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**AMBIVALENCE AND IN-BETWEENNESS IN HANIF
KUREISHI'S THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA AND DORIS
LESSING'S VICTORIA AND THE STAVENEYS***

*HANIF KUREISHI'NİN THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA VE DORIS LESSING'İN
VICTORIA AND THE STAVENEYS'İNDE BELİRSİZLİK VE ARADAKALMIŞLIK*

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Ayla OĞUZ

*Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Batı Dilleri Ve Edebiyatları Bölümü İngiliz Dili ve
Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı*

Abstract

As a comic analysis of cultural moments of the seventies, Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* depicts different characters, white, black, racist and anti-racist. It is presented from a raced perspective through the narrator Karim Amir's consciousness. Karim straddles two cultures as he is the son of a white British mother Margareth and Indian father Haroon. He is naturally a hybrid character and tries to understand who he is as a mixture of different races and cultures. He is always in-between and ambivalent in terms of his own identity. As a consequence of colonialism, the Great Britain is multicultural and a kind of amalgamation of versatile social, ethnic and national identities. So, Karim is the product of this society.

In this concept, it is possible to find similar patterns in Doris Lessing's "*Victoria and the Staveney's*" in terms of Karim's in-betweenness and

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ambivalence as Lessing takes us through twenty years of the life of a young, underprivileged black girl in London. Victoria is seduced by Thomas Staveney and falls pregnant. When Victoria's little daughter grows up, she introduces her daughter to white Staveney's. However, she is always uneasy because her daughter begins to live the ambivalence of the in-betweenness experiencing these two different and unequal life styles in multicultural Britain as Karim has done. Due to the effects of dominant culture, colonized subjects become unstable and ambiguous. As a term adopted into colonial discourse theory by Homi K. Bhabha, ambivalence gives a description of the complex structure of attraction and repulsion. It is defined as ambivalent due to the fact that the colonized subject can never completely resist to the colonizer. So both Kureishi and Lessing try to demonstrate the impact of the society on individual and how the colonized subjects are mixed up in the ambivalence of colonial discourse and inflected by other cultures in Bhabhian terms.

Key Words: ambivalence, in-betweenness, multicultural, colonized, race, Bhabha, Doris, Kureishi

Öz

1970'lerin kültürel zamanlarının komik bir çözümlemesi olarak Hanif Kureishi'nin *The Buddha of Suburbia*'sı beyaz, siyah, ırkçı ve ırkçılık karşıtı pek çok farklı karakteri betimler. Roman, Karim Amir'in bilincinden ırkçı bir yaklaşımla anlatılır. Karim, beyaz İngiliz anne Margareth ve Hintli baba Harun'un oğlu olarak iki kültür arasında kalakalmıştır. Doğal olarak O, melez bir karakterdir ve farklı ırkların ve kültürlerin bir karışımı olarak kim olduğunu anlamaya çalışır. Kendi kimliği açısından her zaman arada kalmış ve belirsizdir. Kolonyalizmin sonucu olarak Büyük Britanya çok kültürlüdür ve çeşitli sosyal, etnik ve ulusal kimliklerin bir tür karışımıdır. Bu yüzden, Karim bu toplumun ürünüdür.

Bu bağlamda benzer kalıpları Doris Lessing'in *Victoria and the Staveney's* adlı roman öyküsünde Londra'da hiçbir ayrıcalığı olmayan siyah bir genç kızın yirmi yıllık hayatına bizi götürüşünde bulmamız olanaklıdır. Victoria zengin beyaz Thomas Staveney's'den hamile kalır. Victoria kızı büyüdüğünde onu Staveneyler ile tanıştır. Ne var ki kızı, Karim gibi, çok kültürlü Britanya'daki bu iki farklı ve eşit olmayan hayat tarzını deneyimlerken belirsizliği ve arada kalmışlığı yaşamaya başlar. Baskın kültürün etkilerine bağlı olarak kolonileştirilmiş özneler dengesiz ve belirsizleşirler. Homi K. Bhabha tarafından kolonyal söyleme uygulanan belirsizlik çekim ve itimin karmaşık yapısının bir tarifini verir. Bu ilişki kolonileştirilen öznenin kolonileştirene hiçbir zaman tamamiyle direnemediğinden dolayı belirsiz olarak tanımlanır. Böylece hem Kureishi hem de Lessing toplumun birey üzerindeki etkisini ve kolonileştirilmiş öznelerin kolonyal söylemin belirsizliğinde nasıl birbirine karıştığını ve öteki kültürler tarafından bozulduğunu göstermeye çalışır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: belirsiz, aradakalmışlık, çok kültürlü, kolonileştirilmiş, ırk, Bhabha, Doris, Kureishi

I. Introduction

In the cultural history of human race, interindividual relations were considered an important future of human beings and made an impact on the early interest of philosophers.¹ Among the terms closely related to colonialism and its effects, hybridity causes identity problem and creates ambivalence and in-betweenness in the inner and social life of individuals. These effects are seen on the people in the former colonies and migrants in the United States, Europe and Great Britain. Homi K. Bhabha, the theorist of postcolonialism, indicates that "every human being, in addition to having their own personal identity, has a sense of who they are in relation to the larger community –the nation".² In this sense, both Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Doris Lessing's *Victoria and the Stavenneys* have rich clues about the ambivalence and in-betweenness of hybrid identities in multicultural Britain.

II. Ambivalence, In-betweenness and Hybridity in Bhabhaian Terms

It is natural that personality, motivations, attitudes and perception influence people's social characteristics like race, ethnicity, ability, social orientation, education, citizenship status, political affiliation on the one hand and they are influenced by socializing agents such as family, mentors and significant others on the other hand. The most important role in the influence of these interrelated factors belongs to society. The function of these factors lies in the socializing process of the culture which is transmitted by the individual and his behaviour.³ This combination creates hybrid identities and cultures including ambivalence and in-betweenness in their social, psychological and cultural attitudes and perspectives towards world, people and themselves. Culture includes the psychological, psychosocial, and psychophilosophical realities of an individual and activates itself by means of totems, taboos, prohibitions, myths, sections, and rewards. The self of the human being is modulated by the dynamics of culture itself. Additionally, the unity of society, nature and the cosmos has a form in the total image of the self due to the increasing awareness of individual.⁴ This situation also gives way to culturally hybrid identities.

Hybridity briefly discusses the rising of new transcultural forms occurred by the impact of colonization and has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha focuses on the colonizer-colonized relations, their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. For him, cultural derivations, codes and systems have a construction in the "third space of enunciation"⁵. It is an

¹ Susan L. Hearly, **Perspective on imitation: Mechanisms of imitation and imitation in animals**, Cambridge, The Mit Press, 2005, p. 111.

² Viktoria Groepper, **'An Englishman, Almost': Hybridity and Initiation in Kureishi's 'Buddha of Suburbia'**, Nordershtedh, Green- Verlag, 2009, p. 4.

³ Patrick Hier, B. Sign Bolaria, **Identity and Belonging :Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Society**, Toronto, Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2006, p. 43.

⁴ Ibid, p. 54.

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, **Location of Culture**, Routledge, New York, 1994, p. 54.

incongruous and ambivalent space in which cultural identity always comes out. Due to this claim, Bhabha says that a hierarchical purity of cultures is ungroundless.

As a term adopted into colonial discourse theory by Bhabha, ambivalence gives a description of the complex structure of attraction and repulsion. The relationship between colonizer and colonized are characterized by these concepts. It is defined as ambivalent due to the fact that the colonized subject can never completely resist to the colonizer. Ambivalence implies that complicity and resistance are the signifiers of a downfall and exist in it. Naturally, this ambivalent situation will disrupt the monolithic power because ambivalence decentres authority from its position of power and becomes it hybridized⁶. Thus, Bhabha tries to show how both colonizing and colonized subjects are mingled in the ambivalence of colonial discourse and deflected by other cultures.

III. Ambivalent and In-between Subjects Inflected by Other Cultures in Multicultural Britain in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Victoria and the Staveney*s

As a comic analysis of cultural moments of the seventies, Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a portrait of different characters such as white, black, racist and anti-racist. It is presented from a raced perspective through the narrator Karim Amir's consciousness. Karim is between two cultures as he is the son of a white British mother, Margareth and Indian father, Haroon. He is not only together with his father's Indian friends, Anwar, Jeeta and their daughter Jamila, Karim's best friend and sexual partner but also with his unhappy and alcoholic British relatives Jean and Ted.

Focusing on life in Britain, *The Buddha of Suburbia* reflects two opposite parts as center and margin; metropolitan and suburban together with multiple conceptions of England. In Karim, Kureishi gives a portrait of a seventeen-year-old boy and his teenage adventures in 1970s. During this time, he falls in and out of love and has changing identities from self-imposed to imposed. He has to see the collapse of his family, his father's transformation into a "Buddha" and Jamila's unconventional marriage.⁷ Having a position as an in-between, Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* has a function like a satirical mirror illuminating the white and minority communities in which he straddles. The theatrical roles Karim is asked to play because he has an ethnic identity shows the attitude of the society towards racialized minorities. Karim as an in-between exhibits how difficult it is for a person of a colour to elude the prejudice imposed on himself. Karim satirizes Shadwell, the theatre director and his cultural racism as he sees Karim a half-cast in England. Karim's role that Shadwell asks him to play is an attempt for Karim to appear more Indian on the stage with his accent and shit-brown make-up over his creamy skin. His role represents the cultural racism of white society. For instance, he has to hiss like the snake who saves Mowgli's life and to

⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.11.

⁷ Yousaf Nahem; *Hanif Kureishi's The Buddha of Suburbia*, Continuum, New York, 2002, p.28.

make other animal voices together with an authentic Bengali accent despite he doesn't want to.

"It turned out that on stage I would wear a loin-cloth and brown make-up, so that I resembled a turd in a bikini-bottom. I undressed. 'Please don't put this on me,' I said, shivering. 'Got to,' she said. Be a big boy....A few days later I did question Shadwell about the possibility of not being covered in shit for my debut as a professional actor." (The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 146)

It is so complicated for Karim to witness belonging nowhere and to be absolutely at a place of ambivalence and in-betweenness, which is a third space in Bhabhaian terms. Thus, Karim notices his place at the stage as an outsider with Shadwell's response to him: " Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not for experience." (The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 147) This makes him uneasy because he thinks that he has been chosen as an actor for a play directed by Shadwell who is a white, famous director. Everything in this society reminds him his otherness. His white darling Elenor despises his accent showing a kind of affection: "And once I practically stopped talking at all, my voice choking in my throat, when Elenor said my accent was cute." (The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 178)

For Bhabha, "the colonial relationship is always ambivalent, it generates the seeds of its destruction"⁸. Karim's world is full of class and racial tension. His encounter with a white girlfriend's racist father (Hairy Back) makes clear the existence of racism in multicultural Britain. While Hairy Back forbids Karim to see his daughter he is a follower of Enoch Powell: "We're with Enoch. If you put one of your hands near my daughter I'll smash it with a hammer" (The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 40). Before this, he shouts at Karim saying that she doesn't go out with boys or with wogs. Indeed, Karim shows that he is aware of the source of the problems that he is face to face. It is his hybrid identity causing ambivalence in his attitudes towards life and people, and also confesses the truth while introducing himself at the very beginning of the novel:

"My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care _Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored." (The Buddha of Suburbia, p. 1)

In this concept, it is possible to find similar patterns in Doris Lessing's Victoria and the Staveney's in terms of Karim's in-betweenness and ambivalence as Lessing takes us through twenty years of the life of a young, underprivileged black girl in

⁸ Ibid., Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, p.13.

London. So, the story of Victoria and the Staveney family has both class and racial undertones. Doris Lessing establishes a pathetic condition for Victoria from the start as a lost and cold child in the school playground but lucky for being under the wings of a rich and bohemian family called the Staveney family. They become her benefactors. The first racial conflict causing ambivalence in Victoria's world depends on her own childhood because she has an opportunity to compare her life with the white and rich Staveney family. Edward Staveney is asked to collect Victoria after school because Victoria's aunt is ill and there is no one to care for her. However, Edward doesn't mind her unconsciously because she is black despite she is ready in the school garden and Edward sees her.

"And now Edward was scarlet, he positively writhed. This was the burning focus of his self-accusation. He had in fact seen a little girl, but he had been told to collect a little girl, and for some reason had not thought this black child could be his charge. He could make all kinds of excuses for himself: the confusion as the other children were running off the gate, the noise, Thomas's bad behaviour, but the fact was, the absolute bottom line, he had not really seen her because Victoria was black. But he had seen her. All this would not have mattered to a good many people who came and went in and out of those big gates, but Edward was the child of a liberal house, and he was in fact in the throes of a passionate identification with all the sorrows of the Third World." (Victoria and the Staveney family, p. 62.)

When Victoria becomes a young lady, she falls in love with Thomas Staveney, Edward's younger brother and falls pregnant. She doesn't get married to Thomas and hides her little daughter at first and later marries to a black man. Mary has a little son from his husband. A while after her husband dies and Victoria decides to tell the truth to Thomas Staveney because she is anxious about her children's future. Of course, everyone is very good about it as they are liberal and have 'a passionate identification with all the sorrows of the Third World'. Therefore, the Staveney family easily accept Victoria's daughter, Mary and also begin to make some arrangements about her new life and relations with the family. However, Victoria is always uneasy because her little daughter has begun to live the ambivalence of the in-betweenness by experiencing these two different and unequal life styles in multicultural Britain as Karim has done. Mary goes to a holiday with her father's family. After holiday, she displays that she misses her new life and its opportunities.

"Mary came home a few days later. Victoria saw the child's bleak look around the little flat, criticizing what Victoria had greeted with such relief: a bare sufficiency, and what there was, in its proper place. And then Mary stood at the window looking down, down, into the concrete vats and Victoria did not have to ask what it was she missed." (Victoria and the Staveney family, p. 123)

Victoria witnesses that her daughter becomes double-voiced due to that her hybrid identity produces ambivalence. However the Staveney's are the supporters of the Third World people, they are the representatives of the authority at the same time. It is an inevitable split despite their political view makes them more sensitive to other people and carry the trace of the other. "It describes a process in which the single voice of authority undermines the operation of colonial power by inscribing and disclosing the trace of the other so that it reveals itself as double-voiced."⁹

Victoria predicts what kind of a future Mary will have. She thinks she is losing Mary to Staveney's, and Mary will be ambivalent between two different worlds, the Staveney's' and Victoria's. Victoria is anxious about Mary because the Staveney's want Mary to go to a good school where most girls are white:

"..She will have bad times. She will be with girls who have money and the things the Staveney's have, and she will come home to...it would certainly ask a lot of Mary's kind heart:two worlds, and she would have to fit in to both of them."(Victoria and the Staveney's, p.126)

Bhabha claims that "ambivalence refers to a broader social framework where divergent cultural signs interact, intersect but fail to coincide with each other."¹⁰

Another situation causing racial complex is colour based. Victoria's daughter is creamy because her father is white, whereas her son Dickson's colour is black due to his father's African origin. Mary is likened to an angel because her father is white on the contrary that Dickson is like a little imp because his parents are black. "It is this perception of similarities and differences that is the basis on which individuals and groups identify themselves as belonging to the same race and ethnic group, and, on the other hand, identify others as belonging to a different race and ethnic group"¹¹. Thus, these symbols point at a racist approach in the ideology of the story and cause trouble in the life of the characters.

"Dickson was black, black as boot polish or piano keys. Somewhere long ago in his family tree genes had been nurtured to cope with the suns of tropical Africa. He sweated easily. Sometimes sweat flew off him as freely as off an over-hot dog's tongue. He roared and fought; at the minder's he was a problem, making trouble, causing tears. Mary was able to calm and charm him, but no one else could, certainly not Victoria, who often found herself weeping with exhaustion over Dickson's brawling

⁹ Robert Young; **Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race**, Routledge, New York, 1995, p.22-23.

¹⁰ Nikos Papastergiadis; **Dialogues In Diasporas:Essays and Conversations On Cultural Identity**, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1998, p.47.

¹¹ Mervyn C. Alleyne; **The construction and representation of race and ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World**, Univ. of the West Indies Press, Barbados, 2002, p.2.

and biting. Bessie adored him, called him her little imp from hell, her hell's angel, and sometimes he would allow himself to be held by her, but not often. By now he knew that he was excessive and impossible and everyone's headache, but that made him worse in behavior and worse in effect, for he acquired pathos, saying things like, 'But why am I impossible?' (Victoria and the Staveney's, p. 115)

IV. Conclusion

As a consequence of colonialism and ensuing immigration from old colonies it is possible to say that the United Kingdom is culturally a mixture and refers to a variety in terms of social, ethnic and national identities despite the fact that it is a unified state, politically. Therefore, it is clear that the characters in both literary works carry the characteristics of the ambivalence and in-betweenness as being hybrid identities living in a space between center and margin, metropolitan and suburban. In addition to this, for Nikos Papastergiadis, hybridity confirms that contradiction and difference have an important role in the making of identity and this construction requires a negotiation of difference, and the presence of gaps and contradictions is not a symbol of failure¹². On the other hand, this fissure affects the hybrid identities and changes the form of the founding objects of western world, as well. Such notions like whiteness to be holy and blackness to be satanic become eccentric as a result of the existence of hybrid identities both biologically and culturally as hybridity has weakened the power of authority. Furthermore, on the margins of the metropolitan desire, they become the erratic and the part-objects of presence in the ambivalent world of the not quite/not white¹³. In this sense, both Krueshi and Lessing try to demonstrate both the impact of the society and the impact of race and class relations on individual and how the colonized subjects are mixed up in the ambivalence of colonial discourse and inflected by other cultures and pushed into a new space to be able to continue their existence and express themselves to be hybrid, ambivalent and in-between souls in Bhabhian terms.

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¹² Ibid, Groepper, p. 4.

¹³ Ibid, Bhabha, p.131.

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