A NEW KIND OF DIGNITY: NOVELS OF SELF-EMPOWERMENT IN THE NEOLIBERAL AGE

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Abstract

In this dissertation I analyze the ideological effects of the neoliberal discourse of "self-empowerment" in selected novels. I define neoliberalism as a hegemonic ideological and political undertaking to transform society and the self according to laissez-faire market principles. While often associated with neoconservative efforts to reintroduce free market solutions to the world in the 1980s, neoliberalism is now a dominant political rationality and commonsense. It is the ideological basis upon which mainstream politics, as well as socio-economic reforms, are animated. Within this ascendency of neoliberal thought, discourses of freedom have increasingly focused on empowerment as the main political objective. This turn towards empowerment, facilitated by the "happiness industry" and the rise in psychotherapeutic counseling, has permeated the literary realm. In my reading of four novels – *The Remains of the Day*, *A Gesture Life*, *Funny Boy* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* – all published in the 1980s and 1990s, I demonstrate how narratives of sexual liberation employ the idiom of psychotherapeutics to articulate a politics of liberation. I argue that these novels reproduce hegemonic perspectives of self and society.

In my first chapter, I analyze Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. I show how the novel's political engagement with the issue of aristocratic subjugation is a thinly disguised psychotherapeutic exercise, of which the objective is to diagnose emotional self-restraint as a particular kind of political neurosis. This theme of emotional lack reappears in the second chapter where I

analyze Chang-rae Lee's novel, *A Gesture Life.* A narrative about historical trauma, this novel addresses the psychological costs of living one's life according to societal expectations. Like *Remains*, this novel is a psychotherapeutic commentary about political alienation. The principal lesson in both these novels is that one must get in touch with one's true self in order to be liberated from the pressures of repressive ideologies.

The third chapter is a reading of Shyam Selvadurai's novel, *Funny Boy*. As a gay coming-of-age narrative that takes place in war-torn Sri Lanka, the novel highlights the importance of sexual liberation to the project of national reconciliation. The novel further seems to suggest that sexual liberation and self-empowerment are key to Sri Lanka's national empowerment. A similar message of empowerment resonates in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, a novel I discuss in the last chapter of this dissertation. Against the backdrop of Thatcherite England which oversaw the breakdown of the post-war consensus of the welfare state, the novel, I argue, promotes the idea that self-discovery and self-fulfillment are synonymous with freedom. Despite their differences – post-war or Thatcherite Britain, contemporary US, and Sri Lanka; middle-aged Asian American or white British male or young Asian-British or Asian – all four novels equate freedom to self-liberation. Freedom, in the novels, is now a hegemonic injunction to empower ourselves, to stimulate the powers of the self.

Dedication

To my father,

who did not live long enough to see this completed,

may your guiding hand be on my shoulder

always.

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This dissertation has been long time in the making. In the period that it took me to write it, many things have come and gone – hairstyles, TV series, Facebook friends. Set against the fleeting nature of such objects and preoccupations are the people who stayed with me all these years, prodding me with their peculiar brand of humor and encouragement to "just" finish it already. I am blessed to have family, friends, and professors who did not give up on me, even though it would have been easy to do so. I am most grateful for their patience.

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I analyze four novels within the context of the ascendency of economic and ideological neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s. The four novels with which this dissertation will be concerned are Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1988) and Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994). In particular, I focus on the novels' negotiations of the emancipation of their protagonists from structures of repression, coercion, and persecution, both political and psychological. Through highlighting the plights of their various protagonists, these novels describe the challenges that come with living in certain oppressive environments marked by sectarian violence, racism, homophobia, social intolerance, statist coercion and the general erosion of democratic practice. In each of the novels, the protagonist struggles against entrenched habits of thought and social norms that seem not only to curtail the expression of individuality but also divide populations along racial, gender, and class lines. I focus on these struggles in the novels, and especially on the solutions they offer, to parse their ideological underpinnings. My analyses seek to understand the larger context within which the need for emancipation is articulated and out of which the resolutions arise. That is to say, I analyze these novels as cultural texts that emerge from a specific historical period and bear signs and symptoms of the socio-political and ideological stakes of that period. By looking closely at the specific articulations and resolutions of problems related to racism, homophobia,

ideological interpellation, national disintegration – that is, problems of power and subjection – I conclude that each of the novels, in their own way, repeats some of the fundamental mantras of neoliberalism: free market liberty, independence, personal responsibility and accountability to name a few.

Despite the laudable ambitions and literary achievements of these four novels, the projects of liberation they put forward are limited in scope; this is due largely to the textual emphasis on self-empowerment through self-awakening and self-realization. Written as first-person narratives, all four novels chart the private psychological and emotional developments of their protagonists, and all culminate in a kind of cathartic release involving a change in self-perception and attitude without any concomitant socio-political transformation. The endings of these novels are marked by a heuristic moment in which the narrator-protagonist makes an evaluative judgment on his prior self; and out of this judgment, a new self-perception emerges – one that presupposes a moral and ethical position in relation to the past. My concern in this dissertation is how the emergence of the new self-perception in these four novels coincides with a larger moral imperative to adopt free market rationalizations of self and society. That is to say, this dissertation seeks to answer in what ways self-awakening, as presented in these novels, reproduces hegemonic notions of happiness and the good life.

Historical Transition and Political Confusion

Written in the 1980s and 1990s, the novels under consideration here engage directly with the widespread and profound changes that saw the retreat of

values and assumptions that had defined the postwar compromise and the rise of laissez-faire economic liberalism as the dominant ideology for social, economic, political reorganization within the United States and Britain, in particular. The postwar compromise between capital and labor saw the redefinition of the role of the state and of international relations after World War II, the ostensible purpose of which was to prevent, as David Harvey puts it, "the re-emergence of inter-state geopolitical rivalries that had led to the war," and to stabilize domestic peace and tranquility via the provision of "full employment, economic growth, and welfare services" to the citizens (9-10). This compromise took the form of "embedded liberalism" which characterized the role of the state in regulating market processes via the adoption of fiscal and monetary strategies known loosely as Keynesianism (Harvey10-11). Following the crisis of capital accumulation in the 1970s, confidence in Keynesianism eroded and efforts to unhinge capital from the regulatory environment of the period began to make headway as neoliberal thinkers pushed for a new consensus founded on free market principles (Harvey 39-63, Gamble 27-60, Hall, "The Great" 19-39).

Within this transitional period that saw the rise of free market principles, notions of freedom underwent a major redefinition. Where the pivotal concern of justice in the immediate postwar years had been grounded in the logics of redistribution of resources, the struggle for labor rights, and the guarantee of universal healthcare and public housing, "freedom" in the neoliberal mode was increasingly being identified as "home ownership, private property, individualism, and the liberation of entrepreneurial opportunities" (Harvey 61). In

fact, the consent for the "neoliberal turn" – to use David Harvey's useful phrase – was often constructed in a framework of antagonism towards the welfare state, now mockingly referred to as the "nanny state." In his analysis of the rise of Thatcherism, Stuart Hall explains how the establishment of a neoconservative mandate was founded on sustained attacks on the welfare state, specifically on what was labeled as "the culture of dependency" it is said to have created. In the populist language of Thatcherism, the over-taxed British citizen was to be rescued from the "coddling" of the "nanny" state and revitalized through "the restoration of competition and profitability; with tight money and sound finance" (Hall, "The Great" 29). Against the resurgent classical liberalism of the New Right, collective social welfare and the custodial moralism of the corporate state, as well as the notion of "the caring society," came to be seen as the enemy of individual freedom (Hall, "The Great" 29). As Margaret Thatcher infamously proclaimed: "There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first … There is no such thing as society" (qtd. in "Margaret Thatcher: a Life in Quotes").

With the retreat of redistributive, class-based politics and leftist struggles, what emerged to fill the vacuum was generally labeled "identity politics" or to use Nancy Fraser's terminology, a "politics of recognition" ("From Redistribution" 70-74). As Fraser notes, since the 1980s left politics have been characterized by the proliferation of political groups seeking legal recognition for injurious social, racial, gender, and sexual stratification. According to Fraser, "the 'struggle for recognition' is fast becoming the paradigmatic form of political conflict in the late

twentieth century. Demands for 'recognition of difference' fuel struggles of groups mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, 'race', gender, and sexuality" ("From Redistribution" 68). What is new and useful about such struggles for recognition is that they emphasize cultural or social identity, instead of class, as a medium of political mobilization. The objective of such struggles is to reclaim, for the politicized identities in question, historically denied and denigrated identitarian value. In other words, the politics is not centered on a demand for social equity via a contestation of state power, but on the production of visibility and acceptance of politicized identities in mainstream culture.

I analyze the four novels as exemplary texts which also grapple with the rise of neoconservative, free market ideology. While it had been easier to contest extreme political elements often associated with the reactionary Old Right, and their call for a return to traditional values and morality or the ban on reproductive rights, the libertarian logics of neoconservative ideology, being less directly socially conservative, is in many ways more difficult to refute. As Harvey notes, the neoconservatives were largely able to capture the "ideals of individual freedom" of the earlier youth and student movements and fold them into the logics of the free market (42). Thus, as individual and market freedom became increasingly synonymous, political objectives of thoroughgoing social change and social justice via an overhaul of the state was set aside for the pursuit of the good life. The desire to overhaul the state was replaced by the desire to overhaul the self. In other words, personal empowerment became increasingly central to the language of political liberation.

Yet, as Wendy Brown notes, the pursuit of the good life in the free market has brought about not the promise of individual freedom, but greater individual anxiety. Individuals today, she argues, are increasingly "buffeted and controlled by global configurations of disciplinary and capitalistic power of extraordinary proportions, and are at the same time nakedly individuated, stripped of reprieve from relentless exposure and accountability for themselves" (Brown 69). This rise in individual anxiety is attributable to what she calls our "contemporary disorientation of freedom" (10). The ascendency of the politics of personal empowerment creates an analytical confusion in which the cause of domination – capitalist exploitation – is now perceived as the source of the good life. Thus, paradoxically, domination is mistaken for liberation. As the political realm becomes increasingly vulnerable to this confusion, Brown suggests, we begin to form "an adaptive and harmonious relationship with domination" (22).

My concern in this dissertation is to understand in what ways liberation has been confused with domination. Specifically, I look at the influence of the happiness industry and its attending psychotherapeutic emphasis in generating this confusion. In her book, *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed argues that the pursuit of happiness is no longer simply a matter related to an existential search for meaning; it has now become a "duty" (Intro, loc. 164). People are *obligated* to be happy or to pursue happiness in their various domestic, social, and professional capacities. This happiness imperative, Ahmed contends, is part of a larger ideological undertaking to establish certain social norms about what it means to be an individual. That is to say, the pursuit happiness is an

injunction for individuals to adopt certain values and character traits that cohere with dominant notions of the good life. Her analysis "expose[s] the unhappy effects of happiness" and shows "how happiness is used to redescribe social norms as social goods" (Intro, loc. 79). Within this context of socialization, psychotherapeutics plays a crucial role as a technology of citizenship. And it is through this technology of socialization – the obligation to pursue a mandated version of happiness – that make individuals realign their emotional and mental constitutions with the priorities of private initiative and private provision. In other words, psychotherapeutics seeks to disarticulate notions of the good life from postwar assumptions and to rearticulate it in terms of the maximization of individual happiness in self-interested pursuits.

I argue that the four novels with which this dissertation is concerned participate in this "turn towards happiness," as Ahmed puts it, and in so doing, the novels reproduce the hegemonic template for citizenship in the neoliberal age. Their politics of sexual liberation, in particular, is undergirded by a psychotherapeutic imperative to achieve a prescriptive good mental and emotional health. As such, the politics of liberation performed in the novels should be better understood as modes of coercion, enjoining individuals, in the Thatcherite mode, to transform themselves into self-governing "free" citizens in the "free" market. The premise of my dissertation is that "liberation" in the neoliberal era is centered on an individual *obligation* to assume the risks and responsibilities that come with seeking the good life under free market conditions, without challenging the terms. The process of acquiring individual freedom in the market place, thus, is a

simultaneous process of acquiring market discipline. That liberation and domination – as well as happiness and discipline – have become indistinguishable from each other is no surprise. To become happy and to be liberated, one must *exercise power* over oneself – become self-*regulating* subjects.

Understanding Neoliberalism

In this context of liberation as domination, and happiness as discipline, I propose that we approach the topic of neoliberalism from several perspectives. Firstly, neoliberalism is both an ideological and political project to reintroduce certain features of 19th century liberalism in the late 20th century. Principal among the features is the fundamental commitment to *individual* freedom, rather than the collective; additionally, it demands blind faith in the free market as the best method for organizing economic activity. Neoliberal doctrine, therefore, is deeply distrustful of state intervention strategies for any purpose and least of all for redistribution of resources. (Harvey 20). The resurgence of liberalism in the late 20th century, as David Harvey, among others, have shown, is due in large part to crisis of capital accumulation of the 1970s and the loss of faith in Keynesian economic solutions. Spearheaded by the neoconservatives,[1] or what is sometimes known as the New Right, neoliberalism, in this instance, can be understood in terms of 1) policy shifts meant to facilitate a transition from Keynesian welfarism

[1] I use the term neoconservatives in this instance to refer to a group of free market advocates who coalesce around the doctrines of liberalism as espoused by Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman and that circulate via the Mont Pelerin Society and the Chicago School of Economics (Harvey 19-31, Klein 59-87). Among such advocates are Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, both of whom have become the symbol for the ascendency of the neoconservative movements.

to unfettered market operations and 2) an ideological hegemonic project to manufacture consent for free market rationalization. Within the context of policy shifts, analysis of neoliberalism focuses on the transfer of ownership of collectively-held resources to the private sector and corporate interests. This transfer of ownership can also be regarded, from a Marxist perspective, as the restoration of class power squarely back to the hands of the capitalists (Harvey 31). As I have already mentioned, the neoliberal ideological project is often carried out in terms of an attack on the welfare state and on Keynesian doctrines. Claiming that economic growth and personal freedom have been stifled by the bureaucratic machine of the welfare state, neoconservatives were successful in putting forward the idea of the free market as the better, and indeed the only alternative, method of socio-economic redistribution and equilibration (Hall, "The Great" 19-39, Gamble 27-53).

Neoliberalism can also be understood as a state form. This understanding focuses on how governments are affected by regulatory frameworks governing the integrated global market. As states become increasingly subordinated to the demands of global capital, social fragmentation and economic displacement become more frequent due to the attenuation of state capacities to organize social, economic, and political activities that retain nationally-oriented interests. In other words, neoliberalism is about globalizing the state. Governments, from the national to the local level, are forced to reprioritize and restructure in accordance with the competitive logic of the global marketplace (Jonathan Friedman 1-34, Terence Turner 35-66). This neoliberal restructuring encourages "market

anarchy" resulting from unbridled global competition which creates perilous zones of disenfranchisement, poverty, and massive population dislocations. (Harvey 82). The need to restore order becomes a major preoccupation of neoliberalism – a need fulfilled by the increase in the coercive and disciplinary use of state apparatuses. In fact, neoliberalism as a state form is characterized by greater surveillance and policing, militarization and declaration of permanent war (Harvey 82-82, Amin 73-86).

Approached from the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, neoliberalism is akin to a kind of political arithmetic involving specific forms of intervention to enable the governing of economic subjects at a distance. Specifically, the political arithmetic is geared towards calculating and delineating a form of neoliberal governmentality – or art of neoliberal government – in which human capital can best be extracted to reinforce and expand economic activity. As Thomas Lemke explains, for Foucault, neoliberalism is based, not on governing "society in the name of the economy" but on redefining "the social sphere as a form of the economic domain" (197). Hence, neoliberalism, especially the US incarnation of it, from the perspective of governmentality, is about socializing citizens – via an ensemble of techniques, rationalities, technologies and strategies – into becoming auto-regulating and auto-governing selves.[2]

I bring all these different understandings of neoliberalism to bear on my reading of the novels. As one can imagine, my reading of neoliberalism is a critical one and seeks to address the implications of restructuring that has been

[2] See Thomas Lemke's "'The Birth of Bio-Politics': Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality." In this article, he expounds on Foucault's analyses of the Ordo-liberals and the Chicago School liberals. Also see Nikolas Rose.

taking place. For example, in my analysis of Chang-rae Lee' *A Gesture Life*, I look at how the re-contouring of the socio-economic landscape which resulted from the shift from welfare state to free market privileges certain types of citizen/individual over others. Those capable of strategically and successfully inserting themselves into the global circuits of capital are rewarded by easier access to certain benefits associated with financial credit, education, ease of social mobility and travel, and expanded choices of consumption and savings. Those unable to do so must survive neoliberal restructuring by offering their labor at greatly reduced rates within increasingly casual and flexible employment arrangements. These individuals who fail are deemed "failures" in individual terms and not viewed as the *intended* and predictable consequences of the system. I also analyze the effects of this free market policy and ideological shift in the context of the Global South in Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. In particular, I look at how Sri Lanka's move to liberalize its economy in the late 1970s and early 1980s exacerbated existing ethno-religious tensions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority and resulted in a long and bloody civil war. Also included in my analysis is how this economic liberalization is accompanied by greater consolidation of executive power and higher incidences of political intimidation and state terrorism. To these realities, the novel posits the classical liberal solution of individual, privatized forms of "happiness" – romantic love.

Despite social fragmentation and displacements resulting from the neoliberal turn, a consensus that neoliberalism was indeed the best and only solution to the welfare model emerged (Harvey 39-63). The economic shift was

flanked by efforts to construct consent for the free market via the rhetoric of independence and individual freedom. As I have already indicated, neoliberal rhetoric successfully presented the welfare state as a debilitating force which restricted human potential, and curtailed individual freedom. The idea of the individual liberated from the constraints imposed by the state proved to be a winning formula and in fact proved to be devastatingly seductive, even among a section of the liberal intelligentsia. In Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, for example, the question of self-restraint and the repression of instinctual drives coalesce around the image of the reluctant butler who clings to the security of an ordered and centralized model of government. While some read the novel as an illustration of the passage from the anachronistic and feudal to the modern, I argue that the novel, disguised as a critique of aristocratic paternalism, rehearses a neoliberal governmental rationality about the need to embody the emotional and mental characteristics for self-governance. Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, though focusing on the suburban life of an immigrant family, nonetheless attempts to rearticulate the logics of free market independence. The novel juxtaposes the city of London with the dreary English suburbs, and advocates for the former as the space of sexual liberation and intellectual experimentation and the latter as the site of sexual repression and intellectual malaise. The movement from the suburbs to the city is a narrative, as I will show, about escaping the welfare state and seeking freedom in the open-ended possibilities of the market.

In each chapter, I highlight the glaring discrepancies between the promise of individual freedom and the actual conditions of existence in the neoliberal era,

which the novels attempt to either repress or deny, or to which they appear to be oblivious. In our "contemporary disorientation about freedom" (Brown 10), the amplification of market-based freedom has brought about, not greater security, but greater uncertainty to the individual – and yet, the novels consistently posit a particularized world of the individual as bulwark and solution.

Happiness, Psychotherapy, and Neoliberal Confusion

My objective in this dissertation, as I have already mentioned, is to understand the novels as instantiations of the adaptive and harmonious relationship with domination that neoliberalism advocates. Implicit throughout the dissertation is the question: what if liberation – defined as personal, private, and individual – is not, in fact, an act of overcoming oppression but rather a coercive process of coming-into-being whose terms are determined by the needs and requirements of the free-market? In her discussion on "happiness," Ahmed proposes happiness as a disciplinary technology. As she explains, happiness is "associated with some life choices and not others" and that these choices are "regulatory effect[s] of a social belief" (Intro, loc. 71, loc. 168). One important implication of Ahmed's analysis is that the way we imagine "happy" is simultaneously a process of establishing certain acceptable social norms (Intro loc. 71). Happiness is not just an affect; it is a "form of world making" that values certain types of people over of others (Intro, loc. 75). Happiness, thus, crystallizes a certain image and expectation of the ideal citizen against whom other non-ideal citizens are measured. For example, the angry feminist who complains about

gender inequality is not a happy person, nor is the migrant who complains about low wages, or, for that matter, the homosexual who complains about homophobia. These unhappy people who complain about injustice and inequality are "represented as deprived, as unsociable and neurotic" (Intro, loc. 124). Central to the happiness industry, Ahmed points out, is a science of happiness that "locates happiness in certain places, especially marriage, widely regarded as the primary 'happiness indicator'" (Intro, loc, 170). In short, happiness is not so much about liberating ourselves from power; it is about *empowering* ourselves so that we can construct our lives according to these socially acceptable happy indicators. Happiness, therefore, is a way we exercise power over ourselves. Rather than a negating force, power here is (re)productive. It reproduces us in the image of the ideal happy person. It invites us, tells us, pressures us to embody hegemonic archetypes of happy selves.

Of course, an important, even central, component of the happiness imperative is the psychotherapeutic industry. The rise of psychotherapeutics since the 1980s attests to its significance as a form of power/expertise on which we depend to achieve happiness. We seek and are encouraged to seek psychotherapeutic counseling because it is assumed that something about our psychic makeup prevents us from maximizing opportunities for happiness. The objective in psychotherapy, for the most part, is to help alleviate our individual neuroses so that we can begin to allow ourselves the chance to be happy. Thus, psychotherapy is a technology of individuation, and insofar as it proposes a normative "self," it is also coercive. As an interpretive science, psychotherapy

deciphers symptoms and produce meaning out of seemingly banal occurrences. Family life, uneventful as it may seem, contains hidden meanings about the formation of the self and therefore is a significant site of examination and interpretation. While the goal of psychoanalysis is to help individuals manage and resolve conflicts within the unconscious, it is also a confessional technology that encourages, among other things, vigilance, not against the incursion of power from without, but from within the order of the self. As Eva Illoutz explains, psychoanalytic approaches to self-understanding involve "a hermeneutic of suspicion vis-à-vis ordinary conduct" (45). Every aspect of our lives is regarded as suspicious, as if harboring secrets that need to be unearthed and explained.

Power, in other words, sometimes appears in the guise of welfare as productive of certain types of good: it is not always negating or negative. In this sense, power can seem to be liberating, allowing us to unburden ourselves from past traumas, ideological trappings, tradition and so on. It is this *liberating effect* that causes confusion and what Nancy Fraser usefully calls, "misrecognition" about domination and liberation; that is, misrecognition about the exercise of power. We get the impression that we are being liberated when what we are actually doing is harmonizing with the demands of power and domination. Foucault understands this "liberating effect" to be an inherent problem in psychoanalytic theory, especially as it is embodied in the politics of sexual liberation. In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Foucault challenged the notion that the consolidation of capitalism in the 18th century had caused sexuality to be repressed. This generally accepted historical chronology and argument rested on

the assumption that the capitalist mode of production entailed the repression of instinctual drives. Foucault argued, instead, that the rise of the bourgeoisie was in fact accompanied by an intensification of a discourse of sexuality, not a repression of it. This deployment of sexuality, as Foucault explains, is coterminous with the bourgeois preoccupation about differentiating itself from the working classes: the bourgeoisie "provided itself with a body to be cared for, protected, cultivated, and preserved from the many dangers and contacts, to be isolated from others so that it would retain its differential value; and this, by equipping itself with – among other resources – a technology of sex" (*History* 123). Hence, the "repressive hypothesis," which ignores the question of class, is misleading. Sex was talked about and studied in ways that allowed for the production of a technology of power and knowledge upon which the bourgeoisie could "underscore the political price of its body, sensations, and pleasures, its well-being and survival" (*History* 123).

Foucault further objected to the repressive hypothesis because it projects power as merely a negating force, and gives the false impression that power can simply be vanquished via the expression of sexual truth. For Foucault, the opposite is true. For him, in talking about the "truth" of our sexuality, we are contributing to a discourse that allows us to understand how sexuality is a central part of our own identities. In other words, the act of "liberating" the truth of our desires and sexuality is, in fact, a process of constructing and consolidating our sexual identities. Within this context of liberation as a process of coming-into-being, the truth of sexuality is not "intrinsically opposed to power" but is a form

of power/knowledge that help us understand ourselves as modern sexual subjects (Dreyfus and Rabinow 127). In critiquing the repressive hypothesis, I am not suggesting that sexual repression did not in fact exist in history. Rather, I am trying to understand how the Freudian theory of sexual repression has come to influence the way we frame our projects of liberation in the 20th century. As Eva Illoutz puts it, Freud was the first to offer "what no sexologist of the time could provide, an all-encompassing narrative of the self in which sexual pleasure was legitimated and turned into the primary site of the formation of the psyche as a whole" (49). In other words, Freud "put erotic sexuality squarely at the center of selfhood" (49).

Implicit in Illoutz's observation is that the pursuit of happiness in the 20th century and beyond, at least in the capitalist West, would be intimately linked to a concern about the *eros*. Freud, after all, introduced the idea that modern man[3] is inherently unhappy. Forced to sacrifice his instinctual freedom in order to live harmoniously, modern man, according to Freud, is in a perpetual struggle with what he calls the super-ego, that ethical force that regulates human conduct via the inculcation of social conscience. The price of living in a civilized world is therefore guilt and neurotic repression (62-63). Central to the psychoanalytic objective is helping to bring the conflict between the drives and social norms into consciousness where it can be managed via the "exercise of the rational ego' (Cushman 112). Freud encouraged the ongoing process of self-narrativization that involves seeking out hidden sources of conflict in the unconscious. Through the

[3] I retain Freud's usage of the masculine form here.

insight gained from this self-narrative, modern man could exert control over the opposing demands of nature and culture (Illoutz 41-42). Yet, as Illoutz explains, Freud's salvific narrative of selfhood is predicated on the assumption that everyday normal behavior is "contiguous with extreme pathologies" (42). The implication of this assumption is that the line separating normality from neurosis is a thin one. In effect, normal people are only a few degrees away from being hysterical (Illoutz 43). The psychotherapeutic narrative, therefore, is not reserved solely for individuals with extreme pathologies; it is for *everyone*.

We can perhaps begin to understand Ahmed's argument about happiness being a "duty" and an imperative (Intro, loc. 164-165). Freud and Freudiansim had not only made it possible for every aspect of our lives to be scrutinized, it also provided the justification for psychotherapy to be used as a technology of the self. Hence, from a Foucauldian perspective, psychoanalysis is a form of bio-power par excellence. Foucault defined bio-power as a modern deployment of disciplinary controls in liberal societies in which "the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" are effected, not by direct coercion, but in dispersed techniques that allow autonomous individuals to exercise power on themselves (Foucault, "History" 140). More provocatively, he suggested that the disciplinary techniques of indirect rule or governing at a distance are embodied in familiar and everyday institutions such as "universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops" – all of which "schools" the individuals in how to conduct themselves in society. Simply put, these institutions suppress rebellions and produce conformity (Foucault, "History" 140). Psychoanalysis figures as one of these

productive institutions because, as I have explained, it is a science that brings the deepest part of our selves – our private thoughts and feelings – to the scrutiny of experts in order for the self to align with the normative.

The so-called liberation of the truth of our sexuality, then, turns out to be, a confession of our dirty secrets in exchange for some kind of salvation based on the realignment of our erotic desires with "healthy" norms. The logics of the repressive hypothesis that inheres in psychoanalysis, hence, gives the perfect alibi to power; masking the process of discovery of "truth" as an act of liberation when, in fact, it is part of the larger deployment of modern power. It is this repressive hypothesis that allows bio-power to be exercised "under the guise of improving the welfare of the individual and the population" (Dreyfus and Rabinow xxvi). To return to the earlier question, it is the repressive hypothesis that confuses the relationship between domination and liberation. It is my goal in this dissertation to demonstrate in what ways the four novels, by ultimately offering self-empowerment as the solution, reproduce this confusion in their attempts to articulate a politics of liberation.

The Promised Land as Duty

The four novels I analyze in this dissertation, though not political texts as such, nonetheless have an understanding of their own importance as literary engagements with politics. Their central concerns of sexual oppression, racial harassment, ethno-religious confrontation, nationalistic chauvinism, to name a few, coalesce around the awareness that individual freedom has been repressed.

The novels in their own way articulate a politics of liberation. Yet, despite the variances in subject matter, geography, socio-political locations, historical contexts, and narrative styles, these novels bear a striking similarity, not to mention a remarkably familiar understanding, about what constitutes liberation and how it can be won. From the delusional and self-denying butler of *Remains* to the bored suburban British teenager in *Buddha*, from the benighted Japanese immigrant in *Gesture* to the gay post-colonial subject in *Funny Boy*, liberation in each of the novels is articulated in terms of a need to release one's instinctual drives. The liberation of *eros,* so to speak, figures as a primary solution for how political domination is to be overcome.

In emphasizing sexual repression as the primary cause of political domination, these novels assign the erotic as a force for political awakening. For example, in Ishiguro's *Remains*, Stevens' political consciousness is framed alongside and even against a romance plot. The closer he journeys to meet Miss Kenton, the former housekeeper at Darlington Hall, the closer Stevens comes to realizing his political mistake of supporting his fascist aristocratic employer. His political awakening is animated by his desire to be reunited with the lost object of his affection. In Lee's *Gesture*, the unleashing of desires is expressed as a corrective to a stifling nationalism that demands social conformity. The erotic also figures as a central liberating trope in both Kureishi's *Buddha* and Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. In both these novels, the release of repressed libidinal desires, the force that disrupts heteronormative assumptions, is cast as a privatized political solution to larger social problems. Hence, while the novels are immersed in

"politics" (Thatcherite England and war-torn Sri Lanka), they posit the erotic over against the political, or more accurately the erotic *in* the political.

While the *eros* as a revolutionary force has been proposed by the likes of Herbert Marcuse, these novels, while also offering libidinal freedom as solution, deviates from the earlier formulation in one important way. The Freudian Left (Marcuse and others) regarded the problem of alienation to be structurally connected to the contradictions of capitalism.[4] Alienated in their labor, the working classes consented to their political domination. The objective of a Freudian Left politics, hence, is to contest and overturn the bourgeois mechanisms of alienation via the revolutionary force of the *eros*. The politics of sexual liberation in these novels appear to be predicated on the assumption that the free market has the potential to reconcile capitalism's contradictions.[5] Within this

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[4] The Freudian Left comprises of several intellectuals – Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse to name a couple – who sought to theorize the causes surrounding the failure of a social revolution to materialize in the 20th century (Lasch "Freudian" 24, C. Turner). Arguing that the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism could not fully explain the implications of alienated consciousness, the Freudian left sought out Freud's theory in an attempt to show how the repression of the working classes is inherently linked to the repression of their sexuality (Lasch "Freudian" 24, Robinson 202-204). Central to this line of thinking is, of course, Freud's general equation of repression and civilization. But while Freud saw an irreconcilable tension between sexual repression and the demands of civilization, the Freudian Left saw civilization as a dialectical structure in which oppression could be overcome via a political engagement with the *eros*. Marcuse, in particular, articulated the possibility for such a reconciliation in terms of a realignment of labor, not with the priorities of commodity production and the maximization of profit, but according to what he calls the "libidinal work relations" among individuals in society (Marcuse 215-216, Robinson 218-219). In other words, the profitable utilization of the productive apparatus must coincide with the erotic functions of individuals. The gist of Marcuse's argument is that *eros* is the solution to alienated consciousness.

[5] Free market proponents such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman – both members of the Mont Pelerin Society – argue that the procedurally-neutral mechanisms of the market, rather than central planning by the state, is the best method of organizing economic activity (Harvey 20). Premised on the theories of classical liberalism, namely the concept of the market's invisible hand, such an argument calls for a minimalist state, deregulation of financial apparatuses, and privatization of national services (Larner 5). The crux of free market thinking lies in the belief that the pursuit of individual interests in the economy would bring about unintended benefits to all (Smart 95). Such benefits include rising prosperity across the socio-economic spectrum and, as

context of the free market solution, alienation is understood to be a transitional, perhaps transitory, problem, an inability to adapt to the evolutionary pace of civilization. These novels address this intermediary problem in terms of a historical trauma. The idea is a simple one: individuals are unable to accede to the free market because something in their past is holding them back. This something is often described as a debilitated or distorted psyche.

For example, the protagonist in *A Gesture Life,* Hata, is very much a personality from the past. Even though he has lived in America for over 30 years, he still conducts himself according to the doctrines of collective individualism that he had internalized while growing up in Japan in the early 20th century. One of the consequences of this attachment to past modes of self-conduct is his inability to form real emotional connections with people. In his self-narrative, Hata unveils his own history as a series of traumatic attempts to be the ideal Japanese citizen. His life has been animated by a constant fear that he might fail to do his part to serve the larger collective. This psychotherapeutic reading of history as a traumatic condition, however, appears to instantiate neoliberal articulations of citizenship. An ideal citizen is no longer someone who is tethered to the larger collective but is a mentally and emotionally sound individual who conducts him- or herself independently of the nation.

The point I wish to make here is that the politics of sexual liberation has become an isolated activity of undoing psychic blockages in order to allow the

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Thomas Friedman argues, greater peace and security. In his book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, he tries to make the case that when a country develops a sufficiently broad and healthy middle-class, it will achieve a kind of democratic peace in which the propensity of war is greatly reduced (248-275).

individual to live "freely" in society, unencumbered by ideological constraints. The underlying assumption of this politics is that in this era of infinite consumerist choices, and possibilities of self-fashioning, we are now able to be happy at last. In fact, to *not* be happy is morally reprehensible. We can now appreciate Ahmed's point about happiness being a "duty." As I will demonstrate in my readings of the novels, the object of critique in these novels is not capitalism; rather, the focus is on the order of the self. The fault does not lie with capitalism's mechanism of alienation but with the individuals who refuse to embrace their *eros*. In her discussion on the self-esteem movement, Barbara Cruikshank talks about the coercive nature of liberation therapy: "Self-fulfillment is no longer a personal or private goal … it is something we *owe* to society, something that will defray the costs of social problems, something that will create a 'true' democracy" (232, my emphasis).

In a sense, the argument of the happiness imperative seems to be that, by ignoring the revolutionary potential of our own libidinal drives, we burden society with our neurosis. Hence, alienation is not something that capitalism does to estrange us from our own humanity; it is something we do to ourselves by clinging on to our historical traumas. In my readings of the novel, I focus on the disciplinary function of psychotherapeutic empowerment. In what ways are we encouraged to "be ourselves" in the neoliberal age? And in what ways are we castigated for refusing the neoliberal imperative to live a normalized lifestyle? In answering these questions, I try to show how empowerment and domination are

two sides of the same coin and that this conjunction—empowerment and domination—is played out in a variety of ways in the novels.

Given the thematic and structural similarities of the four novels, as well as their diverse historical and geographical contexts, I have arranged their order in this dissertation according to no particular priorities other than to highlight the various instances and locations in which neoliberalism manifests itself. I start with Ishiguro's *Remains* because it is the most didactic of the four novels. Its neoliberal message appears to be quite evident in the way it emphasizes the moral dangers of self-restraint. As a follow up, I chose Lee's *A Gesture Life* because it most clearly continues with the topic of self-restraint but in an American and Japanese context. These two novels provide the clearest examples of the happiness and psychotherapeutic imperatives. I take up Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* in the next chapter as its postcolonial setting provides a dynamic contrast to the earlier two texts and allows us to appreciate the global reach of neoliberalism. I end the dissertation with Kureishi's *Buddha*. Unlike in the earlier three texts, which embed the erotic within the political narrative of alienation, *Buddha* engages directly with the erotic as a literary trope and in fact, demonstrates, how the erotic becomes incorporated into the Thatcherite discourse on independence. While it is the most different of the four novels in terms of its tone and literary intention, it brings together many of the important concerns of the other novels: questions of race, nation, sexuality, to name a few.

The choice of these four novels is based on no particular priorities with regards to race, gender, or nationality. They were chosen because of their

thematic relevance to the argument I was trying to make. They stand in for numerous other texts and therefore are exemplary rather than exceptional. The fact that the main characters – and authors – of all four novels are male and non-white might suggest that self-empowerment is a particular kind of politics that appeals to a certain type of cosmopolitan author. In any case, this dissertation serves as the steppingstone to a wider inquiry on the influence of neoliberal thinking in the literary industry.

Chapter 1: Learning to be Free: Neoliberal Obligations of Self-Empowerment In Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

Introduction

In an interview with Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, Kazuo Ishiguro describes his narrative style as "understated and clipped" (142). As he puts it: "my style seemed to be unusually calm with all this kind of strange turmoil expressed underneath the calm" (142). He admits that he had not noticed the unsettling effect of his style until reviewers pointed it out in his earlier two novels – *A Pale View of the Hills* (1982) and *An Artist in the Floating World* (1986). Intrigued by the reviewers' assessment, Ishiguro decided to "tackle on a thematic level" the implications of this economical style in the next novel. To this end, he self-consciously produced *The Remains of the Day* (1988), which allowed him to explore the ethics of self-restraint as it relates to "this whole business about the suppression of emotion" (142). Interestingly, Ishiguro chose to write about the ethics of self-restraint within the topographical setting of the English country estate. As a literary genre, the English country estate/house has inspired a long list of works. From Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited,* from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* to Ian MacEwan's *Atonement*, the English country estate/house has been the site for the exploration of literary

themes from gothic to murder mysteries, from sentimental drama to farce. Ishiguro's engagement with the English estate in *Remains* is therefore not new.

However, as Ishiguro tells Vorda and Herzinger, he had to negotiate the writing of *Remains* against the "enormous nostalgia industry" in which representations of old England, such as the English estate, were being used to forge a certain kind of xenophobic and reactionary nationalism (Ishiguro, "Interview" 139). While he does not call out Margaret Thatcher, the conservative Prime Minister, by name, Ishiguro explains that it is mainly the Right that is manipulating these symbols of the past to reassert a brand of conservative politics (Ishiguro, "Interview" 139). In particular, it is the Conservatives who have capitalized on this nostalgia for a mythic England to propagate the notion that Britain's lost of national glory is the result of "socialized" politics and the permissive cultures they help create:

> [Nostalgia is] used as a way of bashing anybody who tries to spoil this 'Garden of Eden.' This can be brought out by the left or right, but usually it is the political right who say England was this beautiful place before the trade unions tried to make it more egalitarian or before the immigrants started to come or before the promiscuous age of the '60s came and ruined everything. (Ishiguro, "Interview"139)

In the context of resisting nostalgia and the political Right, Ishiguro set out to "rework a particular myth about a certain kind of mythic England" (139). Old

England was to be represented, therefore, not in terms of a longing for its past glory, but as site of moral decay. As such, the estate house Ishiguro presents to us is one that is notoriously linked to the rise of fascism in the interwar years. Using the real story of Lord Londonderry (1878-1949) as the political context of the novel, Ishiguro constructs a narrative of aristocratic blunder and demise.

Lord Londonderry, like many of his aristocratic peers, dabbled in radical politics as a means to making himself politically relevant to the 20th century (N.C. Fleming 1-4, Cannadine 500-502). In particular, as Cannadine and others have shown, Lord Londonderry involved himself with the politics of appeasement in the wake of the First World War and allied himself with Hitler and Nazism (Fleming 1-4). By contrast, the character of Lord Darlington, based on Lord Londonderry, as presented from the point of view of the protagonist, Stevens, is benevolent and well-meaning. He is shown to be a bungling amateur politician who becomes a pawn in Hitler's ascent to power. In the interwar years, Lord Darlington formed associations with the fascist Mosley, fired two Jewish staff on the grounds of their race, and advocated the abolition of parliamentary democracy. By depicting the English estate as some kind of a Petri dish festering with anti-democratic and intransigent politics, all of which are hostile to the interests of the working classes, Ishiguro's narrative attempts to scotch our yearning for Old England.

Yet, how successful is Ishiguro's novel in subverting the nostalgia industry? After all, *Remains* was adapted into film by James Ivory and Ismail Merchant, both of whom have a "reputation for promoting ersatz nostalgia and

fostering an idealized picture of England" (Sim 157). Released in 1993, the movie garnered eight Oscar nominations and high praise for screenwriter Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, the star-studded cast (Anthony Hopkins, Emma Thompson, Christopher Reeve, and Hugh Grant), and of course Merchant and Ivory themselves (Parkes 77-78). The fact that the novel was easily reincorporated into the nostalgia industry in its film version suggests that, perhaps, it is not Ishiguro's subversion of the estate genre that resonated with the public. Rather it was for some other quality that the novel was appreciated.

As evidenced by the scholarly focus on the novel's themes of libidinal repression, the success of Ishiguro's novel (which won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 1989) is likely due to its engagement with the psychotherapeutic industry, not the nostalgia industry.[6] Specifically, what is seductive about *Remains* is the way it captures the problem of aristocratic oppression as a condition relating to some form of emotional deficit. The inability to acknowledge one's feelings of love, the constant denial of erotic attraction, the rejection of an emotional life – all these are projected as an illness deriving from one's imprisonment in the ideological trappings of the aristocracy. Such an approach to the study of power and subjection has a certain radical appeal. As Foucault puts it, if oppression is secured via the repression of one's emotions and desires, the release of such pent up instinctual drives "has the appearance of a deliberate transgression" ("History" 6). However, as Gabriele Annan complains, the novel's message is too obvious and didactic. She writes that *Remains* is "too much of a

[6] See Meera Tamaya, Kathleen Walls, Ihab Hassan, Brian F. Shaffer, Suzie O'Brien, Michel Terestchenko.

roman à thèse," and its message "quite banal: Be less Japanese, less bent on dignity, less false to yourself and others, less restrained and controlled."

Annan's assessment may be glib but it exposes a certain cliché embedded in the novel's emancipatory formula, namely that the refusal or inability to acknowledge one's true feelings and desires is detrimental not only to personal development but also to society. The familiarity of the novel's banal message owes in part to the propagation of psychoanalytic idioms in Britain during the 1980s. As Frank Furedi explains, psychological counseling "became one of Britain's little growth industry" in the eighties when "the number of people practicing talking cures has grown steadily" ("Ascendency" 18). The heavy circulation of psychotherapeutic language in society has to do with governmental efforts to institutionalize therapeutic policies. In an attempt to reconstruct the character of British personhood and to redefine what it means to be happy, the British governments, from Thatcher to Blair, encouraged the disarticulation of certain British characteristics – fortitude and self-restraint, for example – from notions of the good life.[7] Where the good life in the postwar years was understood within the context of state provision of welfare and the guarantee of full employment, it is now something one attains via private initiative in the market (Waine 7, Harvey 61). As such, a new emotionalism is in order. To attain the good life now, one must be more extroverted, unabashed, unapologetic, risk-

[7] See Frank Furedi's "The Silent Ascendency of Therapeutic Culture in Britain" and *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*; Janice Russell's "Counseling and the Social Construction of Self"; Paul Heelas' "Reforming the Self: Enterprise and the Characters of Thatcherism"; Nikolas Rose's *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*; Heidi Marie Rimke's "Governing Citizens Through Self-Help Literature"; Paul Morris' "Freeing the Spirit of Enterprise."

taking, to name a few – qualities that are more associated with American optimism (Rose, “Inventing” 158-159).

I argue that, in perusing a psychotherapeutic platform to critique the political rationality of the aristocracy, Ishiguro rehearses a cultural and hegemonic reconstruction of the British character. As I will demonstrate, Stevens’ liberation from his moral obligations to the aristocratic order is a simultaneous process of acquiring the mental and emotional character of the bourgeoisie, specifically of the American variety. In this sense, the novel’s message about being less self-restraint coheres with the larger ideological undertaking to realign notions of British citizenship with the priorities of the free market.

I. Aristocratic Decline and Bourgeois Ascendency: A Sexual Reading

The novel begins in 1956, an ignominious year for Britain. After all, 1956 was the year of the Suez Canal crisis – a historical event often regarded as "the end of Great Britain's role as one of the world's major powers" (Ellis 212). The Suez fiasco revealed on the one hand that Britain, quite plainly, was no longer the hegemonic imperial power in world affairs and, on the other that the United States was emerging as the world’s super power. The significance of 1956 in the novel, thus, is the temporal metaphor it provides to the narrativization of a historical transition. In particular, it marks the year that Darlington Hall is bought by an American, Mr. Farraday. In a none-too-subtle literary ploy, Ishiguro makes Darlington Hall a synecdoche for Britain as it undergoes a humiliating concession

to the Americans. The purpose of this synecdoche, however, is not to generate a chorus of lament for the loss of British imperial agency but to highlight the fact that the English estate has ceased to be relevant to articulations of British identity and of the British way of life in the postwar period. As François Bédarida explains, the defeat of the aristocracy had been secured on bourgeois terms (143). By the time of the Second World War, the power of the aristocracy had mostly been eclipsed by the rise of a new kind of free-market, mercantilist, multi-national capitalist class.

Ishiguro places his narrator-protagonist, Stevens, at this important historical crossroad to highlight how the transfer of power from the older, traditional land-owning classes to the mercurial entrepreneurs – particularly, of the American variety – inaugurates a new, if false, spirit of optimism. As embodied in the character of Harry Smith, postwar Britain, as represented in the novel, is a country characterized by new possibilities for social mobility and the freedom of expression. Arguing that the defeat of Hitler had stemmed the tide of fascism in Europe, Harry Smith believes the working classes had "won the right to be free citizens," as well as to vote (*Remains* 186). Stevens, on the other hand, is still unable to shed off traces of Lord Darlington's reactionary politics. In particular, Stevens is haunted by Lord Darlington's views that England should emulate fascist Germany and Italy by getting rid of parliamentary democracy and universal suffrage (*Remains* 198-199). Out of place in the postwar world, Stevens has some distance left in harmonizing himself with the ethos of liberation and democracy that Harry Smith evokes.

Remains, thus, is a story about Stevens transitioning between two historical periods. However, as Suzie O'Brien explains, this transitioning is "thematically constructed around an opposition between what are commonly regarded as Victorian values – formality, repression, and self-effacement, summed up under the general heading of 'dignity' – and those associated with an idea of 'America'…freedom, nature, and individualism" (788). O'Brien's observation brings into focus the underlying intention for Ishiguro's use of the English estate, which is to delineate Old England as the repository of unfulfilled desires, reduced expectations, neurotic guilt, and stifled human potential, and to project it against the alleged progressive New World order where individuals are at least able to love whom they desire and to pursue their own truths. In other words, Ishiguro is not invested in a class-based reading of the historical transition from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie; rather, he is interested in constructing that historical transition in terms of a politics that emphasizes the liberation of desires. Within this context of political transition, the novel's politics of sexual liberation is at once radical and not. While the freeing up of libidinal desires is a sign of welcome change from the ideology of restraint, in the novel, it is also an imperative. That is to say, liberating one's desires is not only political; it is a moral obligation. In making sexual truth and self-understanding, as opposed to class, the basis of political rationalization, Ishiguro redirects the focus of political liberation to the individual who must now *unlearn* old habits related to self-restraint and circumspection, as well as *learn* to engage his or her emotional and

mental capacities for freedom. In this section, I will analyze in what ways Ishiguro's novel structures this process of unlearning and learning.

Self-Restraint as Bad Faith

Stevens' narrative is a movement from self-deception/self-denial to self-enlightenment. This movement involves both a physical and a psychic journey. The physical journey is a six-day road trip, undertaken in 1956, by Stevens, the narrator-protagonist. The stated purpose of the trip is to visit Miss Kenton (Mrs. Benn) and ascertain in person if she intends to return to Darlington Hall as a housekeeper. This physical journey is simultaneously a psychic journey of reconstructing the past. Specifically, Stevens recounts his experiences working as a butler for Lord Darlington in the interwar years. In remembering the past, Stevens confronts certain unsettling facts regarding the aristocrat's involvement with fascism and with Hitler. The psychic journey is also a confessional of sorts in which Stevens reveals, among other things, the moral ambiguities of his own conduct in the interwar years. For example, even as Lord Darlington's fascist involvement was becoming untenable, Stevens continued to believe that his aristocratic employer was a "gentleman" who acted in the greater interest of humanity.

Not only did Stevens endeavor to defend Darlington's politics against any doubts issuing from both private and public circles, and indeed from himself, he also knowingly gave his consent to be subordinated by his superiors. In other words, Stevens' narrative is one in which he confesses to the fact that he acted in

bad faith. As Michael Terestchenko explains, Stevens used the cover of his profession – that of a servant – to avoid making moral decisions. By voiding his own needs and desires in service of Lord Darlington, Stevens was able to consider it a virtue to follow the destructive orders of his superiors. This form of bad faith not only serves to detract from "the reality of oppression," but also "helps to dissemble and justify oppression by purely abstract representations" (84). For Terestchenko, *Remains* is an important fictional text that "contributes to the analysis of *mauvais foi* – that moral ideology of obedience to power as an excuse for shunning responsibility for one's own action" (88).

Terestchenko's argument is well taken. As Ishiguro himself admits, the reason for which he wrote *Remains* was to frame self-restraint as "a form of cowardice: a way of actually hiding from what is perhaps the scariest arena in life, which is the emotional arena" (V&H 142). In order to anchor his protagonist within this moral inquiry, Ishiguro creates a fictional club of elite butlers – The Hayes Society – which serves as the central point of reference for Stevens' professional, and even personal, conduct. While Stevens is not a member of this club, he agrees wholeheartedly with its views about professional integrity: "Dignity has to do crucially with a butler's ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits. Lesser butlers will abandon their professional being for the private one at the least provocation" (*Remains* 42). The Hayes Society, in short, demands that butlers inhabit their professional role to the utmost, a duty that involves exercising that great emotional restraint which "only the English race is capable of" (*Remains* 43). In particular, the criterion of "dignity in keeping with

one's position" is a mantra which Stevens uses excessively as justification for avoiding difficult moral decisions.

In March of 1923, Lord Darlington hosted a conference at his estate, of which the purpose was to "outline the strong moral case for a relaxing of various aspects of the Versailles treaty" (*Remains* 92). The specific objectives of this conference were two fold: to freeze German reparation payments and to convince the French to withdraw from the Ruhr region (*Remains* 92). For Stevens, the conference of March 23 represented "a turning point in [his] professional development" (*Remains* 110). While Stevens was serving the prestigious guests who had gathered at the estate, his father suffered a stroke and died. Rather than attending to his personal loss, however, Stevens carried on with his duties. Thinking back on this event, he tells us that his conduct that evening was exemplary of the "great" butlers of his generation. Unlike the "lesser butlers" who would have abandoned "their professional being for the private one at the least provocation," Stevens stayed the course and was proud of it: "you may not think I delude myself unduly if I go so far as to suggest that I did perhaps display, in the face of everything, at least in some more modest degree a 'dignity'" as per the Hayes Society (*Remains* 110).

However, despite feeling triumphant, Stevens did feel a need to vindicate himself. As he explained to Miss Kenton: "please don't think me unduly improper in not ascending to see my father in his deceased condition just at this moment. You see, I know my father would have wished me to carry on just now" (*Remains* 106). That he felt the need to justify to Miss Kenton suggests that, to some degree,

he was aware that his action, or lack thereof, was a betrayal of his own class. As Brian F. Shaffer suggests, Stevens aligns himself, not with his "lower-class natural father," but with his "upper-class 'cultural' father and master, Lord Darlington" (73). Stevens' interests are therefore invested with the latter. His father's untimely death, however, momentarily disrupted his identification with the father-substitute and placed him in a moral position to choose: should he stop serving his cultural father and honor his natural father? Or vice versa? By reminding himself that he must not abandon his professional being for the private one, Stevens was able to realign himself with his father-substitute without having to confront the full moral implications of his decision to relegate the death of his natural father to secondary importance. The Hayes Society criteria, in other words, allowed Stevens to deflect from his consciousness the moral ambiguities of his actions.

If Stevens might be forgiven, even admired, for displaying emotional restraint when informed of his father's death, his reticence on the matter of anti-Semitism is morally reprehensible. Following the 1923 conference, Lord Darlington briefly became associated with Sir Oswald Mosley and his fascist blackshirt's organization. This association behooved him to fire the two Jewish housemaids at Darlington Hall. As he explained to Stevens: "We cannot have Jews on the staff here at Darlington Hall…It's for the good of this house….In the interests of the guests we have staying here" (*Remains* 146-147). Stevens admits to being perturbed by Lord Darlington's decision and tells us that his "every instinct opposed the idea of their dismissal" (*Remains* 148). Yet, he could not

bring himself to contravene in his lordship's decision because, as he explains, "there was nothing to be gained at all in irresponsibly displaying such personal doubts" (*Remains* 148). As he did with his father, Stevens tried to use the Hayes Society as an excuse to avoid making a moral decision. But what is telling in this episode is that Stevens clearly understood Lord Darlington's decision to be unconscionable. Not only does Stevens tell us that he had "personal doubts" about Lord Darlington's judgment, he was instinctually opposed to it. Stevens' revelation that he was aware of the moral implications of his employer's actions gives us cause to believe that, at the time in question, he was not, in fact, alienated from his own consciousness.

It is noteworthy that, while the Hayes Society can be considered what Louis Althusser calls an "ideological state apparatuses" or ISA; in the novel, it functions more as a psychological crutch – a psychic mechanism that permits Stevens to defend himself against what he sees, but refuses to recognize, as Lord Darlington's rapid descent into moral decay. The Hayes Society, in other words, is not so much an ISA through which Stevens internalizes the law of the father, so to speak, but a psychic function through which Stevens denies or evades the truth for reasons of self-preservation. Put yet another way, Stevens does not necessarily believe that there is dignity in keeping with one's position; what he hopes for is that, in keeping with his position, he can avoid making drastic changes in his life – changes that require a thorough reorganization of his priorities and belief systems, that is, an unlearning of old ways. Within this context of psychic self-defense, we can begin to appreciate why Stevens continued to cling to the Hayes

Society even when it was becoming obvious that Lord Darlington was going off the deep end, so to speak. To do otherwise would mean, among other things, leaving Darlington Hall for good.

In effect, Ishiguro frames the issue of aristocratic subjugation in terms of a refusal on Stevens' part to come to terms with reality. The warning signs were everywhere around him to see. Lord Darlington's politics was veering to the extreme right. His involvement with Mosley was merely a prelude to his ardent support for fascism. As Lord Darlington explained to Stevens, England was clinging to "outmoded systems" and would do well to follow the example of Italy and Germany with their "strong leadership" (*Remains* 198). Stevens could not have been oblivious to the fact that his father-substitute was engaged in a violent form of political thinking, especially when that violence was manifested within the walls of Darlington Hall itself. On one particular evening, as Stevens was serving Lord Darlington's guests, he was put on the spot by a Mr. Spenser who wanted to know what he thought about "the debt situation in America" or the "currency problem in Europe" or the "situation in North America" (*Remains* 195-196). This deliberate test of knowledge was not meant solely to humiliate Stevens; rather, it was to highlight a point Mr. Spenser wished to underscore about parliamentary democracy, namely that it was foolish to leave the "nation's decisions" in the hands of people like Stevens who knew next to nothing about world affairs (*Remains* 196).

Mr. Spenser's exercise, it is important to note, was itself a form of violence. He was not merely explaining that parliamentary democracy was

inefficient; he was demonstrating it. Stevens could not possibly have been ignorant of the fact that the friends with whom his father-substitute associated thought him, well, a simpleton. In fact, when Lord Darlington apologized for Mr. Spenser's behavior, Stevens appeared to understand quite well the context in which the apology was made. That is to say, Stevens knew that he had been hit below the belt, so to speak. But more importantly is the fact that, in accepting Lord Darlington's apology, Stevens was simultaneously acknowledging, at least tacitly, that the whole incident with Mr. Spenser had proven that there was in fact no "dignity" to be had – only humiliation – in keeping with one's position. After all, Mr. Spencer's underhanded trick was not to recuperate Stevens as an esteemed citizen; rather, it was to show how Stevens and the "few million other like him" were incapable of running the country (*Remains* 196).

Stevens, of course, would rather accept humiliation as the cost of self-restraint than confront the full implications of life outside Darlington Hall. As he tells us: "I will never be in a position to comprehend the great affairs of today's world, and our best course will always be to put our trust in an employer we judge to be wise and honourable" (*Remains* 201). This statement underscores the fact that Stevens considers Darlington Hall to be a fort, shielding him from the forces of change in the outside world. Even when evidence surfaced that Lord Darlington was being manipulated by Hitler via the German Ambassador, Herr Ribbentrop, Stevens refused to consider the possibility that the English estate he had spent the better part of his life serving might succumb to the changes that were fast enveloping Europe and the world. After all, the fate of the aristocracy

was already hanging by a thin thread in the interwar years. As evidenced by Lord Darlington's desperate attempt to shore up political clout, the aristocracy was sliding into obsolescence, in which case Stevens would not only be out of a job; he would have to rebuild his life around bourgeois requirements of independence, self-reliance, self-governance – a daunting prospect for someone so accustomed to following orders.

Sexuality and Liberation

In effect, the Hayes Society is not so much a tool of political manipulation as it is a tool of psychic defense. In line with his stated intention to portray self-restraint as a form of cowardice, Ishiguro encourages us to view Stevens as desperately trying to hide behind the walls of Darlington Hall. However, this act of cowardice, of shunning the challenges of self-governance, so Ishiguro intuits, is psychically debilitating. Stevens may enjoy the "freedom" of not bearing responsibilities for his own conduct, but he is at the same compulsively repressing his own needs and desires. In Faustian style, Stevens appeared to have traded in his sexuality for the false security of Darlington Hall. As Meera Tamaya points out, Darlington Hall "resembles a luxurious monastery in one key aspect: none of its inmates has any kind of sex life. From the master down to the housekeeper, all lead celibate lives, strenuously sublimating their libidinal energies in the performance of their duties" (50). The conceit in the novel is that, in surrendering his life to the authority of his father-substitute, Stevens is also sacrificing the possibility of finding his own happiness in what Ihab Hassan nicely terms "the

messiness of life: sex, marriage, personal interests, any choice beyond the ambit of a butler's conduct or ken" (370).

According to Ishiguro, Stevens is not only cowardly in refusing to engage with the "messiness of life"; he is also a neurotic. Constantly trying to disavow and ignore his own desires and sexuality in service of Lord Darlington, Stevens becomes paranoid and distrustful, not only about other people's desires, but also about his own. But as O'Brien points out, it is this sexual repression that animates Stevens' narrative. The weight of the novel's meaning does not lie in what Stevens tells us, but in what he does not tell us: his "achingly restraint prose" builds up "against the words a pressure of meaning whose significance is all the more palpable for never achieving release" (O'Brien 795). O'Brien's point is that the tension between self-restraint and the need for release is what drives the desire for a resolution in which the former succumbs to the latter. The novel encourages us to anticipate the resolution of Stevens' tale of self-restraint in the romance plot. The tension is played out in the novel in terms of a battle between the protocol to remain dignified in one's position and the housekeeper's romantic overtures.

For example, if Stevens' goal is to remain "safely" ensconced in Darlington Hall, he must resist the very elements that would lead him to question the logic of the Hayes Society. Of all the other characters in the novel, Miss Kenton is the one who is best able to provoke Stevens to act in ways uncharacteristic of a "dignified" butler. In fact, Stevens' relationship to Miss Kenton was prejudiced from the start. As he tells us, he always found housekeepers to be unreliable employees: "what I find a major irritation are those

persons – and housekeepers are particularly guilty here – who have no genuine commitment to their profession and who are essentially going from post to post looking for romance. This sort of person is a blight on good professionalism" (*Remains* 51). Miss Kenton, to be sure, was an exemplary employee and possessed none of the afflictions of passion that Stevens imagined housekeepers to suffer. However, within the diegesis of the novel, Miss Kenton was a threat to Stevens – precisely because she represented the catalyst for change. She was the one with whom he could possibly start a life outside Darlington Hall – a possibility that frightened and alarmed Stevens. For no small reason, then, that Stevens should constantly try to put Miss Kenton in her place.

For example, when he overheard Miss Kenton calling his father by his first name, he remanded her for "talking down" to him (*Remains* 53). Likewise, when Miss Kenton protested, rather obstreperously, against the dismissal of the Jewish girls, Stevens reminded her to "conduct herself in a manner befitting [her] position" (*Remains* 149). But it was Miss Kenton's femininity that Stevens found most threatening and against which he tried hardest to resist. Miss Kenton, for example, was in the habit of bringing flowers to brighten up the butler's pantry. Stevens had strong objections to Miss Kenton's feminine touches because, as far as he was concerned, the butler's pantry was a "crucial office, the heart of the house's operations, not unlike a general's headquarters during battle" (*Remains* 165). To decorate the pantry with flowers was to feminize what Stevens regarded to be a masculine station. These feminine incursions came to a head one day when Miss Kenton interrupted Stevens as he was in the pantry, "enjoying an hour or so

off duty," and reading a book. Instead of excusing herself, Miss Kenton remained in the pantry, inquiring to know what sort of book he was reading. When Stevens refused to show her the book, she advanced towards him and reached out her hands to "gently released the volume from [his] grasp" (*Remains* 167). Stevens tells us that the incident was as awkward as it was intense:

> Then she was standing before me, and suddenly the atmosphere underwent a peculiar change – almost as though the two of us had been suddenly thrust on to some other plane of being altogether. I am afraid it is not easy to describe clearly what I mean here. All I can say is that everything around us suddenly became very still; it was my impression that Miss Kenton's manner also underwent a sudden change; there was a strange seriousness in her expression, and it struck me she seemed almost frightened. (*Remains* 167)

What is significant about this scene is that it reveals, on the one hand, Stevens' vulnerability to Miss Kenton's erotic overtures and, on the other, his fear that their relationship would be transported out of the professional realm on which it had been based. While nothing transpired beyond that brief awkward moment, the experience was much too close a call for Stevens. Following this incident, Stevens rationalized that their relationship had reached "an inappropriate footing" and as such he "set about re-establishing [their] professional relationship on a more proper basis" (*Remains* 169).

Stevens' neurotic attempts to maintain a professional relationship with Miss Kenton serve, on the one hand, to underscore to what degree he desired her erotically, and, on the other, to highlight the cost for which he paid in rejecting love, marriage, sex, and family life. At the end of his narrative, Steven tells us that he finally arrives in Little Compton where he is to meet Miss Kenton, now Mrs. Benn. During their meeting, Miss Kenton reveals that she has been very unhappy in her marriage. Although she loves her husband, there are times when she thinks she has made "a terrible mistake" with her life: "And you get to thinking about a different life, a better life you might have had. For instance, I get to thinking about a life I may have had with you, Mr Stevens" (*Remains* 239). Miss Kenton's revelation takes Stevens by surprise: "it took me a moment or two to fully digest these words of Miss Kenton" (*Remains* 239). After all, Miss Kenton has just informed him that she had at one point thought about having an emotional, as opposed to a professional, life with him. Miss Kenton's revelation has the effect of bringing Stevens to the realization that his ethics of self-restraint has in the end deprived him of the life *he* might have had with her. As Stevens admits, the implications of Miss Kenton's revelation "were such as to provoke a certain degree of sorrow within me. Indeed – why should I not admit it? – at that moment, my heart was breaking" (*Remains* 239). The poignancy of this moment is that Stevens finally succumbs to his emotions.

Even though the story of Stevens' self-restraint does not get resolved in a happy storybook ending, the novel's tragic-romance dimension only serves to foreground to what degree Ishiguro views love and erotic desire as forces of

political liberation. If only Stevens had listened to his heart, so we are made to think, he would have left Darlington Hall before he became further implicated in Lord Darlington's fascist politics. Ishiguro juxtaposes Stevens' self-imprisonment in Darlington Hall with the opportunity for personal happiness. Having chosen to remain in the former, Stevens ends up with neither love nor dignity. The moral of Stevens' tale of self-restraint, quite simply, is that one must learn to listen to "the voices and needs of the feeling self" (Wall 26).

II. Aristocratic Decline and Bourgeois Ascendency: A Foucauldian Reading

The novel's message that one must be in touch with one's feelings and emotions, despite being familiar, even unexceptionable, as I have argued, is ultimately coercive. In supplanting a more capacious, redistributive politics with a narrowly focused politics of the personal and intimate, Ishiguro effectively shifts the burden of social transformation from the collective to the individual: the novel ultimately suggests it is Stevens' moral responsibility to accept the bourgeois way of life as the solution to aristocratic paternalism. The novel's deployment of romance and erotic attraction, hence, are not radical or progressive in the way we would like to imagine them to be; rather, they figure here as a kind of happiness imperative. As Sara Ahmed argues, love and marriage have become primary indicators of happiness and, as such, they represent social norms by which certain types of personality traits and behaviors are measured and judged wanting (Intro, loc. 158). In this context of the happiness imperative, Stevens' self-restraint is

regarded as a liability to society. Rather than acquiesce to the novel's message of love and marriage as radical, I will focus in this next section on analyzing Stevens' narrative as a process of "unlearning" the old habits of the Hayes Society and of "learning" new habits of love, desire, and risk.

Learning to Banter and to Desire

Farraday's ownership of Darlington Hall is a symbolic representation of the rise of the New World Order. Specifically, it is a disarticulation of the aristocratic elements from the English estate. No longer the embodiment of the aristocracy, the English estate is now the site of a new political rationality, even if the passing of the estate from one entity to another also signals a certain continuity. In effect, Ishiguro gives us two versions of Darlington Hall. The pre-war Darlington Hall is characterized by what Foucault calls a pastoral mode of government while the postwar version exemplifies a liberal style of government. By presenting these two versions, the novel invites us to analyze and assess two very different approaches to government: one founded on a system of rule based on loyalty, trust, and submission to authority, the other on individual truth, independence and self-governance. To help illustrate my point, I will briefly rehearse Foucault's concept of governmentality.

In his Collège de France Lectures (1977-1978), Foucault argued that the dismantling of the structures of feudalism in Europe was accompanied by changes in the rationality of rule itself ("Security 87-134). From the 16th century onwards, as political power became increasingly centralized in the hands of the

administrative state, rather than in the absolute monarch, there emerged a new set of governmental challenges that required a rethinking of how power is to be exercised in relation to the governed. Prior to the 16th century, governmental rationality had mostly emphasized a kind of political pastorate in which the ruler acts as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. The exercise of pastoral power, hence, is predicated on a kind of Christian prudence whereby the ruler/pastor presides over the actions and conducts of the flock in order to assure their salvation. In exchange for this assurance, each member of the flock returns to the ruler/pastor his or her abiding loyalty and obedience (Foucault, "Security" 183).

Of course this pastoral model was subjected to periods of upheaval in the form of pastoral revolts, of which the most radical was the Protestant Reformation. Furthermore, the crisis of the pastoral model was compounded by the emergence of new economic and political relations that disrupted the structures of feudalism. The 16th century, hence, gave rise to the need to transfer the seat of political reason from the pastor to the state, a movement from "the pastoral of souls to the political government of men" (Foucault 227). Within the diegesis of the novel, the year 1956 represents a rupture with the pastoral model and the rise of liberalism as a political rationality. Unlike the pastoral model, liberal governmentality is a political rationality grounded in the framework of consolidating secular security and economic prosperity, not Christian prudence. Liberal governmentality is therefore an art of governing at a distance, providing the population with a certain bandwidth of freedom with which to conduct itself independently and spontaneously within civil society. The political government of

men in the 18th century and beyond is to be a form of political speculation and calculation, necessitated by the complex transactional realities of the market. Where the pastor ruled over his flock within an agrarian setting, the liberal government oversees independent and self-governing individuals engaged in self-interested pursuits in the economy dominated by the market. Within this context of the self-governing individual, the commitment to individual liberty is a priority of rule. Individuals must be free in order that they can be governed at a distance.

Stevens' transition from being a member of the flock in Lord Darlington's pastorate to a "free individual" in Farraday's liberal government is therefore a process of learning to become a self-governing and self-interested individual. As part of his conversion, Stevens must learn how to banter. Mr. Farraday is particularly keen on developing a "bantering" rapport with Stevens: "bantering on my employer's part has characterized much of our relationship over these months" (*Remains* 14). In fact, as Stevens says, bantering is now "an entirely new sort of duty required of me" (*Remains* 17). For Stevens, the proudly disciplined and reserved butler however, the idea of informal, playful and unnecessary exchanges, especially with his superiors, violates the idea of order to which he is accustomed in Lord Darlington's time: "I remain rather unsure as to how I should respond' (*Remains* 14). Stevens' predicament stems, thus, in large part from the risks associated with bantering. As he explains, "how would one know for sure that at any given moment a response of the bantering sort is truly what is expected? One need hardly dwell on the catastrophic possibility of uttering a bantering remark only to discover it wholly inappropriate" (*Remains* 16).

We can surmise from Stevens' discomfort, several underlying reasons for "banter-phobia." The first is that the reception of one's bantering remark cannot be predetermined. Indeed, the social transaction that might have helped him determine meaning has been rendered unstable. As he puts it, "I remain rather unsure" – and this is because a response can only be deemed appropriate or not once it has been spoken; moreover, a bantering remark stands in judgment once it has been uttered. Was it a good rejoinder? Did it go too far, or for that matter, not far enough? Furthermore, bantering is a sort of friendly contest. The OED defines it as a kind of "good-humoured raillery" that not only involves making fun of people, but in cases, also ridiculing or roasting a friendly opponent. To banter one must not only have wit but also one's wit about oneself. Such exchanges also imply a certain social symmetry – a "friendly exchange." Everything in Stevens' make-up, and especially his training, has conditioned him *against* bantering with his superiors. In the interwar years, Stevens' interactions with Lord Darlington was proscribed within the stiff social formalities and etiquettes meant to preserve the highly stratified aristocratic society. As such, there was no need for Stevens to be witty or to have wit.

Farraday's bantering signals a relaxation of such social formalities. To be sure, his bantering does not mean that Darlington Hall is now a classless structure. Despite his geniality and affability, Farraday is a formidable presence representing the rise of a new world order. His bantering belies the power he still exerts over Stevens. But unlike the feudal-aristocratic master-servant relationship, this relaxation of formalities represents a different rationality of rule or art of

government. Farraday does not expect Stevens to pledge his loyalty or allegiance to the order of Darlington Hall. In fact, Farraday appears "genuinely" troubled that Stevens is "always locked up in these big houses" (*Remains* 4). His offer to "take the car and drive off somewhere for a few days" indicates to what degree Stevens is expected to change his relationship to Darlington Hall. He is no longer to be the sheep in the pastorate, following the instructions of the shepherd. The invitation to use the offer of the car to make his own journey marks a significant break: Stevens is to put some "distance" between himself and authority.

But as the trope of bantering implies, becoming a self-governing and self-assured individual involves taking risks. To banter, in a sense, is to occupy the position of authority to one's own speech, as well as to accept its inherent risks and responsibilities. That bantering requires having one's wits about oneself is not surprising. It involves taking a gamble, calculating the vectors of uncertainty and placing a bet that one hopes would bring in a prize. If the bet is lost, then one is expected to assume the responsibilities and consequences for it. In carefully parsing what appears to be an innocuous speech exchange**,** we can begin to see in what sense Stevens' transitioning into a bourgeois subject is also a coercive process in which he is *obliged* to accept the responsibilities for his own actions.

Within this context of obligation, the novel's romance plot is not so much about liberating one's desires as it is about re-aligning them with new concepts of individuality. Stevens must learn to desire in order to cultivate his own sense of self and self-worth. During the interwar years, Stevens identified so closely with the father-substitute that whatever little self-identity he might have had was

subsumed to the order of Darlington Hall. Stevens' lack of desire to see and taste life outside of Darlington Hall is a symptom of his not having any desires that are located beyond the grounds of the English estate. This inability to venture out – or even desire to venture out – also demonstrates Stevens' dependency with authority figures. He needs to be constantly validated and approved by his master. On this count, he has no reason to venture beyond his master's house, unless on an errand. Until Farraday's offer of the car, Stevens was quite content to "see the best of England…within the very walls" of Darlington Hall (*Remains* 4). He has no desire to be anywhere else – that is, not until he receives a letter from Miss Kenton, "her first in almost seven years if one discounts the Christmas cards" (*Remains* 4-5).

The arrival of Miss Kenton's letter appears to animate a certain excitement and curiosity in Stevens. Believing her letter to contain "distinct hints of her desire to return" to Darlington Hall, Stevens accepts Farraday's offer of the car (*Remains* 9). He would travel to Little Compton to visit Miss Kenton. Perhaps for the first time in his life, or at least for the first time in a long while, Stevens allows himself to desire something that emanates from outside of Darlington Hall and, at that moment, only tenuously connected to the estate. This desire allows him to feel "the first healthy flush of anticipation" in making his journey (*Remains* 26). As his car pulls away from Darlington Hall, Stevens begins to feel as if he is "setting sail in a ship" (*Remains* 24). This experience of sailing out into unfamiliar territory causes Stevens to feel both uneasy and exhilarated: "The feeling swept over me that I had truly left Darlington Hall behind, and I must

confess I did feel a slight sense of alarm – a sense aggravated by the feeling that I was perhaps not on the correct road at all, but speeding off in totally the wrong direction into a wilderness" (*Remains* 24).

This sense of alarm at "speeding off" into the wilderness, and losing sight of the familiar, perhaps even the "civilized," can be appreciated for what it says about Stevens learning to desire. He is beginning to accept both the joy and the risk associated with making his own journey. Where he had attempted to shut "out the messiness of life," he is embracing it. As the term "messy" implies, life outside Darlington Hall is unpredictable and precarious: What if he had entirely misjudged Miss Kenton's letter? What if her letter contained no "distinct hints" of her wish to return to Darlington Hall? By making this trip, Stevens is putting himself on a trajectory that would lead to a truth for which he may not be prepared to face or to accept. As the novel would have it, the news he received in the end is not one he wanted to hear: Miss Kenton will not be returning to Darlington Hall. But despite the outcome, what has been important is that he made the journey at all and in making this journey, Stevens begins to organize his desires around his own interests. Furthermore, his journey leads him to revise his views on life. In a cathartic moment, Stevens overturns the lessons of the Hayes Society:

> [Lord Darlington] chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a mistaken one, but there he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I *trusted*. I trusted his lordship's

> wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that? (*Remains* 243, original emphasis).

This rather didactic and familiar message about having the courage to live one's own life and the freedom to make one's own mistakes are expressions that Margaret Thatcher herself might have approved.

III. The Self in the New World Order

It is noteworthy that the novel does not in fact end in an optimistic mode. Tamaya notes that Stevens, instead of replacing "his unquestioning loyalty to one master with membership in the larger human community," returns to Darlington Hall to serve a new master (54). Tamaya is partly correct to suggest that Stevens' return to Darlington Hall represents a recapitulation to power. But as I have been arguing, power in this instance is not defined negatively as that which prohibits and represses Stevens' individuality – but precisely that which produces Stevens as an individual exercising freedom upon himself. We have to remember that it is through Farraday's encouragement that Stevens begins his process of embourgeoisement. Hence, it is better to take the view that when Stevens chooses to return to Darlington Hall, he is not in fact rejecting membership in the larger human community but accepting the challenges of a practicing bourgeois subject.

That is to say, he will return to Darlington Hall with a renewed sense of self – one that is ready to take on the inherent risk associated with bantering. But Tamaya is correct for detecting the novel's pessimistic ending. For, as I will show, impinging upon Stevens' consciousness is the knowledge he now has to accept the new logics of capital accumulation in his professional conduct at Farraday's Darlington Hall.

We can better understand Tamaya's misgivings about the ending of the novel by refocusing our attention to the novel's epilogue where the long shadows of the New World Order have fallen along the corridors of Darlington Hall. Lurking beneath the genial appearance of Stevens' new employer is a new imperative to be fit, flexible, and autonomous. Recall that Darlington Hall is to be managed by a greatly reduced staff of four. Stevens' task, upon Farraday's ownership, is to devise a staff plan that minimizes cost while maximizing labor output. This task proves to be daunting. As Stevens tells us, it entails "a radical altering of our prospective customary duties" (*Remains* 8). Furthermore, as Stevens is only too aware, this revised staff plan would be met with some resistance from the current employees whose duties have already been pushed "beyond their traditional boundaries"(*Remains* 9). To this end, Stevens has had to find ways to help the staff overcome "their aversion to adopting these more 'eclectic' roles" and to make "the division of duties stimulating and unburdensome" (*Remains* 8-9). Stevens is not without apprehension in regards his own efficiency. He admits that in the process of trying to win over the employees to the revised staff plan, he did "not perhaps assess quite as *stringently* [his] own

limitations" (*Remains* 9, my emphasis). As a result of his lack of stringent assessment, he found the running of Darlington Hall to have suffered from several oversights.

The point here is that Darlington Hall is now the site of a new economic reality. To be sure, the reduced staff plan in Darlington Hall can be understood within the larger context of decline of the English estates. But, as I have noted earlier, it is also possible to regard Farraday's occupation of Darlington Hall as a trope to describe the rise of a New World Order. In fact, the rise of this New World Order was prophesized by Senator Lewis in 1923. He had cautioned Lord Darlington and his guests that "international affairs today are no longer for gentlemen amateurs" and that they should be left to the care of "professionals" (*Remains* 102). Implicit in Senator Lewis' use of the word professionals is that world affairs would eventually be "dictated less by the formulas of state than by those of business" (O'Brien 792). The New World Order, thus, could be seen as the aggregation of bourgeois rule over aristocratic rule. In this context of bourgeois ascendency, the value embodied by Lord Darlington – gentlemanly diplomacy – has no place in a world increasingly organized around the priorities of capital accumulation. Ishiguro, in effect, reanimates the idea of America as an economic logic – one that is best served by the values of thrift and enterprise rather than by honor and loyalty. But what is particularly striking about this idea of America as an economic logic is the ways in which it is bound up with the language of democracy and freedom. In a sense, this "idea" of America as the alternative to aristocratic rule does not escape Ishiguro's ironic treatment. Taken

as a prototype of capitalist-led democracy, it is portrayed, not merely as the lesser of two evils but also as portentous of a new political rationality in which, as O'Brien notes, private profit is made coterminous with public interests (792).

Hence, while Farraday encourages the exercise freedom upon the self, he nonetheless expects Stevens to serve Darlington Hall in accordance with the ethics of the marketplace. What we see here is a commingling of market fitness with the idea of democratic citizenship: a good citizen is no longer someone who pledges his or her loyalty to the political order but who rationalizes the concept of his or her freedom upon cost-benefit calculations. Farraday places two requirements upon Stevens: the need to become self-governing and the need to govern the self in a fiscally responsible manner. Hence, when Stevens conflates the meaning of bantering – so that it is simultaneously the key that opens the door to human warmth and to Farraday's Darlington Hall – he is not, as Tamaya suggests, learning "a new trick to perform for a new master" (54), but rather recognizing the grim reality in which human relationships will increasingly be experienced and organized around the "natural" laws of capital. Put another way, Stevens does not recapitulate to old habits. He is merely assuming the burdens of selfhood where freedom will be contingent upon the mastery of self over the market.

Chapter 2: Learning to Unburden the Self from Society: Neoliberal "Happiness" and Social Pathology in Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*

Introduction

Doc Hata is Chang-rae Lee's narrator-protagonist in *A Gesture Life* (1999). Born in Japan, but of Korean descent, Hata appears to be the embodiment of the American success story. He is an immigrant who arrived in America after the Second World War, and through hard work and impeccable manners, built a solidly middle-class existence in what appears to be a quintessential small American town. Bedley Run, the place where he has called home for more than 30 years, has become a part of him. In fact, as his realtor friend, Liv Taylor, puts it, "Doc Hata *is* Bedley Run. He is what this place is all about" (*Gesture* 136, original emphasis). But as the novel unfolds, it becomes obvious that Hata still has some loose ends to tie. Despite his self-possessed nature, Hata is haunted by past memories and traumas. For example, we learn that Hata has a history of broken relationships with women. His affair with Mary Burns, a widow who lives in the same town, fizzles the moment it was becoming physical, and his affair with a Korean comfort woman, Kkuteah, or K, ends with her execution and dismemberment at the hands of his comrades in the Japanese Imperial army. His relationship with his adopted daughter, Sunny, was strained and their

irreconcilably difference eventually drove her to leave home when she was only 17.

Andrew O'Hogan, in his review of the novel, suggests that Hata's pattern of broken relationships with women is due to his being "a victim of old-style immigrant circumspection." Hata, he argues, just "doesn't know how to be loved." O'Hogan's observation pinpoints an important connection the novel makes, namely that something about Hata's immigrant experience prevents him from possessing the emotional intelligence needed to build loving relationships with people. *A Gesture Life,* hence, invites us to analyze issues of national assimilation in terms of an emotional and psychic lack. The invitation has generated a plethora of responses, most of which in the form of praises. [8] Critics generally agree with the novel's premise that national assimilation incurs a heavy psychic and emotional toll on the immigrant.[9] They argue that in trying to conform to hegemonic norms and values of their host nations, immigrants erase the particularities of their past histories and identities and engage in a discursive project of redefining their own lives according to the themes of a larger national script.[10] What is lost in the process is individual truth and personal agency. Compelled to become a parody of the national ideal, immigrants repress their instinctual freedom to such a degree as to become neurotics who metonymically uphold the law that simultaneously disciplines and regulates their libidinal drives.

My concern in this chapter is to understand in what ways this psychotherapeutic framing of national assimilation reproduces hegemonic

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[8] See Carol Hamilton, Anne Anlin Cheng, Kyeong-kyu Im, and Young-oak Lee.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

perspectives on citizenship and the good life. In presenting Hata as a neurotic in need of remedial treatment, Chang-rae Lee posits that "good" citizenship is in fact "bad" for the psyche. In what ways, then, can citizenship be considered "good"? In other words, what constitutes good citizenship, as far as the novel is concerned? I argue that the novel's emphasis on mental and emotional health coheres with the larger happiness imperative. As Sara Ahmed points out, the contemporary preoccupation with pursuing happiness is part of a larger cultural project to redefine the parameters of the good life. The rise of the self-help industry and psychotherapeutic counseling helped to consolidate a concept of happiness that is linked to certain ways of living and being (Intro, loc. 71). *Gesture* participates in this turn towards happiness and tries to articulate an idea of citizenship within the therapeutic template of acquiring mental and emotional health. What is promoted in the novel is a kind of "happy" citizenship based on a dis-identification with the hegemonic nation. That is to say, the novel re-articulates good citizenship as a category located beyond the ideological frameworks of the modern nation-state.

As I will demonstrate, the extra-national or trans-national concept of citizenship espoused in the novel is itself a hegemonic articulation. Following the decline of the welfare state, efforts were undertaken to dis-embed citizenship from the language of rights and entitlements connected to the nation, in particular, from notions of the "social good" that was characterized by the guarantee of full employment and state provision of welfare (Harvey 9-19, Waine 7-8). In effect, the cultural reconstruction of the good citizen as independent of the nation was

the result of growing pressures to redirect the responsibilities for welfare provision to the individual. Within this context of the retreating welfare state, the good life was increasingly defined in terms of the accretion of personal pleasures, the accumulation of things, and the exercise of "choice" made available by the so-called free market.

My goal in this chapter is to demonstrate how this vision of the "good life" as something located beyond the state and the nation is exclusive and exclusionary. By analyzing the novel's sub-plots involving the Hickeys and Sunny, I foreground the fact that neoliberal alignment of citizenship makes a distinction between "preferred citizens" who are able to insert themselves strategically into the circuits of global capital and the non-preferred, nationally-oriented citizens who become increasingly marginalized as the nation undergoes radical economic restructuring. The narrative trajectories of the Hickeys and Sunny provide a striking contrast to Hata's liberation from the nation and society, and bring into focus the unsettling fact that, in the neoliberal era, the "good life" and "happiness" are privileged articulations reserved for those who are able to play by the rules of the market, and beat them.

Hata the Dangerous Neurotic

Arguing that *A Gesture Life* intervenes in the literature of assimilation, Young-oak Lee explains how Chang-rae Lee departs from the tradition of "Claiming America" that had informed earlier Asian American texts. Where Asian-American literary expressions have often sought to appropriate national

membership for their constituents,[11] *A Gesture Life* calls into question the very nature of national belonging itself. Young-oak Lee's argument brings into focus a vexed issue regarding the assimilation of the Asian into mainstream American culture. A novel about psychological injuries issuing from hegemonic citizenship, *A Gesture Life* effectively complicates the logic of legal recognition that so often serves as the basis for claiming social and political agency. Where themes of traumatic wounding often revolve around the alienated and disenfranchised subject, they figure here as a sort of psychic condition attending a "successfully" assimilated subject. Put another way, unlike the experiences of those immigrants who sought to claim legal recognition in America, Hata's story tells us of the psychic cost that such legal recognition confers. Hata's trauma, hence, is related less to his being a victim of racism per se and more to his being duped into believing that his acts of good citizenship can erase his racial difference. In this sense, as Hamilton Carroll explains, *A Gesture Life* does not follow the trajectory of a *bildungsroman* – where the objective of the personal narrative is to reconcile the individual to the social order. Hata's narrative is a failure of arriving at citizenship; and this failure is an occasion to interrogate the inevitable loss of individuation, the psychic cost of erasing one's difference.

As in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, this novel is structured as a psychotherapeutic narrative of political awakening. In trying to resolve his psychic conflicts, Hata is also working out a new politics about the self and society. The moment he arrives at self-understanding is also the moment when a

[11] See in particular Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*.

politics of liberation is hermeneutically articulated. As I will demonstrate, Chang-rae Lee tries to capture the problem of national assimilation as itself a problem related to sexuality. In disclosing the details of his life, Hata reveals that he is a neurotic whose obsession about becoming the ideal citizen is paralleled by his obsession about female sexuality.

When we first meet Hata at the start of the novel, he is retired and living in a small affluent town called Bedley Run, which used to be a small bedroom community that is connected to New York City (*Gesture* 2). The novel does not give us exact dates for the narrative present, but its reference to an economic recession involving, among other things, a glut of empty commercial buildings, suggests that Hata's narrative takes place sometime during the early 1990s.[12] Despite the recession, however, Bedley Run appears to be experiencing a real estate boom driven by demand for older vintage homes within driving distance of the city. A class of "young and high-powered" individuals from the big city is looking to buy a piece of small town America, which Bedley Run apparently represents (*Gesture* 17). Apparent everywhere are the familiar signposts of gentrification, transforming the small, sleepy town. New boutique shops and cafes have sprung up along Main Avenue, with "well-dressed families, many with prams, peering hopefully into the picture window of the Egg & Pancake House for an open table, and if there isn't one, strolling father down Church to the birchwood-paneled Europa, the fancy new pasty shop where they prepare the noisy coffee" (*Gesture* 190).

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[12] The deregulation of the Savings and Loan institutions led to risky investments in junk bonds and commercial real estate lending. The latter resulted in a glut of empty commercial offices and buildings.

Hata, who owns a "two-story Tudor revival," stands to benefit from this new wave of gentrification, which is driving up property prices. As his realtor friend, Liv Crawford, tells him, these young and high-powered types are desperate: "They're already talking an overbid, for the right kind of place, which yours is in spades" (*Gesture* 17). Liv Crawford's advice to Hata to sell his place resonates with the logic that retirees like Hata should downsize and, with the handsome profit from the sale of their homes, spend their remaining golden years in a "welcomingly warm place like Boca Raton or Scottsdale" (*Gesture* 16). But Hata is reluctant to leave. He had moved to Bedley Run nearly 30 years ago when it was a sleepy outpost surrounded by "dairy cow pastures and wooded meadows" (Gesture 2). In the intervening years, he had built a solid, middle-class life, owning and running a medical supply store – Sunny Medical Supply – in the village center (*Gesture* 2-5). Furthermore, Hata is a familiar sight in Bedley Run where he enjoys "an almost Oriental veneration as an elder" (*Gesture* 1). In a way, Bedley Run represents for Hata the place where he achieved his American Dream, or some version of it. His reluctance to sell his home and retire elsewhere is linked directly to his emotional and psychic investment in Bedley Run.

As the narrative unfolds, however, we get the sense that the American Dream might actually have eluded him and that his desire to remain in Bedley Run is somehow related to a need to resolve a long-existing trauma. Hata's affliction in the present is that he is estranged from his adopted daughter, Sunny. We learn that Hata had adopted Sunny when she was 7 years old and that, from the outset, the relationship had not been an easy one. According to Hata, Sunny

was, for the most part, indifferent to his attempts to furnish her with a comfortable childhood, as well as to his efforts to inspire the best in her: "My wish, as I had always explained to her, was that she study hard and practice her piano and read as many books as she could bear, and of course, when there was free time, play with her friends from school" (*Gesture* 27). As childhood yielded to adolescence, Sunny's indifference grew into rebellion: she got in trouble with Officer Como, and started hanging out with Jimmy Gizzi – a 25-year-old high-school dropout who sold weed and speed from his garage (*Gesture* 89). In normal circumstances, Sunny's recalcitrant nature could have been written off as a generic teenage angst related to a desire for autonomy. Hata, after all, admits that he might have overwhelmed Sunny with his expectations of her. But Sunny's problem appeared to go much deeper. Her rebellion was also a defense against Hata's totalizing project of national assimilation. That is to say, Sunny was resisting Hata's attempt to contain her within his own narrative of assimilation.

For Hata, Sunny was not just a daughter that he could love but also a crucial component to the construction of his American Dream. As he tells us, when he first moved to Bedley Run, he wanted to adopt a girl whom he could raise in "an orderly, welcoming suburban home in America" and with whom he could build "a unitary bond of a daughter and father. Of harmony and balance" (*Gesture* 74). With Sunny, Hata hoped to create a happy middle-class American family of his own – one that would be "well reputed and happily known" as "the Hatas of Bedley Run" (*Gesture* 204). In his analysis of the novel, Hamilton Carroll rightly points out that Sunny "stands as the bridge between [Hata's]

Japanese and American identities" (609). As a single Asian male living in America, Hata stood outside the racial and sexual ordering of the nation. Lisa Lowe, among others, has demonstrated that through the various exclusions acts and laws against naturalization, Asians have culturally, legally, and economically been defined as unassimilable and foreign to the American identity (Lowe 4-5). Asian male subjects, in particular, have been subjected to Orientalist racialization that delineated their bodies and their labor as a threat, a "yellow peril," to white European immigrants" (Lowe 5). Politically denied enfranchisement as full citizens, the Asian male subject was compelled to occupy a feminized position in relation to the normative conceptions of American citizenship. Asian males, in other words, were simultaneously racialized and feminized in American history (David Leiwei Li 4, David Eng 14-17). For Hata, the adoption of Sunny was meant to help solidify his patriarchal and paternal presence in America (Carroll 609).

Hence, while Hata may have appeared to be a benevolent father, his relationship with Sunny was founded on his anxiety to consolidate his masculine and patriarchal credentials against the historical feminization of the Asian male in America. Sunny was therefore "a litmus test of the success of his own assimilation" into mainstream American society (Carroll 610). However, as Young-oak Lee argues, in acceding to the requirements of hegemonic citizenship, Hata assumes the gendered and racial logics of his adopted nations (147). By attempting to play the white American father-persona, Hata adopts certain patriarchal attitudes with regards to female sexuality. In particular, Hata perceives

himself to be the guardian and protector of female purity and chastity. As a symbol of *his* national assimilation, Sunny, in turn, is expected to perform the part of the pure and chaste daughter of a respectable middle-class ("white") family. Hata's estrangement from his daughter is due in large part to his perception of her failure to live up to his idealized vision.

In one particularly evocative episode, Hata goes in search of Sunny after she fails to return home for three weeks. Following a lead from his friend Officer Como, Hata finds his way to the house of Jimmy Gizzi where he suspects Sunny is staying (*Gesture* 89). His search, however, does not end the way he had expected. Rather than taking Sunny back into his charge, he leaves Gizzi's house without her and with the firm resolve that he no longer considers Sunny to be of any importance to him: "And it was then that I wished she were just another girl or woman to me, no longer my kin or my daughter or even my charge…" (*Gesture* 116). Hata's rejection of Sunny as his daughter is occasioned by his witnessing Sunny having sex with two men and seeing her "touching herself in places no decent woman would wish men to think about, much less see" (*Gesture* 115). This voyeuristic incident leaves Hata stunned because, as he tells us, he always harbored that "most innocent (if impossible) measure of longing, an aching hope that she stay forever pristine, unsoiled" (*Gesture* 114). The image of Sunny as a promiscuous woman shatters any hope Hata has of recuperating her as a pure and chaste symbol of his middle-class American longings. But as we shall see, this desire has as much to do with the present, as it does with his past.

In fact, Chang-rae Lee encourages us to view Hata's idea of citizenship as inherently linked to a patriarchal desire to police, so as to be able to "protect," female sexuality. During the Second World War, Hata served in the Japanese Imperial army in the capacity of a lieutenant and a paramedic. Hata was proud to be in the army because it allowed him to become part of "the greater destiny and the mandate" of the Japanese people (*Gesture* 120). As a Korean born in Japan, Hata hoped that his membership in the Japanese army would enhance and secure his status as a Japanese citizen. Rising as he did from the "ghetto of hide tanners and renderers" to become a lieutenant in the army, Hata sought to prove himself an exemplary Japanese (*Gesture* 72). However, Hata's involvement in the war also implicated him in a history of sexual aggression towards women. Hata was posted to an encampment in the foothills of Burma. During his time at the camp, Hata was entrusted with the care of five Korean comfort women. As a paramedic, his function was to monitor their health and fitness, the purpose of which was to make sure that "they could perform their duties for the men in the camp" (*Gesture* 180). While Hata abstained from "visiting" the comfort women, he was nonetheless involved in policing their health, checking for signs of "venereal diseases" that might cripple the operations of the army. As Hata tells us, venereal disease was "an intractable problem" whereby "two of every three men were stricken and rendered useless for battle" (*Gesture* 180).

But what is interesting, and troubling, about Hata's account of his experiences in the Japanese army is how he describes himself as a kind and well-meaning lieutenant who was genuinely concerned about the health of the women

in the camp – even though what he was actually doing was to make sure that these women were fit enough to be raped. Hata's self-perception as a benevolent lieutenant becomes more entrenched when he recounts his experience with Kkuteah or K, a comfort woman at the camp with whom he fell in love. Reserved solely for Captain Ono, K was quarantined in the medical building in the camp. In that time, Hata and K formed a close bond owing in some part to the fact that they were both ethnic Koreans. This bond, however, was asymmetrical. As a comfort woman, Kkuteah was the property of the army. But something about her vulnerable and precarious situation appeared to inspire in Hata a sense of paternalism. While other soldiers regarded the comfort women as "soft lips of flesh, a brief warm pleasure to be taken before it was gone," Hata perceived of K in a different light: "But with K, I was beginning to think otherwise, of how to *preserve* her, how I might keep her apart from all uses in any way I could" (*Gesture* 251, my emphasis).

Hata's wish to preserve K can be understood as belonging to his larger ambition to build the good life after the war. As he told K, he intends "to go to medical school and become a respected physician in Kobe" and that he hopes to marry "a nice girl from a good family." Together, they would have many children and live "a fine house with beautiful grounds" (*Gesture* 255-256). Hata believed that if K could only survive the war, which he believed was coming to an end, they could begin life together as civilians: "There is even talk the Americans will soon attempt to invade Japan itself. No one will say it, but the end is likely coming, and an accommodation will be made. It must. Perhaps it will be next

month, or next week even. Then we can go out of this place, we can go out of this place together, and I will take care of you and protect you no matter where we go" (*Gesture* 258). Like Sunny, Kkuteah served as the object around which Hata could build his dream of domestic normativity, a dream that would allow him to suture himself to the sexual and gender ordering of the nation (Carroll 610).

What is most unsettling about Hata's paternalistic benevolence is how it allows him to re-imagine acts of violence against women as acts of welfare. This is particularly true when Hata forced Sunny into having a late term abortion. Towards the end of the novel, we discover that Sunny, barely eighteen, had briefly returned to Bedley Run only a year after having moved out to Upper Manhattan with her friend, Lincoln Evans. The reason for her visit was to secure Hata's assistance in setting up a consultative visit to a private abortion clinic. But when Hata met her at the train station, he discovered that she was "quite near full-term" and hence "much too late" for an abortion (*Gesture* 339). Yet, Hata's first thought was to "spirit her to the private clinic" (*Gesture* 339). Despite the dangers posed to Sunny's general health, future reproductive capacity, not to mention obvious ethical concerns, Hata pressured Dr. Anastasia, as well as an increasingly reluctant Sunny, to go through with the late-term abortion. He forcefully argued that to bring the child into the world would be unjust. Sunny had barely finished high school and had no job. Furthermore, the father was a drug addict and had abandoned Sunny. Essentially, Hata rationalized the need for an abortion as a matter of concern for the welfare of Sunny and of the unborn child.

Of course, Hata's vigorous insistence on the abortion is actually a desperate attempt on his part to minimize public knowledge of his failure as a parent. As Hata notes, the sight of Sunny's pregnancy evoked "a most sickening vision to me, being the clearest picture of my defeats, familial and otherwise" (*Gesture* 341). To allow the pregnancy to be carried to its full term is to allow the birth, not only of a child, but also of a living symbol that would rupture Hata's fantasy of that orderly and secure middle-class American home that he had hoped Sunny would help create. As Anne Anlin Cheng has argued, *A Gesture Life* is not so much "a story of a kind, decent bourgeois dreaming for a moment he is a murderer" but of "a murderer dreaming, in his everyday life, that he is just a kind, decent bourgeois man" (564). Cheng rightly points out that Hata, by virtue of his desire to be integrated into the ordering logics of his host nation, is able to indulge in a fantasy in which he conceives of himself as an outstanding citizen while being deeply complicit in the structures of gendered violence.

Likewise, Chang-rae Lee shows how Hata's national assimilation in America is also, as Keyong-Kyu Im puts it, "the site of dominance in which cultural norms and hegemonic ways of thinking 'race' are confirmed and reproduced" (68). Im argues that Hata, despite being an Asian, is invested in the ideology of whiteness. This is evident in the ways in which Hata tries to erase his racial difference in an attempt to blend into the largely white community of Bedley Run. Hata upholds whiteness as an invisible norm against which all other races are foreground as foreign and unassimilable. In describing himself as having taken on "the characteristics of the locality, the color and stamp of the prevailing

dress and gait and even speech" of Bedley Run, Hata is in fact normalizing and naturalizing whiteness as the foundation American citizenship (*Gesture* 1).

Hata's collective investment in whiteness is also manifested in his concerns about miscegenation. Sunny, as we learn, is not fully Korean as Hata had hoped. When Hata was first introduced to Sunny, he was dismayed to find that she was half black, the product of a "night's wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl" (*Gesture* 240). As a bi-racial subject, Sunny could not provide the camouflage Hata needed to be able to integrate into the racial ordering of the country. Likewise, Sunny's unborn child – the product of her union with Lincoln Evans, a black Jazz musician – would further blight his hope for a kind of invisibility, a simulated whiteness. Where he had hope to erase his difference so as to meld into the American racial landscape, Sunny's child would accentuate his difference and render him even more visible as a raced subject. The argument can be made that Hata's obsession about female sexuality, about policing and protecting female chastity and purity, is linked to a desire to uphold the racial structures of the nation.

As we begin to see, *Gesture* gives us the task of analyzing the vexed issue of national assimilation within Hata's unfolding psychosexual drama. Specifically, we are encouraged to view Hata as a neurotic whose need to be the ideal citizen is linked to a need to preserve women as chaste domestic symbols. This need is a reflection of his anxieties to be realigned with the sexual and racial ordering of his host nations. According to the novel, hence, national assimilation incurs a heavy psychic and emotional burden on the assimilated immigrant. Not

only is Hata alienated from his own history and desires, he becomes, as Young-oak Lee puts it, "involved with complex layers of power" ("Gender" 147). Hence, the transformative logic in *Gesture* is predicated on a kind of awakening whereby Hata begins to realize that he is in fact a dangerous neurotic. The solution proffered in the novel for Hata's neurosis is a kind of self-dispossession from the nation, an uncoupling of the self from the structures of hegemonic citizenship. Various interpretations of the novel's ending are possible. Im argues that Hata begins to "secure a certain kind of critical distance from the symbolic order of American society" in order to assume "a kind of diasporic attitude of total abandon" (98). Young-oak Lee suggests that, in projecting himself beyond the telos of the nation, Hata will be able to transform himself "from a man of prejudice regarding nation, gender, and race, to a man of deeper understanding, embracing difference and diversity" ("Transcending" Young-oak Lee 17).

Coercive Psychotherapy

While I find these various readings of the novel compelling and productive, my focus, though related, is somewhat different. I argue that the novel presents a psychotherapeutic principle which is coercive in nature. As I have been implicitly arguing in this dissertation, psychotherapy is a process of self-biographization through which individuals subject their most intimate thoughts and desires to the scrutiny of experts. In Foucauldian terms, psychotherapy is an invaluable confessional technology that secures the disciplinary objectives of the modern state, which is to govern at a distance (Rose, "Inventing" 102-103).

Psychotherapy allows power to be deployed as a voluntary act of improving the self. As Nikolas Rose has shown, the ascendency of psychotherapy since the 1980s is related to a heightened imperative for self-improvement (Rose, "Inventing" 150-168). As states began dismantling the welfare apparatuses and institutions of the postwar period, psychotherapy assumed a critical role in socializing citizens to become mentally and emotionally fit for life in the so-called free market (Rose, "Inventing" 150-168). One of the primary objectives of psychotherapy is to convince citizens of their own internal resources and power to pursue happiness beyond the promise of full-employment and social services. Thus, psychotherapeutics, as Rose contends, is a technology of citizenship that seeks to liberate the self from the moral foundations of the welfare state:

> The self [psychotherapeutics] seeks to liberate or restore is the entity able to steer its individual path through life by means of the act of personal decision and the assumption of personal responsibility. It is a self freed from all moral obligations but the obligation to construct a life of its own choosing, a life in which it realizes itself. Life is to be measured by the standards of personal fulfillment rather than community welfare or moral fidelity, given purpose through the accumulation of choices and experiences, the accretion of personal pleasures, the triumphs and tragedies of love, sex, and happiness" ("Governing Soul" 258).

A Gesture Life participates in this overall project of redefining citizenship and notions of the good life against the logics of the welfare state. Via a psychotherapeutic platform, the novel projects Hata's troubled relationship with Sunny as a mental and emotional condition related to welfare capitalism. In a word, Chang-rae Lee pathologizes welfare citizenship.

Hata came of age in the earlier part of the twentieth century when Japan was already well on the way to becoming a modern capitalist nation. Unlike in the West, capitalist development in Japan had to be facilitated, on the one hand, with the creation of modern individual subjectivity and, on the other, by delimiting that subjectivity to the "productionist drive that animated Japan's vision of modernity" (Vij 83). To this end, a form of collective individualism was encouraged and propagated. Speaking of Japan's modernization as a capitalist state, Ritu Vij explains that "the overarching principle that animated both emergent state and civil society, was elaborated not in terms of individualism, as has been the case in Europe, but rather in the service of the national collectivity" (87). Within this political rationality, one's labor and its attending "sacralized work-ethic" became central to the ways in which Japanese individuals constructed themselves as modern subjects. That is to say, collective individuality in Japan is the expression of a particular brand of nationalism. The modern Japanese derives his or her identity, not via individuated interests, but through the contribution of his or her labor to "the national goal of economic development" (Vij 81). This collective individualism was further entrenched when the mobilization for war entailed that

resources, both material and human, be allocated to the absolute purpose of the nation-state (Vij 70).

Hata, in my reading, is an embodiment of this collective individualism. His life and its meaning are organized around the objectives of the larger national interest. During his formative years in Japan, Hata learned that, at least for an ethnic Korean, empowerment and liberation were to be found in the establishment of a "harmonious relation between a self and his society" (*Gesture* 72). This mutualism would in turn provide one with "the comforts of real personhood"; that is to say, with a sense of individual identity that is conferred by the state (*Gesture* 72). Eager to be identified as a Japanese, Hata sought to integrate himself into Japanese society via scholastic achievements and commitment to serving the interest of the country in the Pacific War. Hata describes his pride in being a "newly minted officer" and his enthusiasm in fulfilling his duty "for Nation and Emperor" (*Gesture* 120). Hata's sense of individual pride in being a part of a larger national destiny is reflected in the careful and deliberate ways in which he performs his duties in the Imperial Army. Constantly mindful of how his actions, or their lack, affect the proper functioning of the war machine, and by extension the fate of the larger mandate, Hata models himself after his superiors in the encampment, Colonel Ishii and Captain Ono, whose self-discipline and meticulous attention to detail represent the best example of the "resolve of the Japanese soldier, the lore of his tenacity and courage and willingness to fight in the face of certain death" (*Gesture* 170). In fact, such is Colonel Ishii's complete identification with the objective of the nation that he commits "ritual suicide"

upon receiving word of the Emperor's surrender (*Gesture* 171). The colonel's ritual suicide is, to be sure, an extreme example of collective individualism, but it highlights the underlying logic of Hata's own heightened sense of personal responsibility to the larger collective. Hata measures individual worth by how successfully he fulfills the Emperor's mandate to "develop an Asian prosperity, and an Asian way of life" (*Gesture* 249).

Like Stevens in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, Hata is an individual completely given over to the demands of a hegemonic and idealized "national" identity. He devotes his life to the collective interest of the state. Unlike Stevens, however, Hata does not use the law as an excuse to shun the risks and responsibilities that come with living one's own life. Hata at least chooses his own path in life. Hata's problem, however, is that he is constantly anxious about coming up short in his conduct towards the collective. As he explains: "I have feared this throughout my life, from the day I was adopted by the family Kurohata to my induction into the Imperial Army to even the grand opening of Sunny Medical Supply, through the initial hours of which I was nearly paralyzed with the dread of dishonoring my fellow merchants" (*Gesture* 229). Animated by the dread that he might jeopardize the collective interest by his failure to act in accordance with social norms and expectations, Hata becomes obsessed about what other people think of him. As Sunny tells him: "But all I've even seen is how careful you are with everything. With your fancy big house and this store and all the customers. How you sweep the sidewalk and nice-talk to the other shopkeepers. You make a whole life of gestures and politeness. You're always

having to be the ideal partner and colleague" (*Gesture* 95). Despite having moved to America in the postwar years, Hata continues to derive his life's meaning from an assessment of how favorably he is viewed by society. He is completely captured within the rule of social conscience. In fact, he becomes the social conscience. According to Sunny, Hata's act of good citizenship is also a regulatory performance of exacting compliance from others: "you've made it so everyone owes something to you. You give these gifts out, just like to that policewoman, Como. She can't stand to cross you because you're this nice sweet man who's given when he didn't have to or want to but did anyway. You *burden* with your generosity" (*Gesture* 95, my emphasis).

Sunny's point is that, in becoming number-one citizen, Hata forces other people to reanimate the logic of collective individualism in their daily interactions. Hata's frequent drop-ins at the medical supply shop are a case in point. While Anne Hickey appears to welcome Hata's visit, her husband finds them annoying, largely on account of the fact that such civic niceties offer little in terms of a solution to their financial and personal problems. We are told that the Hickeys have missed a few of their mortgage payments owing to slow retail sales engendered by the recession, as well as from stiff competition from a corporate retail chain (*Gesture* 12). Furthermore, their son, Patrick, who has congenital heart disease, requires expensive medical care that they can scarcely afford. All evidence points to the possibility that the Hickeys will soon go into foreclosure. For James, Hata's social call does nothing more than bring into focus the fact that the Hickeys had gotten the raw end of the deal, while Hata walked away with a

profit from the sale of his business. Within the context of the Hickeys' misfortune, Hata's drop-ins constitute a kind of intrusion.

What is particularly interesting about Hata's narrative is the ways in which it captures this civic responsibility and social welfare as a pathology. The name Kurohata, we are told, refers to a black flag that is raised to warn that a village has been infected with the plague. That his name embodies a metaphor of contagion suggests the degree to which the novel seeks to project Hata's good citizenship as a social disease that needs to be quarantined. As Hata puts it:

> Too much now I'm in the vortex of bad happenings, and I am almost sure I ought to festoon the façade of my house and the bumpers of my car and then garland my shoulders with immense black flags of warning, to let every soul know they must steer clear of this man, not to wave greetings or small-talk with him or do anything to provoke the hand of his agreeable, gentle-faced hubris. (*Gesture* 333)

The transformative logic of the novel, hence, hinges on Hata's recognition of the significance of his name; that is to say, on the realization that his kindness and civic mindedness are infectious pathogens for which he would do well to quarantine from society. Hata, in effect, becomes his own warning sign for infection. Upon this realization, Hata rationalizes the need for his departure from the world of Bedley Run in terms of a voluntary evacuation of the self from society: "Now of course I fear darker chance lies ahead for [Sunny] and Thomas

if I don't soon retract myself from their lives, that something terrible and final will befall them as did Anne Hickey, smash them without any sign of admonition" (*Gesture* 333).

Within a psychotherapeutic framework, Hata's awareness of his "disease" is a right step towards healing and closure. Hata tells us that he will finally sell the house and, with the proceeds from that sale, help the struggling Hickeys by buying out their "mortgage on the vacant store and building," thereby stopping the foreclosure on the property. Then he would ask the bank to sell him the building so that Sunny and her son, Thomas, can live in the apartment above the store. Likewise, he will "issue an anonymous line of funds" at the hospital where Patrick Hickey is being treated for congenital heart failure. Once these affairs are settled, Hata will have enough "to go away from here and live out modestly the rest of [his] unappointed days" (*Gesture* 355). While Hata does not tell us exactly where and how he will live out his unappointed days, he does allegorize his new vision of the good life in terms of an emancipation of the body and soul from the ideological trappings of the nation. With some overtones of American transcendentalism, Hata describes that he will rise above religion and tradition – neither seeking "comfort in the visage of a creator nor the forgiving dead" – and restore his body to an originary condition whereby he will "simply bear [his] flesh, and blood, and bones" (*Gesture* 356). No matter where he lives, Hata says he will be on "outside looking in," suggesting therefore that he will hover above the fray of the nation.

The conceit here is that Hata will not derive his life's meaning from the contributions he makes to the nation but from an awareness of his own presence – his flesh, blood, and bones. Hata will also operate in isolation from society, community and other forms of national belonging. The good life is to be lived in the pursuit of self-fulfillment within the infinite global space located beyond the borders of the nation. Hata, in a word, is to become a cosmopolitan citizen who revels and delights in being globally mobile, almost homeless, yet at home anywhere, and liberated from national obligations.

Neoliberal Restructuring and Its discontents

The irony of this concept of a "nationless" identity – a self dispossessed or disarticulated from the nation – is that they also describe the conditions associated with socio-economic displacements of populations caused by neoliberal restructuring. To be globally-mobile, to never come home again, to be without national identity – these states-of-being may not simply be delightful diasporic experiences of social and transnational mobility but describe forms of mobility caused by economic deregulation, which compels certain populations into becoming migrant workers and refugees. In effect, what we have here are two sets of experiences to neoliberal restructuring – one punctuated with delightful possibilities and the other with anxiety and fear. This differing experiences reveal a hidden fault line in neoliberal conceptions of equality – namely that free market freedom is reserved only for the few and at great cost to the many.

My goal in this section is to place Hata's self-dispossession of the nation in the context of the fragmenting neoliberal state, of which the purpose is to highlight how neoliberal citizenship is aligned according to marketable capital. Those endowed with such marketable capital are deemed as "preferred citizens" and those without as "excludable populations in transit, shuttled in and out of zones of growth" (Aihwa Ong 32). The point I like to drive home is that Hata occupies the position of the preferred citizen because he possesses the financial acumen and skill, not to mention good timing, to benefit from changes in the new economy. The Hickeys and Sunny, on the other hand, occupy a more precarious position vis-à-vis the neoliberalizing nation. The Hickeys, as I will show, belong to a diminishing nationally-oriented middle-class, and Sunny is representative of a broadening service-sector classes. By comparing Hata's fate with those of the Hickeys' and Sunny's, we begin to understand in what ways economic liberalization and financial deregulation have resulted in an hourglass economy characterized by the formation of a new class of global elites, the contraction of the nationally-oriented middle classes, and the expansion of the low-wage populations. In an ironic twist, Chang-rae Lee appears to have given us a sub-narrative about the difficulty of attaining the good life in the period of neoliberal reforms. This sub-narrative has the effect of exposing the novel's transformative logic – Hata's liberation from the nation – as an expression of privilege. It provides a juxtaposition in which we are able to witness Hata's psychic transformation into a "preferred citizen" against the fracturing nation undergoing free market reforms. As the novel reveals, not everyone is able to liberate and

disengaged from the nation as Hata does. The Hickeys and Sunny are examples of non-preferred citizens whose lives have been made more uncertain and precarious by neoliberal socio-economic restructuring.

As I have mentioned, the novel's narrative present can be located sometime between 1990 and 1991 when the country was recovering from the Savings and Loan crisis. According to Hyman Minsky, this crisis marks the beginning of what he calls "money manager capitalism" – a term which describes an "economic system characterized by highly leveraged funds seeking maximum returns in an environment that systematically under-prices risk" (Wray 4). One of the main features of such an economic system is the bubble economy that sees unsustainable explosions in real estate prices, as well increased mortgage debts. Unlike in the period of welfare capitalism when governments sought to dampen economy cycles in a bid to assure reasonably full employment (Harvey 10), the era of economic liberalization and financial deregulation that began in the 1980s is characterized by greater market volatility driven by excessive speculation. One of the major effects of this money manager capitalism is the increased vulnerability of ordinary citizens. As the new economy becomes more financialized, and as the state retreats from its welfare provisions, ordinary citizens are forced to integrate their everyday lives into the structures of a highly speculative market in order to supplement their incomes. This financialization of everyday life, as Randy Martin explains, introduces "a new set of signals as to how life is to be lived and what it is for" (17). As the parameters of the good life become subsumed to the speculative economy, individuals must become

financially-savvy citizens, which is a daunting process of acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to survive market volatility, that is to say, to beat the market (Martin 17). Failure to successfully manage personal finance could result in the undoing of one's life, as exemplified by the Hickeys, the new proprietors of Sunny Medical Supply.

Hata tells us that the Hickeys were formerly EMT workers from New York City who were "gravely inexperienced" when it comes to owning and running a small business (*Gesture* 6). Their decision to buy Sunny Medical Supply proved to be ill-timed. Shortly after they purchased Sunny Medical, a recession hit, followed by the opening of a franchise of a regional supplier in the neighboring town of Highbridge (*Gesture* 12). Adding to their misfortune is the illness of their son, Patrick, whose congenital heart condition requires expensive medical treatment for which insurance does not cover in full. As we meet them at the beginning of the novel, the Hickeys are already in financial dire straits. They are already considering signing up for Medicaid and thinking about a second mortgage, although it seems that the building they bought from Hata is now worth only two-thirds of what they paid for it (*Gesture* 8,10). In addition to the reduced equity on the building, the Hickeys had "probably borrowed enough money that their monthly payments were dangerously high" (*Gesture* 6-7). When we come upon the Hickeys later, we find that Anne Hickey has died in a car accident, that Patrick Hickey is in PICU (Pediatric Intensive Care Unit), and that the store is going into foreclosure (*Gesture* 124, 307, 355).

The misfortune of the Hickeys can be understood as a consequence of their failure to align their marketable capital – medical knowledge and experience – with the new economy. Instead, they buy a small business – a medical supply shop – that would soon become a casualty of the corporate retail industry. Likewise, they lacked the financial acumen to beat the market, taking out a loan amount that exceeded their ability to service and having no contingent forms of liquidity. My purpose here is not chasten the Hickeys for their lack of financial savvy but to underscore the fact that entrepreneurialism is not what it used to be when Hata owned and ran Sunny Medical Supply. Hata tells us that his own success as a business man was attributable to a well-integrated civic life: "it was the generous attitude of the customers that drew me out and gave me confidence, and that every decent and good thing that has come to me while I have lived here is due to some corollary of that welcoming" (*Gesture* 4). We can infer from Hata's statement that, at least in his experience, running a small business in small town America involved reproducing social relations in Main Street America. Not anymore. As Hata notes, the vigorous civic life in Bedley Run is slowly being eroded "in the rush to efficiency and profits" (*Gesture* 36). Entrepreneurialism now involves meeting Wall Street expectations.

Within the hourglass economy, the Hickeys belong to the contracting nationally-oriented middle class. Their small business is not strategically plugged into the new economy, unlike the other new boutique shops that line Main Avenue and Church Street in the village thoroughfare. Saskia Sassen explains that high-end gentrification in urban areas generate a demand for specific services.

Small businesses that can cater to such needs are able to insert themselves into the circulation of capital of the new economy. Hata tells us that businesses such as Egg & Pancake House, Bakery Europa, and Sammy's Bagel Nook are doing good business because they cater to a new class of "young and high-powered" people from the big city (*Gesture* 17). Sunny Medical Supply has not evolved with the gentrifying landscape in Bedley Run. In fact, Sunny Medical is in a sorry state: its storefront is weatherworn, with its gold-leaf lettering chipped and dull (*Gesture* 5). Unlike the other shops on Church Street, "the stationers and the florists, whose windows change regularly and have colorful sale announcements and displays of merchandise," Sunny Medical bears the traces of an era that has since passed: the old Small Town America of the postwar boom (*Gesture* 5). The fate of the Hickeys reminds us of the exacting and punishing effects that come with one's inability to successfully transition to the new economy. In particular, it reminds us that the good life is something that is elusive. To attain it, one must know how to plan for contingency and how to beat the market.

Not unlike the Hickeys, Sunny too struggles to make ends meet. Despite being a manager at Lerner's, she lives in a rental condominium, The Conifers, that appears rather unkempt: "you see tricycles and candy wrappers strewn outside; you see perennials and shrubs aplenty but all badly in need of sprucing and pruning" (*Gesture* 277-278). We are told that The Conifers is located in the West Hill of Ebbington, which is supposedly a "'better' section of Ebbington" but is in reality populated by the lower-middle classes. As Hata notes, "[b]y living here it's clear these folk are aspiring to a more privileged life, though perhaps it's true that

most will never see better than the West Hill of Ebbington" (*Gesture* 278). Hata's assessment of The Cornifers reveals a certain stark reality, namely that his daughter Sunny, though persistent and hard-working, would most likely be unable to climb out of the lower-middle class without some of his financial assistance.

Unlike the Hickeys, however, Sunny sells her services to corporate retail. She works as a manager at Lerner's, a women's clothing store that is a "squarely middle-class franchise" (*Gesture* 205). Its location in the Ebbington Mall suggests that its customers are not the young and high-powered types buying up luxury real estate. In fact, Hata describes the town of Ebbington as the "poor cousin town" of Bedley Run (*Gesture* 201, 202). The Ebbington mall, unlike the shops in Bedley Run, "is not of brisk and free commerce but rather the near-sickly laden atmosphere of a terminal, where people wait and linger under fluorescent lights and kill time in any way they can" (*Gesture* 203). Due to the recession, the Learner's store in Ebbington is closing, which means that Sunny would soon be out of a job. Furthermore, as Sunny points out, she would probably have to start out again as a "salesclerk" at another retail franchise (*Gesture* 215).

Sunny occupies the bottom bulb of the hourglass economy, which represents the expanding low-wage sector. It is noteworthy that, despite having grown significantly as a segment of the economy since the 1980s, and despite being "one of the largest areas of new industry employment," retail has one of "the lowest median hourly wage of all industries" (Karjanen 148). Furthermore, opportunities for advancement within retail has been diminished as more corporations adopt a more horizontal staffing framework, thereby eliminating

"many of the career ladders that once enabled clerks to become higher-wage specialist, buyers and managers" (Karjanen 148). Likewise, as Sunny's situation attests, the casualization and informalization of labor is becoming part of the employment trend in retail. As global competition incurs greater pressures on low-profit margins industries, such as retail, to reduce labor cost, companies adapt their employment strategies to include part-time and temporary work arrangements and to exclude employee fringe benefits, as well as opportunities for returns to seniority (Sassen 289). The chances that retail would provide Sunny with a middle-class lifestyle are therefore slim.

In fact, life as a full-time working single mother is beginning to take its toll on Sunny. When father and daughter become reacquainted in the narrative present, after thirteen years of not seeing each other, Sunny is thirty-two years old and has a young son, Thomas, who is almost six years old (*Gesture* 208, 211). As Hata notices, Sunny has already developed the "first lines at the corners of her mouth, a strand (or two or three) of silvery hair, the barest perceptible sag to her cheek. If there's anything one can say it's that she's a young woman of a lovely cast who has been worn down in the course of the years in the ways a woman of privilege or leisure would have never been" (*Gesture* 211-212). But what is interesting to note is how Sunny conducts herself with steely resolution. While she is not unfazed by the prospect of having to look for a new job, Sunny is nonetheless determined that she will manage somehow. As she tells Hata, "I'll get by. I always have" (*Gesture* 215).

Sunny's resolve may owe something to her character and personality, but it also defines the contours of neoliberal citizenship. As Thomas Lemke argues, neo-liberalism is a political rationality that tries to "link a reduction in (welfare) state services and security systems to the increasing call for 'personal responsibility' and 'self-care'" (203). As the social domain becomes subsumed to the logics of market competition and welfare scarcity, individuals, as well as public institutions, corporations and the state, are expected to become 'lean', 'fit', 'flexible' and 'autonomous'" (203). Sunny embodies of such qualities. She is self-reliant, self-sufficient, disciplined and flexible. She refuses Hata's offer to pay for Thomas's day care, insisting that if push comes to shove, she is ready to uproot herself and move to wherever she can find a job. Furthermore, Sunny does not complain, whine, or blame others for her lackluster fortune. However, it is important to note the racial and gender implications of Sunny's exemplary neoliberal citizenship. As Shawn A. Cassiman explains, neoliberal discourses on poverty and welfare are often built on negative discursive constructions of the poor black mother whose welfare assistance is seen as draining public resources (1692). In fact, it is possible to argue that Sunny's refusal of Hata's assistance is a kneejerk reaction against the threat of neoliberal shaming. Unless she proves herself to be lean, fit, flexible and autonomous, Sunny, being half black and a mother, would be vulnerable to the dreaded assignation of "the welfare queen."

Sunny and the Hickeys are examples of the non-preferred citizens forced to negotiate the changing socio-economic landscape engendered by economic liberalization and financial deregulation. As their experiences demonstrate, this

changing landscape is marked by growing social disparities. Those who are able to align themselves with the new economy are better able to benefit from the circuits of global capital. Those not able to do so become second-rate citizens who have to sell their labor at markedly reduced rates. At the same time, these second-rate citizens are expected to bear the burdens of a retreating welfare state by living a lean and austere life, sustained by a diet of neoliberal morality on self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and personal responsibility. In a word, the fates of Sunny and the Hickeys tell us something about "happiness" and the "good life" in the neoliberal age, namely that they are not for everyone.

Chapter 3: Love is All You Need: Romance and the Free Market in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*

Introduction

Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994) is a coming-of-age story of Arjun Chelvaratnam (Arjie) in Sri Lanka during the 1970s and early 1980s. In particular, the novel foregrounds Arjie's struggle with his emerging same-sex desires against the ethno-religious violence between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. As a homosexual and a Tamil, Arjie is doubly disenfranchised in a country where the definitions of citizenship are grounded on Sinhalese culture and language, and on heteronormative assumptions. As we see in the novel, Arjie faces a difficult future as he tries to negotiate his difference, both sexual and ethnic, in an attempt to secure a sense of belonging in Sri Lankan society. His journeys through Sri Lanka's "heteronormative, sexualized geographies of exclusion" are often punctuated with a sense of incomprehension, frustration, and discontent (Jazeel 232). Beginning with "Spend the Days" at his grandparents house to the high school he attends, the Queen Victoria Academy, to the 1983 riots, Arjie's growing up experiences bring into sharp relief the challenges facing the queer Sri Lankan whose sense of belonging on the island nation is contingent upon how well he conforms to prevailing social norms.

Selvadurai, of course, does not give us a defeatist narrative of social conformity. As a novel that won the Lambda Literary Award for the Best Gay

Men's Fiction (1997) and WH Smith's Books in Canada First Novel Award (1994), *Funny Boy* is appreciated as an important literary intervention in contemporary Sri Lankan politics. In particular, the novel's narrative of gay liberation is often regarded by critics as the basis of an agentive politics. Edward Hower, writing in the *New York Times,* states that *Funny Boy* "is a great deal more than a gay coming-of-age novel, for Arjie's loss of innocence is as much a political process as a personal one" (22). Indeed, as John Charles Hawley notes, Selvadurai makes the liberation of individual sexuality central to the process of nation-building (118-119). Within this framework of the personal is political, Arjie's emergent same-sex desires play an important role in the ways in which Sri Lanka's political history is framed and judged wanting. As Tariq Jazeel notes, by foregrounding the importance of Arjie's sexual liberation as itself an expression of progressive politics, *Funny Boy* brings into focus the limitations of Sri Lanka's existing political order and concomitantly highlights the need for its re-organization and re-structuring (236).

The objective in this chapter is to analyze in what ways Selvadurai uses the concept of sexual liberation to re-imagine Sri Lanka as a modern and progressive nation. In particular, I look at how the romance-marriage plot in the novel serves as a proxy for the larger political context. As I will demonstrate, the novel rehearses the tension between true love and traditional marriage requirements. Couples of different ethnicity fall in love against the wishes of their families, who believe in maintaining traditional customs with regards to marrying within the same race. *Funny Boy* captures this tension to highlight, among other

things, how Sri Lanka's ethno-religious politics behoove individuals to mobilize themselves, not according to the truth of their desires, but according to the markers of racial and religious identities. Within this restrictive environment, lovers become alienated from each other and eventually marry the person of the same ethnicity chosen for them by their families. More than just a narrative ploy to incite our sympathy for the estranged lovers, not to mention our indignation at the tyranny of tradition, this romance-marriage plot projects the issues of gender and sexuality onto the larger discussion of nationalism, and invites us to contemplate how the modernization of Sri Lankan society is allegorized as a need to emancipate sexuality from traditional forms of social regulation founded on ethnic and religious identifications. In other words, the novel seeks to de-politicize ethnicity and politicize "desire" as the basis of identity.

This politics of desire is further expanded to include the novel's thematic emphasis on homosexuality. A novel that is ultimately about a Sri Lankan gay romance between Arjie, a Tamil, and Shehan, a Sinhalese, *Funny Boy* poses a crucial question in regards the country's progressive fitness: if heterosexual couples are forced to marry within the same race and are at the same time subjected to traditional regulations with regards to sexual virtue and social respectability, in what ways, if any, can gay couples like Arjie and Shehan live their lives together? That is to say, short of complete conformity to heterosexual norms, where do Arjie and Shehan stand within the restrictive social geography of Sri Lanka?

While Selvadurai harbors no illusions that Sri Lanka would soon overhaul its anti-homosexual legislation[13] and promote gay visibility and tolerance, he does invest Arjie with a political agency that is largely absent in the other characters in the novel. As that "funny boy" who unsettles the heterosexual gaze of the upper-middle-class society in Colombo, Arjie derives courage and a political consciousness via his experiences of marginalization. Relating only tangentially to the heteronormative structures – the family and the school – in which he is forced to inhabit, Arjie develops a brand of politics that emphasizes the liberation of the *eros* from both the gender hierarchies embedded in the structures of the bourgeois family and the masculinist culture that characterizes the school's ideology. In other words, Selvadurai disarticulates the politics of desire from its heteronormative and masculinist assumptions. The ideal Sri Lankan citizen is one whose desires are liberated from any kind of ideological and political structures.

Selvadurai uses this metaphor of the sexually liberated individual, that is to say Arjie himself, to rethink the political rationality of Sri Lanka. As a former British colony, Sri Lanka inherited a system of political patronage and concession that characterized the colonial strategies of divide and rule. This system of patronage and concession remained a dominant feature in Sri Lankan politics in the post independent period. Selvadurai interrogates this form of politics and demonstrates how it is reminiscent of a feudal political organization. Using the Queen Victoria Academy as an allegory for the nation, he makes the case that Sri Lanka's ethno-religious conflict can only be resolved via a re-thinking of the

[13] Article 365 of Sri Lanka's penal code criminalizes "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" and Article 356A criminalies public and private acts of gross indecency (Home Office UK, 8).

relationship between the political order and the citizen. That is to say, in order to have an organic and even capitalist development, Sri Lanka must adopt the values and assumptions of liberal democracy. Within the context of liberal democracy, citizens must be conceived as liberated, empowered, and self-governing subjects, not as vassals pledging their loyalty and allegiance to their overlords.

This liberal conceptualization of the role of government and of the citizen form the very basis for post-cold war intrastate conflict resolution in the Global South. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, development discourses and practices began recommending that problems of underdevelopment and armed conflict in developing countries be resolved via the establishment of the institutions of liberal democracy that would help to facilitate free market reforms and liberal peace. Such a regime of liberalization includes a depoliticization of collective ethnic identities and a redefinition of citizenship in terms of a "liberal conceptualization of people as self-interested and rational individuals" (Stokke 160). Within this liberal perspective on underdevelopment and armed conflict in the Global South, liberal market reforms are regarded as the solution to Sri Lanka's ethno-religious conflict. By placing his hope for Sri Lanka's turn towards modernity on this liberal conceptualization of the citizen, Selvadurai implies that the country's ethno-religious problems are a result of insufficient free market reforms. I argue, therefore, that *Funny Boy* is a neoliberal text offering a cultural lesson about how failing post-colonial states should go on a healthy Western diet of free market reforms, liberal democratic inculcation, and, of course, romance.

I. Romancing Modernity

Funny Boy is a novel written as six interconnected stories. Ordered chronologically, these stories paint a vivid picture of Arjie's coming-of-age experiences in an upper class Tamil society in Colombo – experiences that span the 1970s and the early 1980s – two decades that saw worsening ethnic relations between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. As a bildungsroman, *Funny Boy* charts the development of its protagonist, Arjie, against a difficult and complex historical period in which Sri Lankan politics, mobilized along ethnic-religious lines, encouraged the rise in Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism (Winslow and Woost 6-7). Often regarded as an offshoot of British colonial policies, Sri Lanka's communal politics survived into the postcolonial period where it served as the dominant platform for economic and political redistribution (Sivanandan 1-7). Hence, from 1948 onwards, the escalation of communal violence, as well as rising authoritarian rule, became familiar features of the country's socio-political landscape – features that would become increasingly prominent in the 1970s as the government liberalized the economy and effectively transformed the country from a closed economy to a "free" market economy (Winslow 37, Sivanandan 29).

Funny Boy places us within this historical economic transitioning and describes how the rise in ethno-religious conflict produces a kind of socio-political insularity that, among other things, inhibits the expression of individual truth. In particular, the novel plays out the ethno-religious conflict on a generic

romance-marriage plot whereby true love is sacrificed at the altar of tradition and old world customs, and lovers forced into unhappy unions with arranged suitors. The objective of this romance-marriage plot is to draw attention to the unfortunate fact that, decades following independence, Sri Lankan society – especially the upper-middle-classes in Colombo – remains bonded to certain feudal and colonial attributes that favor strict social regulation of individual conduct over the freedom of individual to pursue private interests. Hence, while the novel foregrounds Arjie's coming-into-being against the unforgiving backdrop of communal politics and identification, the story it finally spins is one about the need to mobilize the forces of romance against the prohibitive cultures of the past that prevent the country's transformation into a modern state.

The Romantic Heroine

The novel's first chapter, "Pigs Can't Fly," sets up the importance of romance to Arjie's coming-of-age narrative. We are told that "spend-the-days" are cherished occasions in the extended Chelvaratnam family. For one Sunday a month, parents drop their children at their grandparents' house and leave them to the care of their grandmother, Ammachi. During spend-the-days, the children play among themselves. The boys occupy the front of the house where they play cricket in the yard, while the girls stake the back garden and the kitchen porch where they engage in make-believe games involving imitating "adult domestic functions" or enacting some "well-loved fairy story" (*FB* 4). Arjie tells us that he is drawn to the girls' territory because it allows for the "free play of fantasy" (*FB*

4). As the most creative among his female cousins, he is always selected to play the coveted role of the bride in a game called "bride-bride." As the name suggests, the game centers on dressing Arjie up as a bride. More than just an occasion for ostentatious self-display, the game holds a special significance for Arjie. When he is transfigured into a bride, he feels emancipated:

> I was able to leave the constraints of my self and ascend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, as self to whom this day was dedicated, and around whom the world, represented by my cousins putting flowers in my hair, draping the palu, seemed to revolve. It was a self magnified, like the goddesses of Sinhalese and Tamil cinema, larger than life; and like them, like the Malini Fonsekas and the Geetha Kumarasinghes, I was an icon, a graceful, benevolent, perfect being upon whom the adoring eyes of the world rested. (*FB* 5)

This passage reveals, among other things, that Arjie perceives the bride to be some kind of romantic heroine, a mythical woman that transcends the world of the ordinary and the mundane. Far from viewing the bride as a woman who would soon assume the role of the subservient wife in a patriarchal household, Arjie is drawn to the matrimonial script for what it allows women to become, at least for one day: the embodiment of feminine beauty and grace. For Arjie, the bride is a heroine for no other reason than the fact that she is made to look and feel like a goddess.

But Arjie's idolization of the bride as a romantic heroine would undergo a revision when Radha Aunty, the youngest of Ammachi's children, returns from America where she has been educated. Arjie is excited about her return owing in no small part to the fact that she is to be married to the son of a family friend, Rajan, who is also educated in America: "I felt an excitement stir in me, an excitement that had died with my expulsion from the world of the girls. There was going to be a wedding in the family! A real wedding, in a real church with a real bride" (*FB* 41). But reality does not coincide entirely with Arjie's concept of the bride. Firstly, as Arjie notices, the bride-to-be, Radha Aunty looks nothing like the "goddess of Sinhala screen Malini Fonseka" (*FB* 42). Instead, she is "a karapi, as dark as a laborer" (*FB* 45). She bears none of the elegance and beauty of the said goddess – her hair is "frizzy," her body is "thin, not plump" and her chest "flat like a boy" (*FB* 45). Furthermore, she does not wear a sari, the garment Arjie associates with the romantic heroine, but instead dresses up in halter tops, bell-bottom pants, and platform shoes – clothes that reflect a Westernized/Americanized sensibility. Secondly, it is not Radha Aunty's marriage to Rajan but her resistance to it that finally gives romance its emotional charge.

Selvadurai, in effect, revises the romantic script. The romantic heroine is not so much a benevolent and graceful goddess as she is a liberal-minded, American-educated woman. Her role within the script is not to marry a man chosen for her, but a man of her own choosing. However, Selvadurai revises the matrimonial script not because he wishes to narrativize the triumph of romance

over the impediments posed by more traditional arrangements of the marriage plot, but to rehearse the tragic romance of Romeo and Juliet within the Sri Lankan political context, of which the purpose is to chasten those in positions of power who prohibit the fulfillment of true love. In short, Selvadurai sets up the romance-marriage plot only to show how love is defeated by tradition. As we see, Arjie would soon learn that the bride, far from being a graceful and benevolent goodness, can be turned into a cold and disillusioned woman.

Shortly after her return from America, Radha Aunty breaks ranks with her family, as well as with prevailing collective sensibilities, when she starts showing interest in Anil, a Sinhalese boy she met at the rehearsal for *The King and I* musical. Tempers flare on all sides when the romance is discovered. Radha Aunty becomes defiant, arguing that when "two people love each other, the rest is unimportant;" while conventional sensibilities insist that love cannot bridge the ethnic divide in Sri Lanka. As Mala Aunty replies to Radha Aunty, "Ultimately, you have to live in the real world. And without your family you are nothing" (*FB* 76). Mala Aunty's warning, unfortunately, proves incontrovertible. The weight of history bears down on the budding romance even before it could get serious. The year in question is 1977, when Tamil-Sinhalese relations are deteriorating. The Tamil Tigers (LTTE), formed in 1976, is agitating for a separate Tamil homeland and anti-Tamil sentiments among the Sinhalese are on the rise. Within this precarious socio-political environment, Radha Aunty and Anil would need more than just each other to survive. They would also need the support of their families and of their communities, both of which seem reluctant to endorse their

relationship. As the novel would have it, the growing violence hits home when Radha Aunty's Colombo-bound train is attacked by Sinhalese crowds in Anuradhapura. Radha Aunty survives the attack but suffers injuries to her face. This unfortunate event drives a wedge between the couple, with Radha Aunty harboring reservations about her relationship with Anil. In fact, she appears at times to blame Anil for her attack.

Following the train incident, Radha Aunty ends the relationship with Anil and agrees to marry Rajan. This decision deals a hard blow to Arjie's romantic ideal. If in the first chapter he learns that one must be of the proper gender to inhabit the role of the bride, in this chapter he learns that the role of the bride is in fact contained within a larger ethnic script. Disenchanted, Arjie finds "no pleasure" in the wedding of Radha Aunty and Rajan (*FB* 96). More tragic is the fact that Radha Aunty loses "a cheerfulness about her that none of the other aunts and uncles had" (*FB* 47). By the chapter's conclusion, she had become sullen and jaded. As Arjie notes, "her eyes had lost their warmth" (*FB* 95).

Liberation of Female Sexuality

Yet, the purpose of the romance-marriage plot is not merely to show how Arjie outgrows his idolization of the bride but to make the liberation of female sexuality central to conceptualizations of Sri Lanka's modernity. To understand this better, it is useful to analyze Radha Aunty's failed romance vis-à-vis the story of *The King and I*. Upon her return to Sri Lanka, Radna Aunty is invited play a part in the production of the Rogers and Hammerstein's musical, *The King and I*.

Arjie also becomes involved in the musical as one the child actors playing one of the many children in the Royal Siamese Court. Based on the true story of Anna Leonowens, *The King and I* tells the story of an English governess who is invited to Siam [present day Thailand] to educate the Royal Siamese children in Western thoughts and values. To be sure, the musical presents a colonial perspective of Anna's experiences in Siam: she is a civilizing force in the Royal Siamese court which is overseen by a tyrannical king. The fact that the musical is presented in Sri Lanka reflects to a large degree the taste and values of the local bourgeoisie. However, the relevance of this musical to the novel is the analogy it provides to the possibility of modernization in Sri Lanka. The musical highlights a moment of historical transition in which Siam, faced with the threat of European colonization, tries to modernize the state so that it can better make accommodations to Western commerce. King Mongkut (or Rama IV), as represented in the musical, however struggles to reconcile certain medieval practices with the modernization process. Principal among these is the issue of absolute monarchy, which allows the king to wield unlimited power over the state and the people. The musical juxtaposes this absolute monarchial power against the sacrosanct tenet of liberalism, which is the protection of individual liberty against the incursion of sovereign power.

Of particular interest is how the musical expresses the concept of individual liberty in the language of heterosexual romance. While the central story revolves around the tension between Anna and the king, the thematic structure of the musical is based on the liberation of sexuality from systems of social

regulation. The king, as we know, is not only an absolute monarch but also the leader of a harem. He is a husband to numerous wives, all of whom are subservient to his needs. The issue of sexual liberation intensifies when his newest wife, Tuptim, unable to abandon hope to be reunited with Lun Tha, her lover from Burma, begins to agitate for change. In a clever reinterpretation of Uncle Tom's Cabin, Tuptim equates the king's absolute monarchy with the tyranny of Simon of Legree. Her motive, however, is to draw attention to her plight of sexual liberation. Married against her will, Tuptim presents her forced union in the royal harem in terms of an imprisonment of female sexuality in a system of patriarchal control. Specifically, she makes the liberation of female sexuality central to a critique of absolute monarchy. In this context, modernity is associated with a liberated woman.

In a similar way, Selvadurai positions Radha Aunty as the catalyst upon which Sri Lanka's turn towards modernity is predicated. Her ability to defy tradition and thus liberate her sexuality from Sri Lanka's system of ethnic regulation is the yardstick by which Sri Lanka's progress towards modernity is measured. Unlike the musical, however, the object of critique in the novel is not absolute monarchism but Sri Lanka's communal politics, a byproduct of the British colonial strategy of divide and rule (Sivanandan 1). As A. Sivanandan explains, post-colonial Sri Lanka materialized out of a history of uneven capitalist development in the colonial era. Unable to "destroy the pre-capitalist modes of production nor to develop a coherent capitalist system in which the economic base would determine…the political and ideological superstructure" in Sri Lanka, the

British effected a system of colonial patronage and concessions through which the old ruling classes[14] and the rising new colonial bourgeoisie[15] sought to secure their own interests. This system of colonial patronage and concessions produced a weak national bourgeoisie that was largely unable to unite and secularize the various sectors of Sri Lankan society following independence (Sivanandan 1-5). Unable to form a bourgeois nationalist project, the Sinhala and Tamil elites thus revived the logics of communalism of the colonial era as a means to sustaining political hegemony after 1948. The failure of modern Sri Lanka, hence, is rooted in 1) the failure of the national bourgeoisie to push through a nationalist ideology grounded on organic capitalist development, and 2) a return to communalism as the basis for economic and political redistribution. Within this system of rule, ethnic identification became a necessary vehicle for the mobilization of communal rights and representation.

The romance of Radha Aunty and Anil serves in large part to question the viability of communal politics as the basis of a modern Sri Lanka. It also brings to light the regulatory and disciplinary functions of the traditional family and the insularity of the upper-middle-class community in Colombo. Both the family and the community play a role in restricting and containing the erotic impulses of young lovers. Like Tuptim, Radha Aunty is a prisoner of Sri Lanka's communal

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[14] The old ruling classes comprises in general of the feudal aristocracies (mostly Sinhalese and Buddhist) in the south of the country, of members of the landowning merchant classes in the coastal regions, which include a mix of races such as Arabs, Sinhalese, Burghers, and of the majority *vellalas* in the north of the country who belong to the highest rank in the Tamil caste system (Sivanandan 1-5).

[15] The rising colonial bourgeoisie refers in general to the comprador class – English educated Sinhalese and Tamils – who emerge from the social formations of the older ruling classes (Sivanandan 3).

politics. She cannot marry the man she loves because the sexual mores of upper class Sri Lankan society are regulated according to strict collective ethnic identification. Radha Aunty, as we know, is not likewise oriented. Her views on sexuality are progressive. When she invites Arjie to play in her room, she allows him to dress up in her jewelry and even applies make up to his face. In contrast, Ammachi is a figure of authority ensconced in the past. Her views about sexuality are conservative, grounded on traditional forms of moral propriety. When she discovers that Radha Aunty has been accepting lifts from Anil after *The King and I* rehearsal, she reproaches her daughter for breaking certain courtship protocols. An unmarried girl should never accept a lift from a man and likewise a man should not be so "impertinent" as to offer an unmarried girl a lift. To break such protocols is to invite gossip. "People will talk," Ammachi explains (*FB* 57).

But the reason for Ammachi's severe objection to her daughter's inter-ethnic romance lies in the fact that her father was killed in the anti-Tamil riots of 1958 – riots that were by instigated by events surrounding Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's failure to make good on his 1956 campaign promises to make Sinhalese the country's only official language. Bandaranaike had run on a pro-Buddhism and Sinhalese-language platform but once in power appeared to waver on his plans to push through the consolidation of Sinhalese interests. Furthermore, he outraged Sinhala hardliners by his decision to compromise with the Tamil elites on the continuing use of Tamil in the country and to abandon plans to repatriate the majority of Estate Tamils to India (Winslow and Woost 6). Anti-Tamil rioting resulted. In effect, Ammachi's objection to her daughter's

inter-ethnic dalliance can be understood with the context of the rise of Sinhalese chauvinism and the emergence of Tamil nationalism in post-colonial Sri Lanka.[16]

Yet, the communalism underlying Ammachi's opposition to Sinhalese-Tamil romance is regarded as a liability within the diegesis of the novel. It is looked upon as a form of social regulation that enchains the function of female sexuality to the reproduction of collective ethnic solidarity. Put another way, the protection of female sexuality is captured as the principal imagery within which ethno-nationalist struggles are fought. Within this framework, Radha Aunty's romance with Anil evinces a certain radicalism in that it represents an attempt to uncouple female sexuality from the larger ethnic script. Can Sri Lanka liberalize, and hence modernize, its political regimes so that women like Radha Aunty can be free to love and marry whom she desires? That her romance ultimately crumbles under the weight of communalism suggests, among other things, the difficulty with which Sri Lanka would emerge from its colonial history as a modern nation-state. Lodged within this romance-marriage plot, hence, is Selvadurai's attempt to politicize "desire," to make it relevant to the re-imagining of Sri Lankan politics. Likewise, the romance-marriage plot is meant to render politicized ethnic identities as reactionary.

The Power of Gay Romance

It is noteworthy that Arjie's romance with Shehan picks up where Radha Aunty's romance with Anil leaves off. If the latter disappoints with a breakup, the

[16] See Stokke, "Sinhalese and Tamil Nationalism as Post-colonial Political Projects from 'Above' 1948-1983," page 100; and Wilson and Woost, page 6.

former delights with a certain triumphalism, namely that of gay liberation. In the chapter entitled, "The Best School of All," Arjie describes his harrowing experiences at Queen Victoria Academy, a school that harbors a culture of male aggression and dominance. Selvadurai's decision to unfold a gay romance within this violent masculinist environment is particularly strategic. While the story of Radha Aunty highlights the need for sexual liberation, it does not challenge the heteronormative and masculinist assumptions within the romance-marriage plot. In order to extend the scope of sexual liberation to include same-sex desires, Selvadurai needs to disarticulate concepts of masculinity from their bourgeois constructions. The story of Arjie's experiences in the Queen Victoria Academy is simultaneously a story about how he derived a gay consciousness while trying to subvert and undermine traditional masculinity.

Before continuing with my analysis of this chapter, it is necessary to take a brief detour to the history of bourgeois masculinity. In his study of Lord Baden-Powell and the rise of the Boy Scouts movement, Michael Rosenthal explains that the ideals of masculinity that were often celebrated in the Anglo-Saxon societies of the late-Victorian and Edwardian period originated in a time of crisis in imperial England. Several major events contributed to the climate of national emergency. On the one hand, the expanding industrial capacity of United States, Japan, and Germany created new pressures on Britain to be commercially competitive, and on the other, the agitations of the labor movement gave rise to the fear that the working classes would soon disrupt industrial production, as well as upset existing political structures (3). Furthermore, the Second Boer War

(1899-1902) cast a shadow of doubt over the military aptitude and fitness of the British army, which had required 450,000 troops to subdue some 40,000 Dutch farmers (3).

These events coalesced around a moral panic about the character of the British citizenry, in particular about the mental and physical state of its male population. The fear that Britain was producing weak, undisciplined, and slack-willed men took hold of the public imagination and contributed to the cultural impetus for building character in Britain's youthful male population. Via the channels of public education (the British public schools) and youth organizations such as the Boys' Brigade and the Boy Scouts, several ideals of masculinity were articulated and disseminated. The Boys' Brigade, for example, promoted a kind of Christian manliness,[17] while the Boy Scouts focused on building up boys in the image of the colonial pioneer and hunter.[18] Likewise, upper-class education at the turn of the 19th-century transmitted the codes of Social Darwinism to the conceptualization of manhood (Mangan, "Social Darwinism" 139-144).

Despite the variance in conceptualizations, these models of ideal masculinity emphasized, among other things, a commitment to physical activity and athleticism, the moral exercise of self-restraint and self-control especially in matters of libidinal impulses, the development of a militaristic or neo-Spartan conduct grounded on "stoicism, hardiness and endurance,"[19] and the cultivation of a kind of corporate loyalty and of obeisance to a system of structured authority

[17] For a discussion about Christian manliness, see John Springhall.

[18] For a discussion of the British masculine stereotype based on the image of the pioneer and hunter, see John M. Mackenzie.

[19] See Mangan and Walvin.

(Rosenthal 3-8, Mangan and Walvin 1-6). These models of masculinity, in other words, stressed the importance of discipline and submission as basis for the production of men into serviceable citizens for the empire. The articulation and dissemination of bourgeois masculine identity therefore has great political significance. As an ideology that is "firmly rooted in the self-interests of the upper-classes," the cultural reconstruction of masculine ideals in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, and especially their transmission to the working classes, is meant to secure middle and upper-class perspectives on national and imperial activities (Rosenthal 7).

The significance of the Queen Victoria Academy, as represented in *Funny Boy*, lies in its continuity with this imperial enterprise. As its name suggests, Queen Victoria Academy is an institution tied to Sri Lanka's colonial past. Aptly, the school's principal, Black Tie, is somewhat of an antiquated figure who dresses in the way of the colonial masters: "in a sola topee" and "a carefully pressed white suit that also belonged to another era" (*FB* 209). As an all-boys institution, the Queen Victoria Academy is not merely a center of education where boys acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for adult life; it is also a hub of social conditioning where boys learn to be men. It is not for nothing that Arjie is sent to the academy. As his father says to him: "The Academy will force you to become a man" (*FB* 205). Arjie dreads attending the Academy because, as his brother Diggy warns him, social relations are organized around a set of codes that require students to act in accordance with the ideals of masculinity as epitomized in the English public school system of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras.

One of the golden rules in the Academy is that a student must never complain: "Once you come to the Queen Victoria Academy you are a man. Either you take it like a man or the other boys will look down on you' (*FB* 207). Implicit in Diggy's warning is that a student is expected to carry himself with stoicism and hardiness – values that speak to the neo-Spartan virility espoused by the Victorian/Edwardian public school system. Furthermore, students are expected to accept masculine violence and physical aggression as part of their education. As Arjie notes, the boys at the Academy played "rugger with a brutality I had never seen at St. Gabriel's" (*FB* 209) and are in the habit of displaying masculine bravado towards each other in their everyday behavior in school. Curiously, despite effecting an aura of masculine aggression and intimidation in their conduct, the students are submissive to a hierarchy of male authority. Older students earn the respect of the younger ones. As Arjie discovers, it is customary for the latter to step "aside respectfully" to let the former pass in the corridors (*FB* 210). Stranger still is the fact that, despite conducting themselves with masculine bravura, students tremble at the authority of Black Tie, a tyrant who metes out punishments arbitrarily. Students get punished for as little as blinking their eyes or licking their lips in front of him (*FB* 206). In line with the public school morality on masculine identification, the boys of the Academy cultivate a masculine persona based upon aggressive physical posturing, disciplined morality, and submission to phallic authority.

In framing Arjie's relationship to the Queen Victoria Academy in terms a confrontation with Black Tie's authority, Selvadurai makes it clear that his

protagonist is the antithesis of the school's masculine culture. Not long after he enters the Academy, he is chosen by Black Tie to recite two poems by Henry Newbolt during prize-giving day. The reason for the recital is political. Black Tie, in his attempts to keep the school open to boys of all races and religion, seeks to win the favor of a particular cabinet minister that is rumored to be the country's next president. Arjie's task is to recite the poems with an eye to impressing the said minister who, we are told, had at one time won the All Island Poetry Recital Contest with a recital of those two poems (*FB* 241). The objective of Arjie's recital is to give a stirring rendition of the poems so that Black Tie could organize a moving speech around their contents. As Mr. Sunderlingam explains to Arjie: "the student who recites those poems will have the honor of helping our beloved principal save the school" (*FB* 241).

But Arjie's experience in this prize-giving day project does not begin honorably. When first called to recite the poems in front of Black Tie, Arjie stumbles over the verses, which instigates Black Tie to bring his cane down on the back of Arjie's legs. From the very start, the prize-giving day recital is framed as the bane of Arjie's existence: "As I looked at the poems, lying on my desk, I thought about the trouble they had caused me, of the humiliation and pain of the canning I had just received" (*FB* 233). Furthermore, these poems by Henry Newbolt speak to the very masochistic dynamic that encourages boys to glorify obedience to phallic authority. Newbolt was one of the public-school poets who extolled the virtues of imperialism within the idioms of sports and war (Mangan, "Manufactured" 134-135). He often interwove imagery of the courageous

schoolboy athlete with the heroic sacrifice of the soldier (Mangan, "Manufactured" 134-135). In his most famous poem – Vitaï Lampada – one of the two poems Arjie is to recite – a game of cricket on the school field is used as a prologue to war:

> And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
> The river of death has brimmed his banks,
> And England's far, and Honour a name,
> But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
> "Play up! play up! and play the game!" (Newbolt 12-16)

The other poem that Arjie is to recite "The Best School of All" speaks of the honor and pride that comes with being a part of the public school system. The prize-giving day recital can be regarded as an attempt by Black Tie to invoke the public school ethos of the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras – an ethos that reinforces Newbolt's vision of an empire built on the symbols of masculine courage and bravery of the sacrificial schoolboy.

But Arjie is far from being a Newbolt boy. He would rather play with the girls during spend-the-days, where he can use his imagination to liberate himself from everyday constraints, than submit himself to the neo-spartan morality that demands conformity and submission to male authority. That Arjie is chosen to recite the Newbolt poems is a great irony, especially when we consider that he would soon fall in love with the school's most irreverent student, Shehan/Soyza,

who, for all intents and purposes, is the antithesis of the Newbolt schoolboy. Rebellious rather than disciplined, he is known in Black Tie's parlance as one of the "future ills and burdens of Sri Lanka" (*FB* 218). Furthermore, as a known homosexual, he is not someone with whom to be associated. As Diggy warns Arjie: "If you remain Soyza's friend, people will think you're like him and you'll become the laughing stock of the whole school" (*FB* 226-227).

However, it is through Shehan that Arjie finds the courage to subvert Black Tie. During a game of hide-and-go-seek in the garage, Shehan and Arjie have their first sexual encounter. Arjie describes how their first kiss, in particular Shehan's tongue, is like "a silent language that urged him to open his mouth (*FB* 252). Once opened, Arjie becomes aware of its potency: "I was aware of my mouth in a way I had never been before, aware of its power to give and receive pleasure" (*FB* 253). His first kiss with Shehan is more than just a physical act. It is also a gesture of empowerment. To be sure, Arjie is wracked with guilt after the first kiss. He feels as though he had "committed a terrible crime against" his family and wrestles between his "desire for Shehan and the disgust at that desire" (*FB* 256, 260).

But his sense of shame and regret soon turns to one of love and tenderness the following day when Black Tie drags Shehan by the ear to the principal's office. The thought of Shehan suffering Black Tie's wrath – of being caned and made to kneel on the balcony – sends Arjie into feeling shame and regret of a different kind: "With the terrible regret of a realization come too late, I saw that I had misjudged what we had done in the garage. Shehan had not debased me or

degraded me, but rather had offered me his love. And I had scorned it" (*FB* 262). Arjie begins to feel "a profound sense of misery" seeping through his body (*FB* 262). We are to take from this the fact that it is Black Tie's threat to Shehan's welfare that prompts Arjie to change his views about that first kiss. That is to say, it is by re-imagining of Black Tie as an oppressor that Arjie begins to positivize his shame and guilt into love. Arjie's acceptance of his own homosexuality occurs as a reaction to the victimization of Shehan by Black Tie. Incidentally, it is this image of Shehan as Black Tie's prisoner that eventually drives Arjie to do "something the bravest boy in [his] class would not dare," which is to intentionally fumble the Newbolt poems on prize-giving day (*FB* 217). In effect, the "silent language" that had urged him to open his mouth would now be used to subvert the authority of Black Tie. By rendering the Newbolt poems senseless, he would deny Black Tie the opportunity to transmit the imperial ideals of compulsory masculinity to the present. This is precisely what comes to past. Following Arjie's botched recital, Black Tie struggles to deliver his speech "as laughter and coughs buffeted his voice" (*FB* 276). Eventually, he becomes silent and returns to his seat, looking "tired and defeated" (*FB* 276).

Black Tie's fall from grace provides Arjie with a sense of triumph. Like some romantic hero, he declares to Shehan: "I did it for you…I couldn't bear to see you suffer anymore" (*FB* 277). In a similar fashion to the romantic heroine who imagines herself struggling against the traditional requirements of the marriage plot, Arjie imagines himself as the romantic hero who battles against the requirements of compulsory masculinity. Selvadurai invites us to make an

important correlation, namely that in subverting the meaning for which Black Tie stands, Arjie not only transforms his marginalization into agency but also affirms his homosexuality as a political consciousness. In a sense, Arjie's self-actualization as a gay man is simultaneously a rejection of imperialist constructions of masculinity and an articulation of a new concept of masculine identity – one that is based, not upon aggression and submission, but upon the awareness of one's individual truth and desires.

II. Free Market as Modernity

I have been arguing that Selvadurai makes use of romance in his coming-of-age narrative to articulate a politics of sexual liberation. This politics of sexual liberation in turn allows him the space to re-imagine Sri Lanka beyond its current political dimensions. Via the romance-marriage plot, Selvadurai attempts to diagnose Sri Lanka's ethno-religious conflict in terms of a historical repression of female sexuality. The figure of the romantic heroine defying the authority of the traditional patriarch and resisting social conformity becomes central to Selvadurai's vision of how Sri Lanka is to modernize itself. Likewise, the gay romance allows Selvadurai to re-imagine the possibility for Sri Lanka's modernity in terms of an emancipation of male sexuality from the colonial enterprise of male character building. In the same way that King Mongkut's royal court imprisons female sexuality within a feudal system of male authority, the Queen Victoria Academy ensnares male sexuality within a colonial system of male aggression

and submission. Like the image of the romantic heroine, the figure of the gay romantic hero who defies the requirements of compulsory masculinity and subverts the phallic of authority of the patriarchal tyrant allows Selvadurai to articulate an idea of Sri Lanka beyond the exclusionary bourgeois, hetero modalities, proffered as "national," within which citizenship is defined. In short, Selvadurai makes use of romance as a metaphor to describe the actualization of sexually-liberated citizens as itself a process of national self-actualization. I argue, however, that this politics of sexual liberation has the effect of promoting free market solutions to Sri Lanka's ethno-religious conflict. That is to say, in re-imagining Sri Lanka's future in terms of the possibility for sexual liberation of its citizens, Selvadurai advances a neo-liberal sensibility about how the historical problems of former colonial countries are to be resolved via a diet of liberal market reforms.

The Vassal Versus the Empowered Individual

A curious turn follows Arjie's botched recital. The sense of triumphant that had overcome Arjie is quickly replaced by melancholy. Scanning the audience from the gallery, Arjie is filled with a certain sadness when his gaze falls on his mother. "What had happened between me and Shehan over the last few days had changed my relationship with her forever. I was no longer part of my family in the same way. I now inhabited a world they didn't understand and into which they couldn't follow me" (*FB* 278). This statement suggests, among other things, that Arjie has arrived at a point in his life where he can no longer relate to

his family in the same way as he had before he fell in love with Shehan. The conceit here is that his gay relationship and his gay awareness have somehow propelled him beyond the care and welfare of his family, and that his anticipated journey into adulthood would be a lonely one. To a certain extent, Arjie's sense of isolation from the family reflects the logics that inhere in gay liberation theory. The activities of the Gay and Lesbian Front (GLF) of the late 1960s were organized around the revolutionary idea that, in order to liberate society from the system of enforced heterosexual imperative, men and women must first liberate their desires from the hierarchical assumptions of male supremacy, which lurk in the sex-role structures of the traditional nuclear family (D'Emilio and Freedman 321-322).

As we have seen, the Chelvaratnam family is an upper-middle-class Colombo family structured around hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality. As Arjie's coming-of-age experiences demonstrate, the family – especially its masculine figurehead – is a regulatory and disciplinary force through which children are raised in accordance with sexual and gender norms. When it was discovered that Arjie plays bride-bride in the girls' territory during spend-the-days, he was placed under strict supervision and made to play cricket in the boys' territory. By extension, the school resumes the said regulatory and disciplinary functions within a public setting. It reinforces the values and sexual mores of the middle-class family. The politics of sexual liberation, as expressed in both the second-wave feminism and the gay liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, seek to disembed these middle-class values and sexual mores from processes of

individuation. The objective of such a politics is to emancipate identity from the constellations of familial and social regulation that condition individuals into compliant and obedient citizens, especially of the heteronormative middle-class kind. That Arjie should suddenly find himself projected beyond the family and the school is not surprising. His sexual liberation behooves him to re-construct his identity outside the constellations of familial and social regulation – a process that requires, among other things, the exercise of freedom upon the self. Put differently, Arjie no longer has the benefit of a historical hegemonic framework upon which to base his identity; he has to find other vectors upon which to re-fashion himself. The task at hand is to find out what these vectors are and what sorts of subjectivities they eventually produce.

To undertake this inquiry, I will read *Funny Boy* within Foucault's concept of governmentality. As an art of government, govermentality refers to the rationalization of the use of power in securing the objectives of the state.[20] That is to say, govermentality is about trying to resolve problems related to how populations are to be ruled and managed, and how state power should be deployed.[21] As I have mentioned earlier, Sri Lankan politics is based on a system of patronage and concessions, which became even more entrenched after independence. Within this system of patronage and concessions citizens are compelled to organize themselves into ethnic collectives and to lend their support to those in power who best represent their collective interests. The objective of government, in such cases, is to mobilize political power along ethnic lines. This

[20] See Michel Foucault's "Governmentality"; Colin Gordon's "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction."
[21] Ibid.

form of governmental rationality, a byproduct of colonialism, results in an inorganic and uneven capitalist development in Sri Lanka, where economic activity is organized around a feudal network of loyalties and dependence.

In essence, capitalist development in Sri Lanka since colonial times has not been accompanied by adequate reinforcements of liberal democracy. Unlike the feudal model, liberal democracy presupposes that individuals must be governed as autonomous subjects whose pursuits of private interests in a liberalized economy contribute to economic activity and prosperity, as well as to economic equilibrium in the market. The idea of economic citizenship, hence, is central to liberal rationalities of rule. The objective of government, in this case, is to secure the optimal conditions in which the *homo-economicus* can thrive. Viewed through the lens of liberal democracy, the problem of Sri Lanka's capitalist development is related to the misguided use of political power. In Arjie's coming-of-age narrative, Selvadurai emphasizes the ways in which the *homo-economicus* figures as a threat to the country's existing system of political patronage and concessions. The novel calls for a re-thinking of the role of the government and a re-rationalization of political power. In what ways must the political order of the country be re-organized, and the political philosophy of the governing body be rectified so that Sri Lankan society can be emancipated from the culture of ethno-religious antagonism?

In the chapter about Arjie's experiences at the Queen Victoria Academy – "The Best School of All" – we learn that the fate of the Queen Victoria Academy is locked in a struggle between Lokubandara and Black Tie – both of whom are

jockeying for political patronage and concessions. We are told, for example, that as a vice principal, Mr. Lokubandara is more powerful than Black Tie. This is due to the fact that he is a "'political appointee,' his cousin being a minister in the cabinet" (*FB* 208). Black Tie, on the other hand, fights for Tamil representation by pandering to a cabinet minister who, as rumor has it, may turn out to be the country's next president. The cumulative effect of this political system is that Queen Victoria is divided into two opposing factions, each supporting the mobilization of political power on the basis of ethnic preference. Arjie finds this form of political jostling morally ambivalent in large part because it resembles the battle scene of the feudal era. Students and staff at the Academy act like vassals, pledging their loyalties and allegiances to their overlords in exchange for a guarantee of their welfare. This feudal arrangement bears many similarities to the concept of pastoral power whereby the ruler/pastor is given the right to exercise an exhaustive jurisdiction over the bodies and souls of his flock (Gordon 8). The power of the pastoral ruler is absolute. As Arjie explains, arbitration at Queen Victoria is executed via the discretion of Black Tie, who makes decisions based on a set of codes that have nothing to do with fairness or justice: "Right and wrong, fair and unfair had nothing to do with how things really are" (*FB* 267). These codes – like the injunction against keeping long hair – are meant to establish order and integrity of the school. Locked into an obligatory relationship to the political order in the same way that vassals/sheep are tied to their overlords/pastor, students earn their welfare and salvation, as it were, by way of obeisance. Rather than serving as one of the institutions of liberal democracy that

reproduces economic citizens, the Academy perpetuates the colonial logic of divide and rule within a regiment of socialization that turns boys into vassals for the country's political overlords. For Selvadurai, any transformation of the political system in the country must come by way of the re-conceptualization of the citizen as a unit of political power. Consider the following observation that Arjie makes:

> On prize-giving day, next week, my reciting the poems was essential to Black Tie's speech. That was why he had changed his behavior towards me. It was not because he was fair that he had listened to Mr. Sunderlingam and removed the cane from his desk. Rather, it was because the poems are an indispensible part of his last hope of triumphing over Lokubandara. Without me his speech would fail and his efforts to save his position would come to nothing. A thought then presented itself to me, so simple I was surprised it hadn't come to be before. Black Tie needed me, and because he needed me, *power* had moved into my hands. (*FB* 269-270, my emphasis).

This passage is significant for what it tells us about the relationship between political objectives and the art of government. Black Tie, as Mr. Sunderlingam explains, "belongs to the old school that believes you can beat knowledge into a student" (*FB* 240). This tactic of intimidation serves him well, especially in the feudal/pastoral context. But in the instance of the prize-giving day recital, Black

Tie is unable to achieve his larger political goals by terrifying Arjie into submission. On the advice of Mr. Sunderlingam, Black Tie puts away his cane – a decision that is rewarded with a favorable outcome. Arjie recites the poems with ease: "I began to recite the poems, and I was surprised how easily they came to me now that I was not under the threat of that cane" (*FB* 269).

Black Tie's decision to put away the cane reflects a change in the art of his government. His usual modus operandi is to secure the loyalty and allegiance of his students by the threat of force. Students submit to his authority in exchange for the security he is able to purchase via his political patronage. But the poetry recital episode engenders a different set of challenges within the problem-space of government. He needs a student with a particular flair or talent that is not commonly associated with the masculine enterprise that he oversees. In fact, he requires a student with a penchant for self-expression, sensitivity, and creativity – qualities that rub against the stoic and hardy nature of ideal masculinity embodied in the school's ideology. In an ironic turn, the recital of poems about ideal masculinity requires the flair and talent of a sensitive homosexual who refuses to submit to the masculine enterprise, therefore prompting Black Tie to resort to a softer approach in his treatment of Arjie.

Essentially, Black Tie is forced to re-rationalize the use of power in accordance to the changing nature of his political objectives. He can no longer depend on the feudal exercise of power because the objective is no longer to secure compliance from the student body as a means to retaining political control. In order to retain political control, he now has to exercise power from a distance,

so to speak, so that Arjie is given the power to harness his talents and develop his potential. The prize-giving day project behooves Black Tie to reassess his relationship with Arjie. He can no longer treat Arjie as a vassal; he must relate to him as an empowered subject. To answer an earlier question, Arjie's new political consciousness derives from the awareness that his identity is no longer to be tethered to the structures of desires of the family and of the school but to be grounded on the cultivation of his own talents and the fulfillment of his own desires. As such, he must be given the *power* to act on these talents and desires.

Self-Governance / Laissez-Faire Versus Authoritarianism

The empowered citizen is a crucial expression of Western liberalism. Nineteenth-century Western liberalism evolved the concept of individuality to make it a central rationality for the re-organization of society in a capitalist mode (Watt 62-63). As more economic specialization became required for the growth of capitalism, the need became ever more heightened for a "less rigid and homogeneous social structure, and a less absolutist and more democratic political system" (Watt 63). Within such capitalist conditions, the "effective entity on which social arrangements were now based was no longer the family, nor the church, nor the guild, nor the township, nor any other collective unit, but the individual: he alone was primarily responsible for determining his own economic, social, political and religious roles" (Watt 63). In effect, capitalistic society is to be "governed by the idea of every individual's intrinsic independence both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiances to past modes of thought

and action denoted by the word 'tradition' – a force that is always social, not individual" (Watts 62). Put another way, under capitalism, society comprises, not of social collectives, but of self-governing individuals. Liberalism's argument rested on the belief that, if allowed to pursue their own interests and "conceptions of the good life" within a free market, these self-governing individuals would provide "an important driving force in the provisions of goods and services for others in the market" (Smart 91,95). In this sense, self-governing individuals, through the pursuits of private interests in a market, bring "unintended mutually beneficial effects" to all within a modern pluralistic society (Smart 95). In this context of the mutual benefits of self-regulation, the free market and its so-called procedurally-neutral operations are regarded as the most effective method in the promotion of human welfare (Smart 91).

This liberal conceptualization of the empowered and self-regulating citizen is one of the central post-cold war expressions for conflict resolutions in the Global South. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, geopolitical discourses on development began to reflect the hegemonic view that peace and prosperity in the developing countries is best secured via the global spread of liberal democracy and economic liberalization – whereby the "vicious cycles of underdevelopment and armed conflict" in troubled countries would be replaced with "virtuous cycles of neoliberal development, liberal democracy and liberal peace" (Stokke 20-21). Central to this neoliberal project of peace building and conflict resolution is the crafting of institutions of liberal democracy, of which the purpose is to facilitate economic liberalization. Among the recommendations for

this neoliberal prescription is the re-definition of citizenship. In Sri Lanka, politicized ethno-national collectivities and group rights tend to generate mutually antagonistic governmental projects that fuel ethno-nationalist sentiments. In order to establish liberal democratic objectives, it is necessary to re-organize the relationship between state power and the political base, which involves the depoliticization of ethno-nationalist identities and the politicization of individual citizenship; in other words, to promote the idea of the citizen as a self-interested and rational individual (Peiris and Stokke 160-161).

One of the criticisms that can be levied against this neoliberal approach to conflict resolution and underdevelopment is how it obscures the fact that free market reforms often promote the interests of the metropolitan elites at the expense of the periphery, thereby creating uneven geographical development that tend to exacerbate existing racial tensions, which in turn necessitates a consolidation and centralization of executive powers and, at times, the militarization of civilian activities. To briefly explain my point, I fast forward to present day Sri Lanka, specifically to 2009 and beyond, when the country's protracted civil war ended. The Rajapaksa government had launched a military offensive in the northern province of Sri Lanka between 2008 and 2009 that defeated the Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE). President Mahinda Rajapaksa declared a military victory on May 16, 2009, officially ending 26 years of civil war. However, this victory was marred by allegations of war crimes and human rights abuses. In March 2012, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed an American-backed resolution demanding that the Sri Lankan government

investigate allegations that its government forces have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in the final stages of the civil war in 2009. However, despite mounting pressures from the International Community – the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union – to address these allegations, there is little to suggest that indictment against the Rajapaksa government would alter the socio-economic prescriptions for post-civil war Sri Lanka. That is to say, while concerns about possible war crimes abound, little critique has been directed at the reconstruction and restructuring of post-war Sri Lanka. This is largely due to the fact that neoliberal reforms undertaken by the Rajapaksa government are in step with international expectations. As Alihan Kadirgamar states:

> Indeed, the regime's economic vision is largely appreciated by global powers. Bilateral development aid from China, India and Japan has seen considerable increases over the last few years. Furthermore, there has been an overwhelming flow of finance capital from the West. Indeed, the regime's economic pundits are boasting about the building of massive infrastructures whether it be roads, ports or power plants, high economic growth rates of eight percent, per capita GDP exceeding two thousand dollars, foreign exchange reserves of eight billion dollars and for that matter even the sale of three billion dollars in sovereign bonds.

Such is Sri Lanka's impressive economic performance that an article in *The Economist*, whose purpose was to address rising concerns of authoritarian rule under the Rajapaksa clan, could barely conceal its general approval of the recent constructions of roads, ports, and the like in Sri Lanka ("The Centre" 47). Hence, while the article points to the problem of authoritarianism, it implicitly recognizes the potential of economic liberalization as a path to liberal democracy. The article makes the assumption that authoritarian rule is the exception and not the rule where neoliberal reforms are concerned.

In her fact-finding mission in Sri Lanka in August 2013, Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2008 to 2014, documented disturbing accounts of human rights abuses and war crimes committed in the final phase of the 2009 war, and takes issue with the extension of emergency rule and the continuation of wartime militarization by the Rajapaksa government. Important as it is for this mission to address the abuse of executive power and the militarization of civilian projects to rebuild communities, Pillay does not draw on a correlation between what Kadirgamar calls "the nexus of global finance and authoritarian state power." For Kadirgamar, this nexus is a class project bent on pushing neoliberal reforms that emphasize not only the "free flow of goods and capital across borders," but also "the monetization of the economy," and "the imposition of fiscal austerity and a fully convertible currency regime." Such a project requires the consolidation and centralization of state

power to secure the confidence of finance capital.[22] This means in effect a clamping down on political dissent and opposition. Reports reveal that since the end of the war, the Rajapaksa regime had expanded executive power, undermined the independence of the judiciary, militarized civilian activities and rebuilding efforts, harassed and intimidated journalists and human rights group. [23]

In fact, the Rajapaksa government received international support in its war against the Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE). Stokke explains that the events of September 2011 made the defense of state sovereignty a primary rationale for liberal peace. In this context of the war on terror, discursive representation of the LTTE shifted from "grievance-based struggle to greed-oriented terrorism," giving legitimacy to state armed intervention as a prescription for conflict resolution. In other words, as the LTTE lost its parity status and came to be seen as a terrorist organization, the Sri Lankan state "received political support and military assistance from international actors" in its bid for security and stability (*Liberal Peace* 22). This security framework for conflict resolution was favored in large part by the USA, India, and China – all of whom were concerned that Sri Lanka's lack of "state sovereignty, security and stability" would adversely affect their own "economic and security interests in the Indian Ocean" (*Liberal Peace* Stokke 23). In effect, Rajapaksa's continuing (mis)use of the military after 2013 is couched in the pretext of maintaining state security. This security framework allows for non-market oriented demands upon the state to be recast as threats to state sovereignty,

[22] Kadirgamar points out that Sri Lanka's post war economic boom has been predicated on a second wave of neoliberalism reforms meant to capitalize on "global finance capital flowing into the emerging markets."

[23] See Navi Pillay, and Amnesty International's "Sri Lanka's Assault on Dissent" (April 2013).

thereby giving the alibi to militarization and authoritarian rule. On this count, militarization in Sri Lankan can be viewed as a necessary operation, giving the government the license it needs to push through the financialization of the economy as if it were an issue related to the defense of state sovereignty. As Kadirgamar notes, in order for Sri Lanka to benefit from global financial capital flows into emerging markets, it first has to assuage investors about the country's political stability – a stability, it may be added, that has to be maintained by an iron fist.

Imperiled Entrepreneurialism

The purpose of this detour to present day Sri Lanka to is to provide the larger context within which to understand *Funny Boy*. The rise of authoritarian rule and the free market is something that Selvadurai addresses in his novel but within the context of an earlier period of economic liberalization in Sri Lanka. Under J.R. Jayewardene, prime minster and executive president of the country from 1977-1988, Sri Lanka embarked on a series of liberal economic reforms meant to replace the country's previous regime of import substitution and welfare support with one of export-oriented industrialization (Winslow 36, Hyndman 876). As the novel intuits, this period of economic liberalization was accompanied on the one hand by intensified ethno-religious conflict and on the other by increasing centralization of executive powers in the hands of Jayewardene. Arjie's narrative provides a thrilling and suspenseful account involving his mother's search for a dear friend, Daryl Uncle, who goes missing in Jaffna, where he was

investigating allegations that the Jayawardene government was clandestinely carrying out state-terrorism against Tamil radicals and using the state's repressive apparatuses to silence dissent to his rule. But what is interesting about Arjie's narrative is how it portrays Sri Lanka's nascent attempts at economic liberalization as a casualty, and not the cause, of the country's intensifying ethno-religious conflicts and growing authoritarianism.

The novel's ideological concurrence with the free market can be understood in the context of Arjie's own socio-economic position in Sri Lanka. He is from an upper-middle class Colombo family that stood to benefit greatly from Sri Lanka's open economy. As Arjie informs us, the free market provided his father with the opportunity to go into the hotel business, and were it not for the ethnic conflict, his family would have been able to enjoy new opportunities for the accumulation of wealth. In the chapter entitled "See no Evil, Hear no Evil," Arjie describes that a new climate of consumerism has arrived in Sri Lanka, especially for the Colombo middle classes. His parents have been frequenting "cocktail parties, dinner parties and dances at the Oberoi Supper Club" (*FB* 99). Furthermore, imported products are becoming more available in the country. The Intercontinental Coffee Shop sold such "exotic foods as hamburger and strawberry cake," while the new American-style supermarket – Cornell's – sold "blueberry jam, kippers, and canned apricots – things I had read about when I was younger in Famous Five and Nancy Drew books"[24] (*FB* 99-100). We are told that

[24] It is noteworthy that Arjie's excitement to see the availability of such products like jam and kippers is a reflection of his upper-middle class tastes, cultivated by a consumption of British and American cultural texts such as *The Famous Five* and *Nancy Drew* novels.

this sudden availability of foreign goods "had to do with the new government and something called 'free economy" and 'the end of socialism'" (*FB* 100).

Arjie's father, looking to capitalize on the free economy leaves the banking sector and together with Sena Uncle opens the Paradise Beach Resort. For the Chelvaratnam family, the free market economy brings new prosperity and opportunities. As Arjie remarks, "[o]ur affluence seemed to reach a new height when my father announced that he was going to Europe to promote the hotel and also to take a vacation" (*FB* 100). Furthermore, while his father is away, his mother goes out with Chithra Aunty almost every night to various events – fashion shows, dances, parties – where she gets to meets different ministers and on one occasion even Mrs. Bandaranaike herself. Selvadurai gives us the impression that this economic liberalization, at least for the Colombo elites, is a move towards prosperity and peace. As his mother exclaims, "[e]verything is wonderful! Who would have thought, a few years ago, that things would turn out so well!" (*FB* 102).

The exuberance associated with the free economy, however, is quickly overshadowed by Daryl Uncle's unexpected visit. Daryl Uncle rekindles a tentative liaison with Amma (Arjie's mother). But the purpose of his visit to Sri Lanka is to investigate incidence of government torture and disappearance. We are told that a war has erupted in "Jaffna, between the army and the Tamil Tigers, who are fighting for a separate state" (*FB* 106). This largely explains why the government enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which, as Arjie puts it, "allowed the police and the army to arrest anybody they thought might be a

terrorist without something they called a warrant" (*FB* 107). Amma, who perceives the Tigers as jeopardizing the chance for reconciliation, thinks the enactment of this act to be "a good thing" and refuses, initially, to believe that it is a "tool for state terrorism" (*FB* 107). It is only after Daryl Uncle's disappearance that Amma comes around to believing that the state and the police are involved in political repression and intimidation. The chapter describes a tense and chilling account of how Amma tries to uncover Daryl Uncle's disappearance only to be met with police secrecy and police scrutiny upon herself. The house phone, we are told, gets tapped. Even Q.C. Uncle, once a famous civil rights lawyer, encourages Amma to give up on her inquiries, warning that the political climate has become too dangerous. Politicians, he says, have become more ruthless: "In my day, politicians were rascals, but never like these ones" (*FB* 137).

Selvadurai draws our attention to the fact that free market reforms in Jayewardene's era was accompanied by a rise in authoritarianism, but he invites us to view it as an exceptional case deriving from insufficient enforcements of liberal democracy. The drama of Daryl Uncle's disappearance is framed from a neoliberal perspective. Its emotive force is driven by the narrativization of a loss of free market opportunities: the Chelvaratnam family is being deprived of the chance for socio-economic advancement due to the failure of the governing elites to liberalize and modernize the country's political structures. We are made to feel indignant about the stifling of the entrepreneurialism spirit that is needed to facilitate Sri Lanka's transition to the open economy.

In the chapter entitled "Small Choices," Arjie recounts how his father's hotel business becomes a target of Sinhalese chauvinism. The Paradise Beach Resort, which Arjie's father co-owns with Sena Uncle, is located in an area south of Colombo that is rife with anti-Tamil sentiments. Bandurante Mudalali, a local businessman, overruns the area with his thugs. Futhermore, Mudalali is himself "backed by a cabinet minister who was a well-known racist" (*FB* 190). During the 1981 riots, Mudalali and his thugs attacked Tamil families in the area, brutally hacking them to death and then setting their bodies on fire (*FB* 168-169). Because of such anti-Tamil sentiments, Arjie's father is cautious in his dealings, careful not to instigate a backlash from Mudalali. As he tells Jegan, the son of long time dear friend: "As a Tamil you have to learn how to play the game. Play it right and you can do very well for yourself. The trick is not to make yourself conspicuous. Go around quietly, make your money, and don't step on anyone's toes" (*FB* 169). This piece of advice highlights the fact that Tamil entrepreneurialism is subjected to the machinations of Sinhalese nationalism. Despite economic liberalization, enterprising Tamil must still conduct business in an environment governed by concessionary politics and political thuggery.

The advice Arjie's father gives to Jegan proves to be futile. Jegan, a qualified accountant and a young man of 25, is hard working and ambitious. He starts working for Arjie's father and eventually gets promoted to a supervisory role, a decision that does not sit well with some of the Sinhalese hotel staff nor it seems with Jegan himself. It appears that Jegan, despite being a supervisor, is told not to directly address his criticisms to the staff, which should be conveyed by

proxy of the manager. The reason for this restriction on his role is to minimize racial discontent among the Sinhalese staff. As Arjie's father explains to Jegan, "the truth is that I have given you a high position and there's bound to be some resentment in part because you're Tamil" (*FB* 169). Despite taking such precautions, Arjie's father and Sena Uncle are unable to avoid clashing with Mudalali. Jegan returns to his room one evening to find it vandalized. Someone had scrawled on the window these Sinhalese words: "Death to all Tamil Pariahs" (*FB* 192).

The decision is made not to report the vandalism because, as Sena Uncle explains, the staff responsible for the incident is probably "in league with Banduratne Mudalali. If we call the police, they will come, harass the innocent housekeeping staff, and then leave without arresting the culprit" (*FB* 194). Sena Uncle's assessment suggests that Mudalali's influence has infiltrated the ranks of the local police. Furthermore, such is the climate of fear that Mudalali has cultivated that none of the staff wants to clean up the vandalized window. As the head housekeeper says,"[i]f we do it, we might be in trouble next" (*FB* 195). Following this incident, Sena Uncle and Arjie's father decide to let Jegan go. They offer him an alternative – to go work in the Middle East, where he would make twice the amount than at the resort. But Jegan chooses to return to Jaffna.

While never explicitly stated, Jegan's return to Jaffna signals a possibility of his renewed ties with the Tigers. In an earlier exchange with Arjie, Jegan explains that young Tamils like himself have little choice but to join the Tigers. With little hope for economic citizenship, young Tamils have to resort to militant

mobilization: “On the other hand, what is the alternative? We cannot live like this under constant threat from the Sinhalese, always second-class citizens in our own country” (*FB* 172). Selvadurai presents us with the sad and somewhat tragic story of Jegan to drive home the point that unless economic liberalization in Sri Lanka is carried out in tandem with liberal democratic reforms, liberal peace and security will remain a pipedream. In fact, Jegan is not the only casualty of Sri Lanka’s communal politics. In the wake of the 1983 communal violence, Arjie’s father, as well as the Chelvaratnam family, is forced to restart their lives as “penniless refuges” (*FB* 302). This image of the Chelvaratnams leaving behind their wealth to restart their lives as poor asylum seekers stands in contrast to Appa’s earlier optimism that “in a free economy, any man who has talent and works hard can get ahead” (*FB* 161).

Bearing an unwavering faith in Western liberalism and economic liberalization as the cure for Sri Lanka’s ethno-religious conflicts, Selvadurai rehearses a familiar trope that modernity is something the West brings to the Global South in the form of sexual liberation. Within this Western-centric perspective, Selvadurai allegorizes Sri Lanka as a failing post-colonial state unable to liberate its political structures from its feudal and colonial legacies. The remedy Selvadurai prescribes for his former homeland is less tradition and more romance: Sri Lankans must uncouple their desires from outmoded and restrictive social regulations and become individuals who govern themselves according to their unique individual truth. This figure of the sexually-liberated citizen is the promissory metaphor for national reconciliation and socio-political

transformation. *Funny Boy* invests its hope for Sri Lanka's future as a modern capitalist nation in the image of the Sri Lankan who is finally able to love whomever he or she desires.

Chapter 4: The Politics of Healing: Therapy and Thatcherism in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

Introduction

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) is a clever and entertaining coming-of-age novel which redeploys the picaresque technique.[25] Set in large part in a dreary, lower-middle class English suburb, the novel recounts the adventures of Karim Amir, the novel's roguish anti-hero, as he negotiates the rapidly changing political landscape and social mores of English society in the 1970s. As the irreverent picaro, Karim exposes and ridicules the various attempts of the English as they attempt self-reconstruction. The end of the war, it would be useful to remember, was also the beginning of the end of Britain's imperial supremacy. The decline of power coincided with the arrival of populations from former British colonies into labor-scarce Britain and, in conjunction they seemed to trigger an identity crisis. While some flocked to the fascist National Front as a means of reaffirming their identities, others began to dabble in exotic "new age" practices, inspired by the so-called mysticism of Eastern philosophy. Kureishi's

[25] I use the term picaresque technique to indicate that *The Buddha* is not, on the whole, a picaresque novel. Kureishi uses the figure of the *picaro* – the knavish and irreverent anti-hero of the picaresque genre – to facilitate a comedic turn in what is primarily a coming-of-age narrative. Social satire is not the novel's only objective. As evidenced by Karim's project of self-discovery and empowerment, the novel is also a moral tale about maturity in a difficult period of English history.

depiction of what Andrew Gamble calls the "Crisis of Social Democracy"[26] is both comedic and yet serious. On the one hand, the scramble for all things exotic and Oriental made for a wickedly humorous representation of the British as they traded in their trademark "stiff upper lip" self-restraint and fortitude for vapors and mysticism. On the other, the rise in racist attacks against minorities was a sobering reminder of a national crisis. But as a coming-of-age novel, the picaresque technique in the end succumbs to the all-important business of maturity, stability, and social cohesion which are the novel's main objectives. Karim may make fun of the English as they try to re-assemble themselves but he is equally worried about his own ability to assemble an identity out of conflicted bits and pieces, especially in the context of a new political rationality: Thatcherism.

More than anything else, *The Buddha* is essentially a novel about a teenage boy – of mixed ancestry and of ambiguous sexuality – growing up in England at a time when free market liberalism is becoming the dominant rationalization of economy, society, and the self. Half English and half South Asian, Karim is a first-generation "black" British who struggles against the dominant British identity-claim of homogeneity. Victimized by racism and consigned to the mediocrity of a lower middle-class existence in an English suburb, Karim seeks a new way of being "British." In this chapter I focus particularly on Karim's modes of self-assemblage in the city which is

[26] The crisis of Social Democracy is a crisis of hegemony resulting from an ideological vacuum in the 1970s. As faith in Keynesian solutions to the economic problems of the 1970s eroded, the authority of national governments, as well as institutions and assumptions of the welfare state, "came under sustained attacked from both right and left" (Gamble 13).

accompanied by his increasing indifference to the suburbs which saw an intensification of racist attacks against blacks and South Asians. As he becomes immersed in fringe theater – on experimentations in acting and cultural representation – Karim begins to acquire what Bradley Buchanan aptly calls a "postmodern awareness of the arbitrariness and contingency of identity" (Buchanan 14). This new awareness puts him at odds with any politics founded on "simple political allegiances or old fashion displays of commitment or sincerity" (Buchanan 14). In other words, Karim's political reorientation involves a disarticulation of group solidarity and communal (one might even say class) identity as the basis for political action, and a concomitant re-articulation of politics as a private, personal, and individual performance of resistance.

My argument here is that Kureishi's attempt to shift the scope of politics from the collective effort (of unions, political parties, interest groups) to the idiosyncratic and the individual is symptomatic. It parallels the cultural trend towards introspection and self-reflection, encouraged in large part by the increasingly popular psychotherapeutic movement which in turn was aligned with the Thatcherite manifesto of self-reliance and individual enterprise. As we shall see, there is a fine line between Kureishi's representation of politics and the ideology of therapeutic self-empowerment. Whatever radicalism may inhere in Kureishi's rehearsal of identity as performative and negotiable, the novel in the end is unable to differentiate its political message from that of Thatcherite discourses on self-help and independence. There is in fact a harmonization of the two. In effect, *The Buddha,* in my reading, in its witty performance of the

"arbitrariness and contingency of identity" performs Thatcher's cherished logic of free market liberalism.

The Crisis and the Release

For Kureishi, the unraveling of the postwar consensus turned out to be both a curse and a blessing. After all, the decade of the 1970s was a difficult and a complex one in Britain. It was defined by a deepening economic crisis that eventually brought down the Labour government and saw the rise of Margaret Thatcher.[27] The country experienced historically high rates of inflation as well as unemployment, which contributed to declining standards of living. Sky-rocketing government debt brought deep cuts in social welfare services[28] while a Sterling crisis forced the humiliated Labour government to seek an IMF loan (Moore-Gilbert ch. 1, loc 130-153). The economic crisis of the 1970s also saw industrial conflict "on a scale unprecedented since the 1920s," and which culminated in the infamous "Winter of Discontent" of 1978-79 (Moore-Gilbert ch.1, loc. 163). Britain's economic crisis also brought to the forefront a great many social issues which had been simmering for a while. There was increasing racialized divisions, the rise of the fascist National Front, industrial militancy, a "moral panic" about rising crime, the IRA bombings – all contributed to an overall sense of social fragmentation (Moore-Gilbert ch. 1, Hall 3-18, Ruth Brown 15). There was increasing evidence of racial divisions in the suburbs and inner cities where white

[27] See Harvey 56-60, Gamble 1-26, Moore-Gilbert Ch. 1, Loc 112-275)
[28] Ibid.

youths, more often than not National Front supporters, often roamed the streets at night terrifying South Asians and Blacks.

As the novel shows, life in the 1970s was a precarious one for a non-white, suburban teenager. Often on the receiving end of racial abuse, Karim describes himself as "lucky to get home from school without serious injury" (*Buddha* 63). Apart from being "affectionately called Shitface and Curryface," he occasionally returned from school "covered in spit and snot and chalk and woodshavings" (*Buddha* 63). His confrontation with a staunch Enoch supporter, Hairy Back, ended with a Great Dane mounting his back: "As I climbed on to my bike I took off my jacket and discovered dog jissom" (*Buddha* 41). The racism in the 1970s was widespread and well-organized, as evidenced by the rise of the fascist National Front. The threat of the National Front is mostly concentrated in the suburbs and inner cities, and especially in the neighborhood where Karim's childhood friend, Jamila, lives with her parents, Anwar and Jeeta:

> The area in which Jamila lived was closer to London than our suburbs, and far poorer. It was full of neo-fascist groups, thugs who had their own pubs and clubs and shops. On Saturdays they'd be out in the High Street selling their newspapers and pamphlets. They also operated outside the schools and colleges and football grounds, like Millwall and Crystal Palace. At night they roamed the streets, beating Asians and shoving shit and burning rags through their letter-boxes. Frequently the mean, white, hating faces

had public meetings and the Union jacks were paraded through the streets, protected by the police. (*Buddha* 56).

The passage provides a palpable account of the lived experience of non-white immigrants in the country at the time.

In addition to racism and violence, the 1970s was characterized, as Karim often points out, by mind-numbing boredom and intellectual apathy – at least in the lower-middle class suburbs where he lives. Karim describes his suburb as being populated by people who "rarely dream of striking out for happiness" (*Buddha* 8). Opting for "familiarity and endurance," these suburban inhabitants are content with "dullness" in exchange for "security and safety" (*Buddha* 8). Karim's mother Margaret, in fact, epitomizes such a suburbanite, who seeks reassurance in sameness even though it proves to be unrewarding. We are told that she works at "a shoe shop in High Street to finance Allie, who had decided to become a ballet dancer and had to go to an expensive private school" (*Buddha* 19). Aside from taking on this additional burden, she also does "all the housework and the cooking" and receives no help from anyone in the family (*Buddha* 19). As Karim notes, she punishes herself and then complains that her life is "terrible! terrible!" (*Buddha* 19). Apart from this self-punishment, his mother avoids any intellectual engagements in culture or politics, preferring to watch programs like "Steptoe and Son, Candid Camera and The Fugitive" or to read "Catherin Cookson novels" (*Buddha* 20). The very mediocrity that is Margaret's life is an outcome, Karim intuits, of a defeatist attitude. His mother does not "fight back"

nor cares to be "stronger" (*Buddha* 19). She seems content to remain within the confines of her uninspiring surroundings.

However, the 1970s was also a decade that saw "the emergence of distinctively new socio-cultural configurations… articulated around questions of gender, race, sexuality, region and, more diffusely, ecological concerns" (Moore Gilbert, ch.1, loc. 234). The Women's Liberation Movement, for example, pushed for greater support for equal rights and status for women, and achieved certain legislative successes.[29] The 1970s also saw the rise of the Gay Liberation Front and a greater push for homosexual rights and visibility (Forster and Harper 4). There was also crossover activism between the Afro-Caribbean and South Asian communities who came together to fight organized violence against ethnic minorities (Hearse). Culturally, the 1970s was a decade in which the experimentations and avant-gardist energies of the 1960s were translated into mainstream cultural projects, the most visible instance of which was the growth in fringe theater (Moore-Gilbert ch.1, loc. 382). There was also a proliferation of theory in the 1970s as the English empiricist tradition yielded to the influence of European critical theory. The increasing influence of Althusserian Marxism and psychoanalysis in Britain's cultural studies is a case in point (Easthope ch. 3, loc. 1210).

In effect, the erosion of the consensus created, on the one hand, the fragmenting tendencies within British Society and, on the other, new stimuli for

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[29] The 1975 Sex Discrimination Act sought further protection against discrimination of women in the areas of employment, education, harassment, while amendments to the 1975 Social Security and Employment Act provided greater enhancement for pension provision and job security for women (Moore-Gilbert ch.1, loc. 250, par. 2; Forster and Harper 4).

the re-conceptualization and the reorganization of politics and society. The novel places us in this framework where formerly subordinated groups and identities – such as women, people of color, migrants, and sexual minorities – sought release from the entrenched relationships of power in the social democratic system. Although often associated with the progressive causes of providing full employment and enlarging the public sector, the Social Democractic system was nonetheless slow to react to the demands of women and immigrants for greater citizenship entitlements (Gamble 15). The reason for this reluctance was largely rooted in the logic of the Fordist regime,[30] which required the "maintenance of traditional family structure and traditional sexual division of labour" (Gamble 14). The Fordist regime, in other words, is predicated on a social organization whose familial structure was predominantly white and patriarchal in nature. In *Buddha*, the unraveling of the Fordist system in the 1970s is allegorized as a weakening of traditional patriarchal structures – a weakening that releases formerly subordinated individuals from their obligations to the deep-rooted habits and customs of a particularly repressive way of life. In particular, the weakening of the law of the father, so to speak, allows for the possible liberation of desires from the configurations of the welfare state.

For no small reason then that Karim should begin the novel by recounting the comical turn in his family whereby his father, Haroon, decides to become an

[30] Fordism refers to the system of mass production that defined the stage of economic development in the 20th century. It is often credited as the mode of economic growth that facilitated the long postwar boom. The Fordist system can be characterized as the following: 1) it is primarily based on mass production of standardized goods and semi-skilled labor; 2) it is the dominant mode of national accumulation, involving a "virtuous cycle of mass production and mass consumption"; 3) it is a mode of economic regulation of corporations and workers; and 4) it is a form of social life, characterized by "mass media, mass transport, and mass politics" (Encyclopedia Britannica)

oriental guru. A couple of important factors contribute to his decision. Firstly, spiritualism is on the rise and demands for all things oriental and exotic opened up opportunities for Haroon to sell himself as an eastern philosopher. As Karim tells us, the Chislehurst bourgeoisie is in need of a guru to help them arrive "an exquisite understanding of their inner emptiness" (*Buddha* 35). The second factor is related to a desire to escape the numbing effects of a typical suburban lifestyle. After all, Haroon's life in a lower-middle suburb has been described as an imprisonment in "a cage of umbrellas and steely regularity. It was all trains and shitting sons, and bursting pipes in January, and the lighting of coal fires at seven in the morning: the organization of love into suburban family life in a two-up-two-down semi-detached in South London" (*Buddha* 26). The one-way ticket out of the "steely regularity" of the lower-middle class suburban lifestyle lies in the opportunity to capitalize on the demand for spiritualism. In becoming an oriental guru, Haroon hopes to live a happier and more meaningful life.

Likewise, Haroon's foray into the spiritualism industry is instigated by his lover, Eva, whose passion for life is infectious. Unlike Margaret, Eva does not "put an armour on her feelings like the rest of the miserable undead around us. She liked the Rolling Stone's first album. The Third Ear Band sent her. She did Isadora Duncan dances in our front room" (*Buddha* 10). She lives "outwardly, towards you, and her face was always watchable because she was rarely bored or dull. She didn't let the world bore her" (*Buddha* 86-87). As Haroon admits, he "hadn't encountered so much passion in a woman before" (*Buddha* 87). Essentially, Haroon's decision to become a guru is intimately related to his desire

for a different, exciting and passionate life with Eva. Rejecting the "organization of love into suburban family life," Haroon seeks to liberate love from collective constraints. One must organize one's life, not according to societal and familial expectations, but according to one's inner truth.

Internalizing his own follow-your-heart philosophy, Haroon finally decides to call it off with his wife, Margaret. He tells Karim that he is tired of playing it safe by clinging to the past: "I've been afraid of hurting Eva, of hurting Margaret, and most of hurting myself….Our lives become stale, they become set. We are afraid of the new, of anything that might make us grow and change….But that is living death, not life…" (*Buddha* 89). Choosing life, Haroon starts anew with Eva, unconstrained by the feelings of guilt and resentment that had characterized his relationship with Margaret. Within this context of liberating desires, adultery is curiously regarded as a necessary evil. Karim does allude to the fact that his father's affair with Eva is a force "leading to destruction" and as "eroding the foundations" of the Amir household (*Buddha* 87). But the blame is rather reserved for the family members who continue to pretend that nothing is wrong: "around the house hearts were slowly breaking while nothing was being said" (*Buddha* 87). The house "was filled with suffering and fluffed attempts to pretend that suffering didn't exist" (*Buddha* 87).

The objection here is not that Eva "had disturbed our household from the moment she entered it" but that the family was pretending that no disturbance had occurred (*Buddha* 11). In a word, Karim is more upset about how his family continues to ignore its misery than he is about the cause of the misery itself: Eva's

libidinal force for change. Karim's partiality towards Eva stems from a certain admiration for both her creative and destructive potential. As Karim says of Eva: "She frightened me; she excited me" (*Buddha* 11). His alliance with Eva is grounded on a certain kind of tough love outlook on life. Eva brings changes to a family reluctant and afraid to change. If not for her, the family would have continued to organize themselves within the repressed structures of suburban life. It is noteworthy that the name Eva is the latinate form of Eve, which in Hebrew refers to "living" ("Eve"). The implication of the name in the novel is that it signifies the force that is needed to invigorate a life that has become "stale" (*Buddha* 89). In a biblical sense, Eva is synonymous with seduction and temptation; but within the diegesis of the novel, such nouns are associated with the follow-your-heart philosophy that Haroon preaches. As is evidenced in the advice that Haroon gives to his brother-in-law, Ted: "Follow the course of *least resistance*. Do what pleases you – whatever it is. Let the house fall down. Drift" (*Buddha* 49, my emphasis). In other words, the advice is for Ted to let himself be seduced by that which he had tried so hard to resist.

To be sure, Kureishi ironizies this turn towards spiritualism as a neurotic preoccupation of the Chislehurst bourgeoisie. By juxtaposing this spiritualism with Karim's interests in the counterculture movement, Kureishi tries to make a distinction between the political *eros* and the spiritual *eros*. The latter is grounded in radical experimentation and meaningful resistance to oppression. The former is merely a cultural trend with no real political objective. Yet, Kureishi is not impartial to the transformative potential of the spiritual movement. In one scene,

where Haroon is conducting a spiritual session, Karim admits that he "became more intensely aware of both sounds and silence; everything looked sharper… Dad's repose and concentration had helped me find a new and surprising appreciation of the trees in the garden as I looked at objects without association and analysis" (*Buddha* 36). Despite his misgivings about his father becoming a guru, Karim nonetheless recognizes the agentive potential in having sharper senses and the momentary ability to look at familiar objects in new and refreshing ways. To be transported outside the realm of the ordinary, to find new experiences via the stimulation of the senses, the flushing out of psychic blockages – these exercises may have the potential to liberate individuals from old habits, practices, and patterns of thoughts associated with a crumbling social order.

The City of Hope and Possibilities

While suburban England figures as the site where stasis and dullness thrive, the city of London effuses an air of constant change and infinite possibilities. Karim describes his first days in London as being an exciting yet confusing experience:

> The city blew the windows of my brain wide open. But being in a place so bright, fast and brilliant made you vertiginous with possibility: it didn't necessary help you grasp those possibilities. I still had no idea what I was going to do. I felt directionless and lost in the crowd. I couldn't see how the city work, but I began to find out. (*Buddha* 126)

What is significant about the above passage is how the city is described as a discursive space where knowledge and meaning are in constant flux. The image of the city exploding the brain suggests a kind of sensory overload. Like Alice who falls through a rabbit hole to find strange talking animals and inanimate objects, Karim is confronted with signifiers whose meaning he cannot yet understand. As the term vertiginous implies, the city is an endless chain of signification that defies one's attempt to fix and stabilize meaning. Unlike in the suburbs where the meaning of one's life is organized around the structures and routine of a middle-class existence, the city offers an endless possibility for self-fashioning. But more importantly, as Sukdhev Sandhu explains, the city is a heterotopia – as opposed to utopia – in which undesirable bodies exist, and non-conforming activities occur, in defiance of the architectures of power. The term vertiginous, in this instance, is a metaphor to describe the contingent nature of the city. Hence, as Sandhu argues, "any attempt to deny the mess, the confusion and the contamination that's central to all urban life, is ideologically and intellectually dubious" (140).

Kureishi uses the city as a textual platform to rehearse a postmodern or queer politics of identity. Representing Karim's experiences in the city as a confrontation with the "mess, confusion, and contamination" of urban life, Kureishi attempts to demonstrate in what ways identity is a category in constant negotiation with the destabilizing libidinal undercurrents that resist and defy fixity. In particular, Karim's urban experiences serve a literary function – one that

allows Kureishi to establish his case against identity politics. Insisting that identity is discursive rather than essential, Kureishi appears eager to expose the inconsistencies and the irony that inhere in any kind of politics that is organized around an official script, or for that matter, on the principle of group interests and solidarity. Kureishi's wariness of identity politics is most evident in his portrayal of the working classes. Karim, as we know, meets fellow actor, Terry in Shadwell's production of *The Jungle Book*. Terry "is in his early forties, with a pale, handsome face – a quiet, generous, working class Welsh man-boy" (*Buddha* 146). As "an active Trotskyite," Terry encourages Karim to speak of "the prejudice and abuse" he faced "as the son of an Indian," and together they "talked of inequality, imperialism, white supremacy" (*Buddha* 147-148). Yet, despite admiring Terry for his "passion for equality," Karim is amused and disturbed by his friend's naïveté. For Karim, the working-class is not an idealized group, especially those in the suburbs who would have "smacked" Terry "round the ear for calling them working class in the first place" (*Buddha* 149). Furthermore, Karim views the revolutionary feelings of "the proletariat of the suburb" as "virulent and hate-filled and directed entirely at the people beneath them" (*Buddha* 149). Kureishi's objective in this section is to bring into sharp contrast Terry's romanticized image of the proletariat and Karim's own experiences with the working-class in the suburbs – of which the purpose is show up the ambiguities of working-class politics.

In fact, Kureishi tries to show how the working-class is an idée fixe for the elite urban intelligentsia. In a rather heavy-handed attempt to articulate identity as

a performance, he uses the figure of Heater, an unflattering proletariat opportunist, to underscore how the urban elites use the working classes to prop up their leftist credentials. Heater is a local road sweeper whose penchant for Balzac has endeared him to the theater circles. In addition to receiving "tickets to first nights and to the parties afterwards, having a busier social life than Cecil Beaton," Heater is invited on occasions to give his man-on-the-street opinion during rehearsals (*Buddha* 175). As Karim puts it, the theater circle views Heater as "a sort of symbol for the masses" (*Buddha* 175). But Heater's working-class status is a performance for the elites, as far as Karim is concerned. Kureishi's conceit here is twofold: to show how identity stands in excess of the working-class master signifier and to define identity as performative rather than intrinsic. Heater gives a conscious performance of the idealized proletariat, which plays into the hands of the theater group, who in turn use Heater as a fetish to consolidate their own performance as politically progressive individuals. A co-dependence is formed as each party plays the role of the essentialized other as means to stabilizing their own respective identities. This scene involving Heater and the theater group is meant, in other words, to show up the structuring fantasy upon which each party stabilizes its identity via a direct and deliberate misrecognition of each other. In other words, each party tries to "authenticate" the identity of the other to sustain the fantasy of their own authentic selves.

Jaques' famous phrase in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* about the world being a stage and that "all men and women merely players" provides a useful analogy to what Kureishi is doing in this novel, namely to demonstrate the ways

in which reality is suspended indefinitely as men and women play roles to sustain the imaginary fourth wall (2.7.139-140). Kureishi positions Karim as that disruptive figure that punctures that fourth wall and that breaks the pretense that the stage is in fact the world. For Kureishi, it is important that the structuring fantasy of the stage be broken to reveal the libidinous undercurrents – "the mess, the confusion and the contamination" – that attend one's subjectivity. From a psychotherapeutic perspective, the breaking of the fantasy is akin to that first step towards self-recognition, or rather the moment in which we admit to ourselves that we have a problem. Here, Kureishi is suggesting that group identities and politics must recognize their inherent inconsistencies. As he tries to show, the idealization of the proletariat sustains a structuring fantasy that precludes any analysis of the libidinal currents of working class sentiments – sentiments that, as far as the novel is concerned, discriminate against other marginalized groups – "the people beneath them" (*Buddha* 149). One has to assume that Kureishi is here referring to racialized immigrant groups who are victims of a certain type of white working class nationalism.

Kureishi rather belabors this point about representing life in all its complexities in another episode involving Karim's confrontation with Tracey, a black actress in Pyke's theater group. Pyke, an important alternative director, is staging an experimental piece and asks each actor in the troupe to find a real life character to play. Initially, Karim picks Charlie but when told that they needed someone from his background, he chooses Anwar, Jamila's father. Anwar is a longtime friend of Haroon. Like Haroon, Anwar came to England in his twenties

to be educated. After university, Anwar, with a windfall from a betting mistake, opened a grocer's shop. While not wealthy by any means, Anwar is nonetheless financially solvent. He boasts to Haroon that he has paid off his mortgage (*Buddha* 27). Unlike Haroon, however, Anwar tries to embody the qualities of the traditional patriarch. He reaches back to his South Asian roots for lessons about how to run and manage his family – in particular, Jamila, his willful daughter. Fearing that Jamila is becoming too militant and sexually available, Anwar decides to fix her up with a boy from India, Changez. Once married, they would live in a rented flat nearby. When Jamila vehemently refuses to marry Changez, Anwar goes on a hunger strike. While the story of Anwar is comical, its underlying logic is repressive. Rather than releasing his family from the obligatory bonds of suburban familial life, as Haroon has done, Anwar oppresses his wife and daughter into conforming to the customs and traditions of his former homeland.

Despite his desperate attempts to assert patriarchal authority, Anwar is finally out maneuvered by his daughter. Even though Jamila marries Changez, she decides not to consummate the marriage, thereby depriving her father of the grandchildren he wishes to have. Furthermore, Changez begins to form a tentative relationship with Shinko, a Japanese prostitute. Instead of a traditional family, Jamila produces a farcical domestic arrangement. As patriarchal authority slips from his fingers, Anwar begins to retreat into a type of "Muslim fatalism" and his sanity begins to show signs of cracking (*Buddha* 172). Following a series of racist attacks on his store, Anwar has taken to "roaming the streets everyday with his

stick, shouting at these white boys" (*Buddha* 171). That Karim's choice to play Anwar should incite some disapprobation is not surprising. After his performance of Anwar during rehearsal, Tracey voices her concerns and objections: "Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we're funny, with strange habits and weird customs. To the white man we're already people without humanity, and then you go and have Anwar madly waving his stick at the white boys" (*Buddha* 180).

Tracey's objection stems from the concern that Karim's representation of Anwar as a comic but fanatical Muslim would give credence to the racist script. Given the rise of the National Front, so reasons Tracey, it is imperative that minority/immigrant culture be protected against racist insinuations (*Buddha* 181). Karim disagrees with Tracey's protective stance. Claiming that "[t]ruth has a higher value," Karim believes in exposing the "bad" minority (*Buddha* 181). After all, Anwar is a tragic comic figure whose desperate attempt to restore patriarchal authority over his family is morally reprehensible. To portray Anwar as a funny character with "strange habits and weird customs" is also to demonstrate the shortcomings of his structuring fantasy for patriarchal authority (*Buddha* 180). The "truth" to which Karim refers is none other than Anwar's tragic insistence on maintaining the law afforded to him by his allegiance to that master signifier – patriarchy. That he should die from the injuries inflicted by a dildo – "a large knobby pink penis" – speaks to the degree to which Kureishi seeks to ironize the concept of identity founded upon phallic authority (*Buddha* 209).

Berthold Schoene, in a very generous appraisal of the novel, suggests that Karim is "a radically deconstructive presence in a world obsessed with clear-cut definitions of cultural or ethnic identity' (117). Schoene derives this assessment by applying Homi Bhabha's concept of "The Third Space." Described as that which "constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity," the Third Space occupies an important place in post-structuralist thinking (Bhabha 37). Characterized by its ambivalence to dominant cultural significations that attempt to fix meanings within the binary structures of power and knowledge, the Third Space is often privileged as the site in which subaltern empowerment can effectively occur. Figuring as the uncanny, the subaltern serves as the reminder of what remains even after meaning has been fixed and unified. In a sense, the subaltern – as that difference which is elided and repressed – returns to haunt the mythic structures upon which grand imperial narratives are built. Refusing to be co-opted into the structures of power, the subaltern preserves his or her difference as that remainder whose insistent particularity threatens continually to disrupt the temporality of dominating significations. The underlying lesson about the Third Space is that the subaltern must not be given into the structuring fantasy of the colonial masters and must preserve the excess signification of his or her own subaltern condition as that uncanny which unsettles the colonial gaze.

Kureishi sets up this uncanny at the very start of the novel. When we first meet Karim, he asserts playfully that but no less defiantly that he is "an English man born and bred, almost" and that he is a "funny kind of Englishman, a new

breed as it were" (*Buddha* 3). Karim, whose father is South Asian and mother White working class British, is an unsettling signifier within the dominant order of signification. British but not quite British, White but not quite White, Karim stands in excess of a monocultural English identity and acts as that remainder of British colonialism that refuses to be forgotten. Daring to declare himself British, almost, but refusing the characteristic specificities of Englishness – civility, moral propriety, Victorian respectability, and bourgeois virtues of work and frugality – Karim calls into question such canonical concepts as national identity and national histories that stabilize the structuring fantasies of imperial Britain. In fact, we see Karim deliberately frustrating the colonial gaze in his role as Mowgli in Shadwell's production of *The Jungle Book*. We are told that Shadwell has been involved in fringe theater and is now trying his hand at theater directing (*Buddha* 113). However, despite having run workshops on Beckett and put on plays by Artaud, Shadwell is looking for "authenticity" (*Buddha* 147). His instructions are for Karim be covered head to toe in brown makeup and that his role is to be spoken in an Indian accent.

Karim finds Shadwell's decision reprehensible as it conforms to an imperial script. Even Haroon objects to his son being made to look "like a Black and White Minstrel" (*Buddha* 157). Unable to convince Shadwell to reconsider the makeup and accent, Karim decides that he would send up the accent by lapsing "into cockney at odd times" (*Buddha* 158). The intention is to make the audience laugh, thereby disrupting the original effect for which his character was meant to produce. In other words, Karim takes it him upon himself to produce an

uncanny effect to unsettle the colonial gaze. It is quite evident that Kureishi's objective in the novel is to position Karim as a figure whose racial marginalization in Britain, youthful impertinence, and sexual desires form the elements for the creation of new concept of Englishness – one that is resistant to authority and that refuses to be co-opted into the dominant culture. In short, a concept of Englishness founded upon The Third Space as it were.

The Suburbs versus the City

Yet, Kureishi's postmodern politics on identity is frustrated by competing claims for justice and equality in the novel. While Karim is busy fighting off attempts to fix his meaning, social problems rage on in the suburbs and inner cities. As Jamila intuits, Karim's postmodern theorizing isolates him from the problems that other *forms of subalterns* are experiencing outside the city, namely "unemployment, bad housing, boredom" not to mention the intensification of racist attacks against minorities (*Buddha* 195). In effect, there appears to be two types of subalterns in the novel – one gets to escape to the city to revel in experimentations and the other has to stay behind in the suburbs to confront the erosion of the welfare state and all the socio-economic problems that come with it. Jamila's reminder that Karim would soon be unable "to understand anything about the *essential* stuff" is significant for what it says about Kureishi's investment in the city as the privileged site of self-discovery and self-transformation: not all battles against racism and colonialism can be fought via a

disruption of metanarratives. Some battles require collective action and a politics founded on group interest and identity, the very politics that Karim rejects.

In order to better understand Karim's growing alienation from the concerns of the suburbs, it is necessary to consider in what ways the decline of the postwar compromise created new social divisions and polarizations within the nation-state. As Jonathan Friedman explains, when the social democratic state weakens, it loses the "unifying force" of its "mechanisms of identification" (7). One of the major consequences of this weakened unifying force is the horizontal dispersion of former political subjects who must now search for alternative forms of collective belonging. This horizontal dispersion affects different sectors of the population differently (J. Friedman 7). For some, the decline of the social democratic state represents an opportunity for the establishment of new group identities, while for others it represents a loss of national coherence upon which their group identities have been structured.

In terms of the novel, this horizontal dispersion plays out in a tension between the neo-fascists and the immigrant community in the neighborhood where Jamila lives with her parents above their shop, Paradise Stores. As I've mentioned earlier, the suburbs and inner cities are awash in racial violence. This violence is not random but, as Karim tells us, well organized and cohere around a fascist politics headed by the National Front. The re-emergence of this fascist longing is in large part attributable to the onset of capitalist crisis in the 1970s (Brown 10, Gamble 14-15). The years 1974 to 1979 saw worker's living standards falling for "the first time in real terms since the 1930s" as inflation ate

into wages. Unemployment likewise rose from 500,000 to over 1.5 million, while national services related to education, health, and welfare were severely cut. As confidence in the Labour government (Wilson and Callaghan) eroded, "a renewed racist offensive took place across British society, witnessed by the success of Nazi National Front candidates in the council elections of 1976" (Brown 15).

The spike in neo-fascist racism can also be understood in cultural terms. As I've mentioned, the erosion of the welfare state was accompanied by the weakening of the traditional patriarchal family. As the authority of the male-centered household weakened against the deepening economic crisis – high inflation, reduced living standards, high unemployment – the conservative Right began a cultural assault on youth culture, feminists, gays, and immigrants in an attempt to restore the traditional structures of race, gender, and sexuality (Gamble 14-15). The breaking down of the welfare consensus was experienced as a loss of cohesion within the ranks of the white working- and middle classes, a loss that gave new impetus to a Conservative-led harmonization of discontent against the racial and sexual Other.

Against the rise of the National Front, minorities in the suburbs are forced to consider self-(re)assemblage, not in terms of a distrust of identity politics, but in modes of social solidarity. In other words, the opportunities for new socio-cultural configurations in the suburbs are predicated on surviving the violence of horizontal dispersion. Unlike Karim, Jamila has to train herself for "the guerilla war she knew would be necessary when the whites finally turn on the blacks and Asians and tried to force us into gas chambers or push us into leaky boats"

(*Buddha* 56). Furthermore, she strives to establish a meaningful resistance via political activism. For example, she starts work at a "Black Women's Centre" where she researches "racial attacks on women" (*Buddha* 182). Likewise, she participates in counter rallies against the National Front. Just like the dislocated and discontented white working- and middle-class racists, Jamila is caught in the struggle of political subjects trying to reestablish group identities and solidarity in the absence of a reassuring national project and in a "violence of differential identities in competition for economic resources and social space" (Turner 25).

Self-(re)assemblage in the city is markedly different. There has long been a division between the cosmopolitan center and its periphery. As Harvey explains, the city of London, as an important center of international finance, is the seat of free market liberalism (56). As globally-oriented finance capital became increasingly important to the maintenance of Western imperial interests, governments moved to protect London from Keynesian economic management in the postwar years (56). This protective gesture had the effect of pitting the cosmopolitan center against the domestic manufacturing base. London's monetarist policies often conflicted with the expansion of the domestic market. In effect, the end of the postwar compromise can be viewed as a triumph on behalf of finance capital, which was now liberated from its national obligations. In a sense, self-(re)assemblage in the city is predicated, not on surviving horizontal dispersion in the domestic realm, but on riding the emergent wave of free market liberalism. Specifically, self-(re)assemblage is to occur within the context of

"home ownership, private property, individualism, and the liberation of entrepreneurial opportunities" (Harvey 61).

To be able to ride this emergent wave of free market liberalism, one must reorient one's personal goals and priorities. In the novel, it is Eva who best embodies such free market qualities. She has individual drive and initiative, and a stomach for risk taking. She buys a run-down apartment in gentrifying West Kensington in order to capitalize on rising property prices: "As property prices in London were moving upwards, Eva's shrewd plan was to decorate the flat as we had the last house, sell at a profit, and move on" (*Buddha* 128). Eva also starts to acquire "a new sharpness, in all senses," becoming "as well organized as any managing director" (*Buddha* 205). Culturally, Eva ingratiates herself with the arts crowd so that she can better "scour the suburban stigma right off her body" (*Buddha* 134). On the pretext of a house warming party, she invites "every theatre and film person she'd run into over the past few years….Every third-rate actor, assistant film director, weekend writer, part-time producer and their friends, slid on to our premises" (*Buddha* 134). As Karim realizes, "Eva was using the evening not as a celebration but as her launch into London" (*Buddha* 134). It is noteworthy that Eva becomes more embarrassed by Haroon's spiritualism the more she becomes connected to the cosmopolitan crowd: "For Christ's sake, can't you cut down on the bloody mysticism – we're not in Beckenham now. These are bright, intelligent people, they're used to argument, not assertions, to facts, not vapours!" (*Buddha* 151).

What is significant about Eva is that she is "the embodiment of Thatcherite ideals and capitalist energies" (Buchanan 18). In fact, during an interview for a home and furnishing magazine, she explains that she has "come to believe in self-help, individual initiative, the love of what you do, and the full development of all individuals" and that she is "constantly disappointed by how little we expect of ourselves and of the world" (*Buddha* 262-263). Inhabiting a Thatcherite discourse, she goes on to say:

> We have to empower ourselves. Look at those people who live on sordid housing estates. They expect others – the Government – to do everything for them. They are only half human, because only half active. We have to find a way to enable them to grow. Individual human flourishing isn't something that either socialism or conservatism caters for" (*Buddha* 263).

Karim, for his part, is barely able to contain his admiration for Eva. Noticing how "businesslike" Eva has become and how her hair is "expensively cut and dyed," Karim exudes: "There was nothing suburban about her; she'd risen above herself to become a glorious middle-aged woman, clever and graceful. Yes, I'd always loved her, and not always as a stepmother, either. I'd been passionate about her, and still was" (*Buddha* 261).

Karim's admiration for Eva signals, among other things, his own investment in the Thatcherite project of self-improvement and self-empowerment.

While he is not as driven as Eva, he nonetheless tries to transform himself – at least culturally. Just as Eva is concerned about appearing sophisticated, Karim becomes anxious about his lack of cultural capital the more he becomes involved in the theater: "I became aware that I knew nothing; I was empty, an intellectual void. I didn't even know who Cromwell was, for God's sake. I knew nothing about zoology, geology, astronomy, languages, mathematics, physics" (*Buddha* 177). This sense of inadequacy is accompanied by a sense of antipathy – both towards the elites and himself: "What infuriated me – what made me loathe both them and myself – was their confidence and knowledge. The easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing the way round a whole culture – it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital" (*Buddha* 177).

What is telling about Karim's sense of loathing is that it reveals a simultaneous sense on longing. Karim, as we know, views himself as a casualty of a mediocre suburban education. Unlike the kids who went to public schools, "with their puky uniforms and leather briefcases," Karim and his schoolmates "were proud of never learning anything except the names of footballers, the personnel of rock groups and the lyrics of 'I am the Walrus'" (*Buddha* 178). For Karim, his poor education deprives him of the language of the elites, the "currency that bought you the best of what the world could offer" (*Buddha* 178). On this count, Karim decides to lose what Eleanor describes as his "street voice" – that is to say, his cockney-sounding South London accent. He will endeavor to speak like Eleanor, to have the same voice as she does (*Buddha* 178). In effect, Karim's

growing indifference to the problems in the suburbs can be understood in terms of his desire to be a sophisticated cosmopolitan.

Healing and Therapy as Political

To be fair, Karim is not quite the exemplary Thatcherite individual. In fact, Karim lacks initiative. As Eva complains: "God, Karim, won't you do anything for yourself" (*Buddha* 136). For Karim, self-(re)assemblage is to occur via a self-reflective and introspective process of acquiring meaning and truth. His approach to self-empowerment is more nuanced and tries to integrate aspects of the social struggle. As I will show, Karim transfers the fight against racism to an interior struggle for psychic release. He attempts to rationalize healing and therapy as modes of political liberation. Where Jamila confronts the racists at the counter-rally, Karim confronts racism as a psychic effect. This interiorizing of racial abuse as a private struggle of liberation gives Kureishi the intellectual platform he needs to justify self-empowerment as political function. Not simply a self-interested project of personal advancement, self-empowerment is a process of overcoming political oppression.

To a large extent, Karim's sojourns in the city and on the stages of fringe theater are often represented in terms of a desire for self-improvement, of unleashing one's full potential. This is particularly true in Pyke's experimental theater. Described as "the star of the flourishing alternative theater scene," Pyke uses therapy as a way to help actors improve their portrayal of others on stage (*Buddha* 159). He believes that actors, even when they are in character, must be

themselves: “to be someone else successfully you must be yourself” (*Buddha* 219-220). On this count, he encourages his actors to engage in “a California display of the self” (*Buddha* 169). This session involves each actor taking a turn on the “hot seat” where he or she will have to share with the rest of the group his or her life-story. Karim finds the ensuing “accounts of contradictions and wretchedness, confusion and intermittent happiness” to be “oddly affecting” (*Buddha* 168-169). More importantly, this therapeutic approach to acting helps Karim in developing the character of Changes/Tariq that he is to play on stage:

> There were few jobs I relished as much as the invention of Changez/Tariq. With a beer and notebook on my desk, and concentrating for the first time since childhood on something that absorbed me, my thoughts raced: one idea pulled from another behind it, like conjurer’s handkerchiefs. I uncovered notions, connections, initiatives I didn’t even know were present in my mind. I became more energetic and alive as I brushed in new colours and shades. I worked regularly and kept a journal; I saw that creation was an accretive process which couldn’t be hurried, and which involved patience and, primarily, love. *I felt more solid myself,* and not as if my mind were just a kind of cinema for myriad impressions and emotions to flicker through. This was worth doing, this had *meaning*, *this added up the elements of my life*. (*Buddha* 217, my emphasis)

This passage reveals that, where Karim is concerned, the process of building the character of Changez/Tariq is simultaneously a therapeutic process of building and finding himself. This psychic process of self-discovery, however, is not merely self-serving. According to Kureishi, it can be the basis for a politics of liberation, especially when applied to a psychological study of the effects of oppression. As I will show, Karim tries to interpret his own experiences of racism as a historical trauma that needs to be resolved within the register of psychic healing and empowerment. Specifically, he borrows the story of Sweet Gene to underwrite his own narrative of self-discovery as inherently a political act.

Sweet Gene was Eleanor's lover. He was a young West Indian man who tried but failed to secure a decent and respectable life in England as an actor. Typecast as a criminal and a taxi driver, he never got to play in "Chekhov or Ibsen or Shakespeare" (*Buddha* 201). He also worked in a hospital emptying bedpans, and was constantly picked up by the police (*Buddha* 201). Sweet Gene eventually killed himself "because every day, by a look, a remark, an attitude, the English told him they hated him; they never let him forget they thought him a nigger, a slave, a lower being" (*Buddha* 227). A story about the psychic effects of racism, Sweet Gene's suicide serves as a useful background on which to project some of Frantz Fanon's concepts about racism, namely the "third person consciousness." Fanon describes the third person consciousness as a psychic condition in which raced subjects, objectified and made to feel hyper conscious under the white gaze, are unable to successfully develop their "bodily schema" (83). Like Fanon describing his experience on the train when a white girl pointed

at him and said, “Look, a negro,” Sweet Gene is a figure whose consciousness in a white world is “solely a negating activity” (Fanon 83).

Karim imagines himself as having suffered the same racial trauma that drove Sweet Gene to take his own life. By aligning his humiliating experience with Hairy Back and the Great Dane on the same continuum as Sweet Gene’s tragic suicide, Karim is able to contextualize the pain of his racism within the larger history of colonialism: “we stared defiantly into the eye of the Empire and all its self-regard – into the eye of Hairy Back, into the eye of the Great Fucking Dane. We became a part of England and yet proudly stood outside of it” (*Buddha* 227). But the significance of Sweet Gene’s story in the novel is the contrast it provides to Karim’s self-empowerment narrative. By showing how racism robs its victims of their humanity, Karim is able to foreground the importance of acquiring mental and emotional health as important acts political resistance. To empower oneself is to confront the structures of power that inhibit one’s psychic channels to becoming a full human being.

However, the language of trauma in the novel is symptomatic of a psychologistically-driven culture in which mental and emotional health have become hegemonic idioms to delineate the parameters of neoliberal citizenship. As I have mentioned in the introductory chapter, the rise of the psychotherapeutics in the 1980s and beyond is intimately related to the cultural reconstruction of the individual and society in the era of the “free” market. In Britain, there was a conscientious effort on the part of the government to culturally reshape the contours of individuality so that such values as self-

reliance, self-regulation, and autonomy became norms in the conduct of citizens (Heelas 72, Furedi 19). As a technology of individuation, psychotherapeutics served as the platform on which social problems could be analyzed in terms of the injury it causes to the psyche. Barbara Cruikshank, for example, explains how such issues as alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, child abuse and illegal drug use are often pathologized as symptoms of "welfare dependency" (238-239). This language of pathology privatizes collective struggles and turns them into a psychic condition to be resolved primarily within the register of individual subjectivity (Cruikshank 231). The burden of social transformation shifts to the individual who must now accept the obligation to heal and empower themselves and to become "responsible" citizens.

In the end, Karim is unable to differentiate his own brand of self-empowerment from that of Thatcher's. In the final pages of the novel, Karim declares that he is "happy and miserable at the same time" (*Buddha* 284). He is happy because his family appears to have survived the breaking down of the welfare state. Eva succeeds in making a career in home design and decoration; Haroon gives up his civil servant job to become a full time guru; his brother Allie works for a clothes designer; his mother Margaret is dating a younger man; Jamila has moved to a commune and is expecting a child (not with Changez); and Changez seems happy with Shinko, the prostitute. Futhermore, Eva and Haroon are getting married. Karim has a reason to be happy too. He has been cast to play in a soap opera.

But Karim's sadness, his misery, is less easy to explain. Throughout the novel, he tells us that he suffers from depression. When he first moves to the city, he tells us that he had been looking forward to seeing Charlie so that he could tell him how depressed and lonely he had been since moving to London (*Buddha* 128). We are not given a deeper clarification about the source of this depression, however, and it is not until he is in New York with Charlie that we learn the extent of his mental state: "All the same, my depression and self-hatred, my desire to mutilate myself with broken bottles, and numbness and crying fits, my inability to get out of bed for days and days, the feeling of the world moving in to crush me, went on and on" (*Buddha* 249). This revelation comes rather unexpectedly and without further clarification. It is not until the very end that Karim gives us the clue to understanding the source of his depression: "I could think about the past and what I'd been through as I'd struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in future I would live more deeply" (*Buddha* 283-284). This statement tells us, among other things, that Karim's self-(re)assemblage in the city has not materialized the truth or knowledge that he wishes to possesses. His search for meaning is still ongoing on the eve of Margaret Thatcher's inauguration to power in 1979. Perhaps his unhappiness has something to do with the happy ending he is forced to narrate in his unfinished story of self-assemblage: the eventual union of Eva and Haroon, the novel's most Thatcherite figure and the Self-Help guru.

Conclusion

The dissertation has been an exercise in scrutinizing the hegemonic project of our times, known generally as neoliberalism. Promoting the free market as the basis for the reorganization of society, economy, and the self, neoliberalism advances a seductive narrative of liberation – liberation defined not as collective emancipation, but as personal struggles in overcoming forms of power relations and social determinations of an earlier traditional society. In other words, liberation, according to neoliberal theory, is a process of emerging victorious from history, of liberating the self from historical constraints via self-empowerment techniques. Within this narrative of liberation the free market is depicted as the site in which power and subjection have been neutralized and in which self-empowered individuals live and govern themselves in accordance with the truth of their individuality.

I have demonstrated in this dissertation that this narrative of liberation is simultaneously a narrative of domination. Self-empowerment in the neoliberal age is not merely about liberation from prior forms of power and subjection; it is also about acquiring the necessary traits – mental, emotional, behavioral to name a few – for surviving the so-called free market. In effect, neoliberal rhetoric about liberation is a thinly disguised moral imperative to re-engineer and realign the self according to new hegemonic configurations of power. The neoliberal narrative of liberation, hence, beguiles individuals into perceiving their acts of self-empowerment as acts of overcoming oppression. I have consistently argued that

self-empowerment, within the context of neoliberalism, is a technology of citizenship through which individuals are made to accept, replicate, and even desire "free" market principles onto their most intimate spaces.

The novels I have considered in this dissertation are exemplary of this neoliberal narrative of liberation. Despite their local differences, the four novels resemble each other in their fundamental adherence to the neoliberal ethos and to their iterations of the efficacy of psychotherapeutic empowerment. In each of the novels, we see the moral imperative to overhaul the self in place of the demand to overhaul the state. Hence, while these cultural texts may have sought to contest forms of power relations and to renounce dominant legitimizations of power issuing from the past, my interest throughout has been to detect how, despite such intentions, the novels nonetheless reinforce the present hegemonic assumption that, to be free, individuals must first accept the challenges of becoming self-reliant, self-disciplined, self-directing, and self-governing individuals.

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