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Identity Construction and Intergenerational Relationships in the Work
of Second Generation Immigrant Writers: Hanif Kureishi's *The
Buddha of Suburbia* and Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow*

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For the last two years, I have immersed myself in the study of postcolonial literature. My interest in this type of literature was aroused during my Erasmus period in Newcastle, where I took the course “The Global City in Postcolonial Writing and Film”. I was intrigued by the work of postcolonial authors, especially by the representation of the issues of identity among second generation immigrants in Britain. Back home, I explored this theme in my bachelor paper on Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*. In this dissertation, I want to complete my research on identity construction in postcolonial English literature, to which others have made important contributions. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Sarah Posman for the critical remarks, inspiring suggestions, and useful insights she has provided throughout the writing process. My thanks also go to Prof. Dr. Stef Craps, who has introduced me to the work of Caryl Phillips, and has helped me with my theoretical framework. Finally, I would like to thank my parents and my brothers for their continuous support throughout my years at university, and for their encouragement while I was writing this thesis.

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1. INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

This master dissertation is concerned with literary representations of the situation of second generation immigrants in Britain. One of the main issues treated in works about and/or by second generation immigrants is that of the struggle in the formation of an identity.¹ I have chosen two works in which I will analyse how the protagonist and other characters deal with processes of identity construction, more particularly Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow* (2009). Both Kureishi and Phillips are authors belonging to the second generation. Moreover, their work deals with the life of a second generation immigrant protagonist who struggles with his identity. These protagonists are shown in different stages of their lives: Karim Amir in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is still an adolescent whose personality is yet to fully develop, while the forty-seven-year-old Keith Gordon in *In the Falling Snow* impersonates the same generation at a more mature stage of life. This aspect adds an interesting layer to the main concerns of this dissertation, since it allows me to take into account how people belonging to the second generation position themselves with regard to their identity in different phases of their lives.

Whereas most literary critics have only discussed identity construction in second generation novels, I will introduce a new focus which is intrinsically linked with identity construction, but which has been relatively neglected in previous research. This new focus is intergenerational relationships. I will contend that the particular relationship of a person with member(s) of another generation – the first generation in the case of Karim and Keith – profoundly influences the ways in which his/her identity is constructed. Conversely, I will also consider how the identity construction of one person affects the intergenerational relationship with another. Furthermore, since Phillips's novel introduces the third generation through Keith's son Laurie, I will analyse how the link between intergenerational dynamics and processes of identity formation presents itself across several generations. I will examine how the relationships between the first and second generation resemble or differ from those between the second and third generation in the context of identity construction.

Before I turn my attention to *In the Falling Snow* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, it is important to consider the historical and literary context in order to better understand the ways in which these novels represent the issues introduced above. Firstly, I will describe the historical emergence of immigration into Britain and the consequences of this phenomenon for both British society and academic studies. Secondly, I will discuss the situation of the first and second generation immigrants in Britain,

¹ Although I consider the term 'immigrants' problematic and ambiguous in the context of the second generation, I will stick to this denomination in order to place this dissertation in accordance with previous scholarly research.

highlighting the differences between the two generations. Thirdly, I will briefly introduce the type of literature to which the novels of Hanif Kureishi and Caryl Phillips are usually assigned, that is, *black British literature*. I will discuss both the generational subdivision of this type of literature and the issues represented, more particularly the themes of homeland, return, identity, and ethnicity. Next, I will elaborate on the issue of intergenerational relationships, showing that it is omnipresent within the works of second generation immigrant authors, but at the same time left untouched by literary critics. Moreover, I will argue why I consider it important to include the third generation within this line of thought. Finally, I will explain the reasons why I have chosen *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow* as two representative novels of the intergenerational dynamics in processes of identity construction.

1.1. IMMIGRATION AND THE SUBSEQUENT CHANGES IN BRITISH SOCIETY AND SCHOLARSHIP

“England has changed” (Phillips, *A Distant Shore* 9). With this sentence, Caryl Phillips powerfully captures the situation of post-war England, and, by extension, of post-war Britain. In the aftermath of World War II, colonies of the British Empire started to ‘battle’ for their independence. India obtained this independence in 1947, and other colonies followed quickly. A consequence of this worldwide decolonisation trend was the influx of West Indian and Afro-Asian immigrants into the former Mother country; a phenomenon which started in 1948 with the Caribbean passengers getting off the SS Empire Windrush in Tilbury. The presence of these and other settlers from former colonies brought about changes in British society on cultural, social, and political level. In an interview with Maya Jaggi, the Caribbean-born British writer Caryl Phillips summarizes how migration has had an impact on all different aspects of British life: “Migration from former colonies has transformed Britain in the past fifty years. Caribbean migration made a phenomenal impact . . . whether it’s the music on Top of the Pops, or football.” (qtd. in Jaggi 157). Further on in the interview, Phillips reinforces his claim by stating that the presence of immigrants has been “absolutely crucial to the development of Britain in the last fifty years” (qtd. in Jaggi 162). Although Phillips is talking about “Caribbean migration,” his statement can be said to apply to migration from Asian and African countries as well.

The presence of foreigners in the country and the changes this caused in society coincided with the rise of British cultural studies.² In this field of study, British scholars and academics began to pay

² Kwesi Owusu already indicates this coincidence in his introduction to *Black British Culture and Society*: “[T]he decade of the birth of cultural studies . . . was also the decade of the historic disintegration of the British Empire and the arrival of large numbers of Caribbean and Asian workers in Britain” (2).

attention to this social phenomenon and started to take into account the notion of Black people in Britain. A pioneer in this regard was Stuart Hall, who brought about “the systematic engagement of ‘race’ and the Black presence within British cultural studies . . . in the 1970s and early 1980s” (Owusu 2). Moreover, Hall’s work “opened up new dialogues on Black cultural identity, effectively challenging the notion that British culture was quintessentially ‘white’” (Owusu 3). The presence of Black people in Britain, initially the original immigrants and later on their children, challenged the traditional views of British culture and national identity. Within British cultural studies, “the experiences of Black people in Britain” began to be regarded “as a distinctly ‘British’ or ‘English’ experience” (Owusu 5). Migration thus had its implications on the traditional concept of ‘Englishness’ or, more generally speaking, ‘Britishness’. The challenging of the traditional idea of ‘Englishness’/ ‘Britishness’ is present in the work of Homi K. Bhabha, who argues in *The Location of Culture* that “[t]he Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*...” (9; emphasis in original), thereby broadening the concept of ‘national identity’ to include those (not necessarily) non-white British residents who were former citizens of the Commonwealth in the postcolonial context of migration.

With regard to the term ‘Black’, the extent of this notion is variable among different scholars. For Stuart Hall, the term is to be applied to “groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities.” (Hall 223). Furthermore, Hall emphasizes the diversity implied by the term:

What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experience and cultural identities which compose the category ‘black’; that is, the recognition that ‘black’ is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature. What this brings into play is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of the black subjects. (225; emphasis in original)

Mark Stein, in his work *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, agrees with Hall’s collective notion of ‘black’, in that, for Stein, “the term *black British* does *not* signify a *homogenous* social group that shares a common ethnic, cultural, regional, or national background.” (11; emphasis in original). By contrast, Roxy Harris is of the opinion that “[w]hen references are made to Britain’s black population they should be taken to refer only to the people who migrated to and settled in Britain from Britain’s former Caribbean colonies in the post-1945 period, particularly in the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s” (396). Harris thus limits the term ‘black’ both geographically and

temporally. Moreover, she restricts the term to “the working-class section of the black population” (396). In the rest of this dissertation, I will align myself with Hall and Stein and denote the works by both Caribbean and Afro-Asian immigrant authors, more particularly the works by Caryl Phillips and Hanif Kureishi, as ‘black British literature’. Before turning my attention to this type of postcolonial literature, however, I will first consider the situation of immigrants and their children in Britain and discuss how the particular conditions of the second generation immigrants affect the processes of identity construction.

1.2. FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANTS IN BRITAIN

As mentioned above, the presence of immigrants in Britain was influential on both the social and the academic level. However, it was not only British society which changed under the mass-migration trend, but also the immigrants themselves were subject to change under their new conditions. The British environment in which the immigrants arrived contained sometimes very diverging or even colliding social and cultural norms compared with the ones they were used to in their home country. As a consequence, the immigrants had to reconsider their cultural affiliations and consciously decide to what extent they were to assimilate into the British lifestyle or to preserve aspects which belong to their original culture. Bhabha explains that “[t]erms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced *performatively*” (2; emphasis added), thereby emphasizing the conscious choices immigrants have to make in their new environment. The performance of cultural affiliation affects the immigrants’ position towards their homeland, original culture and ethnicity.

One generation later, the children of these immigrants face a very different situation. This second generation can no longer consider their parents’ homeland their home country. Since they were born and raised in Britain, their affiliation with the country of origin is even more complicated than their parents’. In the introduction to *Black British Culture & Society*, Owusu describes the situation of the second generation in contrast to that of their parents and emphasizes the problematic status of the notion of ‘home’ in immigrant families: “Unlike their parents, the second generation of Black youth did not see themselves as ‘temporary guests’ of Her Majesty’s government. They were not here to work and eventually return ‘home’ to the Caribbean or Africa. Britain was their home, and . . . they were ‘Here to Stay!’”(9). The relationship of the second generation to Britain is very different from that of their parents, but, in its way, also problematic, due to the fact that the children of immigrants are not seen as straightforwardly belonging to the country in which they were born. Mostly regarded “as foreigners, as interlopers in the land of their birth” (Stein 42), the second generation immigrants experience particular and complex affiliations with Britain. Paul Gilroy describes the situation of

second generation immigrants in England as follows: “The contemporary black English . . . stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages” (439). On the one hand, this generation is influenced by their parents’ culture and ethnic heritage, while, on the other hand, it grows up in a society with a wholly different predominant culture.

This ‘in-between’ situation profoundly affects the second generation’s construction of identity. Identity construction can be subdivided, despite considerable overlaps, into three categories: national, cultural, and ethnic identity. With regard to national identity, the children of immigrants can be considered as having a British national identity. They were born on British soil, and the concept of Britishness is, according to Vesna Goldsworthy, “based on the civic idea of nationality” (96), even though Goldsworthy herself adds that “[a] foreign name, a foreign accent, different skin colour, all seem to imply ‘hyphenated’ Britishness” (96). The other types of identity are not so easily determined, especially not in the context of migration. Cultural identity is an extremely fluid concept in contemporary reality – its fluidity is not to be restricted to immigrants and their descendants – with people choosing to take on certain cultural aspects and consciously distancing themselves from others. Cultural identity is, as Stuart Hall mentions, “not fixed, it’s always hybrid” (qtd. in Chen 415). With regard to ethnic identity, the notion of hybridity can also be applied, but in this case, it is more applicable to migrant contexts. Second generation immigrants consciously have to decide how they will position themselves towards their inherited ethnicity on the one hand, and towards the predominant ethnicity in their environment of upbringing on the other hand. The two ethnicities are not mutually exclusive, but allow hybrid constructs, dependent, among other things, on the second generation immigrant’s attitude towards his/her ethnic heritage and his/her affiliation with his/her country of birth. In the rest of this dissertation, I will analyse which cultural aspects, British or other, the characters belonging to the second generation adopt in the establishment of their cultural identity, and discuss how they regard their ethnicity.

The concept of ethnicity plays a considerable role in one’s identity construction. Hall emphasizes this role by stating that “the term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity . . .” (Hall 226). Because of the explicit link between an immigrant’s identity and his/her ethnicity, the latter can be considered a concept of considerable importance in the context of migration, and, accordingly, has attracted much scholarly attention in the postcolonial period. Yet, although “[e]thnicity is a term that has been used increasingly since the 1960s” (Ashcroft et al, 80), it has no fixed definition. The exact elements which constitute the term are variable. For example, the extent to which the notion ‘race’ occupies a place in the concept of ‘ethnicity’ is arguable, considered an aspect of ethnicity by some scholars, whereas others define it as a separate category (Sollors 221). By stating that “ethnicity acknowledges the place of *history, language and culture* in the construction of . . . identity” (Hall 226; emphasis added), Hall indicates

that the term comprises different factors. Sollors summarizes the different conceptions by stating that ethnicity is “a broadly conceived term.” (222). A more specific working definition can be found in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, in which the term ethnicity “account[s] for human variation in terms of culture, tradition, language, social patterns and ancestry . . .” (Ashcroft et al. 80). Furthermore, Ashcroft et al. specify the concept of ‘ethnicity’ by enumerating “‘the symbolic elements’ that may provide a sense of ethnic belonging”, more particularly “kinship patterns, physical contiguity, religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, physical features, cultural values, and cultural practices such as art, literature and music” (84). In this dissertation, I will analyse which aspects the characters of *In the Falling Snow* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* include in the constitution of their ethnic identity, and discuss the extent to which they consider their race an important factor.

1.3. THE EMERGENCE OF BLACK BRITISH LITERATURE

One of the consequences of the migration into Britain and the subsequent presence of immigrants in British society was the creation of a new type of British literature, which was primarily concerned with the experience of immigrants in Britain. This type of literature has been called *black British literature*. According to Mark Stein, a central genre of black British literature is the novel of transformation (27). This genre works on two levels. On the one hand, the novel of transformation is about “subject formation under the influence of political, social, educational, familial, and other forces” (22), and is thus related to the *Bildungsroman*. On the other hand, the novel of transformation addresses “the transformation of British society and cultural institutions” (22). Moreover, Stein argues that “the novel of transformation not only portrays change in British society and culture, but, significantly, is also partly responsible for bringing about change” (44). This bipartite functioning of the novel of transformation on the social level – both showing and causing change – emphasizes the important role of black British literature in contemporary British society.

Within the realm black British literature, a distinction must be made between first and second generation immigrant authors. To the former category belong, among others, Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming. Their novels are marked by a certain optimism and romanticism towards Britain at the first stage of the immigrant’s arrival, which turns into a sense of frustration due to the immigrant’s difficulties in finding a job or housing and to the instances of racism experienced in social encounters with British citizens. Moreover, in the novels written by first generation immigrant authors, an important theme is the notion of ‘return’. By migrating to Britain, immigrants had the intention to work some years, improve their personal situation and that of their (future) children, and

then perhaps go back to their home country. Britain was seen as a host country, which they were to leave within some years or in which they wanted to create a 'home'. In both cases, immigrants had the possibility to return to their homeland, whether literally or mentally via memories. Mark Stein considers "'return' . . . a prevalent theme in post-colonial literature" (57), and distinguishes between "actual, physical returning" on the one hand and "spiritual, notional, and intellectual returns" on the other hand (57).

With regard to the second generation immigrant authors, the notion of 'return' is of less importance. Moreover, the notion of 'return' is not actually applicable in the case of the immigrants' children, since their country of origin is not the same as their country of birth. Fred D'Aguiar, born in London from Guyanese parents, relates his own experiences as a second generation immigrant in the essay "Home is Always Elsewhere". He stresses the feeling of isolation, of unbelonging and in-betweenness, characteristic of the second generation's situation (197). Furthermore, D'Aguiar describes his problematic relationship to the city in which he was born:

London was spoiled for me by my belief that one day I would return to Guyana, and when that was no longer true, by a feeling that London did not belong to me, could never belong to me on account of my race, my minority status. A white majority made me aware on a daily basis that I was a visitor, a guest . . . (197)

By the words "no longer true", D'Aguiar indicates that the initial belief in a return turned out to be false, and that the notion of 'return' is actually not applicable to his situation. Furthermore, this fragment clearly shows how second generation immigrants continue to be regarded as 'the Other' in their own society, as "a visitor, a guest".

Instead of exploring the theme of going back, most novels written by second generation authors primarily deal with the second generation's struggle to find their place in British society, and to construct an identity of their own. Characters belonging to the second generation are depicted as doubting their decision as to the extent to which they will affiliate themselves with their cultural ancestry and ethnic heritage, or immerse themselves in the culture of their birthplace. D'Aguiar acknowledges the impact of his particular position in society on the development of his identity. According to D'Aguiar, his "allegiances are shifting" (200), as is his identity: "I saw myself splinter across these landscapes and multiply into plural selves" (203). In other words, D'Aguiar acknowledges the unfixed status of one's identity; a concern which is present in many works by second generation immigrant authors. The rest of my dissertation will focus on the issue of identity construction in the work of second generation authors, more particularly Caryl Phillips and Hanif Kureishi. Nevertheless, my interest is not restricted to this single issue, but includes another theme,

that of intergenerational relationships, which, I argue, is intrinsically linked to that of identity construction and may be considered an important concept for future literary research.

1.4. INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE THIRD GENERATION

Many scholars, theorists and authors have been concerned with how and to what degree aspects of parental culture and ethnicity are passed on to the second generation. The focus on identity construction has been on how individuals make (un)conscious choices with regard to preservation of ethnic heritage and cultural traditions on the one hand, and with regard to immersion into British cultural life on the other hand. The second generation has thus been placed in a particular relation to the previous generation. An aspect which can be linked to the construction of identity, but which has been treated less exhaustively by literary scholars, is the concept of intergenerational conflict in the context of postcolonial migration. This issue is already implied by the positioning-work of the immigrants' children with regard to their ethnic heritage. Nevertheless, it seems to me that intergenerational conflict and its representation in literature have not received sufficient attention from literary critics. Tensions between generations have been pointed to by, for instance, Mark Stein, for whom "the conflict of generations" in the context of migration "is of particular importance in that different generations correspond to different cultural and social affiliations" (25). Nevertheless, in his analysis of literary works in *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, Stein does not examine literary representations of this type of conflict. Like Stein, Caryl Phillips refers to intergenerational conflicts in migrant contexts by saying that "[w]hen one examines their family history – they're first- and second generation migrants – there are often problems in the bosom of the family, partly exacerbated by the migration passage" (qtd. in Jaggi 166).

As we can conclude from the above, preponderant attention has been given to identity construction, and the concern with intergenerational conflicts has been frequently raised, but left under-analysed in literary criticism. Moreover, the possible link between the identity construction of an individual and intergenerational conflicts has practically been left untouched.³ Mark Stein refers to this link in his *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, when defining the concept of

³ By contrast, both intergenerational conflict and its influence on identity construction in immigrant context have been widely considered in non-literary research. This research has not been restricted to the immigrant experience in Britain, but includes, for example, immigrant families in American culture (Mann) or immigrants and their children in France (Sabatier). Moreover, research has focused on different ethnic groups, among others British Poles (Lewandowska). The attention given to intergenerational dynamics and the influence on the process of identity construction in the fields of sociology and psychology contrasts with the under-representation in literary criticism.

‘novel of transformation’: “Many novels of transformation can also be charted as a quest for an outlook on life which accommodates the protagonists’ own identity, and which is *shaped by a struggle with the parental generations*, and one’s peers and society at large” (25; emphasis added). Like Stein, Caryl Phillips also expresses his awareness of the link between (unstable) relations within a family and the identity construction of one of its members:

But if you lose sight of the children and engender them in a sense of an unstable family – where the kids have no point of contact with their grandparents and can’t stabilize themselves with an extended family – you’ve messed up the game for two or three generations. . . . Instead of a stable background that would allow [the immigrants’ children] to participate and excel in society, they’re brought up between people, worrying about who they are. (qtd. in Jaggi 164)

The last part of the statement, “worrying about who they are”, clearly demonstrates the influence of the family on one’s identity. Furthermore, the literary critics Nahem Yousaf and Kenneth C. Kaleta have analysed the link between father-son relationships and identity construction in Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Kaleta, for example, acknowledges that the identity construction of the protagonist, Karim, is affected by the particular relationship he entertains with his father: “Karim knows his life choices are inextricably bound up with the connection he has with his father” (49). I will return to both literary critics in my discussion on the character Karim.

Works by second generation immigrant authors, not only Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Caryl Phillips’s *In the Falling Snow*, but also for example Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, deal with both identity construction and intergenerational conflicts. A reciprocal link between the two aspects can hardly be ignored. Therefore, in this dissertation, I want to explore the extent to which and the ways in which parental or other intergenerational conflicts influence the second generation’s stance towards cultural and ethnic affiliations and, consequently, affect identity construction. Yet, unlike Stein, I do not consider intergenerational conflict to be exclusively “a *cultural* conflict between distinct generations” (Stein 58; emphasis added), and will take into account all possible types of intergenerational conflicts, thus discussing both conflicts arising out of different cultural affiliations and those emerging from the issue of ethnic heritage. Moreover, since interactions between generations, which may or may not be influential for the identity of one party in this interaction, do not necessarily have to be conflictual in nature, I will go one step further than Stein and broaden the notion of intergenerational conflict to intergenerational relationships in general. While bearing in mind the immense diversity of ways to construct an identity and of possible relationships between immigrant parents and their children, I consider intergenerational relationships an interesting new angle from which to look at the question of identity construction in contexts of migration. This new

angle allows us both to deepen our insight into the processes of identity construction and to better understand the workings of the family unit in migrant contexts.

So far, I have only considered the immigrants and their children with regard to identity construction and intergenerational conflicts/relationships. However, in contemporary Britain, the third generation has already reached adolescence. Time has come to start focussing on the immigrants' children's children and take into account this generation's identity construction and the role which relationships with their parents, and in some cases even grandparents, plays in this context. This generation has already been welcomed in literature by the character Laurie in Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow*. In what follows, I will enumerate the other reasons for choosing to analyse both this novel and the one by Hanif Kureishi in this dissertation.

1.5. CARYL PHILLIPS AND HANIF KUREISHI AS SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANT AUTHORS

As mentioned before, both Caryl Phillips (born in St. Kitts in 1958) and Hanif Kureishi (born in Bromley, England, in 1954) can be considered as belonging to the second generation. However, this claim is not as straightforward as might be expected. Mark Stein, for example, puts Phillips and Kureishi in two different generational categories, more particularly by proposing a tripartite structure in which Phillips belongs to a middle generation (97-99). This middle generation consists of people who were born in an ex-colonised country, but who were taken to England at a certain moment in their youth. As such, they find themselves in between two generations: "They are neither wholly party to the migrant writers who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, and they are also distinct from the writers born in Britain between the mid-1960s and 1990s" (97). According to Stein, they are "shaped by English culture, not only via colonial education, but more directly by growing up in Britain" (99), thereby contrasting with the first generation immigrants who came to Britain during adulthood, and thus spent a whole part of their life in their country of origin. In contrast with the second generation, then, "a link to one's birthplace is retained" (99), thereby indicating that there is still a connection with a country other than Britain. Unlike Phillips, Kureishi is placed among the second generation immigrants, "born in Britain and whose connection to any other territory is more faint" (98). Although I do not oppose the tripartite structure proposed by Stein, I argue that Phillips and Kureishi should be considered as belonging to the same generation. Phillips was indeed born in St. Kitts, but he was already brought to Britain when he was only a few months old. Therefore, the crucial formative years of his childhood were spent in Britain. Like Kureishi, Phillips can thus be seen as a genuine second generation author, despite his foreign place of birth.

There are other reasons for including Caryl Phillips in the analysis of second generation authors. First of all, as a child of immigrants, he is profoundly aware of the influence of previous generations on one's life. In the interview with Maya Jaggi, Phillips makes clear that it is his intention to put across this awareness to his readers via his work: "I want the kids of my generation and below to realize [that a story about the immigrant experience] . . . is about their own lives" (qtd. in Jaggi 160). Not only does Phillips show the influence of the previous generation on one's life, and thus identity, but he also points forward to the third generation by the words "and below". Secondly, as mentioned before, Phillips is also conscious about the link between family situation and the identity of one of its members. A third point of concern expressed by Phillips during the interview and which relates to the main concern of this dissertation, is the problem of generations. Phillips acknowledges both this problem and the fact that intergenerational problems within families predominate in migrant contexts. He summarizes this by stating that "[t]he story of migrants in the twentieth century is of family tension, crisis, split" (qtd. in Jaggi 165), with "family tension" referring to intergenerational conflicts and "crisis" to identity struggles.

Phillips is thus aware of how the tensions within the family affect one's personality. This awareness is omnipresent in his most recent novel *In the Falling Snow*. The novel follows Keith Gordon, a black Briton of Caribbean descent who is stuck in a midlife crisis, three years after a one-night stand with a colleague led to a divorce from his wife Annabelle. In the story, Keith finds himself suspended from work after a harassment claim by his ex-fling Yvette, another colleague. He is also alienated from his adolescent son, Laurie, who accuses his father of having abandoned him and his mother. Instead of working on his project – a book about contemporary music – Keith drinks and broods about his past. He reflects both on his former relationship with Annabelle and on his family situation while growing up: the vague memories of his mother, who died when he was still a child, the tender memories of his stepmother Brenda, who died from cancer, and the cold relationship with his father, who still lives in the North of England. Initially, the relationship between Keith and his father is presented to the reader by means of flashbacks. Later on in the story, Keith resumes actual contact with his old father. With Laurie, attempts are made to increase contact and tighten the bond between father and son. The focus is thus on the relationships between three generations of men, with Keith acting as a pivot. Moreover, with a protagonist in deep personal crisis and his son in his adolescent years, Phillips excellently represents the struggle with identity in both the second and third generation.

Hanif Kureishi, born to an Indian father and an English mother, has been chosen for this dissertation because of his debut novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Written two decades before Phillips's *In the Falling Snow*, Kureishi's semi-autobiographical novel relates the story of a teenage boy on the verge of adulthood. Karim Amir has, similarly to Kureishi, an Indian father and an English mother, and he grows up in London in the 1970s - just before the beginning of the Thatcher regime. While the

novel follows the protagonist in his adolescent years, the reader is shown the process of identity formation in a second generation context. Moreover, Karim's father Haroon is represented as struggling with his identity in English society as well. Both father and son develop in parallel in the course of the novel. The relationship between Haroon and Karim is influential within this situation. However, unlike Keith and Laurie in *In the Falling Snow*, their relationship is less remote. Karim and Haroon are frequently represented in instances of prolonged interaction, which are not always conflictual in nature. In this way, Kureishi's novel not only presents the identity construction of a second generation immigrant in an earlier stage of his life and in a different era than Phillips's novel, but the father-son relationship depicted in *The Buddha of Suburbia* also opens up the influence of generational dynamics to other than intergenerational conflicts.

Another reason for including *The Buddha of Suburbia* in this dissertation's project, is the presence of two other characters: the white English Charlie Kay, son of Haroon's new girlfriend Eva, and Jamila, daughter of two Muslim grocers and old time friends of Karim's parents. Firstly, Charlie is interesting in the analysis of identity construction in that he provides a counterbalance to the migrant context. Charlie is from "pure" English lineage, but, similar to Karim and Jamila, he is presented as struggling with his identity, in an even more extreme way than the other two characters. Furthermore, his problematic family situation also affects his development. His character thus thwarts a one-sided conception of the issues discussed as being restricted to migrant contexts. Secondly, Jamila offers a female perspective on the identity construction in immigrant environments. Her character counterbalances the preponderant male perspective on identity and family, offered by the male protagonists in both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow*. Moreover, the relationship between Jamila and her father Anwar is one of extreme collision between cultural and ethnic affiliations. The issue of Jamila's arranged marriage with the Indian Changez wonderfully depicts how the immigrant Anwar holds on to a fixed identity composed by Indian traditions and rituals, whereas the opposition of his second-generation daughter exemplifies the wholly different situation of immigrants' children, born and raised in England. The arranged marriage excellently illustrates how intergenerational conflict affects one's identity, since Jamila's behaviour in her marriage betrays a change in her sense of self. In short, both the character of Jamila and that of Charlie prevent a restricted view on the identity construction of second generation immigrants.

On a more general level, there are several other reasons why I have decided to treat two novels by two second generation immigrant writers. Firstly, an analysis of two novels by different authors prevents a one-sided view on the identity construction of second generation immigrants in Britain. The analysis of the characters Karim and Keith shows the heterogeneity and diversity characteristic for intergenerational relationships and for processes of identity formation. Other characters, for example the fathers Haroon and Earl, also differ greatly from one another, which strengthens the idea of

diversity in the establishment of one's sense of self and in the performance of one's identity. Secondly, Kureishi and Phillips are from different ethnic backgrounds, respectively British-Asian and Caribbean. The characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow* have ethnic backgrounds similar to those of the authors: Karim navigates between his British and his Asian ethnic heritage, whereas Keith is a descendant of Caribbean lineage. This difference further prevents a too restricted view on second generation identity construction and the influence on/of intergenerational relationships. Nevertheless, both novels contain similarities as well. In both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow*, class covers a considerable part of one's sense of self. Furthermore, both Karim and Keith experience communication issues with the other characters: lack of communication or failure of conversations occur throughout the stories. With regard to the parents, Kureishi and Phillips present an absent father figure in the characters of Haroon and Earl/Keith. Finally, both authors introduce a mixed race character, respectively Karim and Laurie. The fact of being mixed race entails specific complications in the constitution of an identity, an issue on which I will come back in the analysis of the two characters. In short, the similarities and differences between Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Phillips's *In the Falling Snow* allow me to insist on common processes of identity construction on the one hand, and prevent me from making too easy or self-evident conclusions on the other hand.

2. THE PROBLEMATIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANTS

Having explained the necessary historical and literary context, I will now turn my attention to the novels themselves and start my discussion on identity construction and the link with intergenerational relationships.⁴ In this chapter, I will focus on the identity construction of the second generation protagonists of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow*, respectively Karim Amir and Keith Gordon. Both characters are presented as severely struggling with their sense of self and with their identity; Karim while being in his final adolescent years, Keith while enduring a midlife crisis. I will consider how the protagonists perform their ethnic and cultural identities, and pay special attention to the relative importance of race in their ethnicity. To end my analysis of the second generation immigrants, I will draw a comparison between Karim and Keith in order to demonstrate the differences and resemblances regarding their identity construction in different life stages.

2.1. KARIM'S JOURNEY INTO ADULTHOOD: CRISIS AND CHANGE

2.1.1. KARIM AS A MIXED RACE ADOLESCENT

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (TB) is predominantly about Karim Amir's process of initiation⁵ over a period of four years; a period marked by depression, confusion, and anxiety. Despite the cheerful and ironic introduction to Karim's life, the reader quickly gets the impression that Karim has to cope with enormous personal problems. This impression is confirmed by other characters. Jamila and her husband Changez, for example, recognise Karim's personal issues: "He's got problems, we all know that . . ." 'He's got tremendous personal problems, as you say quite rightly'" (276). The words "we all know that" indicate that the other characters in the novel also understand that Karim is internally struggling. This struggle is due to a severe identity crisis, caused by the failure

⁴ In my analysis of the novels, I will frequently draw on previous literary criticism. The discrepancy between the novels regarding such references can be explained by the fact that, whereas *The Buddha of Suburbia* has been extensively treated by literary critics, Phillips's recent novel *In the Falling Snow* has not yet been subject to many interpretations. Therefore, I have frequently included Phillips's opinions expressed in interviews or in his own non-fictional work. Without assimilating the situation of the protagonist Keith to that of Phillips himself, I think it is interesting to consider whether and how Phillips's views are represented in his novel.

⁵ Initiation is a term which refers to processes of acceptance into a particular (social) group. Furthermore, the term comprises the idea of entering adulthood. "Initiation stories", as Kaleta concisely defines, "treat the process of maturation as experienced by the initially adolescent main character" (77). Since *The Buddha of Suburbia* relates the story of Karim's transition into adulthood, this novel can be correctly described as an initiation story.

of establishing a coherent and satisfying identity. Karim does not know who he is, who he wants to be, or what he wants to achieve in life. He is only able to describe his personality in negative terms: “me, always the voyeur” (37), “I was the nosiest person I’d ever met” (39), and “I’m probably not compassionate or anything, I bet I’m a real bastard inside and don’t care for anyone . . .” (104). At other instances, Karim compares himself negatively to other characters, by enumerating the characteristics which they possess and he lacks: “Unlike Charlie, my will wasn’t stronger than my misgivings” (138), and “Compared to Jammie I was, as a militant, a real shaker and trembler” (53). In the course of the story, Karim attempts to get out of the impasse in which he finds himself, by trying to find a way to escape his “own pointless life” (120) and a purpose for his unfocused ambition (154). Nevertheless, Karim remains in deep personal crisis throughout the novel, which nurtures his anxiety, depression, and confusion: “This was a chance, but I was frightened of taking it, frightened of exposing myself and failing” (138), “I was being tormented by devils” (207), “I don’t know what I’m doing” (252), and “my depression and self-hatred, my desire to mutilate myself . . . went on and on” (249).

Important factors which complicate Karim’s identity construction are his ethnic heritage and biracial origins. Karim has an English mother and grows up in an English environment, but, because of his father’s Indian provenance, he cannot completely affiliate with an English identity. This complication is already present in the opening paragraph of the novel:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman 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) . . . (3)

In this first fragment, Karim tries to determine his own identity; “I am an Englishman born and bred”. This claim, however, is immediately complicated by the word “almost”. Karim acknowledges that his mixed race background, him “having emerged from two old histories”, complicate the straightforwardness of considering himself genuinely English. Nevertheless, throughout the first part of the novel, Karim is mostly seen as confirming his Englishness, which is already exemplified in the opening paragraph by the words “But I don’t care - Englishman I am” (3). Not only does Karim stress his Englishness, he also lacks affiliation with the ethnic heritage passed on to him by his Indian father. A fragment which clearly exemplifies this lack of association with Asian culture and ethnicity can be found in the following conversation, in which Karim wants to inform his girlfriend Helen about Anwar’s hunger-strike: “I . . . asked Jammie if I could tell Helen what was happening. ‘Yes, if you want to expose our culture as being ridiculous and our people as old-fashioned, extreme and narrow-minded.’ So I told Helen about the hunger-strike” (71). Since Karim simply tells Helen everything, despite Jamila’s warning, he clearly does not consider himself part of “our culture” to which Jamila

refers. Another instance which shows that Karim distances himself from Indian people is the scene where Changez and Karim go to a football game. In the stadium, Karim forces Changez to cover his face “in case the lads saw he was a Paki and imagined [Karim] was one too” (98). First of all, by calling Changez “a Paki”, Karim makes no accurate distinction between India and Pakistan. The merging of these two nationalities betrays a lack of knowledge about his Indian roots. Moreover, with the word “imagined”, Karim distinguishes himself from Changez and Pakis in England. Instances such as this make clear that Karim inclines towards his English roots and distances himself from his Indian heritage.

In the first part of the novel, there are only a few instances in which Karim distinguishes himself from his English contemporaries. Firstly, when Karim overhears a man’s racist remarks during Haroon’s first meditation class, he reacts offensively by “[giving] the man a sharp kick in the kidney” (12). This reaction betrays a certain sensitivity to his Asian roots. Secondly, at another instance, Karim encounters racism once again. When visiting Helen, he gets into trouble when her father opens the door: “And then I went white, but obviously not white enough, because Hairy Back let go of the dog he was holding . . .” (40). The words “obviously not white enough” indicate Karim’s understanding that the brutal reaction of Helen’s father is due to his skin colour. Thirdly, Karim betrays a slight awareness of his position as ‘the Other’ in British society while describing his relationship with Jamila: “The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it” (53). Here, with the use of the definite article in “the English”, Karim sets himself and Jamila apart from the rest of their English contemporaries and points to the British attitude towards second generation immigrants. Nevertheless, despite these few instances which betray an awareness of skin colour, Karim does not pay much attention to his ethnicity and does not consider his race an important factor in the construction of his identity. By not according much importance to race, Karim provides one possibility of interpreting one’s ethnic identity. This lack of concern with race will change in the second half of the novel, when Karim follows his Dad and Eva to the capital.

In the second part of the novel, called *In the City*, several instances incite Karim’s awareness of his ‘Otherness’. The ways in which Karim reacts to this status are variable, which signals unstable ethnic affiliations. Just before he journeys into London, Karim explains that he looks forward to this move because “there were thousands of black people everywhere, so [he] wouldn’t feel exposed” (121). It is only at this point in the novel that Karim explicitly aligns himself with other Black people.⁶ Further in the story, however, Karim aligns himself again with white people and does not consider

⁶ The notion of ‘Black people’ is, in this dissertation, used as an umbrella term to include all coloured people in Britain as opposed to white people. The capital in the adjective ‘Black’ indicates the broad application of this term, including not only people from African or African-American descent, but also mixed race people and those from Asian descent.

himself 'the Other' in English society. When he is involved in the rehearsals of a theatrical performance, a dispute with his black co-actor Tracey betrays his ignorance of his 'Otherness'. Tracey opposes Karim's intention to stage Anwar's hunger strike: "'I'm afraid it shows black people – 'Indian people –' 'Black and Asian people –' 'One old Indian man –' 'As being irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical. And as being fanatical'" (180-181; emphasis added). For Karim, Anwar's hunger strike does not present the whole Black community of London as "fanatical". Instead, he regards it as an individual characterisation of "one old Indian man". This fragment clearly shows, as Kaleta remarks, that "[Karim] defines his race by skin tone, not by political color" (79), contrary to Tracey, who accuses Karim of defending "white truth" (TB 181). Another instance which exemplifies Kaleta's claim is Karim's parenthetical afterthought to the description of his acting group: "Two of us were officially 'black' (*though truly I was more beige than anything*)" (167; emphasis added). Yet, while roaming around the London art scene, Karim inclines several times to the Indian part of his hybrid ethnicity as well. This reorientation happens especially at times when Karim is deeply affected on a personal level. During Anwar's funeral, for example, Karim realises that his father's ethnic heritage determines to a certain extent his ethnic identity:

But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now – the Indians – that in some ways these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them. (212)

Karim suddenly understands that he has been denying his Indian heritage throughout his adolescence and that this denial has complicated his identity construction, that it has made him feel "incomplete". At the same time, this fragment illustrates the particular situation for a mixed race person and the difficulties which accompany it. Karim has not yet found a way to reconcile his English and Indian roots, since he combines an alignment to Indian people with a distinction from English people: "my enemies, those whites".

After Anwar's funeral, the Asian part of Karim's ethnic heritage prevails. When his relationship with the white Eleanor ends, for example, Karim sympathises with her other ex-boyfriend Gene, a West-Indian actor who committed suicide after having endured too much racism: "*We became part of England and yet proudly stood outside it*" (227; emphasis added). Furthermore, at the premiere of the play, Karim describes Changez as "*a fellow Indian in the foyer of a white theatre!*" (231; emphasis added). It is his mother Margaret who puts Karim's situation back into perspective, by stressing that he is also her son, the son of an Englishwoman, and therefore also English:

'But you're not an Indian. You've never been to India. You'd get diarrhoea the minute you stepped off that plane, I know you would.' '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 Englishman, I’m glad to say.’ (232)

Not only does Margaret remind Karim of his English background, but she also insists on the fact that he has never been to India and, consequently, cannot consider himself Indian. After this episode, Karim acknowledges his Englishness again. Near the end of the novel, when he is with Charlie in New York, he describes his friend and himself as “two English boys in America” (249), thereby confirming that he has finally made a firm decision with regard to his ethnic affiliations.

2.1.2. A HYBRID IDENTITY: CULTURE, CLASS, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

With regard to the construction of his cultural identity, Karim can be considered as ‘following the flock’. He swiftly adopts the new trends in fashion and music styles, anxious to stay behind on his peers: “The pub was full of kids dressed like me” (8) and “I had to study the *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* to keep up” (8). Furthermore, he is initially influenced by his high-school crush Charlie: “I . . . tattooed his words on to my brain. Levi’s, with an open-necked shirt . . . I would never go out in anything else for the rest of my life” (16-17). His clothing style changes throughout the novel, in accordance with the changes in English society: from his “flower-patterned see-through shirt, blue suede boots with Cuban heels” (6) in the eve of the hippie era, to polo-shirts as recommended by Charlie, to the “black clothes”, “eye-liner and nail varnish” (206) typical for the age of punk. Since Karim faithfully follows the English mainstream, he adopts several aspects which are characteristic for British culture. I agree with Nahem Yousaf, for whom “Karim has few problems in identifying with even the most traditional features of British life” (33), for example drinking tea and cycling (TB 62). Towards customs typical for Indian culture, Karim mainly remains indifferent. He sometimes practices yoga, and his love for extremely spicy food has given him the nickname “Fire Eater” (54). Apart from yoga and food, however, there are no other aspects typical of Indian culture which Karim has taken on. Growing up in 1970s England, Karim predominantly constructs his cultural identity according to British youth trends. However, since youth subcultures are temporary and vulnerable to change, most aspects which make up Karim’s cultural identity are as shifting as his ethnic affiliations.

Three other aspects which are important in the constitution of Karim’s identity are class, sexual orientation, and religion. Firstly, the latter is important in the sense that Karim renounces any notion of religion. When Uncle Anwar goes on hunger strike to force his daughter into an arranged marriage, Karim does not understand Anwar’s reasoning and condemns the action as “old-fashioned . . . out of date” and “plain illusion in the head” (60). His father, with his conversion to Buddhist

practices, is equally ridiculed and ironically called “God” (21). Karim completely ostracises religion from the construction of his identity: “I thought I was one of the first people in history to find all religion childish and inexplicable” (212). Secondly, since class is a very important issue in 1970s England, it matters greatly to Karim and the other characters of the novel. The characters are constantly attempting to improve their position in society, because of which Susie Thomas has termed *The Buddha of Suburbia* “a novel of upward mobility” (74). Karim is conscious about his parents’ lower position in society –they belong to the lower middle class – and desires to leave the suburbs and ascend the social scale. Thanks to the producer Matthew Pyke, Karim is introduced in higher social circles. When he is involved with Eleanor, who belongs to the upper classes of society, he even decides to lose his accent for the sake of his “social rise” (TB 174): “At that moment I resolved to lose my accent: whatever it was, it would go. I would speak like her . . . I’d left my world; I had to, to get on” (178). Thirdly, Karim’s sexual identity is as hybrid and confusing as his ethnic background. He has sexual experiences with both sexes and nurtures romantic feelings for Charlie. Because of the opposition he encounters with regard to his sexual identity – especially by his father, on which I will come back later – Karim has trouble to reconcile with his bisexual orientation: “It was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as girls” (55). Karim considers himself “unusual”, deviant from social norms, which complicates his sense of self: “I never liked to think much about the whole thing in case I turned out to be a pervert and needed to have treatment, hormones, or electric shocks through my brain” (55). Class, religion, and sexual orientation are important in Karim’s identity construction for various reasons: as the main goal in life (class), as an insignificant matter (religion), and as a complication of his sense of self (sexual orientation). Together with Karim’s ethnic and cultural affiliations, they make up a complex and unstable hybrid identity.

2.1.3. REACHING ADULTHOOD

As illustrated by his shifting ethnic affiliations and his sexual confusion, a depressed Karim attempts throughout his adolescence to define his identity. Eventually, a temporary flight from England allows Karim to make peace with himself. In New York, his crisis reaches its summit, and Karim suffers a mental breakdown: “I was in a frenzy, kicking and scratching and screaming” (245). It is his high-school crush Charlie that takes Karim under his care. At Charlie’s apartment, Karim endures the last bits of his identity crisis. When he realises that he no longer loves Charlie, he finally sorts himself out: “. . . I realized I didn’t love Charlie any more. I didn’t care either for or about him. He didn’t interest me at all. I’d moved beyond him, *discovering myself through what I rejected*. He seemed merely foolish to me” (255; emphasis added). I agree with Thomas, who argues that “[o]nce Karim stops

hating himself, he falls out of love fast and completely” (79). Karim’s reconciliation with himself is effectively linked to the end of his love for Charlie, whom he has been envying and admiring throughout his adolescence. Karim finally comes to terms with his identity, and, consequently, returns to England. Back home, Karim still suffers “the remains of [his] unhappiness and depression” (TB 260), and searches peace of mind. Nevertheless, he has clearly reached a stage of maturity, which is illustrated by the closing lines of the novel: “I could think about the past and what I’d been through as I struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply . . . I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn’t always be that way” (284). The internal reflection on what he has experienced and the conclusion that everything will not exclusively be a “mess” anymore mark the end of Karim’s initiation process.

2.2. A SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANT IN MIDLIFE CRISIS: KEITH GORDON

2.2.1. *LOSING CONTROL*

With the character of Keith Gordon, Caryl Phillips represents a second generation immigrant at the start of the 21st century. Similarly to Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the forty-seven-year-old protagonist of *In the Falling Snow* (FS) is presented as struggling with his sense of self and his identity. This struggle is for the greater part caused by an alienation from his wife and child. Keith has been excluded from his family after an act of infidelity. He understands that he can only blame himself: “. . . through nobody’s fault but his own he now lives alone in a small flat, and his wife and son have every reason to be annoyed with him and every right to protect themselves emotionally” (7). The fact that Keith acknowledges Annabelle and Laurie’s right to distance themselves from him shows how he considers himself unworthy of their pity or understanding. His sense of self has been affected by his infidelity and subsequent divorce. Therefore, this episode can be considered the starting point for Keith to question his own identity. He is, for example, unable to understand which internal forces have driven him to confess his one-night stand to Annabelle: “. . . three years later he still questions himself as to why he felt the urge to put in jeopardy everything that they had worked so hard to build” (8). Later in the novel, Keith understands that his case is more than “the surprisingly common occurrence of male forty-something panic” (46), and that his cheating must have been caused by something more fundamental: “However, the fact that he actually confessed suggests to him that *a deeper malaise was being expressed* by this single act of infidelity . . .” (46; emphasis added). As Kasia Boddy notes in her review on *In the Falling Snow*, Keith’s midlife crisis “reveals itself as more fundamental alienation” (Boddy). Not only is Keith alienated from his family, but he also becomes increasingly alienated from himself. He endorses this negative tendency when “he catches a glimpse

of himself in the window of Mr. Crusty and is *relieved to note that he still recognizes the man who is reflected in the glass*. But he will have to be careful” (FS 131; emphasis added). With the words “he will have to be careful”, Keith understands that he needs to work on his personality in order to prevent a complete alienation from himself. Moreover, the fact that Annabelle has not allowed Keith to explain his mistake – “Annabelle’s unforgiving response would admit no conversation” (46) – has nurtured his confusion and has stimulated a negative self-image. He describes himself as “a bit more stand-offish and vigilant” (36) after the divorce, but tries to minimize the connection between his identity and his break from Annabelle by adding that “once you get your freedom back you want to protect it” (36). Nevertheless, it is clear that a budding struggle with Keith’s sense of self has led to his unfaithfulness, and that the following alienation from his family has exacerbated his identity crisis.

In the course of the story, Keith gradually loses his bearings. The exercise of self-control, however, has always been a fundamental characteristic of Keith’s personality. He is portrayed as “private to the point of being hermetically sealed” (11), not allowing any one to come too close for fear of “[appearing] anxious and weak” (90). His anxiety to lose control does not allow him to create and maintain deep social relationships. Even his ex-wife Annabelle – which he still loves deeply – is kept at a distance, for example in that he does not inform her about his father’s death. Another instance which clearly exemplifies his need of control takes place when Keith has a drink in his local pub, after having ended his affair with Yvette:

. . . he picks up his pint and tucks himself behind a circular wooden table in the furthest corner of the empty room. The upholstered bench is dirty . . . but from this vantage point he is able to monitor the door and observe everything that might occur in the pub. *In this sense, he is in control, which is precisely what Yvette accused him of needing to be.* (35; emphasis added)

Keith has broken up with Yvette to prevent “an intimacy that he was keen to avoid” (4). To avenge her broken heart, Yvette shares their flirty e-mail conversations with all their colleagues. Keith is expelled from work, and, accordingly, completely loses control over himself and the events in his life. In the past, his job had always provided the married Keith with “a sense of having reclaimed some of his independence” (34), and has thus continuously confirmed his identity – “[a]t work he is a boss” (74). Due to Yvette’s retaliation, this confirmation has been taken away. Moreover, without a job, Keith is deprived of a stable routine, and is “living without a daily structure” (61). He stays up all night, sleeps late, and starts developing an alcohol problem. Whereas, formerly, Keith’s job has affirmed his identity, its absence deeply affects Keith’s sense of self. He now has to find confirmation somewhere else. An example is the scene where Keith brings home the Polish Danuta, and shows her his CD collection. He admits that “[h]e wants her to be fascinated by the music, to ask him more questions, to

give him the opportunity *to share his knowledge with her*” (71; emphasis added). When Keith impulsively tries to kiss Danuta, she withdraws and decides to leave. The rejection leads to a period of stalking from the part of Keith. When he is caught peeping at Danuta’s apartment, he tries to reassure himself that “[h]e has done nothing wrong. He has broken no rules” (99). Yet, the opposite is being confirmed and it is clear that Keith has completely lost control of himself.

At two instances, Keith admits that he struggles with his identity. Firstly, Keith is faced with his problems when he leaves a shopping centre:

It is the middle of the day, and people are rushing around in their lunch hour trying to pick up a few groceries, or paying bills, or hurrying to the post office before returning to their offices. And then it strikes him again: he does not have an office to go back to. In effect, *he has no role . . . there really is no cogent purpose to his day or his life . . . he is drifting*. (131; emphasis added)

Keith comprehends that, by being expelled from work, he has become a useless figure. This realisation further complicates his sense of self, for he has “no role” in society anymore. Secondly, Annabelle is also informed of Keith’s identity problems when Keith condemns his own life:

I’m so bored with myself, and fed up with what’s become of my life. And maybe you’re right about the Yvette thing. Maybe I am behaving recklessly in order to get some kind of thrill because I’m just bored. I’m forever waking up in the morning and feeling that I’m stuck . . . I can’t quite work out how the hell I got stuck here. (206)

At this point, Keith is at the height of his personal troubles, unable to imagine a way out of the impasse in which he “got stuck”. It is only when he re-establishes contact with his father, Earl, that there is progression in the character of Keith, and that the latter takes his life back into his own hands (cf. chapter four).

2.2.2. KEITH AS A BLACK ENGLISHMAN

The most prominent aspect that makes up Keith’s identity is his race. The opening sentences of the novel already exemplify how Keith, as a son of two West Indian parents, defines himself by means of his skin colour: “He is walking in one of those leafy suburbs of London where the presence of *a man like him* still attracts curious half-glances” (3; emphasis added). Here, Keith hints both at his own

Blackness and at British prejudice against Black people. Moreover, the sentence not only shows how other British citizens regard Keith as ‘the Other’, but also how he defines himself by his ‘Otherness’. Other factors which betray the predominance of race in Keith’s identity construction are his job, his music preference, and his book project. Firstly, Keith is head of the “Race Equality unit”, recently merged with “Disability and Women’s affairs” (31). Before this position, Keith had already worked for the cause of Black people. Shortly after graduation, he had “accepted a job in the black community of St. Paul’s” in Bristol (32), with the ambition of establishing mutual understanding between the second generation immigrants and the rest of English society. In his own words, “he believed that he might be able to help people understand one another” (43). Keith’s race has thus clearly influenced his choice of work. Secondly, Keith has a “passion for Stevie Wonder, and for American soul music of the seventies in general” (11). A large collection of black musicians occurs throughout the novel. The jukebox playing “Bob Marley, Barry White, the Isley Brothers . . .” (35) in his local pub, and the CD of Wynton Marsalis in his CD-player (71) are only two of the abundant references to black music. Here, Keith may resemble Phillips himself, who has been helped by the music of “descendants of the African diaspora” to “come to terms with the issues of race and identity” (Ledent 7). Thirdly, and linked to his music preference, Keith vainly tries to write a “book about music” (FS 61), which translates itself into a book about black musicians and the history of soul music, reggae, and the like. Keith explains that his purpose is “to develop his thesis about how black cultural heritage is passed on from one generation to the next” (90). Keith links his thesis of intergenerational transmission to his own racial awareness, in that he limits his research to “black cultural heritage”. With the predominance given to race in his identity construction, the protagonist of *In the Falling Snow* opposes Phillips himself, who is “more concerned with ‘identity’ than with ‘race’. The latter is just one component in the former, along with religion, gender, nationality, class, etc” (qtd. in Turner). Unlike Phillips, Keith does not consider race “just one component”, but the main aspect in the formation of his identity.

Throughout the novel, Keith is extremely sensitive towards his skin colour; a sensitivity which is largely caused by memories of racist experiences in the past. For example, the one time that Keith visits his parents-in-law, he discusses with Annabelle’s father what Laurie should do about “the boy who had called him a ‘halfie’” and “had hit him” (27). When William – who has previously called his own daughter “a nigger-lover” (24) – inserts that “[p]eople can be very cruel, you do understand that, don’t you?” (29), Keith downplays his awareness of other people’s cruelty, by answering that he has “some understanding of how cruel people can be” (29). Since the conversation is about bullies, Keith’s response clearly implies that he had to endure racial harassment in the past. Another, very significant scene is the flashback to Keith’s early childhood, spent with his biological mother and her partner. Not only does Keith mention that “he learned that he had other names besides Keith, most commonly

‘chocolate drop’” (207), but he also describes how his stepfather “[promised] his mother that one day they would . . . start living like English people, until, that is, the morning when he discovered dogshit smeared all over the bottles of milk on the doorstep” (207). Already before the age of six, Keith has been made aware of what his race entails in a predominantly white society. In his twenties then, Keith decides to abandon his academic ambitions and chooses social work instead, because he “already understood that while he would be bashing the books in the university library, out there on the streets were youths who looked just like him who were being brutalised and beaten by Maggie Thatcher’s police” (38). Instances such as these have made Keith extremely aware of his race; an attitude which he has preserved in a society which has much evolved since Thatcher’s office. In the present, Keith exemplifies this sensitivity when he “pauses to let a young woman, who is wheeling a child in a pushchair pass by. He knows that he is imagining it, but he is sure that the young woman looked at him disdainfully” (55). Keith assumes that the disdainful look is provoked by his black skin. However, the verb “imagining” casts doubt on the probability of this claim and indicates that Keith is over-sensitive about race and other people’s perception of him as ‘the Other’. Later in the novel, Keith considers his perspectives after his resignation: “Without even looking at the jobs that are available he knows that with his experience and *complexion* . . . he will undoubtedly find it hard to land a job that doesn’t place him in the firing line of the press on race issues” (232; emphasis added). Keith is conscious that his race affects his professional life in English society. In short, Keith’s heightened sensitivity to his race in 21st century Britain is the result of racist experiences in the past.

Nonetheless, despite his race and his West Indian ancestry – on which I will elaborate later – Keith considers himself a true Englishman. He asserts his national identity a first time when he describes the situation of second generation immigrants in 1980s England: “His generation of kids, who were born in Britain and who had no memory of any kind of tropical life before England, were clearly trying hard to make a space for themselves in a not always welcoming country” (38). His argument that his generation is “born in Britain” and has “no memory of any kind of tropical life before England” is reminiscent of Vena Goldsworthy’s definition of Britishness, quoted in chapter one. Later in the novel, Keith has effectively found a space for himself in Britain. When he sees a group of language students leaving the language centre, he remarks that “[s]omebody should tell these foreigners that it is always raining in England” (86). He expresses a native opinion about foreigners and thus demarcates his national identity. This self-definition is repeated after his spying expedition, when Keith reflects on Danuta and her roommate Rolf, “both studying the language and learning to clean up after the natives” (100). He distances himself from the two foreigners, by considering himself part of “the natives”. He also imagines “what the young couple thinks of his country” (100). Here, the possessive pronoun “his” further establishes Keith’s national identity. In short, despite his

‘problematic’ race, Keith has successfully found his own place in Britain and considers himself an Englishman.

2.3. KARIM TO KEITH: ONE GENERATION IN DIFFERENT LIFE STAGES

The two second generation immigrant characters discussed above are represented as struggling with their identity construction in different phases of their lives, respectively at the height of adolescence in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and in the midst of a midlife crisis in *In the Falling Snow*. A comparison between the two characters highlights the ways in which Keith and Karim both differ from and resemble one another in different life stages. Several parallels between the characters can be discovered. Firstly, both Keith and Karim lack affiliations with the ethnic heritage passed down to them by their fathers. On the one hand, Karim tries to find a suiting stance towards his biracial origins. Through the contact with his father and the stories the latter tells him about his past in India, Karim has, to a certain extent, access to his Indian ancestry. Accordingly, he switches ethnic affiliations throughout his adolescence, but, eventually, understands that he cannot ignore the predominance of his English heritage in an English environment. On the other hand, despite the precariousness of his race, Keith asserts his Englishness throughout *In the Falling Snow*. Yet, because of his identity struggles, Keith wants to find out about his West Indian descent. This desire is made manifest by his plan to take his son to the Caribbean, and by his curiosity about photographs of his father and other immigrants; two important scenes on which I will come back later. Secondly, both characters display an awareness of class. As I have already analysed above, class is an important aspect in Karim’s identity construction, in that he willingly adapts parts of his identity in order to ascend the social scale. Keith, in his turn, shows the same awareness, especially when he asserts his own place in English society. For example, he remarks that “being dressed as he is only serves to mark him out as prime mugging material” (FS 13), from which it can be deduced that Keith’s clothing style reflects his belonging to the more successful classes of society. Moreover, Keith “wants to reassure [Danuta] that he earns more than enough to have a car. That he is a respectable middle-class professional man . . .” (75). Keith has risen from a humble background – his immigrant father was a workman and a cleaner – to the middle class. Hence, he defines part of his identity by means of his position in British society. Keith and Karim thus resemble one another in that they preserve a considerable place for class in their identity formation. Thirdly, Karim is not committed to the cause of Black people in Britain. He is so occupied with his personal problems, suspecting that Eleanor has an affair with Matthew Pyke, that he fails to attend a demonstration march organised by Jamila and her friends (TB 225-226). By contrast, in his twenties, Keith is engaged in “race relations” (FS 42), and has taken on the job as head of the Race Equality Unit. Yet, in his forties, Keith no longer sees the purpose of his commitment. He is glad

that his expulsion from work means “that he won’t have to write the *stupid policy report on trans-racial adoption*” (56-57; emphasis added), which he considers a “*supposedly ethical question*” (43; emphasis added). Similarly to Karim, Keith is too preoccupied with his own identity to be able to commit to a bigger cause.

Keith and Karim differ in several aspects as well, most remarkably in the extent to which their race receives a place in their identity formation. Keith constructs his identity predominantly by means of his race. Karim, by contrast, considers to a much lesser extent the possible implications of his skin colour in British society. A reason for this difference can be Karim’s mixed race, which make him, to a certain extent, less distinctive from other British citizens than Keith. The latter’s situation resembles Phillips’s description of his own status as a black person in Britain: “I was aware emotionally of the precariousness of being visibly the Other” (qtd. in Yelin 47). As the son of two black parents, Keith is more “visibly the Other” than Karim, which leads to a higher awareness of his race. Another difference is the set-up of their cultural identity. Karim, on the one hand, barely includes aspects belonging to Indian culture in the construction of his identity. Instead, many aspects belonging to British culture, among others music preference and clothing style, are applied to define himself. In Phillips’s novel, on the other hand, more attention is given to Keith’s ethnic than his cultural identity. The reader is only informed about Keith’s love for French wine and for black music. Moreover, the latter is clearly linked to his race. A third difference is the character’s place in society. As an adolescent, Karim actively follows the hypes in 1970s London and is depicted in the course of the story as being at the centre of British social life. The older Keith, by contrast, is set at a more marginal position, looking at British society, and, especially, British youth, with a detached eye: “Everyday now he witnesses packs of these youngsters . . . swearing and carrying on *with a sense of entitlement that is palpably absurd*” (FS 29; emphasis added). Other instances in the novel confirm this social alienation, which I will discuss more profoundly in my discussion on the intergenerational relationship between Keith and Laurie (cf. chapter six).

To sum up, the protagonists of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow* both resemble and differ from one another in the context of their identity construction. Both characters share similar stances to their ethnic heritage, a similar awareness to class, and a shared lack of commitment to the rights for Black people in Britain. However, the exact fulfilment of their identity differs. Keith is much more occupied with his race than Karim, who is more concerned with cultural affiliations and more actively involved in British society. The differences can be explained by, on the one hand, a greater visibility as a black person as opposed to a mixed race person, and, on the other hand, the difference in age leading to a different participation in society.

3. THE FAMILY UNIT IN *THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA* AND *IN THE FALLING SNOW*

Before turning my attention to the effects of intergenerational relationships, more particularly the father-son relationships, on the protagonists' identity construction, I will outline the family situation in both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow*. In sociological and psychological research, the influence of the family on one's identity construction in immigrant contexts has been frequently acknowledged⁷, and it is represented in literature by, among others, the Amirs and the Gordons in respectively *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow*. Both Kureishi and Phillips portray how an unstable family unit can disturb the members' sense of self and, in the case of the developing youth, affect identity formation. Characteristic is the poor family cohesion. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the decision of father Haroon to replace his wife and children by his mistress causes a complete breakdown of the family. Similarly, *In the Falling Snow* portrays two already disrupted families. On the one hand, Keith's one night stand with a colleague has destroyed his family, three years before the story's commencement. On the other hand, Keith had already experienced a family disruption in his childhood, as a result of his father's hospitalisation. Moreover, both in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow*, the destruction of the family unit is caused by the fathers, more particularly by their struggle with themselves. Haroon's midlife impulse to run off with Eva and completely change his identity overthrows the Amir family. In Phillips's novel, both Keith and his father Earl have also destroyed their families, respectively through infidelity and through mental problems. As a consequence, the identity construction of their children is affected. In this chapter, I will discuss how the first generation immigrant fathers give expression to their internal struggles. Then, I will turn my attention to the families of Karim and Keith, and analyse how the breakdown of these families affect the protagonists' sense of self. Finally, I will elaborate on an aspect which is characteristic for the Gordons and the Amirs, and which further complicates the identity construction of the protagonists, more particularly the lack or failure of communication between family members.

⁷ Karen K. Dion and Kenneth L. Dion, for example, contend that "family influences are an important contributing factor to identity development" (349). Emilia Lewandowska agrees, by stating that "[t]he influence of family home is a crucial factor that shapes individual's identity" (214). Colette Sabatier, in her examination of identity construction among second generation immigrants in France, indicates that "[p]arental child-rearing style and parental cultural socialization contribute to the identity and adaptation of immigrant youth . . ." (189), thereby also pointing to the influence of the immigrant parents on their children's identity.

3.1. THE FIRST GENERATION'S STRUGGLE

3.1.1. THE 'RETURN' OF THE INDIAN IMMIGRANT: HAROON AS 'BUDDHA'

At the beginning of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Haroon Amir is described by Karim as a plain but difficult man. He is a "Civil Service clerk" (7), in "a black polo-neck sweater, a black imitation-leather jacket and grey Marks and Spencer cords" (6), who "easily became sarcastic" (4) and "[saves] his sullenness and resentful grunting" (12) for his wife and children. Furthermore, Karim reckons that "[Haroon's] chest was the one area in which he'd been forward-thinking" (4), thereby indicating a lack of ambition. Nevertheless, Karim provides some admirable qualities as well, more particularly his father's looks, "Dad was also elegant and handsome, with delicate hands and manners" (4), and his popularity with women, "drawn by his innocence" (7). The ordinary Haroon disappears, however, when his mistress Eva introduces him into a new world and urges him to create a new persona. Haroon relishes in his role as "guru of Chislehurst" (25), and turns into an eccentric, sparkling personality: "he was life itself, vibrant, irreverent and laughing", dressed in "his best bespoke Burton's suit, a yellow waistcoat with a watch on a chain . . . and a tie in pink and blue . . ." (84). Haroon distances himself from the English identity he has assumed as an immigrant, and, as Bart Moore-Gilbert argues, "increasingly affirms his non-western roots" (132). Certainly, near the end of the novel, Haroon has returned to his origins with the following confession: "I have lived in the West most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian" (TB 263). Yousaf also argues that "Haroon frees himself of the identity that has been imposed upon him" (48). However, I do not fully agree with the view that it was not only his work, but also his family which has forced an identity upon Haroon (Yousaf 48). It is true that Ted and Jean have called their brother-in-law "Harry from the first time they'd met him" (TB 33), but the core of the family, more particularly his wife Margaret and his sons, are not depicted as imposing an identity upon Haroon. Therefore, I consider the adoption of a new identity as a rejection of the identity assumed in response to British society. Moreover, since Haroon consciously adopts a new identity in function of his role as 'Buddha', he does not completely return to his original Indian identity either. For example, he renounces Islam and converts to Buddhism. In addition, Haroon has been living in England for the greater part of his life, and, therefore, he cannot be considered a 'true' Indian anymore. In other words, "Haroon starts off as the mimic Englishman and, when this fails, he becomes a *mimic Indian*" (Thomas 66; emphasis added). Karim illustrates this mimicry by describing his father's manner of speech. "He was hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent. He'd spent years trying to be more of an Englishman . . . and now he was putting it back in spadeloads" (TB 21). In the past, Haroon has tried to assimilate into English society. Now, since he has to practice his accent, he can no longer be considered a genuine Indian.

Although Haroon's new identity is mainly based on his role as spiritual guide, as the one showing "the Way. The Path" (13), the change in identity is also due to an internal struggle. Haroon explicitly questions his identity in a conversation with his friend Anwar: "Look, Anwar, don't you ever feel you want to know yourself? That you are an enigma to yourself completely?" (28). His wife Margaret complains that Haroon "can't even sort himself out" (73). Karim also confirms his father's identity problems by pointing out Haroon's "desire for internal advancement" (28). The abandonment of his wife is one expression of this desire. Haroon's spirit is uplifted thanks to his love-affair and his vocation to spiritually help people. He preaches change, Eastern wisdom, and meditation. Nevertheless, at the close of the novel, Haroon is still struggling with himself. He claims that he has found the meaning of his life (266), yet, when talking about his relationship with Eva, he admits his confusion: "I've never felt like this before. What's happening to me?" (266). This last question betrays his ongoing search for himself. To sum up, like his son, Haroon is adapting his identity throughout the novel. This change affects the relationship with his son, and, consequently, his son's identity construction, a link on which I will elaborate in chapter four.

3.1.2. *A TROUBLED MIND: EARL VS ENGLISH SOCIETY*

Throughout *In the Falling Snow*, an image of the character Earl Gordon is evoked by means of Keith's comments and flashbacks. Keith's characterisation of his father resembles that of Haroon made by Karim. Yet, whereas Karim preserves some positive qualities for his father, Keith's portrayal is exclusively negative. Early in the novel, Keith already mentions that "for the greater part of his father's adult life the man had been either hospitalised or struggling in his mind" (49). He describes his father as "judgemental" (49) and adds that "it is exhausting to constantly negotiate the emotional mood swings of this unpredictable man and his demons" (49). Keith points to a very difficult character, severely disturbed by "demons". Earl is further characterised by means of Keith's flashbacks, in which Earl's aloof character and difficult behaviour are depicted. An example is the following flashback to Keith's childhood:

For two years, the three of them lived in this rented house, but there always seemed to be arguments between his father and Brenda . . . and their heated disputes frequently concluded with his father curled up in a corner and steadfastly refusing to listen to the pleadings of Brenda, or his son's childish entreaties that he should put aside his book and acknowledge their presence. Eventually, he learned to leave his father alone once he picked up a book . . .
(81)

This negative characterisation is confirmed when Keith visits his father in the North of England. Earl's reaction to Keith's visit is not very welcoming: "His father is clearly baffled to see his son standing before him but, frowning his brow, the bemused man points towards the door" (162). The first sentence spoken by Earl stresses his unfriendliness: "You can't call and tell me you're coming?" (162). Later, when Earl is in hospital after a seizure, Keith wonders how the man can be contented with himself or with his life:

Does the obstinate man not realise that after thirty years spent sweeping out lecture halls, and cleaning blackboards and emptying dustbins, his pitiful life has been reduced to drinking by himself in a depressing pub, or making the occasional trip to a community centre to play dominoes . . . ? (250)

At this point, the reader has the strong impression that Earl's "pitiful life" is only the result of the old man's difficult character. Yet, when Earl starts talking about his life, both Keith and the reader are shown the other side of the story.

Caryl Phillips, author of "the first 'second generation' black British novel to return to the experience of the so-called 'Windrush generation'" ("Caryl Phillips", contemporarywriters.com), once again portrays the immigrant experience in a hostile host country by means of the character Earl in *In the Falling Snow*. Earl's story is related in the last part of the novel, and can be considered an independent story. In his review of Phillips's ninth novel, Christopher Tayler calls Earl's narration "a monologue that stands up as a self-contained story" (Tayler). Earl not only informs Keith about his past in the West Indies, thereby outlining his personality before migration; he also relates his migration to Britain, a sad experience which has severely affected his identity. In the West Indies, Earl is a young man with the ambitions to become a lawyer. When he was younger, Earl failed to win a scholarship, and, consequently, had to work in a sugar factory. Nevertheless, his mother told him never to give up his professional dreams. Earl has to take care of his ill father, after his mother's death and his pregnant sister's wedding. However, when his father passes away, there is nothing left for Earl in the West Indies, and he decides to follow his best friend Ralph – who has left the island some months before – to England. Earl admits that "even before I get off the boat England deliver a big shock to my system . . . England punishing my mind and my body" (FS 252). The rest of his time spent in England will only further disturb Earl's mind. Firstly, Earl is quickly made aware that, whatever he does, "they don't care much for *the foreigner, and that is you, man, that is always you*" (253; emphasis added). West Indian immigrants – although holding a British passport in hand⁸ - are

⁸ The British Nationality Act 1948 considered every citizen living in the United Kingdom or in one of the colonies a British subject. As a British subject, immigrants from the Commonwealth did not need a visa to get into Britain. The Act applied until the 1960s, when the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 restricted migration into the country. For more information about the race politics in Britain, see Goulbourne.

considered inferior to other British citizens: “I feel everybody looking down on me” (293). Under the influence of this foreigner status, Earl’s identity changes: “What you must do is *play the stranger* because it make them feel better; play the part of the stranger and nod and smile . . .” (254; emphasis added). Earl thus adopts a submissive attitude in order to survive in Britain. Secondly, the fact that Earl’s dream to become a lawyer is never realised may have added to Earl’s struggle with himself. Thirdly, the most important factor affecting Earl is the omnipresent racism. Immigrants have to cope with, among others, bad working conditions, problems to find lodgings, and instances of “nigger hunting” (276). When his friend Ralph is beaten to death by three English boys, Earl starts hearing voices in his head and, consequently, suffers his first mental breakdown: “I just lean over and push the rice bowl on to the floor . . . everybody else in my head still talking, including Ralph, who is talking the loudest” (294). Earl has learned to surrender to the English environment, and agrees that “[t]he idea of England is fine. I can deal with the idea” (297). Nevertheless, reality has turned him into a broken man who desires, at the end of his life, to go home; a desire which is, as I have mentioned in chapter one, characteristic of first generation immigrants. After his long narrative, the West Indian immigrant passes away in a British hospital bed.

3.2. DISRUPTED FAMILIES AND THE IMPACT ON ONE’S SENSE OF SELF

In an interview with Yousaf, Kureishi mentions that *The Buddha of Suburbia* exemplifies the collapse of “the whole idea of family” in the 1970s (qtd. in Yousaf 13). Kureishi effectively relates how an already unstable family unit completely falls apart when the father gets involved with another woman. He shows how Karim’s life lacks stable foundations due to an unhealthy family situation, and how, after his father’s elopement, Karim “[wanders] among different houses and flats carrying [his] life-equipment in a big canvas bag” (TB 94). Moreover, Kureishi accurately depicts how the destruction of the family unit incites the identity crisis of his protagonist. Karim’s life as he has known it for years staggers when his father begins an adulterous relationship with the flamboyant Eva Kay. However, Karim repeatedly hints at an already unhappy family before Eva’s appearance. Karim “always wanted to be somewhere else” (5), and “often went to the park to sit in the piss-stinking shed and smoke with the other boys who’d escaped from home” (19). Furthermore, Karim frequently stays over at Jamila’s house, which functions as a surrogate family when he wants to avoid the tensions at home. He admits that “Jamila and her parents were like an alternative family” (52), where Karim finds shelter “when [his] own family had [him] thinking of running away” (52). Yet, it is especially the break between his parents which affects Karim’s personality. At the beginning of the story, Karim witnesses his father cheating. As a consequence, he adjusts his ideas about marriage: “I’ll be never getting married, OK?”

(18). His mother's passive reaction to her husband's behaviour also has an impact on how Karim wants to be in the future. Although he pities his mother, he blames her for not fighting back. Consequently, he determines he would never be like her, that he "would be strong [himself]" (19). Karim elaborates on this new attitude and develops "[his] own angry theories of love" (116), while observing Eva and Haroon's romance. He contends that "[s]urely love had to be something more generous than this high-spirited egotism-à-deux" (116). By calling the relationship an "egotism-à-deux", Karim betrays both anger and hurt feelings, because Haroon has not considered his son before running off with Eva. Karim's radical ideas about marriage and love on the one hand, and his upset emotions on the other hand, show how his parents' unhappy marriage and the consequent divorce influence his ideas about the future and his sense of self. In other words, the relationship between members of the same generation, that is, between Haroon and Margaret/Eva, has a considerable impact on the next generation's development.

In Phillips's novel, "the failure of conventional families" is also being portrayed (Ward 10). In his life, Keith has experienced two family breakdowns. Firstly, throughout his childhood, he has been raised alternatively by different adults. Keith spends the first six years of his life in his mother's presence, but, when Shirley dies of a long infection, Keith's stepfather hands over the little boy to the biological father and his wife Brenda. Earl and Keith live together for two years, until Earl is hospitalised for mental problems. Keith spends the next five years in the company of Brenda, a white Englishwoman whom he considers his surrogate mother. From Brenda, Keith learns the particularities of a black skin in English society and inherits the idea that he has to outperform his white peers:

There's people out there, Keith, who think they're better than you, but never mind what they say, they're not. However, I'm not having you giving them some reason to think they are. Keep your chin up, love, your clothes nice and tidy, and your language decent . . . Now get yourself off to school and mind you come back with As on that report card or don't you bother coming back at all. (FS 15)

Brenda's instructions continue to be of relevance to Keith in his forties, since he is still extremely sensitive to racial issues (cf. chapter two) and tries to pass on the values described above to his son (cf. chapter six). The intergenerational relationship between Keith and his beloved stepmother Brenda has thus deeply influenced the former's identity construction. When Keith is thirteen years old, Earl reclaims custody over his son, who from then on alternates between Earl's and Brenda's house. Keith describes Earl's return as follows: "The man who knocked on their door on his thirteenth birthday was *a stranger to him* . . . Unfortunately, the sudden appearance of the cold-looking man standing at the door . . . suddenly complicated his life." (83; emphasis added). Earl's extended stay in the mental

hospital has estranged him from his son, who acknowledges with the verb “complicated” that his father’s reappearance has turned his peaceful life upside down.

As an adult, Keith betrays the impact of his disrupted family on his sense of self. He reveals, for example, that “there were already too many secrets hanging over his life” (236). He aims at the unresolved question of his real mother’s identity and “the number of strange women who seemed to pass through the house” (178), which was, according to Keith, “the usual source of contention between himself and his father” (178). With regard to his biological mother Shirley, Keith explains that he could have asked Brenda about her, but that he “understood that this was a subject that he and his father would have to sort out between them” (179). Yet, at the age of forty-seven, the issue is still not sorted out: “I’ve been thinking about my mother a lot recently. Wondering if this is the grown-up son that she imagined” (206). This statement reveals that Keith is not satisfied with the person he has become and wonders if his mother –if she was still alive – would approve of his personality. The question is immediately followed by the confession that “he has no clear memories of the woman” (206), thereby inviting a link between this ignorance and a distorted identity. In short, the parental alienation experienced in Keith’s youth has negatively influenced the establishment of his identity, which reverberates in Keith’s midlife crisis.

The second family breakdown is caused by Keith himself – by his infidelity – and by Annabelle’s response that she “[doesn’t] deserve to have to put up with [his] pathetic midlife crisis” (7). Keith has not only been set aside by his wife, but also by his son, since Keith is “fully aware that Laurie seems somewhat indifferent to the idea of spending any time with his father” (7). A scene which perfectly illustrates the completely disrupted family unit can be found later in the novel, more particularly when Keith decides that he needs a break and prepares to visit his father. He intends to inform either Annabelle or Laurie, but quickly changes his mind, with the argument that he cannot “be certain that either of them will care”, since “[i]t’s just information, right?” (161). The fact that Keith does not inform his son about his temporary absence from London and that Laurie is not interested in his father’s whereabouts betray the extent to which the family members are alienated from one another. Before this fragment, Keith has already drawn a link between his disrupted family and his troubled identity. When Laurie has forgotten their meeting in the football stadium, a disappointed Keith relates his son’s absence to his own identity crisis:

. . . he was consumed by his feelings of disappointment and frustration that neither Annabelle nor his son appeared to think it necessary to let him know what was going on. How, he wondered, had he gone from being a husband and a father to this? Mr. Bloody Nobody. (147)

This reflection indicates that, similarly to his job, his role as “a husband and a father” had sustained Keith’s identity in the past. Without his family, Keith has become “Mr. Bloody Nobody”, which excellently illustrates how the disruption of the family has led to a negative sense of self.

3.3. COMMUNICATION ISSUES AND THE INFLUENCE ON THE NOVELS’ PROTAGONISTS

A remarkable factor which occurs in both novels and which has a considerable impact on the two protagonists is the lack of communication between family members. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, this feature is especially present when the Amir family is still balancing on the edge of destruction. When Haroon is angry, for example, he “sulked and didn’t speak” (19) for a whole week. Moreover, when Karim considers “the erosion in the foundations of [his] family” (87), he realises that “hearts were slowly breaking *while nothing was being said*” (87; emphasis added), and concludes that his parents, his brother, and him “were all isolated from each other” (87). He also recognises that the situation must be even more difficult for his younger brother, mainly because no one informs Allie about what is going on: “In some ways it was worse for little Allie, as he had no facts about anything. For him the house was filled with suffering . . . *But no one talked to him*” (87; emphasis added). Another significant passage shows how the lack of communication in the family has troubled Karim’s perception of normality. After the premiere of the theatrical performance in which Karim has a leading role, everyone has gathered in the foyer. Before he gets involved in any conversation, Karim observes the reunion of his parents. “Mum and Dad were talking to each other and smiling. It’s not what you expect of your parents” (228). The sight of his parents conversing casually counters what Karim deems normal, thereby illustrating how a disrupted family situation has affected Karim on a personal level.

In Phillips’s *In the Falling Snow*, “the problems of communication between generations appear to be central” as well (Ward 2). However, the conversations between the characters of this novel can be more accurately described as failed conversations. When urgent issues need to be addressed, the characters fail to discuss the matter. For example, when Keith is breaking up with Yvette, the latter is more upset than Keith had expected. Therefore, he quickly tries to postpone the conversation: “Listen, let’s just leave it. We can talk about it later, okay?” (FS 37). The fact that Keith has been waiting until his forties for information about his biological mother is another example. Moreover, every time Annabelle touches upon Keith’s problematic situation at work, her ex-husband brings up his son in the conversation: “When the bill arrived, they decided to have one more glass, which gave him the opportunity to re-route their conversation away from what Annabelle had taken to calling his ‘mess’ and back on to the subject of Laurie” (111). Keith frequently applies Laurie’s

problems as a strategy to hinder a confrontation with his own “mess”. However, at the moments when Keith actually wants to interfere in Laurie’s increasingly rebellious behaviour, Annabelle excludes him as well:

“Look, I can still get a minicab and meet you there. Or back at the house.” “Let’s just leave it for tonight. He seems okay.” “Okay? He’s totally out of order.” . . . “Let me talk to him.” “Look, I’m going now Keith. You can talk to him when you come over tomorrow . . .” (114; emphasis added).

When Annabelle ends their phone call, Keith feels rejected and betrays how much he wants his family back: “As long as he holds this pose there is still some communication between himself and Annabelle and their son. He just has to hold the pose” (114). Nevertheless, communication between Keith and his family is severely flawed, thereby stimulating Keith’s personal problems.

Both in Kureishi’s and Phillips’s work, the strained communication between the characters negatively affects their relationships with one another as well as their personal problems. In immigrant contexts, communication issues can be considered even more pertinent than in other dysfunctional families. Within immigrant families, communication is important to transmit ethnic or cultural heritage to the following generation, which has no straightforward access to their ancestry in their social environment. This transmission can facilitate the identity construction of immigrants’ children, who have to face the problematic collision between their parents’ ancestry – or one of the parents’ ancestry in case of interracial couples - and their current situation. Communication between immigrant parents and their children can thus help the second generation to better understand where their roots are from, and in this way perhaps reduce the struggle with identity. Since Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Keith in *In the Falling Snow* both experience a severe identity crisis and lack communicative interaction with other family members, especially their fathers, it can be argued that there is a causal link between these two aspects. The lack/failure of communication between Haroon and Karim, as well as between Earl and Keith, may have caused the relative ignorance of Karim’s and Keith’s, respectively, Indian and West Indian ethnic heritage, and, consequently, the near absence of these ethnicities in their identity formation. For Karim, the situation is extra complicated, since the lack of communication with his parents has hindered the negotiation of his biracial origins. In short, although communication issues are a pertinent characteristic of dysfunctional families in general, they can especially exacerbate the problems with ethnic and cultural identity construction in immigrant contexts.

4. INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Until now, I have discussed Karim's and Keith's problematic identity formation, and have paid attention to their fathers, who struggle themselves with their identities and thereby cause the breakdown of the family unit. Furthermore, I have shown how the protagonists' identity crisis is to a certain extent influenced by the disrupted family situation. Yet, both Karim's and Keith's identity construction and, especially, the struggle with their sense of self, are to a very high degree affected by the relationship with their fathers. This link between father and son is already present in the title of Kureishi's novel, since, although *The Buddha of Suburbia* is predominantly about Karim, it is his father to which the title refers. The same link is clearly present in Phillips's novel as well. Furthermore, the identity constructions of the two protagonists alter the relationships with their fathers. In what follows, I will discuss how Haroon and Earl influence the identity construction of, respectively, Karim and Keith. In addition, I will demonstrate how the changing identities of the protagonists in their turn affect the intergenerational relationships.

4.1. KARIM AND HAROON: "WE'RE GROWING UP TOGETHER, WE ARE" (22)

4.1.1. *THE BUDDHA'S INFLUENCE ON KARIM*

As mentioned above, the choices which Haroon makes in *The Buddha of Suburbia* influence his relationship with Karim, and, consequently, affect the latter's identity formation. With the sentence "We are growing up together" (22), Haroon involves Karim in the process of his changing identity and makes Karim the witness of all his subsequent actions and decisions. According to Karim, Haroon sees himself and his son as having converging identities: "It was as if [Dad] saw us as having one life between us. I was the second half, an extension of him . . ." (110). Karim also acts as Haroon's accomplice, since he agrees to "never mention tonight again" (18) when he confronts his father with his adultery. When Karim describes this scene, he adds that "[t]he happy fucker laughed and laughed . . . It brought me all the way down" (16). This remark implies a link between his father's behaviour and his own emotions. Moreover, when Karim wonders if he was "conceived like this . . . in the suburban night air, to the wailing of Christian curses from the mouth of a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist?" (16), he further establishes a link between his father and himself. Yet, it is only when he discusses Haroon's adultery with Jamila that Karim becomes conscious about his father's influence on his own person: "It was talking about it now for the first time that made me

realize how unhappy the whole thing was making me” (55). After this conversation, Karim repeatedly returns to this insight. Firstly, when a disappointed Haroon confronts Karim with his failed exams, the latter explicitly blames his father: “. . . I’m not in the right mood for studying. I’m too disturbed by all the stuff that’s happening. You leaving Mum and all. It’s a big deal. *It affects my life*” (110; emphasis added). Karim resolutely assigns his father as the source of his emotional disturbance. After the conflict, Karim feels “lower than [he]’d ever felt before” (110), thereby exemplifying how his mood is dependent on his father’s opinions. Secondly, when Karim meets the producer Michael Pyke, the latter invites Karim to talk about himself:

I was glad he was there; there were things it was necessary to say. So I told him things I’d never told anyone – how much I resented Dad for what he’d done to Mum, and how Mum had suffered, how painful the whole thing had been, though I was only now beginning to feel it. (163)

The realisation that the familial turmoil was painful on a personal level and that its consequences were only now pressing through show both how Karim is evolving as a person, and how deeply he is affected by Haroon’s elopement.

On a more specific level, Haroon influences his son with regard to his ethnic affiliations. For example, Karim is extremely embarrassed by Haroon’s incapacity to figure out the bus routes: “Dad had been in Britain since 1950 – over twenty years - . . . Yet still he stumbled around the place like an Indian just off the boat . . . I sweated with embarrassment when he halted strangers in the street to ask directions . . . ” (7). Since Karim is sometimes ashamed of his immigrant father, this embarrassment might be extended to his Indian roots, and perhaps lead to a rejection of them. Yet, Haroon is more obviously influential in the sense that he has himself rejected his Muslim heritage and tries to pass on this rejection to his son:

‘Why go out with these Muslims?’ he said once, when I brought a Pakistani friend of Jamila’s home with me. ‘Why not?’ I asked. ‘Too many problems,’ he said imperiously. ‘What problems?’ I asked . . . he shook his head as if to say there were so many problems he didn’t know where to begin. (73-74)

Because of Haroon’s attitude towards Muslims, Karim remains deprived of an important part of his ethnic lineage. As mentioned in chapter two, it is at Anwar’s funeral that Karim comes to the insight that he has been denying his Indian ancestry. There are two additional realisations. Firstly, Karim understands that his father has been, to a certain extent, responsible for the ignorance of his Indian roots: “Partly I blamed Dad for this. After all, like Anwar, for most of his life he’d never shown any interest in going back to India” (212). In addition, this comment shows that the notion of ‘return’ does

not apply in this novel written by a second generation immigrant author, not even to the first immigrant characters Haroon and Anwar. Karim adds that Haroon has not been a role model regarding the formation of his ethnic identity: “So if I wanted the additional personality bonus of an Indian past, I would have to create it” (213). Haroon has never informed his son about the specificities of his Indian descent, thereby depriving Karim of any form of alternative to an English ethnicity. Secondly, with the word “partly”, Karim indicates that Haroon’s influence is not absolute, and that he is himself also responsible for his own identity formation. I agree with Yousaf, for whom “Karim is also quick to acknowledge that the father presents his ethnicity as an element the individual may or may not choose to endorse” (49). Nevertheless, although Haroon is not totally responsible for his son’s ethnic identity, he has a considerable impact. When Karim wonders why his depression does not get him down, he once again links the characteristics which enable this endurance to his father: “Dad had always felt superior to the British . . . And he’d made me feel that we couldn’t allow ourselves the shame of failure in front of these people” (TB 250). The immigrant Haroon refuses to acknowledge defeat in front of the British. Karim takes over this attitude, even though his mixed race background complicates his opposition to “these people”. Every time Karim considers his ethnic identity, his father pops up, which clearly demonstrates the impact of his father on Karim’s identity construction.

Two other levels where the impact of Haroon on his son is manifest, are Karim’s sexual identity and his career perspectives. With regard to his sexual identity, Karim establishes a link to his father when he is having a relationship with Eleanor: “I remembered my father saying drunkenly . . . ‘We little Indians love plump white women with fleshy thighs.’ Perhaps I was living out his dreams as I embraced Eleanor’s flesh” (207). With the words “living out his dreams”, Karim shows how important it is for him, at that point in his life, to be appreciated by his father, who indeed approves of Karim’s relationship. Yet, more importantly, Karim’s confusion about his bisexual orientation is nurtured by Haroon’s aversion of homosexual tendencies. When Haroon catches Karim in Charlie’s bedroom, his “flaming eyes” (17) betray his rage. Back home, father and son get into a conflict:

‘What the hell were you doing?’ ‘Shut up!’ I said . . . ‘I saw you, Karim. My God, you’re a bloody pure shitter! A bum-banger! My own son – how did it transpire?’ He was disappointed in me. He jumped up and down in anguish as if he’d just heard the whole house had been burned to the ground. (18)

Haroon’s anger, his scared reaction, as well as the abusive terms make obvious that he opposes to his son’s sexual orientation. Karim recognises his father’s disappointment and anxiety, to which he returns later in the novel. He repeats that his father was “keen for me to go out with anyone, as long as they were not boys or Indians” (73) and that he “was so terrified I might turn out to be gay that he could never bring himself to mention the matter” (174). Yet, Karim also blames his father for his

sexual confusion: “My father, the great sage . . . had never spoken to me about sex. When, to test his liberalism, I demanded he tell me the facts of life . . . he murmured only, ‘You can always tell when a woman is ready for sex. Oh yes. Her ears get hot’” (32). Karim cannot turn to Haroon for proper advice regarding this matter, because of which he remains confused.

With regard to his career perspectives, Karim is a failure to his father. In the beginning of the novel, Haroon reveals his high expectations about his son’s professional life: “He’ll go to university, oh yes. He’ll be a leading doctor in London. My father was a doctor. Medicine is in our whole family” (7). The fact that Karim regards himself as a failure and that he characterizes himself only in negative terms may certainly be influenced by his inability to fulfil his father’s expectations. When Karim decides to drop out of college, he is aware that this decision will deeply disappoint his father:

I didn’t want to be educated . . . Dad was still convinced I was trying to be something – a lawyer, I told him recently, because even he knew that that doctor stuff was a wind-up. But I knew there’d have to come a time when I broke the news to him that the education system and I had split up. *It would break his immigrant heart, too.* (94; emphasis added)

Here, Karim radically opposes his father’s norms and ideals, by choosing to follow the “spirit of the age . . . general drift and idleness” (94). Karim aligns himself with the norms dominant in British culture. The choice which Karim makes will not only act upon his further identity construction, but also upon the relationship with his father.

4.1.2. A FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP COMPLICATED BY IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Throughout *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim goes through a serious identity crisis to arrive at a stage of maturity. This personal development contributes to an evolution in the relationship with his father. As discussed in chapter three, Karim initially portrays his father in ambiguous terms. He admires Haroon on particular levels, such as his intercourse with women and his elegance compared to English men. At the same time, he dislikes his father’s clumsy behaviour in public and his difficult behaviour at home. Throughout the novel, Karim admires his father less and less, which points to a progress in his identity formation. During one of Haroon’s enlightened speeches, for example, Karim openly opposes his father: “This was enough for me. I interrupted. ‘D’you ever think how boring all this stuff is?’ . . . ‘It’s all vague and meaningless, Dad. Hot air, you know’” (89-90). Whereas previously, Haroon’s wisdoms had a soothing effect on Karim – making him feel as if he “were composed of air and light” (36) – he now understands it is mostly “hot air”. He adds that he cannot understand “how [people can] just talk because they like the sound of their own voices and never think of the people

around them” (90), thereby accusing his father of not considering his son’s well-being. Later on in the novel, Karim’s decision to play Mowgli in an adaptation of Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* provokes an intense reaction from the part of Haroon. “Bloody half-cocked business . . . That bloody fucker Mr Kipling pretending to whity he knew something about India! And an awful performance by my boy looking like a Black and White Minstrel!” (157). Haroon disapproves that Karim has sold his ethnic roots. By contrast, at the time when Karim agreed to the acting job, he considered it more important to be respected as a person than to stay true to part of his ethnic heritage: “I was just perfect. I’d done it. I’d got a job” (143). Although Karim feels increasingly uncomfortable with the stereotypical character he has to assume, and opposes firmly to both the brown make-up he has to wear and the ‘authentic’ accent he has to adopt (146-148), the fact that he perseveres in performing this “identity thrust upon him” (Yousaf 48) disturbs the relationship with his father.

After this play, Karim gets involved in another theatrical production and commences a romantic relationship with Eleanor. The two events stimulate him to reflect on his identity and adapt his personality, aided by the fact that he is now distanced from his father for extended periods of time. The progress in the establishment of his identity contributes to a mental distance from his father as well. When he runs into Haroon again, Karim admits he has “also begun to see Dad not as [his] father but as a separate person with characteristics that were contingent. *He was part of the world now, not the source of it*; in one way, to [Karim’s] distress, he was just another individual” (193; emphasis added). Karim continues: “Women had always looked after him, and he’d exploited them. I despised him for it now. I began to think that the admiration I’d had for him as a kid was baseless” (194). What he used to admire in his father has now become a source of contempt. Karim acknowledges that he “no longer wanted to be like him” (194). With the words “I was angry. He’d let me down in some way” (194), Karim reverses the roles and is now disappointed in his father. The encounter ends in a conflict:

‘. . . Tell them you want the lead part or nothing. You can’t climb down – you’ve already climbed up as a leading Mowgli actor in the theatre! You are the product of my number-one seed, aren’t you?’ I imitated him. ‘Number-one seed, number-one seed.’ Then I said, ‘Why don’t you stop talking so much fucking crap, you wanker.’ And went out. (194)

Karim disapproves of his father’s hypocrisy – Haroon suddenly approves of Karim’s impersonation of Mowgli – and of his haughtiness. Kaleta’s observation that “Haroon is everything Karim rejects about growing up” (69) is especially accurate at this stage of the novel, during which Karim increasingly opposes his father’s “ignorance of the world and plain arrogance” (TB 212).

In the course of the novel, Karim mentions several times that his father is not there to provide a helping hand. Although the Buddha has made it his life work to help people find their way to the

spiritual path, he does not help his son in the struggle with his sense of self. Karim feels rejected and neglected by his father. He understands that “[his] father’s too busy with the woman he ran off with . . . to think about [him] too much” (97). With this behaviour, Haroon exemplifies Mali A. Mann’s observation that “[t]he immigrant parents struggling with their own sense of identity formation are not emotionally available for their teenaged children to offer them the assistance they need to deal with and master their anxiety” (144). The identity struggle of the immigrant parent thus negatively influences the identity construction of his adolescent child. Haroon is never really involved, and leaves Karim to figure himself out alone. Accordingly, when Karim’s identity struggle reaches its final stage, he understands that Haroon has let him down. He returns from New York as a grown-up man, and is shocked to see his father in a neck brace: “I’d become the powerful one; I couldn’t fight him – *and I wanted to fight him* – without destroying him in one blow. *It was a saddening disappointment*” (TB 261; emphasis added). This fragment betrays two attitudes of Karim towards his father. Firstly, he wants to fight his father for all the problems he has gone through alone, and which his father has helped create. Secondly, it is a “saddening disappointment” for Karim to realise that he has lost all admiration for Haroon. Once again, Karim interrupts the conversation and leaves Haroon by himself. When Haroon announces to his son, whose personal problems he has been neglecting for years, that helping other people is “the meaning of [his] life” (266), Karim decides to leave: “I put my jacket on and left him. He watched me walk down the street; I was sure he was still talking to me as I went” (266). The last sentence shows that Karim is no longer influenced by Haroon’s words, but that he has moved beyond his father.

With regard to the novel’s ending, I strongly disagree with Kaleta’s conclusion that *The Buddha of Suburbia* “suggests a . . . satisfying bonding of father and son” (185). Certainly, Karim has realised, as Kaleta argues, “that his father is like him, only another man” (185). In addition, he shows some compassion – in the form of surprise - when he understands that Haroon only at this point “realized the decision to leave [Margaret] was irrevocable” (TB 281). Nonetheless, the conflict that precedes the novel’s ending proves that father and son are remote from one another. When Karim announces that he has landed a part in a soap opera, “Top pay. Top job. Top person” (280), his father accuses him of mocking and lying. Karim is upset by this accusation: “I flushed with anger and humiliation. No, no, no, I wanted to shout. We’re misunderstanding each other again!” (280). The misunderstanding between the two characters prevents a “satisfying bonding” (Kaleta 185). Yet, Karim’s humiliated and angry reaction points to a never-ending influence from father to son: “Maybe you never stop feeling like an eight-year-old in front of your parents. You resolve to be your mature self . . . and to see your parents as equals, but within five minutes your intentions are blown to hell, and you’re babbling and screaming in rage like an angry child” (TB 280). Although Karim is no

longer influenced his father with regard to his identity construction, he has to admit that Haroon will always have a considerable impact on his emotions.

4.2. KEITH AND EARL: ALIENATION

4.2.1. EARL'S DIFFICULT PERSONALITY AFFECTING KEITH'S SENSE OF SELF

In *In the Falling Snow*, the intergenerational relationship between the first generation immigrant Earl and his son Keith is marked by an enormous distance, which has contributed to Keith's problems with his own personality. Until the age of thirteen, Keith spends only two years in his father's company. During those years, Keith and Earl have difficulties to build up a strong father-son relationship, mainly because of Earl's aloofness and mental problems. When "the police [has] come and taken his father away" (82), Keith visits his father only once. Unable to understand "what the man [is] staring at" (82), eight-year-old Keith is quickly overwhelmed by the atmosphere and tells Brenda "that he [doesn't] want to visit again, for *this silent man [doesn't] know who he [is]*" (83; emphasis added). In other words, the unwillingness of Earl to acknowledge his son's presence in the mental hospital has led Keith to the conclusion that Earl has rejected his son. Hence, Earl's hospitalisation has annulled any possible bond with Keith. In the following years, the combination of an absent father and a white stepmother results in a heightened awareness of race from the part of Keith. It can be argued that Earl's absence may have stimulated the process of 'Othering' which has been initiated by Brenda (cf. chapter three), for Earl is not present to balance Brenda's ideas or to act as a Black role model for Keith. When Earl returns from hospital, the relationship remains distant: "Father and son did attempt to maintain some kind of cordial relationship with each other, but as he grew older they mainly strove to keep out of each other's way" (178-179). This last sentence clearly exemplifies the great distance between father and son, completely estranged from one another. Because of this great distance, Keith is – at the age of forty-seven – still struggling with certain questions:

He wants to ask his father about Brenda, and why he still can't accept that she did what she thought was best for both of them [hospitalising Earl]. He also wants to ask his father about the women who seemed to drift in and out of his life during the few years he spent in his father's house before university. (173-174)

In the midst of his midlife crisis, Keith returns to these questions, thereby indicating that the obscurities of his past have haunted him until the present day, complicating his sense of self and his identity construction.

An aspect which has deeply influenced Keith's identity construction is his ignorance of his father's past. Due to the distant relationship with his father, Keith has never been informed about Earl's life in the West Indies, nor about his life in England. Therefore, Keith has no knowledge of his ethnic background, nor of the cause of his father's difficult personality. Two instances in the novel betray this ignorance. Firstly, when Keith visits his father, he finds a cardboard box in his old bedroom. "The box is full of photographs, but they are mainly black and white shots of people that he doesn't recognise . . . although in every photograph his father and his friends appear to be cold, they also seem surprisingly content" (165). Keith has found pictures of his father, taken shortly after his arrival in England. The fact that both his father and his friends "appear to be cold" points to the fact that Earl's friends are also immigrants, most probably from the West Indies. Furthermore, Keith "doesn't recognise" the other people in the photographs, which underlines his unfamiliarity with his father's past. For Keith, the pictures may be "a legitimate way to encourage his father to talk about the past" (165). Keith believes that information about his father's time in the West Indies and in England might help to better understand how his father has evolved since his arrival in Britain. In other words, his father's past can enlighten Keith about the difficult man himself. Moreover, since the pictures depict both Earl and his immigrant friends, Keith may also have the desire to be informed about his West Indian roots. Secondly, a very significant scene takes place when Keith visits his parental house after his father's heart attack. He discovers that Earl has also been going through the pictures in the cardboard box. The sight of the pictures "scattered on the tabletop like jettisoned invitation cards to the past" (265) leads Keith to a very important understanding: "Just what, if any, connection do these people have to his own life, let alone that of Annabelle and Laurie? His father's silence has meant that his son has never been able to properly explain himself to anybody" (266). Keith questions the importance of his father's past for his own life. Yet, he immediately relates his father's silence about his past to his own identity construction, acknowledging that, because of his ignorance, Keith has not been able to "explain himself to anybody", including to himself. In this fragment, Keith resembles Caryl Phillips, for whom "history is the best way of knowing where you have come from, and hence of knowing where you are going to" (Ledent 2). Keith wants to find out about his father's past and, by extension, about his West Indian roots, in order to figure out himself and to solve his midlife crisis. In short, due to Earl's character and the rigid relationship between father and son, Keith has been deprived of important background knowledge, and has, therefore, never succeeded to establish a satisfying identity.

Keith has never mentioned the discovery of the cardboard box to his father, believing "that his father would [never] bother to . . . deliberately re-engage with his past" (187), and that any attempt to "[provoke] a response" (166) by means of the photographs would be in vain. Yet, the last part of the novel proves Keith wrong. Earl suffers a heart attack after going through the pictures of his past, and,

consequently, confides in his son. He informs him about his whole past, thereby solving Keith's problem that "there [remained] a lot of questions that he should ask his father" (185). Earl talks about his time in the West Indies and his struggle in England, and explains the reason why he has never been able to bond with Keith:

I lose my best friend, and then I get fooled off by a woman, and then I find myself living with an English girl, *but at least I have you. But I'm not ready for this.* It's not you that I don't want, son. I just don't want this life, because England already hurt me enough as it is. It seem like every time I think I discover some peace of mind then something else come along to trouble my head. *But it's not you that I don't want, it's this damn life.* (297; emphasis added)

This passage is very significant in three ways. Firstly, with the words "but at least I have you", Earl demonstrates tenderness for his son, thereby confirming Uncle Baron's – one of Earl's immigrant friends – claims that Earl "likes [Keith's] company" and that he "is always boasting off about [him]" (184). Secondly, the fragment explains why Earl has failed to take up his father role, more particularly because he was not ready for it, not yet having found his own "peace of mind". Thirdly, Earl's confession beautifully captures how a father's struggle with identity, caused by "this damn life", affects the father-son relationship, which in its turn affects the identity construction of the son.

Earl's confession is followed by a change in Keith's personality. Shortly after his father's death, Keith recalls a rare father-son moment from his childhood. Earl took the thirteen-year-old Keith to see an animated movie in the cinema. On their way back, it was snowing, and Keith remembers that "his father offered him his hand and even though he felt too old for this he took it" (299). He describes the moment as follows:

. . . as the flakes continued to fall on their bare heads he could feel his hand tight and safe in his father's hand. He looked behind him and saw two sets of footprints where they had walked, a large pair and his own smaller ones . . . he tugged his father's hand. His father looked down at him and smiled. He pointed to the sky. "Look at all the snow!" His father continued to smile. (299)

As Abigail Ward notes, "[t]his passage depicts a rare moment of easiness between father and son" (6). Moreover, it is a moment of hope for a strong bond between Earl and Keith, and for the latter having a father figure to look up to and to follow in his footsteps. Nonetheless, when Earl refuses to enter Brenda's house, the moment has passed and Keith remembers how "his father left behind a single set of footprints, and he [remembers] lingering by the doorstep and watching closely as the falling snow steadily erased all the evidence of his father's presence" (FS 300). I agree with Ward, for whom "the snow implies the transitory nature of their contentment, where the gap between father and son is

temporarily narrowed, but once more augments as Earl walks away from his son” (6). The image of his father’s trace being erased by the snow can be considered a metaphor for the absent father figure in Keith’s life. Moreover, the scene can be linked to Earl’s story, in that, with Earl having confided in his son, an opportunity for both characters to bond has been created, but is immediately annulled by Earl’s death. Hence, Keith is angry when the nurse informs him that his father “just slipped away in his sleep” (FS 300). He utters his disbelief as follows: “So that was it? His father had ‘slipped away in his sleep’? Slipped away? . . . That was all she had to say? That was her explanation?” (301). The snow scene depicted on the previous page explains Keith’s frustration, in that, once again, his father disappears after an intimate moment. The knowledge of having lost his father makes Keith feel “exposed and vulnerable. Small. That’s it. Small” (304). This feeling illustrates how the relationship with his father has once again had an impact on how Keith feels about himself. Keith softens both towards his father, exemplified by the memory above, and towards himself, because he now allows himself to surrender to his vulnerability.

4.2.2. RESUMING CONTACT

In the course of *In the Falling Snow*, several scenes illustrate how Keith’s identity affects the relationship with his father. For example, there are two instances in which Earl openly sneers at his son, the Englishman. Firstly, Earl abruptly ends an awkward conversation in the park with the question “Boy, you’re not feeling the cold? You’re *like a true Englishman* able to sit out here without a hat or scarf and acting like the weather ain’t bothering you at all” (174; emphasis added). Earl is oblivious to the fact that Keith is by birth a true Englishman and that his son also considers himself as such. In addition, the weather actually doesn’t bother Keith, since he has never experienced another, warmer climate. Earl’s incapacity to see or understand the discrepancy between him and his son stimulates the gap between the two men. Secondly, in the hospital, a grumpy Earl scorns English tea and, thereby, mocks his son:

“You see what I’ve turned into? A bloody Englishman sharing a cup of tea and a biscuit with you.” “Nothing wrong with a cup of tea.” “So, I have a son who thinks that there’s nothing wrong with an English cup of tea.” (249).

Here, the different cultural affiliations of father and son are symbolized by English tea. With the adjective “bloody”, Earl distances himself from English people. By extension, he disapproves of his English son “who thinks there’s nothing wrong with an English cup of tea”. In addition, the question “You see what I’ve turned into?” shows that Earl dislikes the man he has become under the pressures

of English society. The scene is reminiscent of a remark made by Phillips in his essay collection *A New World Order* as an afterthought to a memory of a conversation with his immigrant father: “In a sense, Britain had come between them” (244). Similarly, England has created a gap between Earl and his son Keith, because the immigrant father opposes to the Englishness of his son’s identity.

Keith’s midlife crisis incites him to revisit his past, both mentally through flashbacks, and literally through a visit to his father’s house. Keith admits that he has been avoiding his father for years. For example, when the graduated Keith and Annabelle were on the look-out for jobs, Keith’s “only restriction was that he didn’t see any reason to go north and back in the direction of his father” (43). By trying to keep a geographical distance, Keith betrays an emotional distance from his father. Before, when the young Keith decides to introduce Annabelle to Earl, he admits that he has to “re-introduce himself to his father after many years of estrangement” (120). A last example is the fact that, in the story, Keith has not seen his father in two years and that, during the last visit, “[t]he greeting back then had been equally unenthusiastic” (163). Yet, when Keith experiences identity struggles, he resumes contact with his father. Initially, a short time in the company of his father makes Keith reconsider this impulse:

. . . perhaps it was not such a good idea to leave London and come up north. After all, they passed the last hour or so in the pub in almost total silence, which pretty much summed up the nature of their relationship since he left to go to Bristol University as an eighteen-year-old. (172).

This fragment both typifies the nature of the father-son relationship, and shows that Keith temporarily regrets the visit to his father. Nonetheless, Keith indicates that his trip to the north has a purpose: “Look Dad, I want to talk to you” (173). By talking, Keith wants to figure out the unresolved questions with which he still struggles, in the hope to better understand his father and, consequently, sort himself out. In short, thanks to Keith’s problematic identity construction in his forties, attempts are made to revive the relationship with his father.

5. FEMALE AND NON-IMMIGRANT PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

In this chapter, I would like to turn my attention to two other characters occurring in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, more particularly Jamila, the daughter of two Indian parents, and Charlie Kay, whose parents are English. Although the characters of Karim and Keith as well as their relationships with their father have already shown the diversity involved in processes of identity formation and intergenerational dynamics, an analysis of Jamila and Charlie will further counter a too restricted view on the link between identity construction and intergenerational relationships in immigrant contexts. The case of Jamila both provides a female perspective and exemplifies the heterogeneity of this dissertation's subject. The character Charlie is included to show that dysfunctional families and problems with identity construction are not exclusive to immigrant contexts. First, I will discuss Jamila's strong identity, which is complicated by her arranged marriage. Secondly, I will turn my attention to Charlie, and show how the identity formation of this English boy is even more problematic and unstable than that of Karim.

5.1. A FEMINIST ACTIVIST IN AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE: JAMILA VS ANWAR

With the character of Jamila, Kureishi provides a counterbalance to Karim, more particularly in the sense that she differs greatly from him in her identity construction. A first introduction by Karim immediately hints at a strong, emancipated woman: "She was forceful and enthusiastic, Jamila. She always seemed to be leaning forward, arguing, persuading" (51). For Karim, Jamila only possesses admirable characteristics: "Jamila was the strongest-willed person I'd met" (53), "She was so powerful, Jamila, so in control and certain about what to do about everything" (55), and ". . . there was in her a great depth of will, of delight in the world, and much energy for love" (216). Unlike Karim, Jamila does not experience internal struggles with regard to her identity construction. For example, she is very resolute regarding her ethnic affiliations, which already becomes apparent when Karim describes "the highest-class education" Jamila had enjoyed "at the hands of Miss Cutmore" (52-53). When Miss Cutmore abandons her disciple, Jamila's reaction betrays a strong inclination towards the ethnicity of her Indian parents. She "started to hate Miss Cutmore for forgetting that *she was Indian*. Jamila thought Miss Cutmore really wanted to eradicate everything that was foreign in her" (53; emphasis added). Karim shows that Jamila aligns herself with her parents' ancestry, but preserves some reservations, for example that "[f]amilies aren't sacred, *especially to Indian men*" (55; emphasis

added). After her father's death, Jamila's decision to live in a commune leads Karim to the following conclusion: ". . . she went forward, an Indian woman, to live a useful life in white England" (216). As "an Indian woman", Jamila is diametrically opposed to other English citizens, to "white England". Although I do not contradict Susie Thomas's observation that Jamila is "not in any way a separatist" (72), I think it is too cautious to say that Jamila "does not want to ditch her ethnic identity altogether" (Thomas 72). On the contrary, Jamila consciously chooses to embrace the particularities of her second generation status and acknowledges her Indian descent as part of her overall identity.

Thanks to the firmness of her ethnic affiliations and her feminist and activist attitude – her idols are, among others, "Angela Davis, Baldwin, Malcolm X . . . Aretha and the other mamas" (95) – Jamila is very committed to the cause of British minority groups. Already in her adolescent years, "[s]he was preparing for the guerrilla war she knew would be necessary when the whites finally turned on the blacks and Asians . . ." (56). Later in the novel, Jamila's reaction to Karim's performance as Mowgli again betrays her commitment. She condemns Karim's lack of morality and opposes firmly to the play:

But no doubt about it, the play is completely neo-fascist . . . And it was disgusting, the accent and the shit you had smeared over you. You were just pandering to prejudices . . . And clichés about Indians. And the accent – my God, how could you do it? . . . Actually, you've got no morality, have you? (157)

Unlike Karim, Jamila is profoundly aware of how she, as a second generation immigrant, as well as her immigrant parents are regarded in British society. Therefore, as an adult woman, she starts working "at a Black Women's Centre nearby, where she was researching into racial attacks on women" (182). Her work neatly combines her feminism with her activist attitude. Jamila also participates in demonstrations for the rights of Black people in England: "Yes; these attacks were happening all the time . . . The National Front were parading through a nearby Asian district . . . We couldn't stop it: we could only march and make our voices heard" (225). Here, Jamila differs remarkably from Karim, in that she is confident enough to speak up for the rights of British minority groups. In brief, Jamila represents a second generation character which is not disturbed by her particular position in English society. She is fully aware of who she is and what she wants to achieve in life, and "sees herself as engaged in a struggle for social justice" (Moore-Gilbert 133). Her confidence in her identity is what Karim is looking for throughout the story.

Nevertheless, despite her own determination, the cultivation of Jamila's identity is drastically thwarted by her father's interference. In the past, Anwar has left Jamila to her own devices:

. . . mainly because of Anwar's indifference, Jamila had got away with things some of her white counterparts wouldn't dream of. There had been years of smoking, drinking, sexual intercourse and dances, helped by there being a fire escape outside her bedroom . . . (64).

Anwar's indifference to his daughter gave free way to adolescent experimentation, allowing Jamila to establish her identity at liberty. Yet, when Jamila enthusiastically starts training for "the guerrilla war" (56) against white suppression, Anwar intervenes:

Anwar didn't like these training sessions of hers . . . Sometimes she'd be running through Deptford and there . . . would be Baby Face watching her, turning away in disgust when she blew Daddy a kiss. Soon after Daddy's hairy nose had been blown a kiss that didn't reach its destination . . . Anwar had secretly decided it was time Jamila got married. (57)

This fragment is highly significant in two ways. Firstly, it demarcates the starting point of Anwar's involvement and its immense consequences for Jamila. Anwar's decision to marry off his daughter drastically changes her life; all subsequent turns in her story can be related to this point. Secondly, the words "turning away in disgust" and especially "a kiss that didn't reach its destination" clearly illustrate Anwar's stance towards his daughter. It is a first but important indication of an unhealthy father-daughter relationship, marked by mutual incomprehension and contempt. Evidently, "with Jamila's temper and Angela Davis' beliefs, Jamila wasn't too pleased" with her father's decision (57). Anwar's attempt to persuade his daughter by abusing her mother is immediately suppressed by Jamila's threat to "cut off his hair with a carving knife if he did it again" (58). However, Anwar turns to other means of manipulation, reasoning that "[i]f Ghandi could shove out the English from India by not eating, I can get my family to obey me by exactly the same" (60). With this statement, Anwar returns to his Indian roots to support his hunger strike. Yousaf correctly shows that Anwar "represents himself as having a 'fixed identity' that originates in his 'motherland'" (44). Moore-Gilbert confirms this view with the observation that Anwar "increasingly embraces a damagingly rigid and exclusionary conception of his 'original' identity" (134). By embracing an essentialist identity, Anwar complicates Jamila's life, and, by extension, her identity construction.

Eventually, Jamila yields to the demands of her extremist father and marries Changez. Yet, even within her arranged marriage, Jamila's independence and emancipation find a way to reveal themselves. Karim already understands this the moment Jamila agrees to the marriage:

Marrying Changez would be, in her mind, a rebellion against rebellion, creative novelty in itself. Everything in her life would be disrupted, experimented with. She claimed to be doing it only for Jeeta, but there was real, wilful contrariness in it, I suspected. (82)

With the words “Everything in her life would be disrupted, experimented with,” Karim indicates how profoundly Anwar’s interference will affect Jamila’s life. The words “rebellion against rebellion, creative novelty in itself”, however, hint at Jamila’s refusal to let an arranged marriage confine her life and at her determination to pursue her own ambitions. I agree with Yousaf, who argues that Jamila has accepted the marriage “in the knowledge that the marriage will operate on her terms” (44). Consequently, the division of power between the newlyweds is quickly established. Changez is not only banned from bed, but Jamila also manages to completely reverse the roles traditionally assigned to husband and wife. When Jamila is out to work, “Changez was dusting, wearing Jamila’s pink silk dressing-gown” (TB 182). When Changez complains to Karim, the latter simply reminds him of his wife’s independence: “. . . she’s never been anyone’s and never will be anyone’s, you know. She’s her own person” (135). When Changez kills Anwar by accident, Jamila seizes the opportunity to move into a communal house. Her husband pleads to accompany her, conceding to the fact that they “won’t be husband and wife” (216). Changez has completely subjected to his wife’s will. He takes care of another man’s baby, and submissively concedes to Jamila’s lesbian relationship. The pursuit of her desires together with Changez’ obedience exemplify how the arranged marriage has driven Jamila’s independence and emancipation to an extreme. At the end of the novel, Karim notices that Jamila’s identity has changed: “. . . there was something quicker, lighter and less serious in her now; she seemed to laugh more easily” (273). Ultimately, Anwar’s hunger strike to lure his daughter into a marriage has liberated Jamila, in that the marriage has stimulated her to fully cultivate her feminist and combatant identity.

5.2. A NON-IMMIGRANT PERSPECTIVE: CHARLIE HERO

The character of Charlie Kay is also interesting in this discussion about intergenerational relationships and identity constructions, in that this character passes through an identity struggle similar to the one of Karim, but in a non-immigrant context. Despite the fact that Charlie’s case lacks the particularities of a second generation adolescent, there are abundant indications that Charlie’s identity formation is very problematic. These problems are nurtured by his mother, the lack of a stable home, and an absent father figure. Firstly, Mr. Kay excels in absence, being in therapy after a nervous breakdown. Moreover, Charlie describes his father as “sadistic” and admits that he doesn’t like him (69). When Eva and Haroon have decided to move in together, Charlie turns to Haroon for fatherly advice regarding his band:

Charlie rarely saw his own father when he’d been a patient and sad character living with his mother. But when Charlie was staying at Eva’s house he spent hours with [Karim’s] father, to

whom he told the truth. Together they divined for Charlie's talent. Dad drew him maps to the unconscious; he suggested routes and speeds . . . (120)

This fragment both shows the non-existent bond between Charlie and his biological father, and Charlie's attempt to find a substitute in Haroon. Secondly, similarly to Karim, Charlie wanders between houses, unwilling to settle in one place. Karim comments that "Charlie liked to sleep here and there, owning nothing, living nowhere permanent" (117), and further draws parallels between both characters with the comment that Charlie "also had nowhere to go" (125). These parallels can be extended to the identity construction of the two characters, thereby implying analogous problems. Thirdly, Eva also influences Charlie's identity, which is obvious in the following characterization made by Karim:

What a confused boy he was. But from the start Eva had insisted he was talent itself, that he was beautiful and God had blown into his cock . . . Naturally, long knowledge of this divinity now pervaded his personality. He was proud, dismissive, elusive and selectively generous. (118)

Here, the first two sentences juxtapose "a confused boy" with Eva's insistence on his extraordinary gifts, thereby inviting the reader to establish a link between both. The word "naturally" reinforces this link between the way in which Eva has raised her son and the formation of the latter's personality. To sum up, both Charlie's parents and the absence of a stable home contribute to Charlie's identity construction and, especially, the confusion this engenders.

Throughout the novel, Charlie is portrayed as fervently pursuing his dream to become a star. Jamila correctly characterizes Charlie as a boy who has "iron ambition under the crushed-velvet idealism which was still the style of the age" (75). The latter part of this sentence points out that Charlie, like Karim, is sensitive to what is *en vogue* in Britain in the 1970s. Accordingly, he frequently adapts his music preference and clothing style, and, by extension, his identity. Karim describes Charlie's first metamorphosis: "[A] tall young man with short, spiky hair dyed white. He wore silver shoes and a shiny silver jacket. He looked like a spaceman" (35). Karim explains that Charlie has assumed this identity in imitation of David Bowie, the local boy-turned-superstar and example for young people desperately hoping to escape the suburbs. This imitation shows how Charlie adapts his personality according to circumstances, for the purpose of becoming famous. Not only his clothing style, but also his behaviour in public are in function of his ambitions, much to Karim's frustration: "He held me fondly, but it was a characteristic gesture, just as he was always telling people he loved them, using the same tone of voice with each of them. I wanted to smash through all that crap" (89). The words "all that crap" indicate that Charlie's assumed identity is merely fake. In London, Karim takes Charlie out to see a new punk band. The latter is stunned by its energy and popularity, and

immediately joins the punkers, “ripping his shirt off . . . away to new adventures” (132). For the sake of his fame, Charlie assumes a new identity once again: “His hair was dyed black now, and it was spiky. He wore, inside out, a slashed T-shirt with a red swastika hand-painted on it. His black trousers were held together by safety-pins, paperclips and needles” (151). He also changes his name to “Charlie Hero” (153). At this point in the novel, Kaleta’s argument that “[s]tyle illuminates not only the need and search for new identities, but also the pretense of assuming them” (8) is especially accurate, in that Charlie’s adoption of a new personality is insincere. In the words of Karim, it is “a wonderful trick and disguise” (TB 154). Karim returns to this insight in New York, where Charlie Hero has taken his abode in a luxurious apartment: “I couldn’t consider Charlie a rock-star. It didn’t seem of his essence, but *a temporary, borrowed persona*” (246; emphasis added). This insincerity is reinforced when Charlie re-adopts his cockney accent, which he has consciously been suppressing throughout his youth: “. . . here in America Charlie had acquired this cockney accent when [Karim’s] first memory of him at school was that he’d cried after being mocked by the stinking gypsy kids for talking so posh” (247). The emphasis on his Englishness is yet another strategy to expand his fame across the Atlantic Ocean: “He was selling his Englishness, and getting a lot of money for it” (247).

In the course of the story, Charlie swiftly adopts new identities in function of his ambitions. Yet, the succession of these different cultural identities is, contrary to Karim’s case, not a search for internal enrichment. As a consequence, Charlie fails to reach a stage of maturity, again in contrast to Karim. In New York, Karim observes that Charlie has changed: “I could see that fame, success and wealth really agreed with him. He was less anxious, bitter and moody than I’d ever known him” (248). However, after six months in his company, Karim has to readjust this opinion, having realised that Charlie is for a large part dependent on him: “It was as if, without me there to celebrate it all, Charlie’s progress had little meaning. In other words, I was a full-length mirror, but a mirror that could remember” (250-251). The superstar needs Karim to witness and appreciate his rise to stardom. In other words, Karim has to appreciate the person Charlie has become. Karim understands that “[his] original impression that Charlie had been released by success was wrong . . . Charlie was dark, miserable, angry” (251). When Charlie begins to experiment with sadomasochism, the novel’s protagonist realises how far he has moved beyond Charlie, simultaneously indicating that Charlie has failed to reach a final stage in his maturing process. Briefly put, “Charlie wasn’t beginning to come to terms with it all: he hadn’t the grace” (251), a conclusion which clearly emphasises Charlie’s ongoing struggle with his identity, more particularly with a false identity he has imposed upon himself.

6. TOWARDS THE THIRD GENERATION

Until now, I have connected this dissertation to previous scholarly research on first and second generation immigrants. I have extensively analysed the problematic identity construction of the two protagonists of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow*, and discussed how this process is affected by, and, in its turn, also influences the relationships with family members, principally their fathers. Regarding these first generation immigrants, I have also considered the complicated performance of their identity in an English environment. Their struggles further strengthen my case that a problematic identity construction of one character influences the intergenerational relationship with another, who is in his turn affected by this particular relationship. This dynamism is also found in the situation of other characters, more particularly the female character Jamila, and the non-immigrant character Charlie in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Yet, Phillips's *In the Falling Snow* presents a third generation immigrant, Laurie Gordon, and situates this character in the middle of his adolescence. Therefore, I would like to include the third generation in the main concerns of this dissertation. In this chapter, I will first analyse how Laurie's identity is described by other characters, and give my own point of view on his ethnic identity construction, more particularly the relevance of his race. Secondly, I will show how the relationship between Laurie and Keith is influenced by both Laurie's identity construction and that of his father. Thirdly, I will briefly consider how the relationships between first and second generation immigrants on the one hand, and between second and third generation immigrants on the other hand, resemble and differ from one another. Finally, by way of conclusion, I will summarise what I have been discussing in this dissertation, and raise possible concerns for future literary research.

6.1. LAURIE GORDON IN *IN THE FALLING SNOW*

6.1.1. LAURIE'S IDENTITY THROUGH THE EYES OF OTHERS

Throughout *In the Falling Snow*, the reader only gets hints of Laurie's identity construction through several adult points of view, especially those of his father Keith and his mother Annabelle. At the beginning of the story, Annabelle informs Keith "about Laurie and the problems he is experiencing at school, having fallen in with what she likes to call 'the wrong set'" (6). When Keith experiences Laurie's behaviour himself, he downplays its problematic nature and attributes it to adolescence. The first encounter between father and son in the story exemplifies Laurie's indifferent and obstinate

attitude. First, “[t]here is no reply” (102) when Annabelle announces Keith’s arrival. Next, the conversation between father and son is brief and slightly defensive from the part of Laurie:

“All right, Dad?” “How’s your schoolwork?” “*You tell me*. Isn’t that what you’re here for?” . . . “Have fun at parents’ night. I can’t wait to hear what those tossers think.” He pauses. “*Not*.” [Keith] looks up at his son. “‘Not’? What kind of English is that?” “*Don’t start, Dad*. You know what I mean. Check you later.” (102-103; emphasis added)

The use of youth language - “Check you later” - underlines the adolescent phase Laurie is going through. Therefore, Keith assures Annabelle that “[h]e’s just styling, that’s all. It’s what the youths do” (103). Nevertheless, Annabelle is worried that she “might be losing [Laurie] around the black-white thing . . . for Laurie only seems to want to be with black kids” (111-112). On this matter, more particularly the problems caused by Laurie’s mixed race, the two adult parties reach a consensus, for Keith is also convinced that Laurie’s problems in school are due to his struggles as a Black person in a predominantly white society: “I don’t like how those teachers talk to him at that school, like he’s some freak. He’s one of the few black kids in his class and I know how that feels” (105). Keith confuses his own former situation as a black adolescent in Britain with the situation of his mixed-race son; a confusion on which I will come back later.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that Laurie’s black friends do not indicate particular racial affiliations in the way his parents, and especially Keith, imagine them to be. As Phillips remarks himself, “in the past fifty years Britain *has* changed and it has changed radically” (*A New World Order* 280; emphasis in original). Unlike the immigrants in the 1950s-60s and their offspring in the 1970s-80s, the third generation immigrants experience less racial prejudice or racist abuse. In 21st-century England, Laurie does no longer have to defend his race in order to obtain a place of his own in the way Keith had to when he was the same age: “These days nobody called him a ‘halfie’ any more” (FS 109). In an interview for *The Guardian*, Phillips expresses his optimism “about this new generation, not least because they no longer have to play the exotic other” (Moss), and “[likes] their ownership of Britain” (qtd. in Moss). This ownership is visible in the character of Laurie, for whom England is his birthright. As a consequence, although he prefers to hang out with his black peers, race is not really an issue for him. I agree with Ward, who observes that “as Laurie recognizes, things are not the same for black, or mixed-race children in Britain today as they were in the 1970s” (7-8). Laurie betrays this awareness when Keith pretends to understand Laurie’s situation, arguing that he was himself “a black kid growing up in this country” (FS 157). Laurie reacts as follows:

The thing is, Dad, I don’t know if things are the same now as they were when you were my age . . . It isn’t just about discrimination and stuff. I know that’s important, and that’s your job and everything, but it’s also about other things. (158)

Here, Laurie shows that he understands the importance of race issues in England, but adds that these issues should not be overestimated in contemporary society. Laurie's preference to hang out with black friends may also be an expression of the impact his parents' divorce has had on his development. Because of Keith's removal from the family unit, Laurie lacks the presence of a father during the crucial years of his identity formation, in which a black father might have helped to balance the upbringing by a white mother. In this way, Laurie's friendships with black people may be seen as a subconscious attempt to replace his absent father.

In the course of the story, there is a slight development in Laurie's personality, which is symbolised by means of his headphones. Initially, Laurie and his headphones are inseparable. He uses them as a means to escape confrontations with his parents. For example, after a father-son evening, Keith "steals a glance at his son, who has slipped his headphones back into place" (123). By this action, Laurie deliberately prevents further conversation. Later in the novel, Laurie gets into serious trouble with some of his friends. He becomes involved in a stabbing incident, and is arrested by the police. When Keith arrives at Annabelle's place to talk with his son, he remarks that "the only unusual thing about [Laurie] was the fact that he was without his headphones" (211), and further comments that "the last time he had seen him 'undressed' in this way . . . was obviously quite some time in the past" (211). This last remark not only indicates that Laurie has recently developed on a personal level, but also that Keith has not had much contact with his son before this point; a subject on which I will elaborate below. At the end of the novel, Laurie faces another problematic situation, that is, his girlfriend's unintended pregnancy. When Laurie introduces Chantelle to Keith, the latter "is surprised to see no sign of the headphones" (305). The absence of Laurie's headphones at moments where he has to turn to his parents for advice and assistance points to an internal progress. Similarly to Keith, whose identity troubles urge him to resume actual contact with his father, Laurie no longer avoids communication with his parents. The failure of communication, which I have discussed in chapter three, is countered by the third generation character. In short, in the course of *In the Falling Snow*, Laurie stops shutting out communication and reaches a more mature stage in his identity construction.

6.1.2. A DISTANT RELATIONSHIP INFLUENCED BY TWO IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS

Due to his alienation from the family unit, Keith has mostly been absent from Laurie's education. Yet, this absence has been convenient for Keith, who is not very interested in his son. This indifference is already obvious at the first encounter between the two Gordons. Remarkably, this encounter only takes place after one hundred pages or – on story level – after two weeks. Above, I have already pointed to Laurie's indifference during this encounter. Keith, in his turn, is equally uninterested. Firstly, he does

not inquire after Laurie. It is Annabelle who has to ask him “Well, do you want to say hello to Laurie?” (102). Secondly, when Laurie does not respond to Annabelle’s announcement of his father’s presence, Keith betrays his lack of interest by saying “[I]leave it, I’ll speak to him later” (102). In the rest of the novel, Keith repeatedly betrays his indifference. As I have already analysed in the discussion about the Gordon family (cf. chapter three), Keith only extensively talks about his son’s problems at school to turn attention away from his own problems. Another example is the fact that, before Keith meets with Annabelle for the parents’ evening, he has been ignoring his ex-wife’s concerned messages about their son. He fails to take up his responsibilities, because he is too overwhelmed by his own issues with Yvette and work. Furthermore, Keith shows the limit of his involvement with the statement “Look I’m his dad, not his bloody therapist. He seems fine to me. All that ADD crap that the headmaster was talking about is just that. Crap.” (125). A last, but very significant example is Keith’s reaction to the plan that Laurie should temporarily live with his father: “The two of them had only just raised the possibility, and suddenly it was as though Annabelle was trying to *force Laurie upon him*” (216-217; emphasis added). Keith feels threatened by the idea of Laurie’s presence in his flat, and even goes as far as saying that “having his son move in with him is hardly a new adventure, but more like *an obligation that he knows he should fulfil*” (230; emphasis added). In other words, Keith considers taking care of Laurie – in the middle of his own identity crisis – a burden forced upon him by his ex-wife. Throughout the novel, Keith is mostly reluctant to take up responsibilities and to be involved in Laurie’s problems, because he is, similarly to his own father Earl and the character of Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, too preoccupied with his own identity struggles.

Keith’s indifferent attitude is shared by his son, but, in the case of Laurie, it is accompanied by a certain contempt. This contempt is caused by two factors. On the one hand, Laurie blames his father for having abandoned the family unit. Consequently, he is unwilling to engage in any father-son relationship. This unwillingness is recognised by Keith: “What he is sure about . . . is the *reservoir of resentment* that Laurie is drawing upon whenever his mother suggests spending any time with his father” (8; emphasis added). Keith points to this “reservoir of resentment” while lying in the bed of his mistress Yvette. These circumstances invite a causal link between his unfaithfulness in the past and Laurie’s resentment in the present. The remark also shows that it is only Annabelle who attempts to bring back together father and son. On the other hand, Laurie’s contempt for his father is provoked by an enormous generational divide, which is reinforced by Keith’s alienation from contemporary society and by the confusion of his adolescent experiences with those of Laurie. In the story’s opening chapter, it is already evident that Keith has no understanding of his son’s generation. In the metro, he sits across three teenagers, who “like his son Laurie . . . are partly white, but it is clear from their baggy dress sense, and from the way that they slouch and speak, that they identify themselves as

black” (13-14). One of them verbally abuses an old woman, and Keith is stunned by the woman’s ability “to maintain such poise with these hooligans” (15). He remarks that “[t]hough only a generation removed from these brutes, he finds their ill manners mystifying” (15). Since Keith has compared these teenagers with his son, it is implied that he finds his own son “mystifying”. In addition, this fragment shows that the third generation is “increasingly influenced by an American gang-based youth culture” (Ward 6), which may give an additional reason for Laurie’s behaviour and choice of friends. Similarly to Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Laurie adheres to the prevailing tendencies in London. Later in the novel, Keith receives an alarmed phone call from Annabelle, who is looking for Laurie. He is baffled when she informs him about the hangout place of Laurie and his friends: “‘A skateboard park. At this time of night?’ . . . ‘What’s he doing?’ ‘Nothing. He’s just with some kids on mountain bike. Laurie’s sitting on a park bench.’ ‘Just sitting by the Westway at this time of night?’” (FS 113-114; emphasis added). Keith’s incredulous questions betray his distance from Laurie’s generation, and thus from his son as well.

Keith further increases the intergenerational distance by wrongly conflating his own adolescent experiences with those of his son. When Keith tries to pass on “his own understanding of how to survive an English childhood” (16), he is stuck in the mentality of survival which has helped him throughout 1970s-1980s England, and fails to see the altered social conditions. Later, a very significant conversation between father and son takes place in the London Eye:

Laurie finally deigns to look interested in the view and he points to the newly refurbished Wembley Stadium in the north. “Check it out, Dad. You can almost see right into it.” It does look impressive . . . but he wants to talk with his son about things other than sport . . . “You know, if you look over there you can get a really good idea of how London developed as a great port city.” “What do you mean?” “. . . London made its money out of shipping. That was its business.” Laurie shrugs his shoulders. “Well, the business is all mashed up now, right?” (152)

By shrugging his shoulders, Laurie clearly indicates that he is not interested in his father’s “history lecture, which is of course a veiled attempt to persuade Laurie that this is his city too” (153), but in the “now”, symbolised by the Wembley Stadium. Next, Keith tries to pass on the instructions once given to him by Brenda (cf. chapter three): “All of this is yours if you want it, but to get it you’ll have to work harder than your mates . . . and you’ve got to remember that nobody is ever going to give you anything” (156). These statements baffle Laurie, as is illustrated by his “confused face” (157) and the reaction “I’m not sure what you’re on about” (156). Whereas, for Keith, surviving in England still comes down to overcoming racial discrimination, for Laurie, it is more a matter of respect (158). Keith does not understand his son generation’s preoccupation with respect: “What have they done to *earn*

respect?” (158; emphasis in original). He tries to tell his son to “act your age, not your colour” (158), once again widening the generational gap by conflating memories of his adolescence as a black person in London with the contemporary situation for his mixed-race son. Keith is thus unable to understand that “the new generation of kids have an entirely different conception of Britain and a different conception of self as a result” (Phillips, qtd. in Moss). A last example takes place at the police station, where Keith wants to make sure there wasn’t any “racial abuse” (FS 214) involved during the interrogation about the stabbing incident. Laurie does not understand: “*What are you on?* The copper who interviewed me was black.” (214; emphasis added). Once again, Keith’s preoccupation with race does not longer apply to Laurie’s case, because of which a distance between father and son is created. Laurie is unable to comprehend his father, who is clearly stuck in a past where Black discrimination was still prevalent in British society.

Until now, I have shown that the relationship between Keith and Laurie is characterised by indifference, reluctance, and even contempt. Yet, since there is, in the course of the story, development in the identity of both characters, there is also a change in their relationship. Firstly, both Laurie and Keith are aware of the necessity to tighten family bonds. On their excursion to the cinema and Pizza Express, Keith tries to win over his son by allowing him to drink alcohol. He then invites his son to a trip to the Caribbean, the place of their roots. Keith mentions that “this Caribbean trip . . . it’s about you and me” (121), and thus intends to connect with his son. His son understands, “Yeah, I know bonding” (121), and shows a cautious willingness to consider the idea: “All right then, we can check it out” (121). Later, when Laurie has to explain to his parents how he got involved in the stabbing incident, a rare moment of mutual understanding between father and son occurs. Initially, Laurie’s attitude is defensive: “Look, it’s got nothing to do with either of you, right . . . You’re treating it like it’s some big tragedy. Can I go to my room now?” (214). However, when Keith announces the possibility to come stay at his apartment for a while, and gives his son some time to consider the idea, “Laurie looks him in the eyes and slowly nods” (215). By giving Laurie the opportunity to decide for himself, Keith manages to create a moment of understanding between them. Shortly after this scene, Laurie makes another attempt to connect with his father:

Laurie had called and asked if he should come round to see him . . . Laurie confessed that he didn’t really have much to say at present, and he was sorry for all the trouble and worry that he was causing. Maybe they could do something later in the week? (238)

Both his apology and his initiative to arrange a meeting indicate a growth in Laurie’s personality, which has incited the desire to revive the relationship with Keith. The latter comprehends that “Annabelle had probably encouraged Laurie to call him, but unless Laurie wanted to speak with his

father then he wouldn't have picked up the phone" (238). Laurie's initiative provokes an important change in Keith's attitude:

His son called him, and so he will set up something specific with him. During the past three years there have already been too many casual plans made, and too many casual plans broken, and as the grown-up it is his responsibility to change this pattern of behaviour between them. (238)

Laurie's mature initiative to resume contact has made Keith realise that he has been neglecting his duties as a father and that he should take up responsibility. At the end of the novel, Keith offers Laurie the possibility to postpone the conversation about Chantelle's pregnancy. Yet, "Laurie looks directly at him and shrugs his shoulders. 'We can talk now if you want'" (305). Accordingly, Laurie apologises to Keith and announces the plan to end the pregnancy. Keith agrees, "I know what you mean. You're right" (305), thereby establishing another moment of mutual understanding between father and son. To sum up, the relationship between Laurie and Keith is initially characterised by indifference and reluctance. Both characters' identity construction, however, positively affects the intergenerational relationship, leading to cautious moments of connection between father and son.

6.1.3. *FIRST TO SECOND TO THIRD: INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS TIME*

Since Phillips has presented his protagonist Keith in two different intergenerational relationships, a comparison between both relationships as well as between the different generations can be made. Moreover, Keith occupies the position of son in the first relationship, and that of father in the second, because of which it is interesting to consider how intergenerational relationships in migrant context may differ across generations. First of all, in the transition from the second to the third generation, a certain loss of curiosity for one's roots can be detected. Whereas Keith's interest in the cardboard box betrays the interest in his father's West Indian past, Laurie does not care about his ethnic heritage. This difference is exemplified in the conversation about the Caribbean trip. Laurie asks Keith why he has chosen the Caribbean as a destination. The reason is obvious: "What do you mean 'why there'? Your grandparents come from there" (120). For Keith, it is rather self-evident that he and his son should visit the island where Keith's part of the family originally came from. The following exchange is also very significant, in that it further illustrates the different attitudes towards ethnic heritage: "'Are you saying you're not interested?' 'Whatever.' 'What's that supposed to mean? *You're supposed to know something about where you come from.* Or at least be curious'" (120; emphasis added). By using the verb "supposed", Keith states the importance of finding out about his roots. By contrast, Laurie

indicates that he does not really care about “where he came from”, because his parents and himself are from Britain. When Laurie defines his grandfather as a “Weirdo” (120), it is clear that his roots play no part in his life. The fact that Laurie has no connection with his grandfather at all – the only time Keith took Laurie to see Earl, the latter gave them a “silent treatment” (121) – has also led to an uninterested attitude from the part of the third generation immigrant Laurie regarding his ethnic roots.

Yet, there is also a certain parallelism between Keith and Earl’s relationship on the one hand, and Keith and Laurie’s on the other hand. When it comes to the upbringing of his son, Keith shows that he has inherited certain ideas from his own situation as an only child in an immigrant context. When Keith is panicking about the prospect that Laurie might come live in his apartment, he “knows that Annabelle feels that children ought to spend time with both of their parents, particularly if the child is without siblings” (217). Here, Keith attributes this educational opinion to Annabelle, and places his thought right after his fear that “Annabelle was trying to force Laurie upon him” (217). Hence, he distances himself from this point of view. In his youth, Keith has mainly been raised without a father. It can thus be argued that Keith’s relationship with his father – the lack of any strong bond – has an impact on the contemporary relationship between Keith and Laurie, in that Keith’s norms and values, which he passes on to his son, have been formed in the context of an absent black father. Another parallel is Keith’s resemblance to Laurie regarding their stance to their respective fathers. Initially, both characters feel reluctant to approach their father. Laurie shows this by means of his “reservoir of resentment” (8) towards his father. Similarly, Keith refuses to deliberately approach Earl: “[H]e had consistently made it clear to [Brenda] that he had no interest in spending the summer building any kind of relationship with his father, for he felt that the effort should be coming in the other direction” (40). Keith blames the other party for the intergenerational distance, and has “no interest” to alter the situation himself. Laurie displays the same accusation and reluctance. However, due to their changing identities, both characters commence to take initiative; Keith by looking up his father in the North of England, and Laurie by calling his father to arrange a meeting. The instances discussed above are a first attempt to analyse the similarities and differences between different intergenerational relationships. I am aware that the comparison made in this dissertation is too concise to draw solid conclusions, but think that this subject can be interesting for future literary research.

6.2. CONCLUSION: THE THIRD GENERATION IN FUTURE LITERARY RESEARCH

In the works of second generation immigrant authors, the struggle with identity construction as well as the problems of finding a place in British society are depicted. I have explained why I consider all second generation immigrant characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *In the Falling Snow* as having

a British national identity. Yet, with regard to their cultural and ethnic identity, unstable and hybrid constructions are represented in the characters of Keith, Karim, and Charlie. Karim's case in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is especially complex, since he finds himself in between "two great cultural assemblages" (Gilroy 439), that is, between English and Indian ethnicity and culture. Karim is actively involved in English society, but, because of his biracial origins, it is difficult for him to fully align himself with British culture. Moreover, due to his mixed race, a straightforward alignment with British ethnicity is impossible. The awareness of his 'Otherness' is especially stimulated when Karim leaves the suburbs for the centre. In London, his ethnic affiliations are rapidly shifting, but, after a temporary exile in New York, Karim asserts his Englishness. In general, race does not occupy an important place in his ethnic identity construction. With this, Karim provides one possible interpretation of ethnic identity construction and ethnicity. Regarding his cultural identity, the adherence to British youth subcultures determines his clothing style and music preference, changing throughout the novel. The rest of Karim's complex, hybrid identity is made up by the desire for social upward mobility and by confusing sexual orientations. In addition, he leaves out any religious adherence in his identity construction. Regarding the effect of intergenerational relationships on Karim's identity construction, I have shown how the destruction of the Amir family and the lack of communication between family members affect Keith's emotional well-being, his sense of self, and his perception of normality. The main cause of his emotional disturbance, however, is his father Haroon. Under the influence of an internal struggle, this character claims to return to his Indian roots, while impersonating Buddha. Yet, as I have analysed, he has become merely a mimic Indian, unable to resume his original identity, which has been too much altered under British influences. Haroon has not only impact on an emotional level, but he also influences his son with regard to his ethnic affiliations, the confusion about his sexual identity, and his self-image in the context of professional prospects. However, Karim's personal development contributes to an evolution in the relationship with his father, more particularly in that there is increasingly less admiration and more distance from the part of the son. Karim starts to oppose Haroon's behaviour, which results in a weaker bond between father and son than at the start of the novel.

The second generation character Keith in *In the Falling Snow* is presented with a negatively affected sense of self due to an overall alienation – from his wife and child, himself, and English contemporary society. The loss of work leads to the loss of self-control, which further stimulates the struggle with his identity. Unlike Karim, Keith's race is utterly important in his identity construction. His extreme sensitivity towards his skin colour betrays this predominance, which is caused by racist experiences throughout his childhood and adolescence. Other aspects which can be part of his ethnicity, for example "religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality . . . cultural values" (Ashcroft et al. 84) are not considered, from which it can be concluded that, for Keith,

his ethnic identity is almost exclusively made up by his race. Nonetheless, Keith firmly asserts his Englishness. The combination of a black ethnic identity and a British national identity is specific to migrant contexts. Class is also important, but, since Keith has already ascended the social scale, there is no more need to adapt his identity in function of his ambitions. With this, he clearly differs from Karim and Charlie in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, who adapt specific aspects of their identity, among others their accent and clothing style, to climb up in society. With regard to the family's influence on the second generation character, Keith's parental alienation in the past has negatively influenced his identity formation, which is expressed in the form of a severe midlife crisis. I have shown how Keith's awareness of his 'Otherness' as a black person in Britain has been incited by the education of his white stepmother, and by the absence of his black immigrant father. The alienation from his own family unit in his adult life has further troubled his sense of self. Moreover, the flawed communication between Keith and the other characters in the novel also stimulates Keith's personal problems. His unresolved questions and self-imposed search for his West Indian roots show how communication issues in migrant contexts hinder the transmission of cultural and ethnic heritage not directly available in the social environment of second generation immigrants. Since there is a distance between Keith and Earl, there remain obscurities about Earl's immigrant experience and life before migration as well as about Keith's own childhood. These obscurities continue to complicate Keith's identity construction in his forties. Yet, when Earl narrates his life story and explains the reason for his obstinate behaviour and lack of complicity, Keith's character softens both towards his father and towards himself. In addition, Keith's own identity affects the father-son relationship. Whereas his Englishness impedes bonding with Earl, the personal struggles which Keith experiences in the course of the story encourage him to resume contact. Despite the fact that the attempts to improve the father-son relationship are annulled by Earl's death, they have offered Keith a way out of his midlife crisis.

Unlike Karim and Keith, Jamila does not experience any problems in establishing her identity in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Her ethnic affiliations are decisive: although she has grown up in an English environment, she embraces her Indian ancestry, which sets her off from her English contemporaries, and fights for the rights of British ethnic minority groups. The cultivation of her identity is temporarily thwarted when Anwar imposes a marriage. Yet, this imposition encourages Jamila to push her emancipated and independent attitudes to an extreme. The course of her life has changed by Anwar's interference, but her character refuses to submit to the traditional patterns of marriage. The management of her marriage stimulates her feminism and activism to the extreme. By contrast, the character of Charlie completely surrenders to the demands of English and, later, American society in the pursuit of his ambitions, by swiftly changing cultural identities. Moreover, the confusion about his own person has been stimulated by an absent father figure, the lack of a stable

home, and the upbringing by his mother. At the end of the novel, Charlie is still struggling with a false identity he has assumed.

With the character of Laurie in *In the Falling Snow*, the third generation has been introduced in postcolonial literature. His identity is perceived through the eyes of adult characters, which imagine that his status as a Black person in British society complicates his identity construction, and who find confirmation in his intercourse with black friends. I have discussed that, as a third generation immigrant living in 21st-century Britain, Laurie's complexion does to a much lesser extent influence his place in society than Keith's did when he was Laurie's age. Therefore, I have proposed two other readings of Laurie's black company, more particularly an adherence to tendencies among young British citizens on the one hand, and an unconscious attempt to replace his absent father on the other hand. This absence is the consequence of Keith's indifferent and reluctant stance towards his son, caused by a preoccupation with his own identity. Laurie, in his turn, combines this indifferent attitude with contempt for his father's abandonment of the family unit, his alienation from contemporary society, and the conflation of Keith's own experiences with those of his son, especially regarding his race. Nonetheless, Keith's changing identity, as well as Laurie's evolving adolescence bring the two characters closer together.

Throughout *In the Falling Snow*, the reader is informed about the bad relationship between Keith and Laurie, and shown how Keith's identity struggles stimulate this situation. It is also demonstrated how Laurie's maturation process positively affects the father-son relationship. However, the implications of this relationship on Laurie's identity construction are not really visible, especially in comparison to the link between Earl's aloofness and Keith's midlife crisis. Whereas the distant relationship with Earl clearly affects Keith's own identity construction – for there is no knowledge of ethnic ancestry and no Black role model during his youth – it is not shown how the distance between Keith and Laurie alters Laurie's identity formation. I have offered one possible implication, that is, the absence of a black father leading to a connection with black peers. However, since the focalisation of the story is mainly through the character of Keith, it is rather difficult to establish links between the intergenerational relationship and Laurie's behaviour. Since it is more than plausible that other third generation characters will emerge in future literary works, it would be interesting to analyse the intergenerational transmission of ethnicity, race issues, and cultural affiliations to these characters by their second generation immigrant parents as well as the influence of the latter, themselves profoundly influenced by their immigrant parent(s), on the identity construction of their children. Furthermore, as I have briefly attempted in the last part of my dissertation, it is also interesting to consider how the intergenerational dynamics and the impact on processes of identity formation evolve from one generation to the next in migrant contexts. All in all, with many postcolonial novels written by second generation immigrant authors, and dealing with second generation immigrants, it is interesting to

continue the analysis of the correlation between intergenerational relationships and identity construction – already studied in sociologist and psychological research – and broaden the perspective to its representations in literary works. This focus can also comprise, for example, comparisons between dysfunctional families in immigrant and non-immigrant contexts, or between different sexes. The literary representations of these issues allow access to the negotiating reality of second and third generation immigrants in British society, and should, therefore, be the subject of literary criticism in the future.

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