehow, understanding that his mother did not suit in the Indian culture since the beginning unlike Eva.

Moreover, on the other hand, an opposed situation happens when Karim joins Pyke's theatre company. He is asked to find an Indian model in his family or his environment to imitate. He chooses Anwar, whom Karim calls uncle and a member of his family due to the close relationship between them. The way in which he portrays the character disappoints all the members of the company since he shows Indians as real stereotypes of the white British prejudices "your picture is what white people already think of us. That we're funny, with strange habits and weird customs [...] Why do you hate *yourself* and all black people so much, Karim? [...] We have to protect *our own culture* [...]" (*BS*, 180-81) Until that moment, he was unaware of his own conception of Indians. The influence he has on British people's prejudices about Indians makes him culturally confused: he sees his Indian culture through the white British eyes, considering Indians as uneducated and fanatic people. Nevertheless, in contrast to this closeness to the British thinking, he does not consider himself British since he criticises Londoners, for instance, as if he was not one of them "The word 'supper' itself confused and irritated me. They called everything by the wrong name, *these London people*." (*BS*, 194)



These facts reflect the difficulties through which he goes in order to discover what he is and what he wants to become. The critic John McLeod also agrees with Stuart Hall raising awareness on the importance of the hybrid culture that, according to his vision, the subject, i.e. the individual, is constructed from a collection of experiences, places and circumstances that make him hybrid.

The subject becomes produced from the process of hybridisation. His or her subjectivity is deemed to be composed from variable sources, different materials, many locations – demolishing forever the idea of subjectivity as stable, single, or 'pure'. The concept of hybridity has proved very important for diaspora peoples, and indeed many others too, as a way of thinking beyond exclusionary, fixed, binary notions of identity based on ideas of rootedness and cultural, racial and national purity. Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves [...] Instead, they remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription. (McLeod (129)

Hybridity, therefore, breaks with the idea of a fixed culture that excludes members or that is 'pure'. Hybrid identities are formed by different experiences and are changed and reconstructed unpredictably. When two cultures coexist Karim's moral dilemma starts. As it has been mentioned above, his dual origin confuses him. His *roots* (his Indian origin) confuse him and are opposed to his *route* (his projection of life). His *route* seems to be connected inevitably with his roots; the future is marked by the past. He wants to become an actor and, precisely, he is chosen to be the Mowgli of *The Jungle Book* because he suits very well in the role as he is "dark-skinned [...] small and wiry." (BS, 142) He is going to play the role of an Indian boy and, although his physical appearance fits perfectly, he is not Indian enough, as he has to imitate the accent. However, in another occasion, his British friend Eleanor, points out that his accent is cute and he feels worried and starts thinking about talking like her "At that moment I resolved to lose my accent: whatever it was, it would go. I would speak like her. It wasn't difficult. I'd left my world; I had to, to get on." (BS, 178) This fact reflects that Karim is not Indian enough for the Indian members of the theatre company and in the same way he is not British enough for his British friends.

The *in-betweenness* or *hybridity* can also be reflected in Karim's everyday life where he is influenced by both the British and the Indian cultures. He is in Britain, therefore, he is inevitably in contact with the British culture and reality. We can observe that there are several allusions to the British music "Dylan's 'Positively Fourth Street,'" books (BS, 5) "Yoga for women," (BS, 6) newspapers (BS, 153) "Daily Mirror," (BS, 6) television programmes "Steptoe and Son" and places (BS, 43) "Brixton," "Brainyville" (BS, 196) but, at the same time, Karim is also influenced by his Indian environment: his father, his Indian friends and even by the Indian food "a packet of kebabs and chapattis," (BS, 3) "keema and roti and pea

curry." (BS, 3) The realities of both cultures are present in his life, making harder his identification with one of them.

Karim's sexual experiences can also be compared to his hybrid cultural origin. He is not sure whether he likes men or women "it was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as girls." (BS, 53) This sexual *in-betweenness* can reflect the cultural hybridity itself: the conflict about constructing his personality. However, his father's opinion about the matter is not positive at all since "in his Muslim mind it was bad enough being a woman; being a man and denying your male sex was perverse and self-destructive, as well as everything else". (BS, 174) Marked by a religious Indian perspective, his father is not only a misogynist but a homophobe, and rejects anything which goes against his tradition and beliefs.

London, the big city, offers the opportunity to negotiate one's identity. When different cultures coincide in the same place, two situations could happen: a cultural *assimilation*, where the previously existing culture is assimilated by the others, or *multiculturalism*, where different cultures live separately in a place. However, Karim's situation cannot be completely associated to either of them since he, as a *pícaro*, is trying to construct his identity by fitting in a community that he cannot totally assimilate. Instead of being a part of it he is, somehow, camouflaging himself pretending to be Indian or British depending on the situation, what is known as *mimicry*.

In the same way as *hybridity*, the biological term *mimicry* was adopted in post-colonial studies by Homi Bhabha. He criticized the colonized cultures which were imitating the colony, which "mimicked their colonizers and suppressed their very own, innate knowledge and culture". (Wohlsein 12) In some cases, "mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask" (Bhabha, 86) which means that the imitation is sometimes the only way to be deceptively identified with a culture. The *camouflage* is used by Karim to be accepted as equal in the British society. However, even if he tries to hide his Indian background making British people see him only as British, it is quite difficult to hide the evidence.

In relation to other hybrid identities, it is remarkable to comment on the "Buddha identity". Haroon, Karim's father, tries to construct his own identity in the British society. He is so interested in being accepted as an equal that he rejects sometimes his Indian background. However, his vision starts to change when he becomes a spiritual guide, a Buddha, emphasising his Indian traditions and culture and acknowledging that he will never be seen as an Englishman. This new conception of life makes him finally change his former vision towards the rejection of his culture in favour of the British, realising that it is significantly more important for him to preserve his own Indian identity.

At the beginning of the novel, he considered that his life had changed when he went to England "He'd never cooked before, never washed up, never cleaned his own shoes or make a bed. Servants did that," (BS, 23) his position in the Indian society was completely different. Margaret, his middle-low class British wife, was very proud of this background and was constantly highlighting his origin as opposed to the other immigrants'. Her comments

about his husband's life "ensured there would be no confusion between Dad and the swarms of Indian peasants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s." (BS, 24) Unlike most immigrants, who were considered uneducated and dirty, he was sent to England to be educated and, then, returning home as a "qualified and polished English gentleman lawyer and an accomplished ballroom dancer." (BS, 24) Haroon was completely amazed when he emigrated to England because he did not expect to find illiterate and poor people. He criticised the treatment and consideration Indians had in the British society: "the whites will never promote us [...] not an Indian while there is a white man left on earth [...] they still think they have an Empire when they don't have two pennies to rub together." (BS, 27) He stills felt the influence of colonialism on immigrants' life. He could not fully adapt to the British the society because British citizens did not see himself as part of it, nor did they see immigrants as equals that could be integrated in the culture. Although he tried to keep his Indian traditions and culture "[he] appeared to be returning initially to India or at least to be resisting the English here" (BS, 64), but the 'myth of return' was consolidated as an actual myth since he did not see himself back to India "my father was too involved with things here to consider returning." (BS, 64)

Once he is settled and, especially, when he meets Eva Key, he starts to emphasize his Indian culture, doing an extremist *camouflage*. He tries to become even more Indian than the Indians "He was hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent" (BS, 21) during the Buddha-performances. His extremism to become a pure Indian leads him to the ridicule and his overacting has a comic effect that leads to parody. "He has spent years trying to be more an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads." (Wohlsein 42) He has spent his life in London trying to be accepted, but "by inventing the 'Buddha of Suburbia', his figure of a spiritual leader, Haroon's attitude towards his hybridity takes an interesting turn. It seems like after decades of trying to be accepted, he now realises that the English will never regard him as a true English citizen". (Wohlsein 43) According to Barbara Wohlsein, Haroon feels inferior to the British people and he needs to prove that he can be at the same level (28); this is why he always carries a little dictionary with him. He always wants to be prepared because "you never know when you might need a heavyweight word to impress an Englishman." (BS, 28)

Another remarkable fact is that he is called Harry by his British relatives "Ted and Jean never called Dad by his Indian name, Haroon Amir [...] they'd called Dad Harry from the first time they met him, and there was nothing Dad could do about it". (BS, 33) It seems that his British family in-law felt ashamed of his Indian background and wanted to camouflage his origin. Haroon's response towards the change of his name is more comic than offensive calling both of them 'Gin and Tonic.'

As it has been previously mentioned, at the beginning he seems to be very worried about showing his Indian origin to impress the British Eva Key. Nevertheless, when they finally start a relationship and leaves his wife, he begins to be absorbed by her culture "they saw fewer Satyajit Ray films now, and went to less Indian restaurants". (BS, 150) However, towards the end of the novel, when Karim is back from his trip with the theatre company to

America, Haroon's vision has changed notably: "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) He considers that the British society has lost its spiritual values and that there is "no deepening in culture, no accumulation of wisdom, no increase in the way of the spirit. There is a body and a mind [...] but there is a soul too." (BS, 264) Finally, he decides to quit his job and start a new career as spiritual guide, a Buddha, helping people to become aware of "how we live our lives, what our values are, what kind of people we've become and what can we be if we want" (BS, 266) highlighting proudly his Indian background that he considers now to be more important than his acceptance in the British society.

In the novel, there are some other cultural and racial issues that need to be taken into consideration. It is well known that arranged marriages are a common practice in India. In the case of our novel, parents struggle to accept the hybrid life of their children, raised in between two cultures, but sometimes they try to impose one culture over the other, such as Anwar, who does it by arranging a marriage for his daughter Jamila. As they live in England and he cannot force her, he wants to make an emotional blackmail applying the same technique as the prophet Gandhi in India to expel the British colonizers: through a hunger strike<sup>3</sup>. Karim, who does not share this Indian tradition, criticises Anwar's decision describing it as 'old-fashioned' It is essential to point out that not only was Jamila forced to accept some Indian traditions despite being English but, on the contrary, she also suffered from the intention of completely removing his Indian background by a British librarian, who, according to Jamila's belief, "Miss Cutmore really wanted to eradicate everything that was foreign in her." The situation was confusing for her, she was English born but not fully English for the society she lived in. The Indian cultural influences mainly come from her parents (*diaspora*). She lives a hybrid situation as other characters in the novel but she does not seem to be fully aware of what colonialism is and why it has such an influence in her family's past and in her current life. She starts to be aware of it when the librarian teaches her about the empire "without Miss Cutmore, Jamila wouldn't have ever heard the word 'colony.'" (BS, 53) She has not been told about colonialism so the only explanation she could grasp of why she was rejected by many British was because she was physically different from them not because they considered her as a subordinated colonized.

A second issue worth being mentioned in this part of my discussion is racism. In a multicultural city such as London, racial conflicts arise. As such, racism is a very important issue in the novel that shows that immigrant descendants are not considered as part of the British society. Karim is aware of the rejection "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) not mattering what they do, or how they behave since they will never be regarded as British. His friend Jamila is also victim of racist attacks. Once, she is told by a British "eat shit, pakis" (BS, 53)

<sup>3</sup> "If Gandhi could shove out the English from India by not eating, I can get my family to obey by exactly the same" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 60)

but she reacts aggressively "throwing the bastard off his bike and tugging out some of his hair" (BS, 53) not allowing anyone to offend her.

There are some other situations that are derived from racial abuse, for instance, Karim's brother changes his name, Amar, for Allie to avoid racist attacks "My brother Amar, four years younger than me, calls himself Allie to avoid racial trouble" (BS, 19) even though he was born and bred in England, the hybrid situation in which he lives, make some racist to think he is not British but only Indian. This rejection also affects Karim, who goes to his British friend's (Helen) place and her father does not allow him to visit her because he is a "wog," "blackie," "coon" or "nigger." (BS, 40) However, the situation is portrayed by Hanif Kureishi downplaying the serious tone. There is a comic relief when he jokes about being not pale enough for Helen's father "the front door opened. Helen's dad stood there [...] and then I went white, but obviously not white enough, because Hairy Black [Helen's father] let go of the dog he was holding." (BS, 40) Although, some racist situations are represented with a comic tone, others emphasise the conflict like the attack of an old Indian man in a train, where some boys "jeered racist bad-mouth at him." (BS, 44) Other forms of discrimination are present such as when Auntie Jean tells Karim that they (her and her husband) did not reject his father because of his ethnicity although others did it "We've always quite like your dad, and we never had no objections to him marrying Margaret, though some people didn't like her marrying a coloured." (BS, 44) Another moment when immigrants are seen inferior is when Haroon is told that he is supposed to obey the British rules including the respecting the monarchy "your Dad's a civil servant. What would the Queen say if she knew what he was up to?" (BS, 44) His sister-in-law is exaggerating only to point out that if his ancestors were once subject to the Empire in the colony, he is now to the queen in the metropolis. Nevertheless, in this multicultural and hybrid environment, as a result of the continuous attacks for being immigrant or their descendent, discrimination also exists on the other way round, for instance, the white British Helen is rejected by one of Anwar's relatives who calls her "Pork, pork, pork, VD, VD, white woman, white woman." (BS, 84)

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has examined the concept of cultural hybridity and the identity conflicts that many migrants and diasporas encounter. Specifically, it has analysed these aspects in Hanif Kureishi's novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* in which we can see the result of the multiple migrations to the United Kingdom: the mixture of cultures and the problems of belonging derived from this multicultural environment.

From my point of view, the narrator and main character of the novel, Karim, does not feel completely or, at least, mainly Indian. Although he is inevitably in contact with the Indian culture due to his environment, his friends and family, he seems to regard it with the same kind of fascination a tourist can have when travelling to a foreign country. Tourists consider the culture interesting and new, nevertheless, they are not part of it. According to the analysis that I have carried out, I can see that there are more evidences that show that Karim is fascinated with the Indian culture rather than a person that belongs to it. The

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problem of identities arises when the British society does not accept him as a member. The racial abuse and the discrimination he suffers makes him aware that, even if he considers himself British, he will never be completely accepted as an equal by the British society.

The understanding of the hybrid life of this particular group of characters in the novel and the parallelism with the author's life can approach readers to the reality of many migrants. This literary analysis reflects similar problems migrants undergo when they have to get along with a completely different culture. For these reasons, I consider that it would be relevant to carry out further studies in order to raise awareness about the conflict of identities that mark the contemporary societies in the world where migrations and cultural coexistences are constantly present.

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