

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF “HIGH CULTURE”: YOUTH SUBCULTURE AS DEVIANT IN HANIF KUREISHI’S *THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA*

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Abstract

This paper examines youth subculture as a different social deviance in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The youth subculture developed mainly during the 1950s and 60s with its distinctive views, values, life-styles, attitudes and patterns of behaviour, in which young adolescent people opposed firmly the dominant high or established culture of their adult parents. In its examination of the youth subculture, the paper will focus upon three central aspects in the lives of young people, which put them at once into a different position from that of adult people as well as from the streamline of the dominant culture. One of them is the idea of freedom and independence, which young people dream of in their lives in the face of the limiting and moralizing aspects of traditional culture represented by their parents, pastors in the church, and other important adult people in their lives. The second aspect is the use of music, which provides young people with genuine positive energy and creativity, in which they become able to express their deviant views and opposition to the dominant life-styles of their parents and society which disappoint them and regulate their lives, so that music, in a sense, enables young people to cross the borderline of what organizes their lives and then liberate them from the bondage of the restrictive traditional culture. Finally, the paper also explores how alcohol and sex are represented by Kureishi in the novel used as two primary indicators of independence from adult supervision.

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The 1950s and 1960s underwent radical social and cultural changes in the Western World, particularly in America and Britain, and one of the most striking and visible manifestations of these social changes is the emergence of the ‘Youth Subculture’, in which young adolescent people opposed and questioned adamantly and profoundly traditional hegemonic assumptions and homogeneously established official world view of their adult parents about certainty, meaning, reality, truth, and identity. As a deviant and counter-culture mainly caused by the aftermath effects of the World War II due not only to far-reaching developments in popular mass culture and music, mass communications, mass entertainment, and mass art but also to “the grimmer matter of a world recession and rising unemployment”, young people developed a different way of life, world view, culture, values, life-styles, attitudes and patterns of behaviour, which directly and indirectly enabled them to get free from the bondage not only of the established conventions of their societies and cultures but also of the restrictive rules and values of their own parents and family (Kumar, 1983, p. 44. See also Morrison, 1980; Rennison, 2005 and Bently, 2008). Eventually, there have been two different perceptions of life running opposite to each other in social and cultural life: an official perception which designs life and attitudes of individuals according to some social and cultural norms commonly accepted by the people and a different youth subculture which enables young people to oppose the established

view of life and culture and define themselves as separate from the identity imposed on them by the mainstream official norms.

This paper examines this different cultural perception, together with different “subversive ideas”, “deviant”, “new nihilistic” views, values, life-styles, attitudes and patterns of behaviour of young people in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Kureishi 1990, pp. 53, 97, 153). In so doing, the paper first defines the concepts of culture and “youth culture” or “subculture”, and then it debates how these opposing cultural forms of cultures come into conflict with each other in the wake of the World War II. Secondly, the paper focuses upon three aspects of life mainly practiced by fictional young characters such as Karim, Jamila, Helen and Charlie in the novel, and the practice of these aspects - the idea of freedom, the use of different form of music and of alcohol and sex obviously put these young characters into a different position from the perception and understanding of adult people at their homes as well as from the common ways of society and culture. Although these characters do not detach themselves thoroughly from the culture and common way of life of their parents, they seem through their “deviant” behaviours and beliefs in the novel not to care for what their elders take into account or what their elders pay attention to; they yearn for living on their own as free and independent and not according to the generally accepted and decided norms of their family and society, which, they believe, organize and control their lives but according to their own tendencies without restriction. Through their yearn for freedom and independence as well as through music, moreover, young characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia* long for creating a space of multiculturalism when young people, both immigrant and native in English society without any racial discrimination, regularly come together in the cafes, play, sing and listen to different forms of music as part of their popular youth culture, since young people from both sides feel that they are exposed to the same restrictive manners and value, even though they come from different backgrounds. Finally, the paper also debates how alcohol and sex contribute to youth subculture in the novel. As represented by Kureishi in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, alcohol and sex are not only two primary indicators of independence, but they also enable young characters to be creative in their vision of relationship with the adult world as well as of the future life. For example, the homosexual relationship between Karim and Charlie and the lesbian relationship between Jamila and her woman friend becomes means first for realizing their “deviant” behaviours and freedom by which they visibly deconstruct the very basis of heterosexual relationship consecrated by the patriarchal society and culture and secondly for achieving a kind of illumination or a new creation concerning their identities in the future or for finding their own ways of life by discovering their own identities different from what have been predetermined for them by their own background as well as from the dominant indigenous British society and culture.

Culture, like many other concepts, is tricky, vague and difficult to define as its meanings change not only from one person to another and from one group to another according to their interest, world views and professions but also from one period of time to another as the ways of looking at life, world and reality, shifts in each period of time. Thus, the meanings of culture have gradually evolved but sometimes contradicted each other throughout history (Foucault, 1988; Street, 1994 and McRobbie, 1994). In *OED*, culture is defined “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group”, “the beliefs and attitudes about something that people

in a particular group or organization share” and technically “the growing of plants or breeding of particular animals in order to get a particular substance or crop from them” (2010, p. 357). For Raymond Williams, moreover, culture is “one of the two or three most complicated words in English language”, and for him, it “is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought” (1985, p. 87). In his another often-quoted book *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958), moreover, Raymond Williams also summarizes these differing meanings which have constantly shifted since the fifteenth century:

Culture...had meant primarily, the ‘tending of natural growth’, and then, by analogy, a process of human training. But this latter use, which had usually been a culture of something, was changed, in the nineteenth century, to *culture* as such, a thing in itself. It came to mean, first, ‘a general state or habit of the mind’, having close relations with the idea of human perfection. Second, it came to mean ‘the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole’. Third, it came to mean ‘the general body of the arts’. Fourth, later in the century, it came to mean ‘a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual’ (1960, pp. xiv-xv. See also Williams, 1961).

Furthermore, Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1945) gives a similar view of culture concerning “a whole way of life” commonly shared by the people of a particular group or nation:

In order that society should exist and, a fortiori, that a society should prosper, it is necessary that *the mind of all the citizens should be rallied and held together by certain predominant ideas; and this cannot be the case unless each of them sometimes draws his opinions from the common source and consents to accept certain matters of belief already formed* (1945, p. 8. Emphasis added).

Finally, in Akira Iriye’s view, culture is “the sharing and transmission of memory, ideology, emotions, life-styles, scholarly and artistic works, and other symbols” of a particularly group or nation from one generation to another in a smooth way (1990, p. 100). As clearly seen in the arguments above, culture in its traditional sense is “a whole way of life” and “certain predominant ideas” commonly shared by the people of a particular group or a nation and transmitted from one generation to another in a smooth way without cease. This form of culture obviously entails uniformity, conformity, stability, and familiarity, which every member of a nation or society is visibly supposed to accept without hesitation. What is more, this kind of cultural perceptions and constructions also draw borders around the lives of the people and shape them, imposing certain norms, values, limitations on the behaviours and beliefs of people; these borders are also internalized and thus accepted voluntarily by people without questioning them with a view of identity as fixed, stable and uniform (Brake, 1985).

However, this view of “a whole way of life” embraced as “predominant ideas” by the adult people of traditional hegemonic culture has undergone a huge transformation since World War II as a result of the development of popular culture, multiculturalism, liberalism and feminist movements, as well as the development of cultures of resistance movements such as hippies, goths, rock and roll, fans of hip-hop or heavy metal, punkers, mods, skinheads and rappers. This new culture includes a kind of meaning and perception closely linked to the values, attitudes, behaviours and norms of the young. Now mainly called as *youth subculture*, it is considered a subdivision of a national culture, in which the youth have striven to create different spaces, meaning and perception to free themselves

sometimes imaginatively and sometimes physically from the binding and organizing norms of their parents' view of life and culture (Lee, 1945, Gordon, 1947 and Brake, 1985). "In *OED*, the youth is defined as "the time of life when a person is young, especially the time before a child becomes an adult" (2010, p. 1730), and *OED* also defines youth subculture as "the behaviour and beliefs of a particular group of people in society that are different from those of most people" (p. 1487. For similar views, see also Baron, 1989; Bennett, 1999; Martin, 2002; Raby, 2005 and Holt, 2007). For instance, Nikola Bozilovic argues that the emergence of youth or subcultures "is not preceded by any symposia, programs or memoranda. Subcultures very often come into being with no special planning in advance; they are spontaneously generated while their activities are directed towards the goal which bases its *raison d' être* on *the escape from anonymous everydayness imbued with boredom, spiritual emptiness and impersonality*" (2010, p. 46. Emphasis added). Bozilovic continues to argue that "In the traditional society, in which the centre of the entire life is a kinship system, the place of an individual in the group is of no particular importance", and thus the youth in their subcultural world tries "to find meaning" beyond "the kinship system" of "their parents' culture and the ruling ideology", so that "On their way they will face resistance, firstly in their own family and then in a wider social environment, and all this is due to their subversive and resistant strategy or their refusal to subdue themselves to the ruling procedures in the culture of subordination" (pp. 50-3). Moreover, J. Patrick Williams argues that the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Britain "tended to emphasize leisure over other social realms, such as the family or school, because leisure spaces were relatively free of dominant cultural forces (at least in youths' minds) and thus were where subcultural expressions were most likely to appear" (2007, p. 578). Finally, for Angela McRobbie, young people are "active negotiators and producers" of a different culture which "is not too bound to 'parents culture' or the culture of the larger society" (1994, pp. 167-8). In this new culture, McRobbie continues to argue that young people create their own space even though it is small and sometimes imaginary, yet they feel themselves free from restriction with "new sensibilities", new styles, images and values bound up with a new view of "deviant identity" as opposed to the fixed and essentialist view of traditional identity (pp. 172-191).

As seen in the discussions above, the cultures created by hippies, goths, rock and roll, fans of hip-hop or heavy metal, punkers, mods, skinheads and rappers are just subcultures within the culture of the larger society, which oppose the mainstream culture of the larger society. Subcultures represent those young people who yearn for escaping from "boredom, spiritual emptiness and impersonality" in their small community and space; they develop their own style, image and symbols by which they strive to represent their deviant behaviours and beliefs in opposition to the common practices of the larger national society. In this way, young people feel themselves happy and free of "dominant cultural forces" which organize and shape their identities in an essentialist fixed way. What is also important in such a kind of subcultures is that there is no racial and gender discrimination most of time, so that young people from different ethnic backgrounds – white and black, along with feminist activists, come together and create a form of culture of co-existence because they all are very much suppressed between "dominant cultural forces" of their traditional family and of the larger society.

Similarly, Kureishi represents such kind of youth subculture in *The Buddha of Suburbia* through lives of his young fictional characters, Asians and British, who are very

much repressed between the culture of their traditional family on both sides and racial indigenous British culture, so that Kureishi empowers them in the novel to create their emancipatory strategies and space to get rid of “dominant cultural forces” or “predominant ideas.” *The Buddha of Suburbia* opens with a view of Karim Amir, the son of an Indian Immigrant family and chief protagonist of the novel, in which the reader at once sees him in a way that he is not happy with his current life, and thus he longs for getting rid not only of the London suburb but also of the meanness and conflict of his family life, where “things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family. I don’t know why. Quite frankly, it was all getting me down and I was ready for anything” (Kureishi, 1990, p. 3). Being “ready for anything” is the motto of young people in the novel for freedom and independence in their lives, since they all feel that they are restricted and that their lives are obviously regulated by their parents and customs practiced both at home and in the larger society, so that they themselves wish one way or another to run away from their home, create their own space and find their own voice and meaning of life on their own as “an entirely new way of being alive” (p. 36). Like Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), therefore, Karim is “ready for anything” in his future life as long as it will enable him to free himself from the monotony of life in the London suburbs or as long as it will fit his view of life and please him, since “in the suburbs people rarely dreamed of striking out for happiness. It was all familiarity and endurance: security and safety were the reward of the dullness’ (p. 8). Simply, Karim looks for a kind of life which will be “bottomless in its temptations” (p. 8). The view of “bottomless in its temptations” challenges general common-sense practices not only of his Asian background at home but also of the larger indigenous racial English society and always pushes him ahead for seeking his own way rather than referring to both his family background and what English society decides for him, since he is very much unhappy at school, very much disturbed by his father’s treatment of mother; there is no peace at home, and his home, his father’s view of life and Indian background do not provide a satisfactory view of life for him. In his attempts to be different, free and independent, Karim also plays music, read various magazines such *Rolling Stone* and closely visualizes inwardly his present life, yet he cannot find a way out of the dullness and stinginess of life in the London suburb but feels that “the whole world was converging on” his life and is imprisoning him psychologically into his small room, and eventually he says: “I wanted to begin now, at this instant, just when I was ready for it” (p. 62). Hence he wants to be various things such “a photographer or an actor, or perhaps a journalist, preferably a foreign correspondent in a war zone”, because he, like majority of other young people, hates “authority and being ordered” (p. 120).

What is of vital importance for Karim is freedom and independence in his life, a life which will please him and will fit his own expectation, and eventually he fantasizes what will happen once they move from the London suburb to the city centre of London:

There was a sound that London had. It was, I’m afraid, people in Hyde Park playing bongos with their hands...there were also kids dressed in velvet cloaks who lived free lives; there were thousands of black people everywhere, so I wouldn’t feel exposed; there were bookshops with racks of magazines printed without capital letters...there were shops selling all the records you could desire; there were parties where girls and boys you didn’t know took you upstairs and fucked; there were all the drugs you could use. You see, I didn’t ask much of life; this was the extent of my longing. But at least my goals were clear and I knew what I wanted. I was twenty. I was ready for anything (p. 121).

As seen in the quotation, Karim is obviously different and seems uninterested in

what his parents or elder people want in life – money, houses, fame and so on; he appears not to have big aims and desires in life, but he just desires to live and act as freely and independently as possible; he desires and seeks his own inclinations in life as much as possible, particularly in the city, London, where, he thinks, young people are free from the limitation not only of racial discrimination but also of the customs and demands of their parents and society, where “kids were fabulous; they dressed and walked and talked like little gods” (p. 128). In his view, the city offers any kinds of liberation and deep sensations to its residents, and of them, it is young people who enjoy themselves more than the other people, since they are able to disguise themselves and gain free movements within the crowd without being exposed to any restrictive standards and behaviours.

However, Karim is also disappointed in London, since the city first fascinates him in the sense that it first offers him a lot of opportunities which he was unable to get in the south London suburb, but later on he becomes a bit vague and ambivalent in his view of life in the city centre, or he is a little bit afraid of the radical shift in his life as Charlie says to him (pp. 127-132). In the city, there are theatre companies, cinemas, various cultural activities and magazines, cafes and music halls, which liberate him, like other young people and avail him of chance to chase his own free tendencies. In the first place, it is fine with Karim, yet he gradually becomes weary of London once he sees a lot of disruptive young people with different styles of clothes such as ‘dirty jeans, patchwork boots, and sheepskin coats’ and so on (p. 129). “The city at night intimidated me: the piss-heads, bums, derelicts and dealers shouted and looked for fights” (p. 131), so that he comes to notice that the city gives and constructs a sense of individual identity in various ways, breaking up the very basis of traditional essentialist view of identity: “I began to understand what London meant and class of outrage we had to deal with. It certainly puts us in proportion... London was killing us” with its “smelly old hippies”, “slag,” and “ugly fart-breaths” (pp. 129-130).

Whether or not Karim likes London is not so important, but what is important is that Kureishi represents him as a young character in a way that Karim portrays almost all the aspects of the youth subculture not only in England but also across the world as being stubborn, subversive, deviant, homosexual, alcohol user and untraditional in his views of life and attitudes. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, therefore, Kureishi employs a new strategy, in which he artistically enables Karim to go beyond the borderline of his background and family tradition as well as of the demands of English society by creating a new hole, a new space, or what Homi Bhabha calls “Third Space” or a sense of “hybridity”, which “ensure that the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew” (1994, pp. 37-8). In the novel, “the act of ambivalence”, “the differential relations”, “disavowal” and “difference” are obviously seen in Kureishi’s representation of Karim through his constant oscillation from one set of identity and role to another (1990, pp. 33-4). With such constant oscillation, Kureishi enables Karim not to imprison himself within the fixity of categorizing polarities and identity but to negotiate constantly with various identities and roles in what Bhabha also terms the “interstitial passage between fixed identifications [which] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (1994, p. 4). Kureishi strongly longs for subverting the boundaries between the non-whites and whites in the British society, stamping out this rigid binary opposition of racism and then constructing an “interstitial passage” or space

where individuals may be free to express themselves and act freely in their movements.

Kureishi exploits this new strategy of culture, perception and hybridity, in which identity, as opposed to what has been perceived, becomes flexible, ambivalent, and indifferent to whatever restricts it in life - racism, prejudices, traditions, culture and so on. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim obviously fits into this view of life. From the first page of the novel onward, he is visibly observed as being indifferent, uncaring, and relax in his views and relationship with one another, particularly with the whites when compared to other Asian or brown-skinned people. In view of what immigrant people experience in the London streets, ranging from violence and attacks to humiliation and prejudices, he imagines that there could be a different relationship, different approach and view “somewhere”, so that he wants to face up to life and “extract be a different life from it all the real joy it has to offer” (Kureishi, 1990, p. 5). Hence it is in this respect that Karim himself not only denies the fixity of his own identity and his father’s Indian background together with his English mother’s background but also tells the reader how he is the construct of differences:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an English man born and bred, almost. 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), from the south London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of the 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. Anyway, why search the inner room when it’s enough to say that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family. I don’t know why. Quite frankly, it was all getting me down and I was ready for anything (p. 3).

As the quotation indicates, Karim does not have a fixed, stable and autonomous identity, but he is very loose and flexible in his own view of identity as “a new breed” constructed of “two old histories”; he himself declares that he does not belong to any of backgrounds coming from his parents – Indian and English, since belonging to either of them may give rise to partiality, biased behaviour and fixity of view as well as to racial marginality this way or another. Karim scoffs at Englishness, challenges it and considers himself “a funny kind of Englishman” which used to be perceived as being serious, powerful, stable, and autonomous in his views, movement and action. Moreover, he does not acknowledge the cultures of his father’s Indian background, either, but tries to find his own way of life as he grows up in a culture which actually rejects and sees him as the other due to his brown-skin colour. That he does not care for belonging to nowhere avails Karim of opportunity to feel himself “ready for anything” in life. He does not want to stick to any side of his parents’ cultures and values - his father’s Indian background and mother’s Englishness; he defies these two cultures and backgrounds which try not only to construct him as fixed in a marginalized way but also to prevent him from moving freely from one set of life to another; he wants to be simultaneously inside/outside of polarities at a time, pertaining to both and to neither as in the words of Bhabha: “neither One or the Other but something else besides, in-between” (1994: 219). As quoted by Deborah A. Kapchan and Pauline Turner Strong, moreover, Benjamin Lee also argues that “leading edge of change lies in the intersections and interstices of processes beyond the nation-state that have their own global infrastructure. Hybrid spaces created by diasporic migrations are inhabited by bilingual and bicultural resident nomads who move between one public sphere and another” (1999, p. 245).

Karim’s “bicultural” perception, understanding and attitudes may, in fact, derive

from his family background and upbringing. Like Kureishi himself, he is the son of a Pakistani father and an English mother as the second generation of immigrants in England. Although he has never seen his father's home, tradition and culture back in India, he is also influenced by his father's culture, perception and world view as well as by the views of those Asian immigrants around him like his father's close friend Anwar. He also has something from his mother's background, that is, English culture, attitudes, "class antagonism" and confusion, "strikes", racism, "prejudices", and so on (Kureishi, 1990: 247, 256). After one of shows in Pyke's theatre, for example, his mother congratulates Karim upon his success and says:

I was leaving; I was getting out, when Mum came up to me. She smiled and I kissed her. "I love you so much," she said.

"Wasn't I good, eh, Mum?"

You weren't in a loin-cloth as usual," she said. "At least they let you wear your own clothes. Bu you are not an Indian. You have never been to India. You'd get diarrhoea the minute you stepped off that plane, I know you would."

"Why don't you say it a bit louder," I said. "Aren't I part Indian?"

"What about me?" Mum said. "Who gave birth to you? You're an English man, I am glad to say..."

I don't care," I said. I'm an actor. It's a job."

"Don't say that," she said. "Be what you are."

"Oh yeah." (p. 232)

The quotation shows that Karim's mother considers her son "an English man" due to the birth, even though he is aware that he is half Indian and half English, a new construct of two cultures as he himself states in the quotation given above. In fact, Karim yearns for getting rid of this restrictive boundary of being an Indian or English, yet his upbringing in these two mixed cultures and perceptions may also help him have a kind of the world view and identity based on indifference, flexibility, ambivalence and hybridity as being "a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories". He does not care for being an Indian or English but craves for expressing himself, playing various identities and roles and understanding as oscillating constantly between the same and the difference in the white British society as much as possible.

In this respect, Karim obviously becomes Kureishi's voice to represent these values and perceptions in life so as to go beyond the certainty of positioning caused by the norms of both his own family tradition and indigenous English society. What is more, Karim as the representative of subculture questions the norms and culture of the adult world in a different way, even though he still keeps some aspects of cultures of his parents – Indian and English. Due to this flexibility and indifference with his "deviant" attitudes in life (p. 97), therefore, Karim is able to see his future life in a way different from what his father and mother would give in life. Like many other young people in Britain, he wants to live on his own way freely and not according to his father's Indian background and his mother's English background: "I've glimpsed a world of excitement and possibility which I wanted to hold in my mind and expand as a template for the future" (p. 19). As seen later in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim is aware of the view that the racial and skin-colour issue is an ongoing vicious circle, which obviously imprisons and will thus prevent him in the future from expanding and crossing beyond the border, so that he longs for creating a third space within subculture for himself where there may not be any conflict linked to race and skin-colour, where he may be free of the imposition of his family's limiting attitudes and then enjoy his life freely as much as possible. Karim's indifference or view of "third

space” in his life deeply stuns Shadwell, the director of the first theatre in the novel, where Karim has acted the character of Mowgli as discussed above in detail. It is true to some extent that Karim gets this job in Shadwell’s theatre because he is “dark-skinned”, “small and wiry” (142), and thus there is a kind of prejudice or categorization towards Karim in Shadwell’s sarcastic statements as well as in his solid sense of “superiority” which he is not aware of (pp. 146-7), yet what is important is that Shadwell finds Karim unconcerned about racism as a coloured one. He talks about immigration, imperialism and indirectly pushes Karim ahead to express his view and take sides with these issues, but Karim pays no heed to them. Then he says to Karim: ““that must be complicated for you to accept – belonging nowhere, wanted nowhere. Racism. Do you find it difficult? Please tell me. He looked me’. ‘I don’t know,’ I said defensively. ‘Let’s talk about acting’” (p. 141). In this quotation, as in the quotation above, Karim seems disturbed by Shadwell’s insistence on talking of racism; he does not pay attention to racism, to being half Indian or half English but to acting which he thinks will enable him to express himself the same as a white actor in the theatre; he thus strives to avoid Shadwell in a polite way, and a few pages later in the novel it becomes obvious in Shadwell’s colonial discourse that he strives to display his solid sense of “superiority” (p. 146).

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, it is this flexibility which enables Karim to go beyond the boundary of the skin-colour and find job in another “theatre” (p. 137). Matthew Pyke is the director of the second theatre where Karim, as in the previous show, performs an Asian character, yet he is not exposed to categorization as much as he used to be in the former one. It is Eva who introduces Karim to theatre which becomes a means for him to reconcile the binary oppositions of racism and culture on both sides. This introduction not only becomes a chance, “big moment” and a new start in Karim’s life (p. 136), but it also avails him of opportunity to prove himself and his ability in acting, intellectual and artistic circle of the white upper class British society. Although characters such Karim, Tracey and Gene are clearly exposed to racial discrimination, humiliation and segregation among the whites actors and actresses on the stage, “theatre” still becomes a means particularly for Karim to express himself and achieve a kind of reputation and status despite his brown colour; it is the theatre which enables him to see the light of the future in his life.

It is funny and unusual, yet his first acquaintance with the idea of theatre takes place in the bathroom of Eva Kays during one of his visits, and it is at this moment that he sees his future in the theatre:

In the Kays’ bathroom there were framed theatre posters for Genet plays. There were bamboo and parchment scrolls with tubby Orientals copulating on them. As I sat down with my trousers down, taking it all in, 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. I hadn’t come upon it all like this before, and now I wanted nothing else. The door to the future had opened: I could see which way to go (pp. 14-5).

In his second theatre under the directorship of Pyke, Karim achieves his future success, fame and status in his life without any overt segregation. Now he is happy and enjoys public attention freely the same as other white actors: “People pointed us out to each other. They bought us drinks; they felt privileged to meet us. They required us urgently at their parties, to spice them up. We went to them, turning up at midnight with our arms full of beer and wine. Once there we were offered drugs...” (p. 235) Karim has been able to find his way for himself in the artistic and intellectual space of the British society on his

own without binding himself to the background of his Indian father and English Mother; he is not subjected to any categorization, discrimination and humiliation but praised, so that Karim is offered further roles: “I was offered a small part in a television film, playing a taxi-driver” (p. 235). Eventually Karim also travels to New York to take part in another show under Pyke’s leadership and enjoys to some extent the opportunities the dominant cultures of both British and American societies provide their own citizens with.

As for the view of alternative way of life, “subversive ideas” and “deviant” attitudes, almost all the young characters of Kureishi in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, it is not only Karim with his brown-skin but both immigrant and local English young people who actually represent the youth subculture as they strongly desire to run away from the view of life which they find their bleak, uninspiring, dull and restrictive at home and at school as well as in society and culture. For example, Helen, the daughter of Hairy Back, who heavily insults Karim due to his skin colour, also wants to escape from her home, even though she as a local white English girl has everything materially and has no racial and discriminative problem in the streets of London. Moreover, Helen does not have any problem to live together with the children of the immigrant families and black people, yet Helen, like many other young black and people, is also unhappy at home, too, and thus unable to find at home whatever she desires. Her father Hairy Back is a traditional tyrant and restrictive man, who is very angry with the non-white people, and Helen as a young girl does not approve of her father’s attitudes towards the non-white people, since she has no problem with the non-white people; even she has brown-skin and black friends, whom she gets on well with. The way her father acts and thinks obviously upset her, and thus she tells Karim her plan or what she also wants to do in her future life:

She said she was going to run away from school and go to live in San Francisco. She had had enough of the pettiness of living with her parents and the irrelevance of school was smothering her heads. All over the Western world there were liberation movements and alternative life-styles – there had never been a kids’ crusade like it – and Hairy Back wouldn’t let her stay out after eleven (pp. 71-2).

In the quotation, Helen’s views illuminate some general aspects of youth cultures and attitudes developed in the second half of the twentieth century, and these views of subculture continue to draw attention of many people to a greater extent across the world due to the unavoidable rise and spread of electronic media on stage and on screen, which has made even much freer and excessive the range of topics, manners and views. As for Helen’s views, there are two important different aspects linked to youth cultures and attitudes. First, she, like Karim, Charlie and Jamila in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, is not happy at home due to the nasty, stale, trivial and restrictive view of life, so that she thinks that her father will not let her practice “alternative life-styles” on her own, together with her free movements in line with “liberation movements” developed in the Western Europe, so that Helen, without offending much her father at home, sees her only chance in San Francisco to exercise her view of life free from the limitation of her father and society. Secondly, Helen, like many other students today all over the world, finds school suffocating and destructive on account of the strict moral and disciplinary codes which do not allow them to act in the way they want and live as per what pleases them.

In addition to Karim and Helen, Charlie, the son of Eva Kays, also seeks his own “temptations” and freedom in his life different from the life at his home. Charlie is an aloof, elusive, dismissive and unconcerned young character in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, but he is more radical and courageous than Karim and Helen in the way he stands “apart”

(p. 149). His father has a psychological problem, and mother is having an affair with Karim’s father Haroon whom he knows and often sees him together with his mother at their home, yet he is always in his “attic” room as being indifferent and isolated to what is going on at home. He has homosexual relationship with Karim and wears unusual clothes such “long hippie smock”, “cowboy boots”, “an old pair of frayed jeans or a wide collared shirt with pink flowers on it”, and “jumpers” (pp. 35, 88). From the very beginning of the novel, we often see Charlie as a young man who not only seeks a new different life but also prepares himself for the rest of his life whatever it is (p. 37), and halfway through the novel, he makes his own “start of a life”, a life which definitely opposes what is commonly accepted and practiced at home and in English society. This new life as part of youth culture is a kind of “new nihilism” and indifference (p. 153), or it is a kind of hippie and casual life without being bound to any kind traditional norms and practices: “Charlie liked to sleep here and there, owning nothing, living nowhere permanent, screwing, whoever he could; sometimes he even rehearsed and wrote songs. He lived this excess not yet in despair but in the excitement of increasing life” (p. 117). For young people like Charlie, the act of “to sleep here and there, owning nothing, living nowhere permanent” is not strange but means a kind of freedom and independence, because there is nothing in such kind of life which binds and constrains young people. This is obviously the opposite of what traditional culture and way of life demand young people in that young people are requested to be at home at certain times and that they should have a regular and tidy lives since they are considered the future of society and its culture.

Charlies also shows his reaction to this kind of regularity and tidiness of traditional society and culture through music he plays and songs he sings in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. This new form of music is new popular music as “the product of an alien and dangerous culture”, which not only occupies everyday life of young people but also encourages them with different racial background to have an alternative way of life which objects to the established way of life and culture of the adult people (Hamm, 1985, p. 163). Unlike a written text, music reflects its sound, echo, meaning and impact at once on the audience, particularly on the young people, retaining what Dan Laughey points out “social and cultural force of identification and presentation in nearly all young people’s lives, whether they like it or not” (2006, p. 1). As the product of its own time, popular music as an opposite of classical and established form of music represents the values, taste and interest of young people and then becomes their voice, in which they not only identify themselves as different and free but also give their messages to the outside world, usually contrary to the common world view of their adult parents. For example, last summer I was shopping last summer with my family in LCWaikiki, a shopping chain, and I saw the following banner on one of the shirts, which I wanted to purchase, yet it was too small for a fat man like me: “Rock and Roll, in all its forms, gives us a microphone to communicate with the world. It has the power to bring nationalities and generations together, to elect world leaders, and to move people. No other art form has the social significance of Rock and Roll. You simply cannot understand Western culture without taking a serious look at this music”. After World War II, there have been developed various kinds of popular music such as rock and roll, rhythm and blues, gospel music, pop, country and western and so on, which have obviously challenged art music or traditional music. As a new form, popular music has been a kind of reaction against the restrictive nature of traditional culture and values in which particularly young people had felt themselves imprisoned

and voiceless. Secondly, popular music has broken the class, ethnic and racial boundaries in that young people from different ethnic or racial have become able to come together and create a space free from discrimination and categorization. Finally, popular music with its styles, images, taste and lyrical aspects has become a means for young people to express their feelings and emotions without being exposed to any limitation; in this respect, they have striven to get rid of everyday routines and boredom imposed on them by their parents' culture and moral values.

Similarly, music in *The Buddha of Suburbia* becomes a means of protects, reaction and escapism for young characters, who often gather, play music and sing songs in the places away from their parents and their control. Through their music, these young people gain energy and power that not only call into question the old order of parochial culture, stereotyped assumptions, old prejudices, backward attitudes of English society, but they also avoid close observation and control of their parents. From the very beginning of the novel, Charlie and Karim are always seen as being involved in music, which not frees but also puts him at once in a different position from his father and mother in the sense that they have different type of music, representing the life style of the working-class youth, which "originated the chief developments in music and fashion", and as a result, "the 'lifestyles' and values of the 'Sixties people' in Britain spread wide, encompassing all ages, classes, and regions" (Kumar 1983: 44). In its earliest example, Karim is getting ready to go together with his mother to the Yoga meeting at Mrs. Eva Kay's home. While getting ready, he puts on one of his favourite records, "Dylan's 'Positively Fourth Street', to get [him] in the mood for the evening" (Kureishi, 1990, p. 6). Karim wants "to study the *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* to keep up" with his mood of hope in the suburban London, where "it was all familiarity and endurance: security and safety were reward of dullness" (p. 8). As seen here, music refreshes and cheers up Karim. Secondly, once he is bored in the suburb of London, which he feels makes his life dull and tasteless, music immediately fills him with energy, hope and excitement for the future.

Like Karim, Charlie also uses music a means of escapism and expression since he is very bored at home and feels himself isolated and lonely. Music becomes a kind of therapy for him. For example, Eva is the mistress of Karim's father. Karim knows their relationship, and they often visit her house together. In one of their visits, Karim meets Charlie, who invites him to his attic room, where he has "piles of records" and "the four Beatles in their Sergeant Pepper were on the wall like gods." (p. 14). The Beatles were an important popular music band in England during the 1960s, and they visibly affected culture and people's way of thinking. The Beatles were very much influenced by black music, namely by rock and roll music and musicians like Chuck Berry, Roy Orbison, Isley Brothers, and the "King of rock" Elvis Presley, whom young people listened to and still continues to listen to them in a manner which not only opposes traditional art music and its culture, but it also challenged the political situation of the 1960s. Charlie seems influenced very much by this form of music and asks Karim if he has recently heard such a good music lately. Karim tells how he himself played "the new Stone album" at music society, making young people there "crazy" due to the happiness and enjoyment: "They threw off their jackets and ties and danced / I was on the top of my desk! It was like some weird pagan ritual. You should a bin [Sic. have been] there, man" (p. 14). As we have seen above, young people, both white and coloured-skin, seem unhappy, bored and limited in their lives under the control of dominant cultures and values of their parents,

so that music, as the quotation illuminates, frees young people imaginatively; it allows them to forget temporarily what bores them and ignore indirectly what controls their life and identity.

What controls the lives of young people is destabilize through the use of alcohol and sex in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Kureishi employs alcohol and sex in a way that they become not activities, with which young people engaged themselves the same as the other people but activities which enable them to lead an alternative or deviant life as opposed to how traditional societies applied them. From the very beginning of the novel to the end, it is possible such “deviant” behaviours and relationship among young people which they see the ways leading to their emancipation. Jamila, the daughter of an immigrant family, also represents the view of the youth culture once she rejects the view of life which particularly her father strives to impose on her. Like Karim and Charlie, she also has far-reaching different “subversive ideas” about life (p. 53), particularly about marriage, which are closely bound up with the youth culture, in which she strongly challenges her father’s view of marriage as well as the view of the family structure in the contemporary England. Jamila is the daughter of Haroon’s close friend Anwar, who, together with Haroon, came from India to England in the 1950s to get a good education, yet he, like Haroon, has not turned back to India, and now Anwar is running a food store called Paradise Store in the London suburb. In many ways, Jamila is different from her mother, who voluntarily accepts her place as an obedient wife in the family, yet Jamila as a girl seems unwilling to perform the same roles as her mother. She is more educated, “forceful and enthusiastic” and advanced in many areas of life when compared to her mother (pp. 51-2); she has a strong powerful character and is in the total control of her life and “certain what to do about everything” in her life (p. 55). Moreover, Jamila, unlike a traditional girl and woman, learns “karate” and “Judo” and runs long distance, even though her father gets suspicious of whether or not she meets boys (pp. 56-7). Besides, Jamila is a good reader and reads non-stop under the close supervision and tutorial of the librarian Miss Cutmore of a nearby library, and she reads particularly important feminist critics such as Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), a French writer who had an important influence on the development of feminism. Her most famous book is *The Second Sex* (1949), which, now a classic of feminist literature, is a scholarly and passionate plea for the abolition of what she called the myth of the “eternal feminine”. In addition, Jamila always carries the photography of Angela Davis (1944-), a left-wing black American political activist, scholar, and author, who was politically active during the late 1960s and 1970s as a member of the Communist Party USA, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panther Party.

Jamila’s view of life, her gender identity and her relationship with the other sex are very much influenced by Simone de Beauvoir and Angela Davis as for her future life of marriage, positions and roles in her own family once she is married, so that she starts viewing her space and future life in a different way. This difference becomes very visible once her father secretly decides that it is time Jamila got married. Upon deciding that it is time for his daughter to marry in a decent way, Anwar gets at once in touch with his brother who arranges a boy in Bombay, India, for Jamila. When Anwar tells her about his decision that “she was to marry the Indian and he would come over, slip on his overcoat and wife and live happily ever after in her muscly arms... ‘Soon you’ll be very happy.’ Her mother said, ‘we’re both very glad for you, Jamila’”, and “Not surprisingly for someone with

Jamila's temper and Angela Davis's beliefs, Jamila wasn't too pleased" with this news (p. 57). For Anwar as a traditional man, family and marriage are the moral basis of society and happy life, so that she should obey his decision and accept this arranged marriage with the Indian boy Changez, yet when Jamila rejects to marry him, her father goes on the hunger-strike (pp. 59-60). Having considered her father's situation, eventually she accepts to marry Changez, but she has a different and alternative view of marriage in her mind (p. 82). Like Orlando in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), she forges and pacifies the demand of her father in a way which avails her of chance to achieve happiness without submitting completely to the order of her father as she tells Karim: "I don't want anything but to live my life in peace" (p. 84). Changez comes to England, and eventually they marry. After a while, however, Changez learns the real situation with her, and then they both decide to depart Anwar's house and start living in south London. As per Jamila's alternative plan, the relationship between them is very untraditional, loose and unusual: that is, they are legally and traditionally husband and wife and live in the same house, yet they do not go to bed together. She is so adamant that she does not allow Changez to approach her, since she is very upset with her father's decision imposed upon her without her consent. Hence they are absolutely free in their lives, so that Jamila has not only sexual relationship with another man called Simon and a baby from him and but also lesbian relationship with "a woman friend" (p. 273; see also p. 277) while still living together with Changez in the same house (pp. 223-4, 231). As a young female character, she makes fun not only of Changez but also of the whole patriarchal tradition once she says to him: "I am asking how you, Changez, you with your background of prejudice against practically the whole world, are coping with being married to a lesbian" (p. 273). On the other hand, Changez also has sexual relationship with a Japanese prostitute Shinko (pp. 101, 135-6), which may be seen as normal for a man in a patriarchal society, yet there is something wrong or new in the relationship between Changez and Jamila as husband and wife, offending the very basis of traditional patriarchal society whether it is Indian or English.

This kind of relationship in marriage and family is obviously uncommon and very radical in a traditional society and culture, and Kureishi represents the deep-seated shift of view in marriage through the lives and relationship of Jamila and Changez in contemporary British society as part of youth culture. As clearly seen in her views, attitudes and practices, Jamila as a young female represents the general tendency of a new and different view among many young girls and women who are against the arranged marriage, and even they are against marriage in general in the sense that it not only requires a kind of responsibility but also limits the life and constrains free and independent movements of women in the family, since those women, who do not fit into these expectations, are obviously marginalized and become outcast.

The homosexual relationship between Karim and Charlie does not fit into expectation of traditional society and culture but is used not only as an escape from restriction and control but also as an illumination and creativity or a kind of new vision particularly for Karim to see where his future life lies:

As I sat there with my trousers down, talking it all in, 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. I hadn't come upon it all like this before, and now I wanted nothing else. The door to the future had opened. I could see which way to go (p. 15).

This quotation gives hints about Karim's future life and expectation, in which there

will be “mysticism, alcohol, sexual promise, clever people and drugs”, which used to be main aspects of youth life and culture in the 1960s and 70s. In his relationship with Charlie, Karim at once makes clear what is important for him, and it is not actually the love between himself and Charlie but the intensity as well as Charlie’s way of life and style which enable him to visualize his future life: “And Charlie? My love for him was unusual as love goes: it was not generous. I admired him more than anyone but I didn’t wish him well. It was that I preferred him to me and wanted to be him. I coveted his talents, face and style. I wanted to wake up with them all transferred to me” (p. 15). A little bit later, Karim kisses Charlie, which opens further the door for him: “I tried to kiss him. He avoided my lips by turning his head to one side. But when he came in my hand it was, I swear, one of the preeminent moments of my earliest life. There was dancing in my streets. My flag flew, my trumpets blew” (p. 17). As we learn from Karim himself, he has had many times before such kind of relationship with the other students at his school: “I had squeezed many penises before, at school. We stroked and rubbed and pinched each other all the time. It broke up the monotony of learning. But I had never kissed a man” (p. 17). In such relationship, Karim is very easy-going and free and does not care even for the criticism of his own father. For instance, his father catches Karim with Charlie in the bed and gets very angry. Once they are back to home, he rebukes and wants to slap Karim. Then he says: “what the hell were you doing...I saw you, Karim. My God, you’re a bloody pure shitter! A bum-banger! My own son – how did it transpire?” (p. 18). Karim does not allow his father to slap him, and his answer to father is sharp and clear: “he was drunker that I was stoned and grabbed the ungrateful bastard...’shut up!’ I said, as quietly as I could” (p. 18). As Kureishi represents both Karim and his father, there is a big difference between them as for judging the man-to-man sexual relationship. His father is having an illegal affair with Eva Kays, yet he does not see it as bad and immoral, probably because of the fact that it, though illegal, is a heterosexual relationship, yet he gets so upset about Karim’s relationship with Charlie, since society and culture, particularly the background from which Karim comes, will never tolerate it. However, Karim does not care for what his father is telling or what morality says about it, and what actually concerns him most is the “extraordinary revelation” and intensity of feeling, which not only open “the door to the future” for him but also enable him to “see which way to go” in his life. What is more, Karim liberates himself imaginatively through this relationship from the world of his father and his background as well as from the banality of the London suburban where he lives with his family, since he thinks that people cannot see their lives “but their double-glazing flashing before them” in the suburb of London (p. 23). During the night after the meeting at Eva’s home and relationship with Charlie, Karim cannot sleep due to the complex thought in his mind but strives inwardly to envision his future life which will definitely contradict the view of life of his father: “I’d glimpsed a world of excitement and possibility which I wanted to hold in my mind and expand as a template for the future” (p. 19).

In conclusion, Kureishi represents various aspects of youth subculture through the lives of his fictional characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, in which there seems a kind of conflict between the old generation and young one – a kind of conflict in which the old adult people want young people to follow strictly their footsteps, culture and way of life in an obedient way, which, in fact, aims at constructing a view of identity in the expectation and interest of traditional parochial culture and society, yet young people are not willing

to do so; they are bored, unhappy and feel controlled and limited not only in their lives, identity and expression of thought but also in their free movements. Hence they tend to devise and exercise deviant strategies and behaviours as different subcultures within the border of the dominant national cultures not only to sidestep the routines, boredom and constraint of everyday life but also to forge a space where they feel themselves free, happy, energetic and hopeful, where they are able to defy in different ways what shapes and controls their lives and also to contribute to the shift in the perception of culture and relationship.

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