Portrayals of Identity in the Works of Hanif Kureishi

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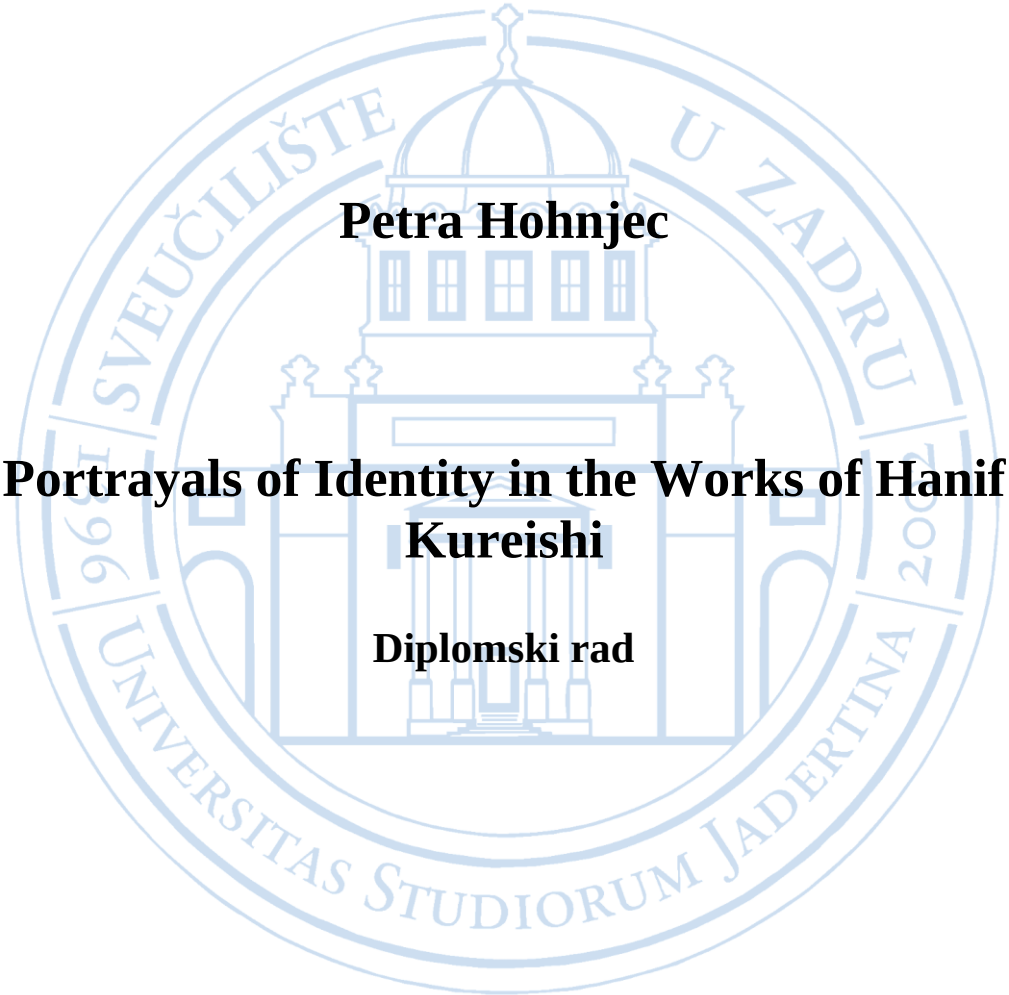

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Zadar, 2024.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

Ja, **Petra Hohnjec,** ovime izjavljujem da je moj **diplomski** rad pod naslovom **Portrayals of Identity in the Works of Hanif Kureishi** rezultat mojega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na izvore i radove navedene u bilješkama i popisu literature. Ni jedan dio mojega rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno nije prepisan iz necitiranih radova i ne krši bilo čija autorska prava.

Izjavljujem da ni jedan dio ovoga rada nije iskorišten u kojem drugom radu pri bilo kojoj drugoj visokoškolskoj, znanstvenoj, obrazovnoj ili inoj ustanovi.

Sadržaj mojega rada u potpunosti odgovara sadržaju obranjenoga i nakon obrane uređenoga rada.

Zadar, 2024.

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Introduction

The cultural exchange experienced within the borders of the United Kingdom increased after the Second World War when the collapse of the British Empire led to mass migrations from former colonies. The immigrants, coming from different parts of the Commonwealth, brought with them a variety of traditions, values, beliefs and languages. This influx of cultural novelties had an impact on all walks of life, including literature. The gradual shift from a homogenous, white community to a culturally and racially diverse society resulted in the broadening of Britain's literary horizons. Carter and McRae distinguish four directions in which the novel develops in the 1970s: works in which the focus is put on either foreign or local and regional voices, works in which more female voices appear, academic or campus novels, and novels containing the elements of magic realism (207). The first category includes postcolonial literature written by both authors born outside of Britain and by authors of foreign descent who brought a myriad of new experiences into the modern British novel (Carter and McRae 207).

Moreover, Culler claims that authors coming from postcolonial societies use postcolonial theory and writing as a means "to write their way back into a history others have written" (131). This means that besides participating in the record of their own histories, postcolonial writers have a chance to give an accurate representation of their experiences to the wider readership. The increase in works written by authors coming from postcolonial societies resulted in the establishment of 'migrant literature' which Frank defines as "works which reflect upon migration" (2), hereby determining that being a migrant is not a necessity for writing migrant literature. He categorizes the representative literary form of the genre, the 'migration novel' according to theme: novels that deal with coping with migration, novels that focus on the importance of the nation to someone who does not belong to it or belongs to more than one nation, novels that examine the definition of Europeanness, and novels that explore the issue of globalization (17-18). Starting from these broad themes, Moslund specifies cultural hybridity

as a particular distinguishing feature of the 'migration novel' (4). The concept of cultural hybridity is realized through employment of literary tropes, such as existing in the liminal space between two cultures, consequently portraying the perpetual state of uncertainty and change (Moslund 4).

In this paper we will show that the fall of the Empire and subsequent changes in the structure of the British society have impacted contemporary British writers, among whom is Hanif Kureishi. His writing deals with the aforementioned themes which emerged as a result of cultural exchange. Kureishi's early works, including the novels *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, as well as the screenplay *My Beautiful Launderette*, seek to redefine the notion of Britishness in a newly-formed, multicultural society, while primarily focusing on ethnicity and religious issues associated with it. Secondary focus is put on other aspects of identity such as gender, sexuality or social class. In his early novels and short stories written in the late nineties, Kureishi distances himself from early postcolonial themes, instead exploring identity on an individual level, in the context of a romantic relationship, a family or a professional career. The novel *Intimacy*, as well as short story collections *Love in a Blue Time* and *Midnight All Day*, focus on identities of contemporary British men and their daily struggles, such as leaving unsatisfying marriages, fulfilling their roles as fathers, and trying to find a sense of stability in an ever-evolving society.

This paper sets out to analyse Kureishi's fiction written in the 1990s in order to discern the difference in his portrayal of identity. To do so, we have chosen to analyse his early nineties fiction where focus is put on postcolonial themes, including the struggles of immigrant characters and their desire to settle in a hybrid identity, and contrast it to his late-nineties fiction which mainly focuses on everyday frustrations of modern British men. The basis of the analysis presented in this diploma paper are Kureishi's three novels and two short story collections written over the decade: *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), *The Black Album* (1995), *Intimacy*

(1998), *Love in a Blue Time* (1997), *Midnight All Day* (1999). The selected works will be analysed in the context of postcolonial theory with an emphasis on the notion of hybrid identity, and we will also use Zygmunt Bauman's theories of liquid modernity and liquid identity.

1) Theoretical Framework

What is identity?

The concept of identity is quite difficult to define due to its multifaceted nature. In the context of sociological studies, Fearon relies on binarity: he defines identity as a concept consisting of the social – marked by some type of group membership, and the personal – self-proclaimed characteristics that one is particularly proud of (2). He also maintains that each person is responsible for determining their own identity by giving definitions of themselves (9). Fearon identifies two types of identity – role identity and type identity. Each can be related to the previously mentioned binarity because the former relies on sharing a characteristic with a group of people, while the latter includes performing roles that we ourselves choose, or the roles that are bestowed upon us (16). In regards to social identity, Stets and Burke identify uniformity of perception and action among group members as its basis (4). In other words, we share a characteristic or a role with a group of people which distinguishes us from groups of other people and signifies our belonging. They emphasize the importance of rules that are expected to be followed by each member of the group in order to gain membership in it. However, these rules are often in conflict with personal characteristics which makes maintaining group membership difficult (7).

Furthermore, identity can be examined in the context of literary theory. Jonathan Culler asks the following question: "I", what it is and what makes it such (108). He claims that there are more possible answers because there are various iterations of the self – it can be a

combination of "given or constructed" in addition to being "social or individual", while the actions of an individual are justified by their individuality (109). This means that literary characters could either suffer their fate or that they could be responsible for creating it, which can be recognized in certain narrative tropes. Some of the examples of narrative tropes include identity determined by birth, identity transformed along with the change of the character's status or social standing, identity constructed upon certain qualities that have only been revealed while the character was undergoing an ordeal, and more (110). Unlike Culler, Zygmunt Bauman recognizes that the need for an identity only rises from a desire for security (*Identity, Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* 29). He claims that despite our need for stability, identity is an ever-changing "unfulfilled project" and a result of our constant transgression in modern society (*Liquid Modernity* 29). In short, our identities are in a perpetual state of transformation and there are no efficient ways to make them stable in a long-term sense.

Bauman's ideas about identity stem from his theory of 'liquid modernity', which he proposes is a continuation of modernity. He describes it as a time when 'broken moulds' of behaviour are being replaced by new ones and the individual is tasked with conforming to their own niche (*Liquid Modernity* 7). With the individual in the centre of focus, their burdens become their own and should not be shared. This kind of privatization brings with it the destabilization of established social groups and communities, which makes the formation of identity more difficult (*Liquid Modernity* 8). Therefore, in order to form an identity, one must seek new networks of support which are more flexible. What this means for an individual is that they are offered innumerable possibilities from which to choose and have the freedom to exchange one possible identity for another over time. However, this opportunity for change and the existence in a fluid, untethered space raises the issue of security – Bauman wonders if the individual can ever be secure in an identity if it is elusive (*Identity, Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* 29). Following Bauman's model, Kureshi's characters are often faced with

the task of finding flexible support networks which would allow them to form an identity in a safe environment and subsequently let them maintain those relationships.

Additionally, Bauman claims that the fluid nature of our identity translates to romantic relationships. He claims that one's inability to stabilize their identity causes the inability to commit to a single person, which results in experimentation and superficial short-term relationships (*Liquid Love* 9). He compares relationships to the consumption of cheap commodities by claiming that the lack of high-quality relationships is fulfilled by a quantity of insubstantial ones. Seeing as reproduction and child-rearing is possible outside of a marriage or a committed relationship, the need for them simply diminishes and is replaced by multiple short-term relationships (*Liquid Love* 5). Nevertheless, this instability to commit is circled back to the fluidity of identity. Bauman argues that our identities are defined by our connections with others, which means that unstable relationships cause unstable identities (*Identity, Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* 58). The constant change and fluidity do not satisfy the need for security, which causes frustration and anxiety. Kureishi explores this theme in his works written in the late nineties, where the modern individual turns to relationships in an attempt to find security, but the 'man with no bonds' is not ready to forfeit his freedoms and therefore continues to exchange one relationship for another (*Liquid Love* 9).

Postcolonial theory

The initiator of postcolonial theory, Edward Said, established it by examining Western academics' ideas about the Middle East in his seminal work *Orientalism*. Said introduced the term 'Orientalism' and its three distinct meanings: it can denote the academic field which dealt with the Orient, it can be understood as a worldview opposing the Western one, or it can refer to a political instrument (*Orientalism* 3-4). In other words, it is an institutionalized way of approaching the Orient, be it by making proclamations about it, or by describing and

subsequently teaching it in the West, which is followed by ruling over it. All of the actions related to Orientalism are made possible by the long colonial tradition of Western European countries. According to Said, European literature is the reason behind the swift and vast spread of Orientalist ideology; he claims that Orientalist discourse is embedded in literature which enabled European dominion over the East (*Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* 12). Owing to the binary opposition of the West and the Orient and the differences construed between them, the Orient is seen as the "Other", that is, as the culturally, politically, and economically inferior. In addition, Kastoryano identifies modern European multiculturalism as the reason for radicalization of the "Other", in this case Islam, which in turn leads to restrictive migration policies (93).

According to Hall, there are two iterations of a cultural identity in the postcolonial context: a fixed one and a flexible one ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 223). The former is a collective one – based on shared culture, history and ancestry, what Hall refers to as "one true self". The latter is based on the difference of being and becoming. Hall argues that we position ourselves in the narratives of the past, and due to the ever-changing nature of history, our identities change as well ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 225). Comparably to Hall's second definition, Bhabha talks about 'cultural hybridity' but he replaces the historical factor with spatial change, that is, with immigration. Bhabha defines cultural hybridity as the third, or liminal space between two cultures, specifically between the colonizer and the colonized (38). The third place is where "translation and negotiation" between the two cultures occur (38). The result of negotiation between them and the amalgamation of two cultures in a third space creates a new type of identity that is hybrid. Kureishi's first two novels feature the aforementioned postcolonial topics as well as the concept of hybrid identity and the struggle of existing in a third place.

2) Ethnic and Religious Identity in Kureishi's Early Works

According to Hall, positive and naturalized black imagery has occurred after two shifts happened in black cultural politics: the first one refers to the moment when the term 'black' became a hegemonic moniker for experiences of several different communities in a predominantly British environment, while the second one refers to the struggle over 'the politics of representation itself' ("New Ethnicities" 441-443). In other words, Hall suggests that a shift from the stereotypical 'essential black subject', that is, from someone who is marginalized and whose purpose is not to be an individual character but rather an opposition for the white British experience to a multifaceted individual, is happening within the context of black representation. Furthermore, Hall emphasizes that everyone is 'ethnically located' which raises the question of what it means to be British. He emphasizes that the answer cannot be simply putting history in the present context ("New Ethnicities" 448). As a successful attempt to answer this question Hall cites Kureishi's screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette* which refused to "represent the black experience in Britain as monolithic" ("New Ethnicities" 449). Alongside Kureishi's screenplay, his novels *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* deal with black representation in a well-rounded and intersectional way.

Bauman claims that ethnicity is the most easily recognizable form of identity and the easiest niche to conform to (*Liquid Modernity* 107). That is why we will firstly analyse it as a central issue in Kureishi's early fiction. Schötz maintains that Kureishi's stories can be divided into ethnic and 'postethnic'; the former includes stories where the issue of ethnicity, specifically of South Asian ethnicities, is at the forefront and plays an important narrative role, while the latter includes stories which do not deal with ethnicity as prominently or they do not deal with it at all ("The Exploration of Community in Hanif Kureishi's Short Fiction." 2). The first type of story also tends to focus on issues related to ethnicity to a lesser extent, such as the desire to belong to a social group that shares cultural identity. Besides dealing with ethnicity directly,

ethnic stories also tend to focus on issues which can be related to it, notably the issues of race and religion. The desire to belong is often contrasted with the notion of Otherness and what makes one undesirable to their peers. Another important concept is the hybrid identity of mixed characters – Kureishi juxtaposes traditional South Asian values with life in modern-day Britain and shows how their intermingling can produce a new type of identity.

In contrast, 'postethnic' stories rarely refer to the ethnicity of the characters, it is either contextual or not mentioned at all, since it does not contribute to the narrative. In most cases, the main focus is put on the identity of middle-aged Englishmen who deal with personal crises of masculinity ("The Exploration of Community in Hanif Kureishi's Short Fiction." 6). That is not to say that they solely deal with gender issues of protagonists. In 'postethnic' stories Kureishi also examines romantic and familial relationships, dissatisfying careers and marriages, infidelity, fatherhood and the desire to achieve happiness. Additionally, in these stories Kureishi gives life to culturally diverse characters and thus distances himself from the idea that he should be responsible for representing South Asian culture in media. According to Yousaf, the 'postethnic' stories are Kureishi's attempt to lessen the burden of writing characters that the readers expect him to (19). Kureishi's ethnic works include novels *The Black Album* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, his first screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette,* the short stories "We're not Jews", "My Son the Fanatic", "With Your Tongue Down my Throat", while 'postethnic' works include the novel *Intimacy*, and most of his short stories.

Redefining Britishness

As we have mentioned, the diversity of modern British society is caused by its colonial past and the mass migrations that ensued the fall of the Empire. The cultural and ethnic diversity of the community imply that there are multiple ways one can be British. According to Hall, British racism is characterized by defining ethnicity as "culturally constructed sense of

Englishness and a particularly closed, exclusive and regressive form of English national identity" ("New Ethnicities" 446). Kureishi challenges this vision of Englishness and addresses the issue of racism in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and in *The Black Album* by portraying different aspects of identity of second-generation Asian immigrants. The protagonists live in contemporary Britain but the fact that they are immigrants cannot be hidden due to the colour of their skin. The binarity of their identity is reflected in their desire to belong and the comfort found in fluidity. Kureishi's portrayal of the composite nature of identity in these novels distances him from earlier postcolonial writing, where fist-generation immigrant writers focus on the issue of assimilation in British society. Contrarily, his representation of ethnicity is contextualized through hybrid identity.

Ethnic identity is one of the main issues dealt with in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) which follows the life of a second-generation immigrant, Karim Amir. Karim is a teenager, son of an Indian father and an English mother who lives in the suburbs of London. His father, Haroon, came to England for education and never returned to India. He married Karim's mother, Margaret and is working for the government as a Civil Service clerk. Seeing as Haroon is a first-generation immigrant, his perspective of Britishness differs significantly from Karim's, who was born in England. On the one hand, Karim, a second-generation immigrant, sees himself as an Englishman: "I am often considered to be 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)," (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 3). Even though he does not feel the need to imitate his white, English peers to negotiate membership in their groups, he does internalize some aspects of the culture, especially the popular culture. On the other hand, Karim feels connected to his Indian identity, especially after being challenged by his mother: "Am I not part Indian?" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 232). Karim interacts with both cultures and the oscillation

between the two results in a formation of a hybrid ethnicity. His intricate ethnic identity represents a kind of Britishness that is fluid and less restrictive.

Even if frequent changes of identity might be ascribed to unstable teenage nature, Karim and his cousin Jamila follow popular trends, mostly in terms of fashion, music and literature which allows them to briefly take on new ethnic identities. Karim asserts "sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went black American," (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 53). In addition to popular culture, Jamila challenges the traditional idea of Britishness by participating in youth counterculture of the 1970s – she reads feminist literature, idolizes American social movements and their leaders, she loudly proclaims her opinions about injustice. In doing so, she also disputes her traditional South Asian culture, especially when she resists the marriage her family arranges for her. Similarly to Karim and Jamila, Charlie, who is the son of Haroon's lover Eva, often changes his identity through his appearance. Even though he is a white, suburban teenager, he challenges his Englishness through participating in subculture as the singer of a punk band. His ethnic identity is otherwise stable; in fact, he purposefully exaggerates his Englishness once he moves to New York. Contrary to his punk image, Charlie decides to speak in a posh accent, thus becoming a caricature of a typical upper-class English man. His overemphasized Englishness is not a sign of pride but rather a way to popularize his music.

Like Charlie, Karim exploits his ethnic identity in hopes of advancing his career. In Karim's case, being seen as the Other by the English serves as an advantage in securing a role. His dream of becoming an actor becomes reality when he is granted a place in a theatre group. His first theatre role is Kipling's Mowgli and once the opportunity for acting presents itself, he takes it without any regard for the role or for his dignity. The director's vision of the character is an extension of Kipling's original, Orientalist one, but despite seeing that he is not being treated with respect, Karim still performs. Following the performance, Haroon criticizes both

Kipling and Karim: “That bloody fucker Mr Kipling pretending to whity he knew something about India! And an awful performance by my boy looking like a Black and White Minstrel!” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 157). In addition to Mowgli, Karim’s second role is just as problematic – he invents the character Tariq, a caricature of Changez, Jamila’s husband and his friend. The character is a stereotypical and insulting portrayal of South Asian immigrants pandering to Orientalist ideas of the director.

Alongside the changes in his appearance, the exploitation of his Indian culture and the internalization of English popular culture, Karim’s hybridity is reflected in the place he lives – the suburbs. According to Ryan Trimm, the suburbs are the in-between, the barrier between the urban and the rural (52). Like the barrier between the urban and the rural, Karim is the barrier between the English and the Indian. His life is not dissimilar to other lower middle-class English teenage boys in the sense that his family consists of a mother who works in a shop and enjoys soap operas, a father who works for the government and a younger brother. His interests in popular music and literature follow the trends of the 1960s and 1970s. He does, however, challenge this perception of Britishness with the colour of his skin. His own reasoning is that “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. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it” (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 3). He is a person caught between his Englishness and his Indianness, trying to transcend the binary, constantly evolving as a person and moving around, but eventually coming back to the liminal suburb, to his in-betweenness.

In contrast, Karim’s father, Haroon is a first-generation Asian immigrant, and that is why his perception of ethnicity differs from Karim’s. He came to Britain with his cousin Anwar in pursuit of an education and a better future. Both of them come from rich Indian families and only saw what it means to be poor when they moved to England. The problems they face are more similar to the issues explored by first-generation immigrant writers; namely, struggling to

integrate in a foreign society and neglecting their own tradition in order to assimilate. Not to be seen as the Other, although they will never completely succeed due to their race, Haroon and Anwar need to negotiate their membership within the British society. To do so they change their accents and the way they dress, imitating the English people around them. Bhabha calls this process 'mimicry' and explains it as the Other's desire to access the power of the colonizer, despite it being out of reach (85). Haroon and Anwar assimilate quickly but in turn repress their own culture. What is more, Haroon's mimicry of the English reaches a point where it can be seen as a parody of Britishness when he turns into the eponymous Buddha.

Another way for Haroon to negotiate his way into British society is through his mistress, Eva. She is a white English woman interested in the religious and spiritual practices of the New Age movement. Eva and her suburban friends see Haroon as the embodiment of their Orientalist ideas, which Haroon decides to exploit. Even though he was raised as a Muslim, he is determined to meet Eva's expectations and impersonates a Buddhist guru, or rather what the New Age movement would consider to be one. To become the 'Buddha of Suburbia', Haroon reads Buddhist and Eastern philosophy, he dresses in traditional Indian clothes and reverts his accent to sound more Indian. He feels no qualms about exploiting the religious and philosophic texts of a culture that is not his own, nor does he feel like he is betraying his heritage by dismissing Islam. Instead, he creates a new hybrid identity which grants him a place in the British society while remaining the exotic Other. Despite being accepted by white, English suburbanites, Haroon is aware that he will never truly be their equal: "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" (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 263).

Kureishi's second ethnic novel, *The Black Album* (1995), follows Shahid Hasan, a university student on a path of self-discovery. He is also trying to find a place between a traditional culture and modern English ideals. Dayal claims that the diasporic subjects'

doubleness reflects their desire to belong to two places or cultures (3). Torn between two cultures, Shahid attempts to form an identity which would enable him to belong to both. Shahid's family immigrated from Pakistan and he, as a second-generation immigrant, challenges what it means to be British. Similarly to the aforementioned characters, Shahid will always stand out in British society on the account of his race, but unlike the others, he internalizes his Otherness in a profound and extreme way. Du Bois describes double consciousness as "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of other" and the constant feeling of two-ness, "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (8). Shahid articulates his double consciousness through racist retorts, "going around abusing Pakis, niggers, Chinks, Irish, any foreign scum," and his desire to join the Nationalist Party (*The Black Album* 11).

According to Shresta, Shahid's double consciousness is a result of his hybrid identity, and the reason why he internalizes the insults and beliefs about black people that were aimed at him (156). Realizing that this way of coping with double consciousness is not productive, Shahid turns to exploring the Asian side of his identity by joining a religious group. His older brother, Chili internalizes the rejection and racist remarks from the English as well, but unlike Shahid, he expresses them in a self-destructive manner rather than hurting others. Instead of becoming a parody of white nationalists, Chili becomes disdainful of himself and his own family. This results in a rejection of Pakistani culture and Islam and the acceptance of Western fashion, popular culture and popular rituals. Contrary to the brothers, Shahid's friend Chad, a Pakistani man adopted by English parents, does not challenge Britishness, but rather rejects it completely. The idea of forming a hybrid ethnic identity is not acceptable for him, which is why he changes his English name, decides to give up his Western vices, including music and poetry, and practices radical religion.

Religious fundamentalism in the face of hybridity

Eagleton states that culture is a "division within ourselves" and a "matter of self-overcoming and self-realization" (11). In *The Black Album* Shahid is divided between British culture represented by his professor and lover Deedee Osgood and traditional Pakistani culture and Islam represented by his friend and religious leader Riaz. He wishes to belong to both and alters his identity accordingly, at times participating in the religious group's activities and at times partying with Deedee. However, his constant oscillations in behaviour create issues between him and the two opposing sides. Deedee introduces him to new music and literature, Western philosophy, political movements, liberty of sexual and gender expression. On the contrary, Riaz shows him the security afforded by belonging to a community that shares a cultural identity and follows traditional Islamic rules amidst a Western society that only rejected him before. The group identity shared by Riaz and his followers is based on their similar ethnic background (they are second-generation Asian immigrants) which then becomes interchangeable with their religion. To belong to the group, one must follow rules issued by Riaz. According to Yousaf, Shahid's desire to belong to Riaz' group is an attempt to find security in a group identity because his distinguishable ethnicity is threatened (17).

Kureishi's portrayal of religious identity in his ethnic works is complex, especially in the aftermath of the *fatwah* put on Salman Rushdie. Drawing inspiration from his own environment, he illustrates two sides of Riaz' religious group: one seen from the perspective of other Muslims and the other seen from an outsider's point of view. This duality stems from Riaz' desire to maintain traditional Islamic customs in a manner of a local vigilante and his desire for separation from white Englishmen and their supposed immorality. At first, after being rejected by the English, Shahid is drawn to the group by the promise of safety and by Riaz' public persona. He presents himself as a pious Muslim who selflessly helps his community and writes religious poetry. Nevertheless, once Shahid becomes aware of their separatist desires and

extremist views of freedom, his enthusiasm about belonging to the group diminishes. Riaz' fanatic ideation reaches its peak when he orders the burning of a book which allegedly transgresses against Islam. Kureishi thus alludes to Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* which were met with the same fate.

Another real-life event that inspired Kureishi was the worship of an aubergine which happened in Leister. In an interview Kureishi mentions that he "found it odd that people were reading aubergines and burning books," (Jaggi). In the novel Riaz manages to convince his followers that the vegetable contains Koranic verses and is therefore a holy relic. Owing to his followers' blind faith in him, the holy aubergine reaches a wider audience of believers but also attracts the attention of media. Like Kureishi, Shahid is perplexed by the incident and his scepticism grows further. In the end, the ridiculousness of the holy aubergine, and more importantly, the violence and fanaticism exhibited by the group, overweigh Shahid's desire for security found in a community that shares his cultural identity. His decision to leave the group prompts him to form his own niche with Deedee. The stability of the group is exchanged for a more fluid identity when Shahid reasons that "there was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world," (*The Black Album* 274).

In addition to the two novels, Kureishi's ethnic short stories "My Son the Fanatic" and "We're Not Jews" deal with the issue of religion and its role in formation of a hybrid identity. The former follows Parvez, a first-generation Pakistani immigrant who assimilated into British society. Parvez has integrated to the point where he stopped following Islamic rules which causes a rift between him and his son, Ali. Like Riaz and his followers, Ali resorts to religious fundamentalism in an attempt to form a secure and stable identity that would separate him from the British society which rejects him. Ali's obsessive behaviour leads Parvez to suspect he is addicted to drugs. But like Chad, Ali is only trying to free himself from everything

that might distract him from Islam. Not only does his rejection of English culture prevent him from forming a hybrid identity, it also leads him to frequent confrontations with his father. The situation culminates in a physical fight between the two. After the fight Ali asks Parvez in a bout of religious self-righteousness "So who's the fanatic now?" thus confirming irreconcilable differences between them ("My Son the Fanatic" 114).

Unlike the characters we have mentioned so far, the protagonist of the short story "We're not Jews," Yvonne, is a white, English woman struggling with her cultural identity. Her situation is peculiar – she is prejudiced against immigrants, yet she married into an immigrant, Pakistani family and converted to Islam. Her son says that "she refused to allow the word 'immigrant' to be used about father, since it applied to illiterate tiny men with downcast eyes and mismatched clothes," ("We're not Jews" 41). Yvonne's conversion to Islam and her immigrant family challenge her British identity, making her the Other in her own native culture. Even though her Otherness is not made obvious by her skin colour, she, along with her young son Azhar, gets verbally abused during a bus ride by an English nationalist, Big Billy. Yvonne deals with abuse by directing it towards another minority – her response to Big Billy accusing her of stinking is "We're not Jews," ("We're not Jews" 41). Yvonne is struggling to reconcile being seen as the Other in the British society with the fact that England is her home.

In addition to being isolated by the British, she feels quite lonely within her family. Yvonne felt estranged whenever her family spoke about going home since it meant something different for her. Pakistan was 'home' for the family, but she does not feel the same because "how could she go 'home' when she was at home already?" ("We're not Jews" 42). What is more, being in Pakistan made her uncomfortable because she was not accustomed to the cuisine and could not support the weather. She struggled with the position women have in the culture as well. Besides her different feelings about Pakistan, what makes Yvonne the Other in the family, is language. Her husband struggles with English, calling his idiolect "Bombay variety,

mish and mash" and the older family members often speak in Urdu or Punjabi, languages she does not understand ("We're not Jews" 42). These differences between her and her family make her feel displaced in her own home but the comfort of her British identity is tainted by the abuse she receives. In the end, her cultural identity is fragmented and she is forced to exist in between two cultures but not truly belong to either.

3) Sexual and Gender Identity of Kureishi's Protagonists

Judith Butler claims that fluidity of identities, gender and consequently sexual, leads to an openness for resignification and recontextualization (176). In practice, this means that gender is an act and is therefore susceptible to imitation or change, but it can be stabilized if the performance is repeated (178). In the era of the Section 28, a legislative from 1988 which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality by teaching or publishing materials[1], Kureishi candidly and directly portrays sexuality and gender and how it can change. Additionally, Eleftheriadis states that hybrid models of gender and sexual identities are built upon survival strategies employed by minorities who find themselves in a phobic environment (5). Kureishi articulates the sexual and gender hybridity, or rather fluidity, of his characters in a number of ways, including changing their appearance and therefore imitating and performing gender, and having romantic relationships with multiple genders. Like it was mentioned, in the late nineties he focuses on middle-aged men and their issues with gender. Some of these characters try to resolve their issues with masculinity by exchanging long-term relationships for short-term affairs, while others seek stability of domesticity. In this section, we will examine how Kureishi

[1] "Local Government Act 1988." Legislation.Gov.Uk, King's Printer of Acts of Parliament, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted. Accessed 13 May 2024.

approaches sexuality and gender in ethnic stories in comparison to his approach to masculinity in 'postethnic' stories.

Formation of a fluid sexual and gender identity

Characteristically for *Bildungsroman* heroes, Karim, Jamila and Shahid are on the path of discovery of their sexual and gender identity. They challenge the heteronormative society they live in, even if it means defying their parents or religion. For Karim, this exploration begins with Jamila and Charlie. He is shunted for his sexuality early on when his father laments "a bum-banger! My own son – how did it transpire" after seeing Karim and Charlie engage in intercourse (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 18). Kosofsky Sedgwick emphasizes that coming out can potentially be dangerous, especially for a family dynamic (86). However, despite Haroon's indignation, Karim seems to be comfortable with his sexual identity – it is fluid. He declares that there is no reason to choose between men and women: "I felt it would be heart-breaking to have to choose one or the other, like having to decide between the Beatles and the Stones." (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 55). What is more, he feels secure and confident in his bisexuality, even enough to exploit it. Karim has an actress girlfriend, Eleanor, but later on, he sleeps with the play director hoping that he could gain his favour and secure roles.

Furthermore, Jamila experiments with her sexuality in the same way she does with the rest of her identity. She feels empowered by the feminist literature that she reads and consciously challenges, not only the heteronormative British society, but also her family's traditional values. The disagreement between Jamila and her family is caused by their wishes to arrange a marriage for her. She is to be married to an Indian man, Changez. Initially, she refuses to marry him, but she is coerced into doing it by her father, Anwar, who goes on a hunger strike until she acquiesces. The arranged marriage and Changez' failure to provide for the family do not waver her resolve – she finds a way to be happy while still appeasing her

father's wishes. She even ends up being the provider for her family thus subverting established gender norms. Yet, her practice of counterculture culminates when she moves to a hippie commune where she lives with her girlfriend and boyfriend, who is also the father of her child. All the while she remains married to Changez, breaking the norm once again.

Contrary to Karim and Jamila, Shahid in *The Black Album* is more concerned with his gender expression than his sexual identity. Butler states that the body is destroyed by past attempts at defining it but the destruction is necessary for culture to occur (165-166). In Shahid's case, he is burdened by both Pakistani and English history of ideas about gender. The former categorizes people according to the strict gender binary and the latter has undergone a transformation of understanding it in the 1960s. On the one hand, his Pakistani family, and afterwards his group of religious friends, have staunch opinions about what a "real" man is. For them, gender is natural and predetermined by a higher power, which would make any deviation from the norm a transgression against god. Kureishi correlates Shahid's deviations from the gender norm with literature, fashion and music. His masculinity is often, and from an early age, questioned by his family because of his interest in literature, which they see as a female trait. His father refers to him as "a bloody eunuch fool" for reading Keats and Shelly to a girl that he likes (*The Black Album* 52). Similarly, his friend Chad calls him "an old lady" for reading poetry. His older brother, Chili, is the more masculine one which is why their father wants Shahid to imitate him. Chili's opinions about Shahid's masculinity are similar to his father's but they are based on appearance: "the shorter haircut… you've become less womanish. I s'pose you're nearly a man now. Papa would be pleased" (*The Black Album* 42).

On the other hand, Deedee's mentorship offers Shahid a secure environment to explore and experiment with his gender. Deedee introduces him to her world of culture, sexual freedom, and liberty of gender expression. Her postmodern, liberal ideas and the influence she has on Shahid prompt the religious group to refer to her as the 'pornographic priestess' thus

condemning her openness (*The Black Album* 228). Shahid states that he has wondered what it would like to be a woman and Deedee gives him the tools to try. He claims that he "liked the feel of his new female face" (*The Black Album* 117). Before giving him make up, Deedee gives him the necessary reassurance through Prince, a musician. She explains that he is "half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho, too" (*The Black Album* 25). Shahid identifies with Prince and his hybridity – they are both mixed, both masculine and feminine. The extent of Prince's influence is emphasized when Chad rejects his music which Juhász identifies as his denial of the feminine (6). Both Shahid and Prince are the embodiment of duality, or rather, of fluidity between the binary. In the end Shahid accepts and maintains his fluidity: "It suits me. There's nowhere else I'd rather be" (*The Black Album* 175).

Crisis of masculinity in contemporary society

As we have mentioned, in Kureishi's 'postethnic' stories the focus shifts from the struggle of finding one's identity within a certain group to personal issues of protagonists and their frustrations with existence in the modern world. As Chalupský points out, the most noticeable difference in Kureishi's newer work is visible in the tone of narratives, which shifts from humorous and witty comedy to a more pessimistic, introspective, and critical observation of middle-aged men's traumas (63). Kureishi focuses on men in their forties and fifties working in intellectual or creative fields. The post-feminist world disrupted the patriarchal hierarchy and introduced new kinds of issues for these men. They are trying to either change accordingly or are struggling to persist by living by their own principles. The issues they face comprise the struggle with their roles as fathers and husbands as well as their occupational roles. The protagonists of 'postethnic' stories are seeking to change their situations because their dissatisfaction with life is becoming overwhelming. The root of their problems usually lies in a dissatisfying marriage accompanied by new expectations that society puts on men.

The most prominent difference regarding sexual and gender identity between ethnic and 'postethnic' stories is the fact that in ethnic stories the characters are trying to form their identity and thus find security, while in 'postethnic' stories the characters already have formed their identities but are looking to exchange the security of an unfulfilling long-term relationship in order to attain personal freedom. Kureishi's 'postethnic' stories primarily deal with the issue of traditional masculinity being challenged by societal changes and how the protagonists cope with those changes. According to Horlacher, one of characteristics of traditional masculinity is the lack of space for mistakes or deviation from the patriarchal norm (qtd. in "What is a Man?" 5). This is one of the reasons why some of the protagonists are reluctant to change. In this case, masculinity is seen a primary marker of gender and is realized through successful fulfilment of certain social roles. Mistakes and unsuccessful fulfilment of social roles cause frustration and ultimately, an unstable sense of self.

Kureishi's novel *Intimacy* (1998) shows how he transitions from the postcolonial subject of ethnicity and establishing one's identity within a group to the private issue of trying to keep up with the changes in the world. The novel, following a single day in the life of a middle-aged writer and a father, gives us an insight into frustrations of domesticity from a distinctly male perspective. Jay spends his day deliberating whether he should leave his long-term partner, Susan and their two young sons for a much younger woman. He admits that his situation scares him: "Tonight my predominant emotion is fear of the future. At least, one might say, it is better to fear things than be bored by them, and life without love is a long boredom" (*Intimacy* 11). The source of his boredom at the moment of his musings is his unsatisfactory marriage and the bleak domesticity that comes with it. He comes to see his family as "no more than a machine for the suppression and distortion of free individuals" (*Intimacy* 55). Jay finds his freedom in a young mistress who challenges him physically and intellectually, something his partner no

longer does. Jay's fear of the future which he could have with his young girlfriend is in conflict with his reluctance to leave his family thus causing a crisis of his masculine identity.

Jay states that he wishes to leave because he "wants to become someone else" (*Intimacy* 101). Representing Bauman's 'man with no bonds', Jay bases his identity on his numerous relationships, principally with women. He is quite preoccupied with physicality. In a traditional manner of understanding of the concept of masculinity, he relates his sexual prowess with being a man. He often exercises his violent urges to "kiss her and push her into the bedroom" while remaining unaware that this kind of behaviour could be demeaning for his partners (*Intimacy* 40). However, his young girlfriend, Nina is aware that his traditionalist ideals are hurtful and refers to him as an "inflexible tyrant" (*Intimacy* 81). Nina's remark shows that Jay's behaviour is incompatible with the social changes happening around him. Not yet ready to change accordingly, this is another source of frustration for Jay. What is more, Jay associates his success as a writer with his masculinity. In a crude display of arrogance, he claims to write "with a soft pencil and a hard dick – not the other way round" (*Intimacy* 62).

Alternatively, Jay values intellect and individuality. He states that he "believes in individualism, in sensualism, and in creative idleness" (*Intimacy* 132). The source of his frustration is the feeling that his family prevents him from attaining these traits. He considers himself to be quite intellectual, but Susan "doesn't constantly lucubrate on the splendours and depths of her mind," which is irritating for him (*Intimacy* 23). This is one of the reasons why leaving her for Nina could be liberating for him. His unhappiness with the domestic life can be recognized in the cruel way he treats Susan even before he contemplates leaving her. His cruelty is expressed on the emotional level: "I enjoyed making her the only unmarried woman in her group of friends from university (*Intimacy* 72). In addition to his partners, Jay bases his identity on the relationship with his mother. He blames her for staying in an unhappy marriage which affected him as a child. Jay's crisis of masculinity does not get resolved in the end, seeing as he

does not reach a concrete decision. His fear of future prevents him from leaving his family but he is aware that his happiness and freedom lie with Nina.

Moreover, according to Bettina Schötz the main topic of Kureishi's first short story collection, *Love in a Blue Time* (1997) is the disruption of masculinity ("What is a Man?" 226). She recognizes three types of masculine protagonists and side characters: middle-aged men who are unhappy in their marriage, career, and are afraid of fatherhood, middle-aged and younger men who are looking to settle down, and a man whose divorce did not solve his crisis like he hoped it would ("What is a Man?" 226-227). What all of the characters have in common is the need to change their patterns of behaviour which are considered to be traditionally masculine because the hierarchy between the genders is changing. The pressure to change leads them to a crisis that they seek to resolve by either cheating on their long-term partners, divorce or, in some cases, attempts at selling down. In addition, Bauman claims that one could possibly be disappointment once their desires are fulfilled (*Liquid Modernity* 28). This means that the unhappiness that might occur after attaining freedom is preventing men from even trying to change.

The first type of man Schötz describes, a middle-aged man unhappy in his marriage and dissatisfied with his career is the protagonist of the story "D'Accord, Baby!", Bill. He struggles with accepting the discrepancy between the success of his wife's career and his own because he finds it threatening. His wife, Nicola, works in television, a male-dominated industry, and is getting recognition for her work while his career as a screenwriter stagnates. Her career even leads her to infidelity – she meets Vincent when she goes to France for work. Nicola's relationship with Vincent is another reversal of traditional gender roles and an additional source for Bill's frustration, seeing as she dares to follow her desires. What is more, his dissatisfaction and the feeling of anguish are amplified by Nicola's pregnancy. He fears fatherhood and resorts to reading classic literature in hopes of finding instruction: "the heavy volumes surely

represented the highest point to which man's thought had flown; they had to include guidance" ("D'Accord, Baby!" 47). Bill's solution for averting his crisis and restoring the established order between genders is to sleep with Celestine, the daughter of Nicola's lover.

Contrary to Bill's desires, Celestine only confirms the role-reversal he experienced with Nicola. Like her, Celestine is independent and sure of herself. Despite his reluctance "he did everything she wanted, for as long as she wanted" ("D'Accord, Baby!" 52). In the end, Bill's only chance at overcoming his frustrations is to acknowledge the fact that the patriarchy as he knows it does not exist anymore. He will have to accept that society changes, whether he changes with it or not. Nonetheless, Schötz claims that Bill's masculinity will be recomposed by fulfilment of his more internal desires, such as travelling ("What is a Man?" 229). Comparably to Bill, the protagonist of the short story "In a Blue Time", Roy, is a middle-aged film director who is frustrated by his stagnant career. His film keeps getting delayed which makes him "feel a failure. It's hard to live with" ("In a Blue Time" 34). The impending fatherhood adds to his worry about providing while being unemployed. Unlike Bill, he does not resort to cheating; instead, he decides to make an effort to reconnect with his wife, be a good father and try writing again.

The second category of character that Schötz identifies is represented by the protagonist of the short story "The Tale of the Turd". The narrator is a forty-four-year-old man who is in a relationship with a teenage girl. His situation is quite bleak – he is perpetually unemployed, an addict and an alcoholic whose stay at the clinic did not help him get sober. He is looking to settle down and sees her family as the ideal model: "this is the life, what they call a happy family, they've asked to meet me, why not settle down and enjoy it" ("The Tale of the Turd" 115). In order to attain this kind of life and have a happy family, the protagonist should change his masculine identity but is ultimately unable to. Schötz claims that the configuration of masculinity is impossible due to the immaturity of the character and difficulties with fulfilling

responsibilities (“What is a Man?” 230). The narrator of this short story is aware that his behaviour will only give him “two years” with her and his dreams of “marriage and of putting the children to bed” will remain only that (“The Tale of the Turd” 117). Despite knowing that it is too late for him to change, he enjoys feeling settled, even if it is only temporary.

The third category of man is represented by the protagonist of the short story “Nightlight”. He is a divorced middle-aged man who, even though five years have passed, still struggles with the fact that his wife left him. The unhappiness in his marriage was caused by the upheaval in the patriarchal society. The narrator claims that his wife is too liberated and successful which is why he could not please her. His attempt to be the man his wife wanted leads him to an existential crisis: “soon he didn’t know who he was supposed to be. They both got lost. He dreaded going home” (“Nightlight” 122). Like the characters we have mentioned above, he seeks fulfilment in superficial relationships with younger women. However, like his wife, his girlfriend is not someone who complies with his ideals of patriarchy. Their relationship is mostly physical and she is in charge of their meetings. In the end, she reduces him to a means to an end – they do not communicate in a meaningful way because she only calls him to have sex. Nevertheless, she makes him feel less lonely and suicidal, thus bringing him a step closer to happiness. Schötz maintains that the narrator is on the way to transform his masculinity because he dared to divorce his wife and found solace with the younger woman (“What is a Man?” 232).

Moreover, going further than just acknowledging the disruption of their masculinity, the protagonists in the later short story collection, *Midnight All Day* (1999), actually transform it. Similarly to the characters we have mentioned so far, the protagonists of these short stories find themselves in unhappy domesticity and decide to fix that by illicit romantic relationships with women half their age. However, the difference is that the protagonists in this collection take on an active role in the transformation of their masculinity, usually with a divorce. According to

Schötz, leaving their families and starting new ones is their last chance for a fulfilling life ("What is a Man?" 232). Another difference that Chalupský recognizes is that the stories in this collection, even though thematically similar, tend to be happier than the stories in *Love in a Blue Time* or the novel *Intimacy*. As the source of their happiness, he identifies the right choice of partner and the effort they decide to put into new relationships (Chalupský 64).

Schötz selects Ian, the protagonist in the short story "Midnight All Day" as the representative of masculine transformation. Ian is a middle-aged man who contemplates leaving his wife Jane and their child for a much younger woman, Marina. Despite his concerns about failing as a father, he leaves his family in the end, with the main reason for his leaving being his wife's independence. Jane becomes suicidal because of it and Ian's friends urge him to go back to her. However, Marina becomes pregnant, and Ian sees this as an opportunity to begin anew. He decides to start a new family with Marina and not repeat the same mistakes with their child. Marina's personality is somewhat similar to Jane's – she is quite independent – but this does not seem to bother Ian as much as it did with Jane. In order to overcome his issues with the evolution of gender roles, Ian turns to art. The visit to the Musée d'Orsay gives him the confidence to embrace his new role: "this was a man: someone who had taken action" ("Midnight All Day" 294).

Unlike Ian, Nick, the protagonist of the short story "That Was Then" is married and has a son with his wife Lolly. He is a successful writer who could settle down and live comfortably. His daily routine gets disturbed when Natasha, a former lover, decides to contact him and ask for a meeting. They reminisce about their past together which prompts her to accuse him of a hurtful and misogynistic portrayal of her in his book. Nick's portrayal of Natasha is surprising because he is aware of the changes in the patriarchy. He even wonders how men could benefit from it in a book about his father: "The last chapter was concerned with what men, and fathers, could become, having been released, as women were two decades earlier, from some of their

conventional expectations" ("That Was Then" 230). After spending the day with Natasha and reliving his wild past he decides that for him "boredom was an antidote to unruly wishes, quelling his suspicion that disobedience was the only energy" ("That Was Then" 239). He transforms his masculinity by letting go of Natasha and their wild past and settling into fatherhood and domesticity.

4) Kureishi's Portrayals of Class

Historically, the concept of social class has impacted the structure of the British society and it continues to do so in the modern era. Belonging to a social class is one of person's group identities, whether they are born into it or they negotiated their membership by fulfilling necessary conditions. The most frequently represented social class in Kureishi's fiction is the middle class. His protagonists generally belong to the lower middle class, as does the majority of the side characters, whether they are part of ethnic or 'postethnic' stories. Djahazi recognizes occupation, consumer goods and culture as identifying features of the middle class (16-32). Kureishi's protagonists often make references to cultural objects or consumer goods. Additionally, their jobs are stereotypically middle-class occupations. Another characteristic of the middle class is the suburbia. Susan Brook notes that the stereotype of suburbia "as homogenous and conformist is pervasive, not only in popular culture but also in contemporary literary and cultural criticism" (209). Most of Kureishi's characters live in the suburbs and escaping it would mean leaving the confines of the middle class.

The first indicator of social class in Kureishi's fiction we will mention is occupation. On the one hand, in ethnic stories the first-generation immigrants, such as Haroon Amir and Shahid Hasan's parents, work in typically lower-middle class jobs, the former being a Civil Service clerk and the latter being the owner of two travel agencies. Both are satisfied with their

jobs and live comfortably but this social position is a downgrade for them – Haroon comes from a wealthy family of doctors in India, while Shahid's family has a significant social standing in Karachi. Their children are ambitious but remain in the middle class, only moving upwards as far as the upper middle class. They are able to climb socially because they decide to work in creative fields – Karim as an actor and Shahid as a writer. On the other hand, the protagonists in 'postethinc' short stories and the novel *Intimacy* work mostly in creative or intellectual fields. Their careers include movie directors, writers, journalists, and similar jobs which are typical for the middle class. Even though they do not struggle financially, most of these men are disappointed with their careers. The disappointment stems from the level of success they have reached – they feel like they are capable of much more.

The second marker of social class in Kureishi's fiction is consumerism. Djahazi emphasizes the lower-middle class fascination with material goods and indicates their belief that the accumulation of objects could improve their social standing (22-23). For example, in *The Black Album* Shahid mentions his father's preoccupation with material objects and constant renovation: "the furniture was replaced every five years and new rooms were necessarily added" (39). Even though the family lives comfortably, Shahid's father needs to prove his social standing in the middle class through acquisition of new objects. Jay describes his childhood in the middle class in the same manner: "every few months something new and shiny arrived: a car, a fridge, a washing machine, a telephone. And for a time each new thing amazed us" (*Intimacy* 17). Another example of a character who constantly displays his social class is Chili in *The Black Album*. However, Chili's need to display his social status is fulfilled through fashion and his indulgences. He displays his position through popular brands such as Ray-bans, Marlboros, Jack Daniel's, Boss or Calvin Klein (*The Black Album* 38). What is more, Chili maintains his social standing through the relationships he upholds with his service providers:

"His barber shook his hand, his accountant took him to dinner, his drug dealer would come to him at all hours" (38).

The third indicator of social class in Kureishi's fiction is culture. Djihazi states that possession of cultural knowledge is what distinguishes the lower middle class from the upper middle class (27). Kureishi portrays this difference through literature. In ethnic stories lower-middle class characters, tend to read stereotypically low-brow literature. For instance, Shahid mentions that people only read atlases, gardening books and Reader's Digest where he is from (*The Black Album* 27), while Karim sneers at the abridged and illustrated versions of *The Woman in White* and *Vanity Fair* that Eva's friend reads (*The Buddha of Suburbia* 30). Both of them thus make a distinction between themselves and the lower middle class, or rather suggest that they do not belong in the lower middle class. The cultural knowledge they possess should place them in the upper middle class, seeing as they both read authors like Proust, Dostoevsky, Kerouac or Rushdie. What is more, the difference between the social status of Karim's parents is emphasized by Haroon's foray into Buddhism – he studies Eastern philosophy while Margaret watches soap operas, a staple of the lower middle-class suburbia. The same difference is portrayed in *Intimacy* when Jay alludes to the philosophers and classics he reads, while Susan reads cookbooks in bed (*Intimacy* 23).

These markers of the middle class accumulate in one place – the suburbia. The protagonists of ethnic stories all live in the suburbia, but Karim is the one who is most affected by it. Brook notes that suburbia is represented as "the (often demonized) other of city life" (209). We have already established that the suburbs are a reflection of Karim's hybrid identity in *The Buddha*, but to be more precise, Karim's feelings for the suburbs are fluid and change with the rest of his identity. At the beginning of the novel, he sees it as a dull place that he needs to escape, but once he does escape to New York, he realizes that life in the city is not what he imagined it to be. Feeling disappointed, he returns to the liminal suburbia where he feels secure.

Contrary to Karim, some of the characters in 'postethnic' stories see the suburbia as yet another source of disappointment. For Jay, it is a sign of stagnation and of lack of success: "Being lower-middle class and from the suburbs, where poverty and pretension go together, I can see how good the middle class have it" (*Intimacy* 20). Similarly, for Marcia, the protagonist of the short story "Sucking Stones", it represents repetition and her unsuccessful career as a writer: "Every evening, when Marcia drove back from school through the suburban traffic, angry and listless, with a talking book on the cassette player and her son sitting in the back, she hoped she might have received a letter from a publisher or literary agent" ("Sucking Stones" 243). By portraying different attitudes towards the suburbia, Kureishi makes a distinction between finding happiness in liminality and feeling trapped in it.

Conclusion

This diploma paper has attempted to examine representations of identity in Hanif Kureishi's fiction written in the 1990s. British society changed in the decades following the Second World War, putting the individual at the centre of the focus. This era, which Zygmunt Bauman refers to as "liquid modernity" is a time of constant transformation and evolution for the individual. Identities become unfixed thus allowing the individual to choose from the various options available. Additionally, breaking long-lasting relationship and transgressing against social norms becomes less frowned upon. However, the great number of possibilities can be overwhelming and lead to frustration and anxiety. Consequently, individuals frequently change their opinions, styles, beliefs, ideologies and relationships. With many options available, identities are easily acquired and equally easily discarded, similar to consumer goods. In Kureishi's works, characters exchange or form identities in search of security or personal freedom all the while breaking old bonds and creating new ones. The individual changes often reflect the evolution of the community.

Kureishi's nineties fiction can be divided into ethnic and 'postethnic', depending on the major themes they explore. His early novels, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* belong to the former category because they deal with the issue of hybridity of mixed characters. The young protagonists are caught between two distinct cultures and are seeking for security in the liminal space between them. Kureishi's work written in the late nineties, including the novel *Intimacy* and two short story collections *Love in a Blue Time* and *Midnight All Day*, belong to the 'postethnic' category. The focus is put on the changes in masculine identity brought on by the changes in modern society. The individual's desire to belong to a group is replaced by the search for personal freedom in the face of dissatisfying and disappointing domesticity. Changing their routines is the only way to escape the boredom of every-day life and whether they succeed in doing so depends on their readiness to accept the newly-established hierarchy.

In this paper, we have firstly analysed Kureishi's portrayal of ethnic and religious identity. In the postcolonial context, we have explored the differences between first and second-generation immigrants. The representative character of the first-generation immigrants is Haroon (*The Buddha of Suburbia*). He attempts to negotiate his way into British society by imitating the Englishmen around him. In order to assimilate, he changes his accent, habits, and clothes but still remains the Other in the eyes of Englishmen because of the colour of his skin. His Otherness later becomes another means to negotiate his belonging in English society. Accepting that he will always be seen as the Other, Haroon decides to become the suburbia's Buddhist guru. Not only does he change his accent and clothes again, but he also appropriates Buddhist teachings and interprets them for the suburbanites deeply fascinated by the New Age movement. Despite trying very hard to be seen as English, Haroon only refers to himself as Indian.

The second-generation immigrants are represented by Karim, Jamila (*The Buddha of Suburbia*) and Shahid (*The Black Album*). Being born in England, in a multicultural society

leaves them with a confusing sense of self. They do not need to negotiate their way into English society so they challenge the modern understanding of it. Their search for a more stable identity is influenced by both of their cultures but also by popular culture, foreign resistance movements, and the desire to rebel against authority. Having tried and then discarded some identities, they form their own hybrid ones which consist of elements they choose from each culture. Their identities represent a new way of being British. Their existence in the liminal space grants them the security they search for. In addition, religion plays an important role in the formation of Shahid's identity. His ethnic identity becomes intertwined with his religious one when he gets involved with a group of religious fanatics. After not being able to find a place in British society, belonging to this religious group provides him stability. However, their extremist views and separatist tendencies are not compatible with Shahid's liquidity, which is why he eventually leaves the group.

Secondly, we have analysed Kureishi's portrayal of sexual and gender identity. The theme of forming a hybrid identity remains present in the ethnic stories. Like with ethnicity, the young protagonists experiment with identity while seeking stability, but ultimately settle in hybrid liminality. Challenging the social norms regarding sexuality, both Karim and Jamila find themselves in relationships with people of multiple genders. They are content in their queerness despite the indignation shown by their families. Shahid's queerness relates to his gender. His relationship with Deedee allows him to experiment with it and finally leads him to the feeling of liberation. In contrast, the male protagonists of 'postethnic' stories have already formed their sexual and gender identities. The issues they have are caused by those masculine identities being disrupted as a result of social change. Kureishi's criticism of marriage aligns with Bauman's idea that relationships need to be fluid in order to retain the possibility for change. For the protagonists in short stories, this means leaving long-term relationships for much

younger women, or even divorce. The frustration of domestic life and unfulfilling careers prompt these men to change.

Finally, we have examined Kureishi's portrayal of the social class. He focuses on the life of the middle class across his work. Kureishi employs certain markers of social class in order to portray it. The most evident one is the occupation of the protagonists. In the short story collections, the characters generally work in creative and intellectual fields, including jobs such as journalists, directors, or writers. The stereotypically middle-class jobs are a source of their frustrations because they feel like they have not fulfilled their potential. The fluidity is reflected in their desire for social climbing by leaving their jobs. Another way to express their fluidity is the desire to leave the suburbia which is seen as a staple of the middle class. In addition, the middle class is portrayed by the goods they consume and the amount of goods they possess. Cultural capital sets them apart from the working class, as well as being the difference between the lower middle class and the upper middle class, while the amount of goods they possess ensures their belonging to the middle class.

Kureishi's fictional world recognizes the fluidity of identity and is aware of the power it holds. Bauman's 'liquid modernity' requires the individual to be able to change because they are the only ones responsible for finding their own niche. Seeing as constant change is quite demanding, the individual searches for a sense of stability, whether it is in a group, a family or a relationship. Kureishi portrays identity as hybrid, susceptible to change, fluid, and never truly stable. The characters seek security in relationships, families or social groups, but all of these bonds can easily be broken or replaced. Ultimately, the characters persist either by transgression against social norms or by obeying them while trying to fulfil the demands of a modern society.

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SUMMARY

Portrayals of Identity in the Works of Hanif Kureishi

This diploma paper sets out to analyse representations of identity in Hanif Kureishi's fiction written in the 1990s. The paper explores his three novels: *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), *The Black Album* (1995) and *Intimacy* (1998), as well as two short story collections, *Love in a Blue Time* (1997), and *Midnight All Day* (1999). Ethnicity and religion are examined in terms of hybrid identity. Issues of sexual and class identity are also explored in the context of postcolonial theory and Zygmunt Bauman's theories of liquid identity.

Key words: Hanif Kureishi, postcolonialism, Otherness, identity, hybridity, liquidity

SAŽETAK

Prikazi identiteta u djelima Hanifa Kureishija

Ovaj diplomski rad bavi se analizom prikaza identiteta u djelima Hanifa Kureishija iz devedesetih godina prošlog stoljeća. Rad razmatra njegova tri romana: *Buddha iz predgrađa* (1990.), *Crni Album* (1995.) i *Intima* (1998.), te dvije zbirke pripovijedaka, *Love in a Blue Time* (1997.) i *Ponoć cijeli dan* (1999). Etnicitet i religija razmatraju se u pogledu hibridnog identiteta. Također, pitanja seksualnog identiteta i klase proučavaju se u kontekstu postkolonijalne teorije i u kontekstu Baumanovih teorija o tekućem identitetu.

Ključne riječi: Hanif Kureishi, postkolonijalizam, Drugost, identitet, hibridnost, fluidnost