Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*: The Production of Subjectivity and Commodification

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Abstract

This essay aims to analyze the main characters of Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The main characters embark on a metaphorical journey against a backdrop of turbulent socio-political changes in 1970s Britain, ending with the emergence of neoliberalism and the rise of Margaret Thatcher. While the previous research primarily focuses on the formation of identity and race, I primarily examine Kureishi's dramatization of neoliberal tendencies in the main characters. The theoretical framework of this analysis is based on two contrastive perspectives on neoliberalism: Michel Foucault and his somewhat positive concept of the entrepreneur of the self on one side, and Fredric Jameson and concepts of pastiche and loss of historicity as negative effects of neoliberalism on the other. The main argument is that Kureishi's dramatization of neoliberal tendencies in the main characters is complex and contrastive by simultaneously reflecting and denying Foucault and Jameson. Thus, it challenges these two theoretical perspectives, which suggests that literary works might have a significant theoretical potency.

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1. Introduction

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* deals with a plethora of themes relevant to post-war Britain, especially to the tumultuous decade of the 1970s. The novel follows a young protagonist, Karim Amir, on his exploration of identity, sexuality, and success, interwoven with the socio-political dynamics of the transformative 1970s. Through Karim, Kureishi paints a vivid picture of London and the whole nation, the decadence, hopelessness, boredom, anger, but also curiosity. The book opens with a bleak description of London suburbs and ends with a rather hopeful anticipation of the emerging neoliberalism brought by newly elected Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Therefore, the historical aspect of the transformation from the welfare economy to neoliberalism is omnipresent and dramatized through different characters, and it is crucial for understanding this novel. In addition to the protagonist Karim, the emphasis is on Karim's father Haroon, stepmother Eva, and stepbrother Charlie, and I will analyze the metaphorical journey and development of these four characters, which coincide with the socio-political transformations of the 1970s. The analysis will use two contrastive views on the nature of neoliberalism by Michel Foucault and Fredric Jameson, which are set in opposition to the more complex and nuanced portrayal by Hanif Kureishi.

Even though Kureishi's engagement with the emergence of neoliberalism is only implicit, and the most salient theme is the formation of identity, the historical shift is embedded in all the processes in the book. The author acknowledges the socio-political transformation but approaches it somewhat ambivalently by not being openly critical or affirmative. One of the reasons for this ambivalence might be the fact that the novel was written in 1990 at the height of the neoliberalist project. Therefore, despite the fact that it is set in the 1970s, Kureishi engages with that decade retrospectively and in the context of the absolute discursive and ideological internalization and dominance of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, Kureishi's depiction displays the complex and contradicting nature of emerging neoliberalism and offers a unique perspective on the social dynamics of that period.

Opposed to Kureishi's multi-dimensional perspective of neoliberalism stand Michel Foucault and Fredric Jameson, with their viewpoints that are antithetical to each other. Foucault argues that a new form of homo economicus emerges in neoliberalism, described as the entrepreneur of the self, who, through applying the economic rationality of neoliberalism to non-economic spheres of life, reaches absolute subjectivity. On the other hand, Fredric Jameson's standpoint is far from Foucault's optimism and argues that neoliberalism, or late

capitalism, is a new form in the continuity of capitalism. As such, Jameson argues, it is more pervasive and damaging, leading to the death of the subject. Taking all this into account, in this essay, I will argue that Kureishi's dramatization of the main characters and their development displays the complex and contradictory nature of emerging neoliberalism, and as such, it challenges Jameson's and Foucault's representations of neoliberalism.

1.1 Background

Hanif Kureishi is an English writer born in London in 1954 to a family of an English mother and an Indo-Pakistani father. He studied philosophy at the University of Lancaster and King's College London, after which he became a writer. At first, Kureishi was primarily occupied with writing plays and screenplays, his most notable work being a highly regarded movie, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985). In 1990, he published his first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, for which he received the Whitbread Award. It was followed by *The Black Album* (1995) and *The Intimacy* (1998). In addition to these three highly praised novels, Kureishi has published several more novels, short stories, and plays. He is regarded as one of the most notable British Asian and "commonwealth writers" (British Library).

The Buddha of Suburbia is a bildungsroman novel that tells the story of young Karim Amir. Karim is a mixed-race teenager growing up in London suburbs dealing with his identity, sexuality, and the condition of the society surrounding him. Through Karim, readers get to see other characters and their attempts to position themselves against a backdrop of social and political changes. He is a restless and curious teenager struggling to find his place in the world and eager to move both physically and metaphorically. In the process of coming of age, Karim seeks fulfilment from different sources, which eventually endangers his relationship with some close friends and family members, and he becomes angry and depressive. Ultimately, he begins to find his own path and identity as he embraces his unique experiences and affirms himself with regard to new social reality.

2. Previous Research

Most of the previous research on *The Buddha of Suburbia* deals with three prevalent themes — identity formation, popular culture, and spatial aspects. Berthold Schoene and Elisabeth de Cacqueray argue from a postcolonial position that Kureishi revolutionizes the notion of postcolonial identity through the protagonist's hybridity that surpasses traditional

multiculturalism. The cultural aspect of the novel is the focus of Ali Gunes, who follows Williams's concept of hegemony and views popular culture as potentially challenging the dominant culture. As such, Gunes views popular culture as emancipatory in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Lastly, Cai Xiaoyan and Nathanael O'Reilly investigate the role of the suburb and city in the novel by analyzing the protagonist Karim Amir's metaphorical and literal journey from the suburb to the city. They argue that Kureishi contradicts the traditional portrayal of the city-suburbs dichotomy. However, even though the aforementioned research touches upon the features of neoliberalism, it is mostly in the background.

Regina Martin and Gurenci Saglam, in contrast, deal with elements of the novel that are closer to the aim of this essay. Martin investigates London as a source of fascination, linked with the temporal feature of the disintegration of the welfare state and the rise of Thactherism. The researcher focuses on the city and its residents' identities amidst changing power relations, analyzing the central conflict between the professional civil classes and private professional classes mirrored by the complex nature of the city. Therefore, Martin recognizes emerging neoliberalism as one of the main themes in the book. Similarly, Saglam identifies and discusses the same phenomenon from the angle of popular culture and commodification. However, Saglam argues that there was never a contradiction between the capitalist system and normatively anti-capitalist sentiment in popular culture, which is, in fact, just a part of the overall capitalistic structure. Nevertheless, even Martin and Saglam do not delve deeper into the nature of emerging neoliberalism and its influence on Kureishi, which is where I will contribute.

Regarding theoretical perspectives, Michel Foucault's work is extensive and far-reaching, and as such, it is widely influential in literary analyses. Since Foucault's interests and investigations touch upon different fields and topics, many different concepts are drawn from his work. However, his most significant writings are on the concept of power. For example, Armela Panajoti discusses the power dynamics in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* using Foucauldian relational and fluctuating notions of power as the theoretical basis, together with Foucault's spatial concept of heterotopia. Moreover, Jonathan Loesberg investigates Victorian sexuality in Neo-Victorain historical fiction using Foucault's analysis of sexuality, freedom, and power as the theoretical framework. Conversely, while Panajoti and Loseberg adopt Foucault's influential work on power and sexuality, Jennifer Rust examines the Foucauldian concepts of governmentality. Rust analyses Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* using Foucault's analysis of pastoral government grounded in Christianity and adopted into liberal and neoliberal forms of governmentality. However, even though Rust touches upon Foucault's

work on governmentality, the primary purpose is the examination of power and sovereignty. Therefore, I will contribute to this research gap in the Foucauldian theoretical approaches to literature by applying Foucault's perspective on neoliberalism.

In contrast to Foucault's vast array of interests, Fredric Jameson is renowned for his focus on culture and postmodernism. Most previous literary research utilizes Jameson's approach to literature and adopts the main concepts he developed, such as pastiche, waning of affect, and depthlessness. One example is Wendy Matlock's article on the children's play "Follow Your Heart." Matlock argues that "Follow Your Heart" is a quintessential example of postmodern utilization and pastiche of historical elements for the sake of superficial effect and commodification. However, Jarrad Cogle argues that despite the importance of Fredric Jameson, his concepts are flawed. Coggle does not reject Jameson's ideas completely; on the contrary, the researcher recognizes the importance of Jameson's insight on postmodernism. Nevertheless, Coggle claims that there are shortcomings with Jameson's theory and that, in many instances, his totalizing Marxist analysis of culture fails to shed a relevant perspective on postmodern literature and that other perspectives should be derived for analyzing postmodernism. Considering these two pieces of research, I will argue that my contribution to adopting the Jamesonian concepts in postmodernist literature lies in the fact that I will be applying the main ideas of Jameson together with the contrastive neoliberal perspective developed by Foucault.

3. Theoretical Framework

This essay's theoretical framework is based on concepts developed by Michel Foucault and Fredric Jameson. Both scholars deal with the emergence and nature of neoliberalism in their influential works, but they approach it from different perspectives and draw contrastive conclusions. In this section, I will present both approaches in more detail and define the key concepts.

3.1 Michel Foucault: Homo economicus as the entrepreneur of the self

Michel Foucault's most notable work focuses on the concepts of power, sexuality, madness, and punishment. In addition, Foucault investigated various political, philosophical, and economic phenomena, mainly included in his lectures at Collège de France, where Foucault delved into other areas, such as governmentality, subjectivity, and economy. In one of the series

of lectures compiled in the book *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), Foucault discusses the emergence and the nature of neoliberalism as the new and unique mode of the economy in the aftermath of WWII. Foucault traces the background and rationality behind neoliberalism and develops several key concepts summarizing his reasoning on this phenomenon. I will use some of those concepts as the basis for the theoretical framework for analyzing *The Buddha of Suburbia.*

Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism starts with investigating the struggle between the economic practice of the free market on the one hand and different governmental realities on the other, present throughout the history of economic liberalism. As the word struggle suggests, the relationship between two fundamental parts of the society has always been confined to the conflict for domination. Since classical liberalism and laissez-faire economics were initially introduced by the government, it resulted in overarching power and constant intervention by the state in the sphere of the economy. Foucault argues that it hindered any possibility of a truly free market. However, the unique set of developments, including WWII and the reconstruction afterward, opened the space for the form of economy and governmentality called neoliberalism. Its emergence in postwar Germany is marked by the exact opposite logic to that of classical liberalism. That is to say, the state and governmental rationality emerge from the previously established free market. In that way, "the economy produces legitimacy for the state that is its guarantor" (Foucault 84).

This new mode of economic and governmental rationalization implies different consequences for the society and individuals that constitute that society. First and foremost, the inverted form of the state that receives its legitimacy from the free market economy implies the economization of the various, previously non-economic, spheres of state and the "economic analysis of the non-economic" (Foucault 243). Thus, the logic of the free market, including its prerequisites, achieves an a priori position of dominance in the neoliberal state. Every other question, like marriage, reproduction, and politics, is subservient to it. Consequently, this new rationality changes its position vis-á-vis individuals as well. Foucault suggests the creation of an "enterprise society" (150) as a new arrangement of the social fabric in which every individual, including their private property, talents, and skills, will be viewed as a part of an enterprise. This is a typical and comprehensive example of the economization of non-economic spheres, i.e., "constructing a social fabric in which precisely the basic units would have the form of the enterprise" (Foucault 148). In that sense, having every aspect of life shaped around economic rationality and being homo economicus themselves, individuals become the entrepreneur of the self.

Foucault argues that the essence of the entrepreneur of the self is the new notion of homo economicus. While the term "homo economicus" is not entirely innovative and Foucauldian per se, he engages with it in an original way. He connects it to a larger logic of neoliberalism, as opposed to the classical liberal notion of homo economicus as a "partner of exchange" (Foucault 225). Instead, neoliberal homo economicus is "entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (Foucault 226). Thus, even though Foucault borrows the idea of homo economicus from the classical liberals, by shaping it into the concept of entrepreneur of the self, he changes its interpretation fundamentally. Moreover, being the neoliberal, self-entrepreneurial, homo economicus entails specific conduct of intrinsically rational behavior. Foucault claims that "homo economicus is someone who accepts reality" (269) and, consequently, any modification of that reality. The adaptation to those modifications, Foucault continues, is embedded in economic rationality, which is "the science of the systematic nature of responses to environmental variables" (269). Therefore, following the notion of "economic analysis of the non-economic" (Foucault 243), the entrepreneur of the self reacts in a systemic, rational, and methodical way to any changes in the variables of the environment.

In addition to the rational conduct of behavior, the notion of self-interest, or what Foucault coins as "the subject of interest," is another constitutive part of the entrepreneur of the self. Foucault explains that the "principle of an irreducible, non-transferable, atomistic individual choice which is unconditionally referred to the subject himself is what is called interest" (272). That is to say, subjectivity is fundamentally connected to the pursuit of interest. Moreover, the significant difference between the logic of the subject of interest and the logic of other subjects, such as the subject of right, is that the subject of interest comes into being by positivity and not negativity, i.e., by asserting its freedom and by a determined and enduring commitment to freedom and production of subjectivity. One example is consumerism, as one of the most essential aspects of neoliberalism. Foucault argues that the man of consumption should not be considered a part of the exchange in the classical liberal way. Instead, the neoliberal entrepreneur of the self is "his own producer," and by consuming, "he produces his own satisfaction" (Foucault 226). Then, if we view satisfaction as an undetachable part of the subject of interest, we can say that the consumption by the entrepreneur of the self perpetuates the production of subjectivity.

Lastly, Foucault examines the role of labor and wage as one of the most critical aspects of human life. Foucault establishes his analysis in opposition to the Marxist critique of wage and labor. Put simply, Foucault explains that the Marxist definition of labor as a commodity

that a worker is forced to sell for a particular time to receive a wage is faulty. In contrast, Foucault defines labor as constituted of two aspects — a worker's skill, i.e., capital, and income, i.e., earning stream. A worker's skill, or capital, "really is a machine, but a machine which cannot be separated from the worker himself" (Foucault 224). Thus, the skill is a fundamental part of a worker, and as such, it cannot be separated and measured by labor time. On the contrary, the skill is capital, and a worker, as the entrepreneur of the self, decides by pragmatic self-interest how to allocate the capital in a way that results in the highest earning stream. Foucault argues that the entrepreneur of the self engages in a specific relationship with his surroundings, including his skills, that leads to "not [being] alienated from his work environment, from the time of his life, from his household, his family, and from the natural environment" (242). Therefore, the worker that acts as the entrepreneur of the self utilizes talents, skills, and opportunities as capital in accordance with self-interest, which, in turn, enhances his freedom and subjectivity.

To summarize, I will use Foucault's concept of the entrepreneur of the self in analyzing Kureishi's dramatization of the main characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia.* It is evident that Foucault views neoliberalism as a somewhat positive development concerning individuals and their subjectivity. By applying his thorough and overarching conception of the entrepreneur of the self, I expect to identify the elements that Foucault paints as essential to neoliberalism. That is to say, the focus will be on characters that utilize their skills and talents as capital, act in self-interest, and possess rational conduct of behavior to pursue their subjectivity. However, since Foucault rarely offers any criticism of the production of subjectivity in the form of the entrepreneur of the self, I will also engage with the antithetical theory developed by Fredric Jameson.

3.2 Fredric Jameson: Pastiche, the death of the subject, and waning of affect

Fredric Jameson is considered one of the most prominent scholars of postmodernism, and his analysis of the cultural effects of late capitalism provides a great insight into this phenomenon. Even though Jameson does not use the term "neoliberalism" and instead borrows the term "late capitalism" from Marxist theorist Ernest Mandel, both terms refer to the same economic rationality. However, as opposed to Foucault, who views neoliberalism as a distinctive economic and governmental rationality, Jameson deals with late capitalism in terms of totality. As such, late capitalism is a "moment of capitalism which projects the cultural logic of what some of us now seem to be calling 'postmodernism'" (Jameson, *The Cultural Turn* 41).

Jameson's Marxist approach implies another fundamental distinction from that of Foucault. On one hand, Foucault deals only with economic and governmental rationality as a form of historical discontinuity from classical liberalism and as a new form indeed. On the other hand, Jameson argues that "it is true that we have to do here, not with some new mode of production as such, but rather with a dialectical mutation of capitalist system already long in place" (*The Cultural Turn* 93). Thus, he views this new stage of capitalism in dialectical historical continuity of capitalism that is totalizing in its effects, instead of viewing it as a new mode of production per se. These fundamental differences between Jameson and Foucault are significant to note even though they both talk about neoliberalism.

Using Marxist notions of totality and historical dialectics, Jameson engages in a specific relationship between neoliberalism, as a new stage in the capitalistic mode of production, on one hand and postmodernism, as the cultural logic of it, on the other. This relationship is marked by a dynamic of a specific conjecture between the mode of production and culture in which one affects the other and vice versa. That is to say, there is a mediation between the economic reality and culture — "everything, including commodity production and high and speculative finance, has become cultural; and culture has equally become profoundly economic or commodity oriented" (Jameson, *The Cultural Turn* 73). Thus, when Jameson talks about postmodernism as a cultural reality, it is undetachable from the economic mode of production in neoliberalism. Following that, Jameson pursues the totalizing effect that culture and economics have on one another and comes up with several key concepts.

According to Jameson, the recurrent characteristic of postmodernism is a loss of historicity. Consequently, the loss of historical sense leads to an obsession with the present. This syndrome of what Jameson calls "historical deafness" is a result of an attempt to analyze the present without resorting back to grand narratives and dealing instead with "an antifoundationalism" (*Postmodernism* xii), which is contradictory to the historical continuity of the capitalist mode of production. Consequently, Jameson argues that "our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past," which generates "the transformation of reality into images, the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" (*The Cultural Turn* 20). To explain the effect of this fragmentation, Jameson uses the Lacanian concept of "schizophrenia as a breakdown in signifying chain" (*Postmodernism* 26). He argues that if we are not able to have a coherent historical and temporal experience as essential parts of our signifying chain, "we are reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers" (*Postmodernism* 27). Thus, the loss of historicity generates the

inability to create a coherent experience of reality, which then renders individuals to pure material signifiers resulting in superficial commodification.

The loss of historicity and the fragments that create this postmodernist reality are filled with pastiche. Jameson explains that the concept of pastiche is parody devoid of its parodical effect, i.e., "pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique (...). But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse" (*Postmodernism* 17). Jameson takes Van Gogh's modernist painting "A Pair of Boots" and compares it to Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes" as an illustration of pastiche, inasmuch that Warhol's postmodernist recreation of the thematic object "shoes" is devoid of any of the essential and more profound signifiers of Van Gogh's painting, and it turns centrally around commodification. Therefore, postmodernism uses historical elements and references to reproduce them in a superficial way that is absorbed with commodification. Moreover, the effect of the pastiche is that postmodernism is "a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles" (Jameson, *The Cultural Turn* 7). In sum, the loss of historicity results in a preoccupation with the present, which leads to the appropriation of historical elements and turning them into a meaningless repetition and pastiche.

The consequence of loss of innovation, pastiche, and historical fragmentation is the waning of affect and the death of the subject. Taking again paintings by Van Gogh and Warhol as examples, the elements of the waning of affect can be identified. Jameson argues that Van Gogh's painting can be interpreted in different ways, as a utopian or material reflection. Still, both interpretations are hermeneutical, inasmuch that "objectal form is taken as a clue or a symptom for some vaster reality" (*Postmodernism* 8). On the other hand, Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes" is superficial and revolves around the fetish of commodification. This difference is a symptom of depthlessness and waning of affect as one of the recurrent characteristics of postmodernism. The effect it has on the individual subject is catastrophic, according to Jameson, and it is, once again, detectable in the fundamental break between modernism and postmodernism. Jameson argues that the underlying force of modernism is a unique self that expresses its unique vision of the world in its own unique style (*The Cultural Turn* 6), making the subjectivity, or autonomous subject, essentially modernist. However, the consequence of pastiche and the affectless repetition engender the death of the subject as such. Thus, depthlessness and loss of subjectivity are characteristically postmodern.

In conclusion, it is evident that Jameson's bleak and dystopian view is opposed to Foucault's somewhat positive analysis of neoliberalism. The former suggests that the subject

is dead, while the latter revives the economic subject in the form of entrepreneur of the self. In this essay, however, I will use elements of both theorists and apply them to different characterizations by Kureishi. More concretely, when it comes to Jameson, the concepts of loss of historicity, pastiche, and affectless commodification will be constantly referred back to in the analysis.

4. Analysis

In this section, I will present the analysis of *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The analysis is divided into two subsections. In the first subsection, I will analyze Eva and Haroon as representations of the middle-aged generation and their adaption to neoliberalism. The second subsection will focus on Karim and Charlie, who are experiencing coming-of-age in the turbulent decade of the 1970s. All quotations are taken from Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), and relevant page numbers will accompany them.

4.1 Eva and Haroon

Eva and Haroon are significant individual characters, and their relationship is influential for their and other characters' developments, such as that of Karim and Charlie. Haroon and Eva meet very early in the novel, and soon after, they begin their relationship and eventually move in together. In the last chapter, Haroon announces that they are getting married. Even though it seems that this is a quintessential love story with a happy ending, they both undergo tumultuous critical points that thoroughly influence and transform their relationship's dynamic, inasmuch that both characters embark on a journey that coincides with the profound and fundamental changes in the 1970s. Their developments are in absolute conjunction, and for most of the novel, their relationship seems to instigate their personal journey. However, Eva and Haroon end up in different places — while Eva is working towards becoming an ultimate representation of the Foucauldian concept of the entrepreneur of the self, Haroon ends up as a subjectless, trivial, and obsolete character, illustrating Jameson's perspective. Therefore, the dynamics between Eva and Haroon portray the colossal socio-political shift the middle-aged generation goes through in the 1970s Britain.

Initially, Haroon leads a dull life, but he yearns for a change, which is eventually brought upon by Eva. Haroon is an Indian immigrant from a wealthy family, and he moved to England to study, but his playful nature prevented him from achieving anything significant and

led to him being cut off from his family. After that, Haroon is forced to get married and settle for a job as a clerk in the Civil Service; his life "was now a cage of umbrellas and steely regularity" (26). Thus, Haroon was alienated from his true childlike spirit and forced to conform to the suburban life and everything that comes with it. However, Haroon is a more complex character that does not want to completely settle down and give up on his "desire for internal advancement" (28). The breakthrough on his internal advancement path comes when he meets Eva in one of the creative programs they both attended. After that, with Eva's encouragement, Haroon infiltrates upper-class suburban London as a spiritual guru. Even though his breakthrough happens with the help of Eva, which makes her a central figure for Haroon, it is evident that Haroon seeks advancement and pleasure in being regarded highly. It suggests that Haroon is what Foucault calls the subject of interest, pursuing his own satisfaction.

On the other hand, from the beginning, Eva is clearly the subject of interest. Eva's self-interest is evident in her initial interest in Haroon and his mysticism, which proves to be a suitable means for Eva to move up the social ladder. The cultural momentum of exoticism and spiritualism peaked in the early 1970s and had turned Haroon, a middle-aged Indian immigrant, into a fascinating, intriguing, and even controversial figure. Haroon's exoticism was incredibly alluring for the upper and upper-middle-class people, to which Eva undoubtedly belonged. Indeed, Haroon's wife, Elizabeth complains, "[Eva] ignores me. (...) She treats me like a dog's muck, Haroon. I'm not Indian enough for her. I'm only English" (5). Eva treats Elizabeth in such a way because there is nothing beneficial for her in hanging around a regular, working-class white Englishwoman, unlike Haroon and his mysticism, which provides Eva with an intimate relationship with the object of attraction of her peers. Therefore, it appears that Haroon appeals to Eva partly because of his cultural and racial background. Evidently, during Haroon's second seance, Karim describes the admiration these upper and upper-middle-class people have for his father and how they are mesmerized by his representation of Indian culture. He states, "House was owned by Carl and Marienne, friends of Eva, who'd recently been trekking in India. This was immediately obvious from the sandalwood Buddhas, brass ashtrays and stripped plaster elephants. (...) I heard Carl say, 'There are two sorts of people in the world — those who have been to India and those who haven't'" (30). This quotation shows the cultural trend of exoticism prevalent in this class in the early 1970s. Furthermore, it presents a unique juxtaposition that is constantly visible throughout the book by emphasizing the idea that spirituality promotes immaterialism next to the commodification of symbols bought and placed

in Carl and Marianne's house. This juxtaposition is a prominent example of the Jamesonian pastiche and loss of historicity.

The same juxtaposition is displayed by Haroon, in whose case it is an even more profound expression of the waning of affect and loss of historicity. Haroon appropriates spiritualism and Indian culture throughout the book, even though it stands in opposition to some of his characteristics. Firstly, Haroon has spent a better part of his life living like an Englishman who is fixated on his looks and clothes, criticizing his sons for not being better at school and not aiming to be successful in a material sense. Yet, when Haroon talks to others about his spirituality, he proclaims his aversion to materialism and ambition, "I don't care about money. (...) I must understand these secret things." (27). Furthermore, he advises Ted, his brother in law, not to work, "Follow your feeling. Follow the course of least resistance. Do what pleases you — whatever it is. Let the house fall down. Drift." (49). But at the same time, Haroon uses Ted's weak moments to take advantage of his labor and skills. Karim notes how Haroon completely changes the moment he starts talking to Ted about the philosophy of immaterial and changes back when he asks Ted to fix his record player. This change suggests that Haroon is really just performing his identities in different contexts and utilizing them for his own advantage. Secondly, Haroon is an Indian immigrant, and he was brought up in that culture, which makes his shallow and affectless appropriation of it an ultimate sign of the Jamesonian pastiche. Therefore, Haroon is unable to create a coherent historical sense of reality, inasmuch that he is taking the historical elements and reproducing them in superficial, postmodern replications.

Meanwhile, Eva's development led to the embodiment of the entrepreneur of the self, which is obvious through Karim's descriptions of Eva as bold and ambitious. She is regarded as a person that follows trends and knows the right books, music, and clothes. Moreover, Eva is energetic, passionate, and proactive. Karim states, "[Eva] frightened me; she excited me; somehow she had disturbed our whole household from the moment she entered it" (11). Therefore, in Eva's relations with others, her impact on them is highly consequential, i.e., Eva forces everyone around her to adopt some of her proactivity and boldness. This is noticeable in her encouragement of Haroon by organizing his seances but also in her advice to Karim on books, music, and fashion. Even though it suggests that Eva is a kind-hearted character who wants to help others, in fact, her ambition to advance herself is so profound that she understands that in order to do that, she must be surrounded by like-minded people. Indeed, Eva sees her life as a project and has a clear image of how it should develop. She explains to Karim, "my dream is to get him to meet with more responsive people — in London. I'm determined to get

all of us to London!" (30). Moreover, Karim realizes Eva's ambitious nature and determination to reach set objectives early on when his father tells him that Eva is meeting someone else apart from him, "[Eva] likes important people. She's doing it to blackmail you, I know she is" (67). This quote suggests that Eva is willing to do whatever it takes to get what she wants, which in this case is making Haroon jealous and forcing him to leave his wife. Hence, Eva's nature and behavior are typical characteristics of the Foucauldian pragmatic and self-interested entrepreneur of the self. Her actions are driven by her self-interest and she pragmatically utilizes all tools available to her to get what she wants.

The move to London is a critical juncture for both Eva and Haroon and a point where their metaphorical paths start to diverge. Eva has become progressively entrepreneurial at this point in the novel. The move to London is a unilateral move by Eva when she realizes that London is the place to be. This insight suggests that Eva possesses rational and pragmatic adaptability to the changing reality, which Foucault presents as essential features of the entrepreneur of the self. She has become entrepreneurial in a literal sense as well by looking for ways to commodify her and other people's skills and opportunities. Before moving to London, Eva convinces Haroon to charge for his seances. She also starts refurbishing their house, and as soon as it is done, she sells it and buys an apartment in London. At the same time, Eva is meeting new and important people, organizing parties, and her business is flourishing. With this progression, she recognizes that the era of spirituality is over, and she moves towards an entrepreneurial and posh way of life. Karim explains, "Eva gave up learning Urdu and listening to sitar music at breakfast. She had a new interest. (...) Eva was planning her assault on London" (150). This affects Haroon, whom Eva forces to dress differently, develop different interests, and tone down his spirituality. She tells him, "for Christ's sake, can't you cut down on the bloody mysticism" (151). Thus, Eva, as the pragmatic entrepreneur of the self, realizes the direction society is going and adjusts to this change impeccably. On the other hand, Haroon is struggling to adapt, and it seems that he is stuck in his newfound suburban spirituality, which suggests that Haroon diverges increasingly from the Foucauldian notion of the neoliberal entrepreneur of the self.

When Karim returns from America at the end of the novel, he finds London a changed place and Eva and Haroon at the final point of their metaphorical journey. He states, "I was shocked by Dad's appearance as he got up to embrace me. (...) He wore a thick white collar around his neck (...). It was a saddening disappointment. In contrast, Eva looked fresh and businesslike" (261). This quote clearly depicts the new reality in Eva and Haroon's relationship. While Eva looks bright and lively, Haroon looks unsightly. The fact that Karim

emphasizes that Haroon wears a "thick white collar" suggests the inappropriateness since throughout the book Haroon is presented as a spiritual man. Thus, it is evident that Haroon has not been able to adapt to changes in socio-political variables. At the same time, Haroon commits a definite appropriation and commodification of his culture and spirituality by turning them into a source of income and his full-time job. However, no one takes Haroon and his business venture seriously, and even his own son talks of him as a lost person, "Don't you think he's insane? He'll have no money. Eva will have to support him. (...) What will he be doing, St. Francis of Assisi, discussing life, death and marriage — on which he's a world expert — with idiots who'll think he's a pompous old bore" (269). Therefore, he is stuck in constant reproduction and pastiche of part of his identity and cultural background for the sake of affectless and superficial commodification. As such, Haroon ends up as the epitome of the Jamesonian portrayal of a subjectless and fragmented individual.

In contrast, while Haroon struggles with his subjectivity, Eva becomes an embodiment of a new homo economicus. In the remarkable scene where a journalist interviews Eva, her journey comes to the final point. She lays out her paradigm in a clear and articulate way, "You see, I have come to believe in self-help, individual initiative, and the full development of all individuals. (...) We have to empower ourselves. Look at those people who live on sordid housing estates. They expect others — the Government — to do everything for them. They are only half human, because only half active" (263). The key phrases here are "individual initiative" and "full development," and they echo the inherent fruition of Eva's development. The historical momentum is also the key to Eva's evolution. Suburban Eva treads carefully, her initiative is not that explicit, and it is coated by the trend of spirituality, which is prevalent at that point. However, as this analysis shows, Eva's self-entrepreneurial spirit emerges in line with the shift from the spiritual to the entrepreneurial era. It is even more momentous that when she finally articulates her paradigm in the interview, Margaret Thatcher, the face of British neoliberalism, comes to power. In sum, Eva stands as opposed to Haroon — while he is a subjectless and lost person, she has adapted to the new circumstances extraordinarily. As such, Eva portrays an ultimate representation of what Foucault calls the entrepreneur of the self, a pragmatic and adaptive subject of interest.

Kureishi's dramatization of Eva and Haroon in this novel is the key to understanding his perspective on neoliberalism. The embarking point of both characters is very much in the spirit of the Foucauldian viewpoint of neoliberalism: Eva and Haroon are restless and attempt to break free from their old lives. However, as the novel proceeds, the characters go in two different directions. Every step of Eva's journey represents absolute and pragmatic self-

interest, driven by an entrepreneurial spirit that is taken from the economic logic of neoliberalism and transferred into every aspect of life. She utilizes her talents and initiatives as capital and cautiously manages and commodifies them. In this process, her subjectivity and self-awareness flourish. Therefore, she is an evident victor of this new socio-political reality by being in line with Foucault's concepts on neoliberalism. On the other hand, Haroon's journey is initially embedded in the concept of the entrepreneur of the self. Still, Haroon's lack of pragmatism and short-sightedness makes him a subjectless and superficial character, unable to make a coherent and historical perception of reality. Thus, Haroon embodies Jameson's rather dystopian perspective of neoliberalism.

4.2 Karim and Charlie

Karim and Charlie represent the younger generation and the experience of the tumultuous 1970s from their viewpoint. Karim develops an affection for Charlie and idolizes him from the beginning. However, as they both tackle new challenges and navigate through their careers, Karim's affection for Charlie eventually fades away when he finally sees Charlie as shallow and foolish. As a consequence of Eva's and Haroon's relationship, they reflect some of the philosophical and ideological characteristics that Eva and Haroon express throughout the book, but in a less explicit way. Moreover, they move together to London, which proves to be an essential change for both Karim and Charlie and their respective careers, propelled mainly by Eva's support. However, in the end, Karim is more in line with Eva's paradigm, while Charlie seems much more comparable to Haroon.

Karim is a character whose coming-of-age is intertwined with boredom as one of the essential traits of youngsters in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. In the first chapter, Karim states that he "was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest [he] could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy (...) and [he] was ready for anything" (3). Indeed, Karim repeatedly refers back to the boredom and hopelessness that was present among his generation stating, "and if we were going to be bored, and we were usually bored, rarely being self-motivated, we could at least be bored on our own terms, lying smashed on mattresses in ruined houses rather than working in the machine" (94-95). However, this self-proclaimed boredom is not unique and is a concept borrowed from modernist and pre-modernist discourse. As such, it is not without its postmodernist contradictions. The key phrase Karim repeats is that he is "ready for anything" (3; 121), suggesting he is not entirely apathetic. Instead, Karim is trying to position himself in the world, or rather, to reshape the world in his own image. While

Karim proclaims that he does not care for a regular job, "I wouldn't want to work in a place where I couldn't wear my fur coat" (95), this quote shows that he cares about clothes and fashion as a representation of cultural trends. In line with that, he is consumed by following the latest trends in music and literature. Therefore, boredom in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is an example of a Jamesonian pastiche that lacks historical affect and profound meaning. Instead, it is a superficial trend that eventually becomes commodified by both Charlie and Karim in the different art forms.

This contradiction of boredom and hopelessness opposed to ambition and initiative is even more vividly illustrated in Charlie. Charlie's fame and admiration by others follow him throughout the novel. Karim states, "[Charlie] was a boy upon whom nature had breathed such beauty (...). Women sighed in his presence and teachers bristled" (9). In short, he is an object of affection, envy, and the ideal for which other boys strive but who are aware of the futility of that task. However, Charlie is also a representation of cruel pragmatism and ambition. In the beginning, Charlie is a hippie-like character, very mystic and deep. Karim describes Charlie's room as being decorated in the hippie style, "mandalas and long-haired heads were painted on the sloping walls" (14). The next time he visits, he describes Charlie's room as being changed completely, "The place had changed a lot since last time. Charlie's poetry books, his sketches, his cowboy boots, were flung about, (...) he'd given up being a hippie" (88). Therefore, Charlie does not attach any real value to the philosophy that he practices at the moment, but instead, he consumes it and throws it away the moment it becomes redundant for something new that emerges as a trend. This cultural versatility enables Charlie to successfully adopt all new looks and lifestyles without being ridiculed. On the contrary, the changes are a tool to reach his goal, which is a success. Indeed, even others, including Karim, realize his drive and ambition that was pragmatic and cruel at moments. Therefore, from the first moment Karim encounters him, Charlie epitomizes the superficial reproduction and pastiche of different cultural elements for the sake of his strong drive for success, which suggest that there are also elements of the entrepreneur of the self to Charlie at the beginning of the novel.

On the other hand, Karim does not initially succumb to his ambition and sticks to his principles even when he finally finds something he is willing to focus on. Soon after moving to London, Karim starts working in a play directed by Eva's friend Jeremy Shadwell. Karim gets the part of Mowgli, and he immediately begins to feel that the fact that he is half-Indian might be the reason for getting that role. He constantly complains about the costume and brown makeup. However, when Shadwell asks Karim to do the Indian accent, Karim starts resisting harder and pleads to Shadwell that "it's a political matter to" (147) him. This quote suggests

that Karim, at this point, still has important principles, inasmuch that he is ready to endanger his first real opportunity to do something meaningful. The matter being "political" is symbolic since it signifies that something abstract and related to moral values and beliefs is of substantial importance to Karim. He eventually capitulates and does the accent, but he states that he "hated Shadwell and everyone on the cast" (148). Therefore, unlike Charlie, whose ambition and drive are explicit and overwhelming, Karim is a more complex and developing character. His transformation happens gradually and is interwoven with his principles and self-reflection, which impacts his destination on the turbulent coming-of-age journey.

When it comes to Charlie, moving to London brings yet another transformation. When Karim and Charlie go to hear a new subcultural movement in one of London's pubs, Charlie instantly recognizes punk as a new way to achieve success. He transforms himself, his music, and his band and becomes the success of London's punk phenomenon. However, after hearing Charlie's finally successful attempt at realizing of his ambition, Karim realizes that Charlie is an impostor and does not truly belong to the punk world, "it was a wonderful trick and disguise. The one flaw, I giggled to myself, was his milky and healthy white teeth, which to me, betrayed everything else" (154). This shows that Charlie's experience of reality is fragmented, and he is driven by success, to which he devotes all his talents, skills, and opportunities. Despite having some characteristics of the entrepreneur of the self, it seems that Charlie loses his subjectivity in the process of constant commodifications and transformations, which is in line with Jameson's reasoning and contrary to Foucault's.

Charlie's pragmatic and shallow ambition to succeed inspired Karim. He states after seeing Charlie's show, "one strong feeling dominated me: ambition. As yet it was unfocused. But I was completely impressed by Charlie's big con trick" (154). As the quote suggests, Charlie's success reveals to Karim that he wants success as well, and from then on, he starts to compromise with himself to reach it. Firstly, he accepts the offer from a big-shot director, Pyke, without considering Shadwell, who gave him his first chance and already prepared another role for him. Shadwell perceives this as betrayal stating, "You're being ungrateful, Karim. You shouldn't just bugger off, you know, it's not right" (165). Karim remains unbothered by Shadwell's comments and continues on his path to success. Secondly, Karim voluntarily chooses to appropriate parts of Indian culture when he bases his character on a somewhat satirical and parodical version of Anwar. Tracey, one of the members of the cast, states about Karim's performance, "it shows black people (...) as being irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical. And as being fanatical" (180). Yet, Karim does not see anything wrong with that. After he is forced to find a new character, he chooses his Indian friend Changez despite

Changez's explicit request not to base his character on him. Finally, Karim's drive becomes remarkably evident when he compromises on things he was so adamantly opposed to. He explains, "I was working on Changez's shambolic walk and crippled hand, and on the accent, which I knew would sound to white ears bizarre, funny and characteristic of India" (189). While he strongly opposed Shadwell when asked to do the Indian accent for a fictional character of Mowgli, Karim deliberately appropriates and ridicules the Indian culture for his new role. Therefore, at this point, Karim becomes so obsessed with being successful and prosperous that he completely rejects any principles he previously had. This makes him reach a point similar to Charlie, where he becomes a subjectless and superficially commodified individual.

However, when Karim finally succeeds and goes to New York to present the play to the American public, he experiences a breakthrough. Despite being in a good position in his career, he becomes depressed, fights with Pyke, and leaves the play. He decides to stay in New York with Charlie. At the beginning of his stay with Charlie, Karim is excited since Charlie is now a big star, and Karim still admires him. He has a chance to spend time with and get to know this new Charlie. However, he states, "I couldn't consider Charlie a rock-star. It didn't seem of his essence, but a temporary, borrowed persona" (246); "I could see that fame, success and wealth really agreed with him" (247). These quotes imply that Karim comprehends that Charlie is still just an impostor and that success, and consequently, money and fame, are what only matters to Charlie. Furthermore, Charlie is desperate to make Karim stay with him and even go with him on tour, and this is the moment where Karim realizes that "without [him] there to celebrate it all, Charlie's progress had little meaning. In other words, [he] was a full-length mirror, but a mirror that could remember" (250-251). Thus, Charlie becomes so consumed by the success that even his relationship with Karim revolves around proving to him his worthiness in this superficial manner. In the same way that Karim is a mirror for Charlie, Charlie's state helps Karim to clear his focus and see what is important to him, stating, "I didn't love Charlie anymore. I didn't care either for or about him. (...) I'd moved beyond him discovering myself through what I rejected. He seemed merely foolish to me" (255), that is to say, Karim realizes that his notion of success does not coincide with Charlie's. Therefore, Karim rejects Charlie as superficial, subjectless, and lost, which helps him to move on.

Karim returns to London, reaching the final point in his coming-of-age journey. He is surprised by the change that happened in London while he was away, including people in his life: his brother is a grown-up now and a promising designer, Eva is a businesswoman, Haroon left his job, and his mother has a boyfriend. Thanks to his experience with Charlie in New York, Karim has a clearer vision of what he wants to do now. Karim goes to the audition for a

soap opera that he initially ignored. When they offer him a job, he wrestles with the decision. He explains, “I was being given a part in a new soap opera which would tangle with the latest contemporary issues: they meant abortions and racist attacks, the stuff that people lived through but never got on TV. (...) Millions watched these things. I would have a ton of money. I would be recognized all over the country. My life would change overnight” (259). In comparison with his previous roles, when Karim was purely driven by the need to fit somewhere and to be famous and successful, this is the first time that he contemplates what the opportunity means for him, not only in regards to money and success but also in regards to his personal principles. This quote suggests that Karim finds a balance between the principles important to him and his pragmatic ambition. Therefore, Karim ends up as a reflection of the Foucauldian entrepreneur of the self — utilizing his talents as capital in a way that will benefit him on levels of pragmatic success and the production of subjectivity.

Finally, Kureishi enables us to see the emergence of neoliberalism through the eyes of the younger generation depicted in Karim and Charlie. In a sense, they are the ultimate product of the period, and the dynamics that led to neoliberalism are crucial elements of their coming-of-age. Their depiction shows the complexity of this era even more so than in Eva’s and Haroon’s cases. While Karim’s journey ends with him being the subject of interest and the entrepreneur of the self, he still has elements of pastiche and superficiality to him. Similarly, Charlie has pragmatic aspects of the entrepreneur of the self throughout his development, eventually leading him to money and fame. However, he becomes a fragmented individual that reproduces and pastiches parts of history, his identity, and culture in a superficial, affectless, and commodified way. This results in him ending up as a subjectless character. Therefore, both of them are products of the 1970s and, as such, are even more complex and contradictory.

Furthermore, even though I do not engage with the question of race directly, it is impossible to ignore it in the case of Karim. Karim has to battle with racial prejudices and issues throughout the novel and it is exactly those issues that lead him to being more in line with Jameson’s analysis of postmodernism. That is to say, the elements that are presented in this analysis of Karim as pastiche are at the same time examples of racial prejudices against Karim. A prominent example is how Shadwell and Pyke treat Karim, forcing him to pastiche Indian culture in his acts. Therefore, Karim constantly encounters racism which forces him to eventually adapt his acts to superficial recreations of Indian culture.

5. Conclusion

This essay examined the metaphorical journey and development of the main characters of *The Buddha of Suburbia* against a backdrop of the turbulent 1970s and emerging neoliberalism. The analysis was guided by contrasting theoretical approaches to neoliberalism by Michel Foucault and Fredric Jameson. It showed that Kureishi's dramatization of neoliberal tendencies in the main characters is far more complex than the approaches Foucault and Jameson suggest.

At the novel's end, Eva becomes the typical embodiment of the Foucauldian notion of the entrepreneur of the self and she nourishes her subjectivity. Similarly, Karim ends up more in line with the neoliberal homo economicus, but he contains elements of pastiche and depthlessness, making him even more complex and contradictory. This contradiction is evident in his pragmatic decision-making on one hand, and his ironic outlook and self-reflection on the other. Therefore, Karim himself problematizes both Foucault's and Jameson's theoretical perspectives by displaying elements of each of these mutually exclusive perspectives. One of the reasons for Karim's complexity is the question of race, meaning that Karim does not enjoy white privileges. Therefore, even though he ends up in a similar position to that of Eva, he has to face racial issues that are pushing him towards pastiche and depthlessness.

On the other hand, Haroon and Charlie correspond to Jameson's perspective of neoliberalism, even though they both contain some of the Foucauldian elements of the entrepreneur of the self as well. They engage in constant reproduction and pastiche of cultural and historical elements for the sake of depthless appropriation and commodification; consequently, at the end of the novel, they are portrayed as superficial and subjectless characters, suggesting a somewhat bleak and pessimistic perspective for the two of them. Therefore, Kureishi's dramatization of neoliberal tendencies in *The Buddha of Suburbia* simultaneously supports and contradicts both Jameson's and Foucault's perspectives — elements of these two perspectives exist and are detectable, but they are not exclusive.

Moreover, the fact that Kureishi, through plot and characterization, manages to reconcile two prominent theoretical perspectives that may seem mutually exclusive implies the theoretical potency of the literary work in general. Through careful analysis, I have shown that Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, as a fictional work, contributes to a better understanding of the historical phenomenon of neoliberalism. Additionally, this fictional work, perhaps because it is fictional, provides new theoretical insight. This insight is important because it shows the overarching effect and influence that literary works have on the different historical and social processes, which often may be unrecognized.

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