



The Janissaries for Colonial Power: Mimicry and Ambivalence in the Novels:

The English Patient and The Reluctant Fundamentalist

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Abstract

This paper aspires to explore the concept of postcolonial identity as Janissaries which is a product of mimicry. Janissaries were the well-known troops of Ottoman Empire and were famous for their unsullied loyalties towards the Muslim empire despite the fact they were Christians, and they fought against Christian for the protection of Muslim empire. This kind of obligation from the oppressed colonized is the result of their quest for “acceptance” and “adoption”. This is comprehended in the character of Kip from *The English Patient* and Changez from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* who copy the colonizer and act like the janissaries of the colonial power. The process of mimicry is central for Bhabha who claims that the process of mimicry doesn't only “reproduce” and replicate the colonizer but it is also a “menace” for the colonizer (86). Therefore, in the quest of imitation, an “alterity or otherness” is also created because mimicry is “almost the same but not quite”(86). The study has explored the “ambivalent mimicry” in Changez and Kip through textual analysis. It has shown that these ambivalent characters leave their countries and get recruited or work for the colonizer's benefits against their own countries. The colonized is obliged due to his inferiority complex and adopts the process of mimicry to be accepted. Moreover,



the study has also explored the “corruption of janissaries in Ottoman Empire” which resonates with the ambivalent identity of Kip and Chengez. Their rebellion is shown as a “menace” for the colonial power.

Introduction

This paper situates itself in the area of postcolonialism to look at the idea of janissaries who were the well-known troops of Ottoman Empire who were famous for their unsullied loyalties towards the Muslim empire despite the fact they were Christians, and they fought against Christians for the protection of Muslim empire. This kind of obligation from the oppressed colonized is the result of mimicry. The colonization has not only disintegrated the Third World geographically or politically rather it has also shattered it ontologically. In order to exist respectfully, the colonized usually merge himself in the world of colonizers and become janissaries for the colonial power through mimesis that constructs ambivalent identities and reveals that the legacy of colonization is never-ending. Ashcroft et al. explains that the colonizer brings the “Eurocentric discourse” with them and endorses the colonized to mimic their “culture, habits, assumptions, institutions and values” (125).

The idea of mimicry is not a new concept. The Greeks pointed out that human nature is prone to “imitation”. This idea is later adopted by many thinkers who represented imitation in various ways. Recently, Homi K. Bhabha’s notions of “mimicry, ambivalence, uncanny and hybridity” have stirred the postcolonial theory. These concepts interrogate the Eurocentric notions of “superiority”, “civilization” and “enlightenment”. There is something more than oppression and



domination of colonialism which emerges as resistance just along the process of colonization. The resistance of colonized has emerged in various forms. Mimicry is one of the strongest tools of resistance and transformation of a culture. Bhabha's work shows colonialism as a strong "force of cross-culturalism". His writing strongly holds this impression that every culture is always in contact with other cultures and the process of transformation and cross-breeding is inevitable. No culture is ever one and complete; therefore, the innumerable forces work in forming one's identity which is always in flux either it belongs to the west or east, colonizer or colonized. In this regard, the idea of mimicry is viewed through ambivalent identities.

Frantz Fanon highlights the "inferiority complex" and "existential crisis" of black men in his book *Black Skin, White Mask*. He postulates the concept of "internalized inferiority concept" which emerges due to the connection between the colonizer and the colonized. He points out that the colonizer elevates himself with centrality to such an extent that "an inferiority complex (in the colonized) has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality" (9) and the colonizer's civilization looks down on the culture of their mother's culture (9). This causes the colonized men to adopt the attributes of the civilized colonizer in order to be honored as cultured and civilized inhabitants of the world. In these efforts, the colonized start mimicking the colonized. Bill Ashcroft defines this attitude in the expressions of Edward Said as a process in which there is "a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed"(4). Such kind of adoption and absorption in the wake of an inferiority complex can lead to developing a new idea of janissaries.



The colonized act like loyal and die-hard janissaries like that of Ottoman Empire in order to win the favors of the colonizers which will also make them men of the purported superior nation.

By copying, the half westernized subjects of the colonizers become the janissaries of the colonial power who work for the colonizer's profits in the countries of the colonizers or in their own countries. For example, Chengez from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* studies in America and works in an American company for the prosperity of America. Similarly, Kip in *The English Patient* gets recruited in the army of British and fights in the WWII as a "sapper". They render their services to the imperialist power because they want to achieve the eminence like that of the superior nations. These two characters learn skills from the colonizers and adopt their language, manners and identities from them, for example, Chengez considers himself as American and Kip has patriotism for the British Empire, he even accepts the distortion of his name and becomes at one with the new name "Kip" from Kirpal Singh. But later on, the resistance of Kip and Chengez is also evident when they didn't do what was expected of them.

Homi K. Bhabha will describe this situation of assimilating into the colonizer's world as a discourse of "irony, mimicry and repetition"(85). He doesn't consider mimicry as pure adaptation of the colonizer's discourse rather he highlights the diplomacy of colonizer to keep the colonized in the margins by not allowing them to completely associate themselves to the white supremacy, for example in India, the colonizer "didn't want them to become too much Christian or too much English"(Bracken 87). In this way, the process of mimicry becomes "ambivalent" for "mimicry is constructed around ambivalence"(Bhabha 86). This ambivalence makes the colonial subject



“uncanny” and “threatening” not only for the colonized culture also about for the colonizer’s power. While copying the colonizer the colonized become conscious of the colonizer’s diplomacy and revolt against them. The diplomacy of the colonizer is responsible of this “ironical construction”. Similarly, the janissaries of the Ottoman Empire also became corrupted when the Muslim born soldiers joined in the training of the unsullied janissaries which resulted in treason and plots against the King of Ottoman. If we consider Chengez and Kip as janissaries they also become aware of the colonizer’s hypocrisy and give up serving the colonizers.

Literature Review

In the 15th century, Muslim’s agenda of spreading Islam swept over the whole of Europe and shattered the Europeans to their core. According to the record of Phil Grabsky, the Turks of Ottoman Empire wanted a large number of an army to secure their empire and a number of slaves to protect the Sultan. It was illegal in Islam to make any Muslim their slaves, however,, the Turks captured the Christian children from the Balkans and trained them for serving the Sultan. Grabsky notes down in Ancient Wars, “Whenever the Turks invade foreign lands and capture their peoples, an imperial scribe follows immediately behind them and whatever boys there are he takes them all into the janissary and gives five gold pieces to each one and sends them across the sea”(5). These troops were considered loyal to the king and were respected by the Muslims. “They were feared by the whole Europe” and this was meant to be their destiny. The gypsies were not recruited as janissaries because their loyalties could be questioned. In order to win the loyalties of the janissaries they were given high pay as well as the taxes on their families were abolished. Due to



the respect and financial privileges, some people voluntarily started sending their children into the janissaries.

These Janissaries were trained by the special chief and with unique arms. They had fought for the Sultan against the Christian countries. They won many battles and conquered a large part of Europe including Constantinople. Later on, when the empire's vastness reached to uncontrollable places, Muslims were also recruited into the Janissary. This led to the decline of this dauntless troop. They started copying the luxurious style of Muslims and endeavored to get into the power. Gilles Veinstein writes about the decline of Janissary, "When the Janissaries rose in revolt against this decision, the Sultan had his artillery shoot them to pieces in their barracks on 18 June 1826, an incident known in Turkish history as the auspicious event" (121).

Cemal Kafadar writes about the condition of the Janissaries, "Until they became corrupt, the Janissaries they were pure. Severed from their social roots, not allowed to marry, they were not worried about family and kin" (273). The seeds of their corruption sprouted when they began to take part in the economic interests and started copying their Muslim fellows who were rich.

The notion of mimicry has been discussed by many critics in the postcolonial theory. Leela Gandhi appropriately discussed the phenomena of mimicking that it is a "sly" process of copying the colonizer which confronts the "colonizer's discourse" and ridicules it. She asserts about mimicry, "The native subject often appears to observe the political and semantic imperatives of colonial discourse. But at the same time, she systematically misrepresents the foundational assumptions of this discourse by articulating it"(50).



Christopher Bracken talks about Bhabha's expression of "mimicry and ambivalence" in a different way that mimicry on the part of the colonial subject is intolerable for the colonial power. It smudges the colonial discourse of power and undermines the Eurocentric postulation of the superiority and civilization, moreover, "India's mimicry of the English blurred the boundary between the rulers and the ruled"(506).

Ania Loomba has very concisely explained the method of "mimicry" offered by Homi K.Bhabha that "there is always a slippage, a gap, between what is said and what is heard"(98). It is like the gap of the signifiers which come to mean something more than the signified, thus "mimicry creates a gap" which is never filled because mimicry surfaces like the differences between the signifier and signified.

The mimicry leads to "hybridity and ambivalent identities". Helandra writes about the hybrid identity of Chengez from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* who resist against the American power despite the fact he gets his education and job from America. He never assimilates between the Americans as well as he remembers the "stereotypes" of the Eastern world (47). Kip from *The English Patient* is also one such character who loves English conduct of manners, English Patient, English Lord Suffolk but he also suffers when he realizes the double standards of the Western empire and gets disappointed. In *The English Patient*, everyone suffers from the West's destruction. It is written about the shattering identities of the characters by Bolland that "The fragility of identities and selves are even for those who represent European civilization and



Imperial Rule as hegemonic powers together with the colonized Kip who is shaped by these powers as a hybrid identity”(211).

Analysis

Michael Foucault describes “discourse” as a scheme of the system which maintains the perspectives that are responsible for knowing the world in a certain way. The colonial discourse comes up with such a scheme that it is responsible for the development of perspectives of the colonized. When the colonial discourse makes their superiority known to the Third World Country by the use of power, the perspectives of the colonized people are influenced and they begin to see the colonizer as the most civilized and cultured superior men. This discourse creates binaries of superior and inferior, civilized and uncivilized, white and black etc. Such dichotomies create an inferiority complex in the colonized who strive to reach the top of the hierarchy. Such endeavors lead them to win the favors and loyalties of the colonizers that make them janissaries of the colonial power.

The two diasporic characters, Changez and Kip are the two janissaries who serve in the colonial power. They both are impressed by western culture and they both serve it voluntarily because they are affected by the colonial discourse which has taught them about their inferiority. Changez leaves Pakistan and gets the education from America and becomes the servant of America like the janissary of Ottoman Empire who gets the best financial support and training under the command of the Sultan whereas Changez also gets the best training in this regard. He was “given visa, scholarship and complete financial aid”(Hamid 4). The janissary works hard in order to



become closer to the sultan. Changez also has a hardworking and ambitious inclination, “I (Changez) work hard and harder, I suspect than any of the other”(41). Similarly, Kip from *The English Patient* is also one such character who leaves Punjab, India and joins World War for the British army. He also works hard and gets best training under Lord Suffolk, “the best kind of teacher”(90) and learns about guns from the English Patient when he begins to live in the villa, “The young student was now Indian, the wise old teacher was English”(58). Like Changez, Kip also tops the tests and proves himself as a smart person. Lord Suffolk likes him and selects him because he can see the admiration Kip has for the British Culture, ““Congratulations, your exam was splendid. Though I was sure you would be chosen, even before you took it”(95). He wins “the passage, free of the chaotic machinery of the war. He stepped into a family, after a year abroad”(95). Despite, his brother’s admonition Kip joins British army and works with great loyalty for the British empire. His position resonates with Changez’s position who is taken in the Underwood Samson’s Company under the support of Jim.

In order to achieve these positions, they mimic the attitudes of the colonizer. They desire to completely adopt colonizer’s manners. Changez becomes immersed in the life style of America he drinks, listens to English songs, goes to parties and starts affair with Erica. He learns American manners over his roots and when he gets the job he calls himself very much like the colonizer and says “On that day, I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee”(34). His hard work and loyalty belong to America now. But as we know that the process of mimicry is not a complete process. Bhabha says, “It is almost the same but not the quite”(86).



There are many incidents in which we see that Chengez is not completely copying American culture. He wears Pakistani kurta with jeans while going to visit Erica and her family. His beard is the sign of his different origin. Similarly, Kip also maintains his traditional style of wearing turban and eating with hands. This process of half mimicking becomes threatening for the colonizers. Chengez feels in high spirits and satisfaction at the attack of 9/11, “I (Chengez) stared as one - and then the other - of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased.....I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees”(74-75). But he keeps working for the benefit of the colonial power. He is compared with sky-walker of the Star Wars as well as janissaries. Drayoosh Hayati writes about the analogy of sky-walker who was being disloyal to his own kinsmen in the movie and serves for the evil-universe completely, this echoes the situation of Chengez who betrays his own kind and serves American, the very country which is killing the Muslims of East. Later on, Jean Baptist tells him about the janissaries which shatters him to the depth of his existence. He thinks about “The fear of becoming inadvertently a foot-soldier in America’s march of progress, as a result, his identity resembles that of janissaries”(6).

Kip is also called “international bastrad” who serves in another’s army against the eastern world, his own kinsmen. After the attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki he becomes aware of the diplomacy of the English people. He weeps bitterly with remorse and recalls his brother’s words, “Never trust Europeans, he said. Never shake hands with them. But we, oh, we were easily



impressed – by speeches and medals and your ceremonies. What have I been doing these last few years? Cutting away, defusing, limbs of evil. For what? For this to happen”(139). He has also served as janissary who battles against this own fellowmen, the people of East. The consciousness about their identity becomes threatening for the colonizer for both Chengez and Kip leave colonizer’s countries. Their revolt against the colonizers may seem beneficial for themselves but their ever transforming and ambivalent identities show that the legacy of the colonizer is never ending. After staying with the colonizers, these characters learn the vicious attitude of the colonizer and while copying their cunning manners they revolt against the colonizers as well, Chengez doesn’t fulfill his project with Jean Baptist and Kip leaves the people in the villa without even caring for his lover, Hana. They become rootless and more ambivalent that their loyalties are not to be seen anywhere. Chengez never becomes one with Pakistan even after starting the Jihad movement with his students, he is still ready to welcome the American spy and act hospitably towards him. Also, Kip is seen at the end as never getting out of the dilemma of loving and despising the colonizer. He names his daughter Hana and shows his ambivalent attitude.

Conclusion

To sum it up all, it will be convenient to say that the struggles of the colonized to be like the colonizers resonates to the position of the janissaries of the 15th century who served the Muslim Ottoman empire for the annihilation of their own Christian fellows. Chengez and Kip are the janissaries of the Ottoman empire who try to mimic the colonizers in order to be “accepted and assimilated among the colonizers”. Bhabha points out that mimicry is not a complete phenomenon



of transformation rather it appears with differences and proves to be threatening for the colonizer's power. It strengthens as well as challenges the colonial discourse at the same time. Chengez and Kip show such kind of ambivalent attitudes. They try to incorporate themselves into the imperial world but they end up leaving the colonizer's world for they can never completely join in that world. Moreover, they become conscious of the colonizer's diplomacy and revolt against them. This revolt is not only threatening for the colonizer's power rather it is responsible for creating ambivalent identities that they are unable to show devotion to one side or another.

After the decolonization, the Third world countries are still working for the benefits of the colonizer without concerning how much danger the imperial world is imposing for them. The previously colonized countries are still using the products of the colonizers and serving them in one way or another through economic means. The role of Muslims in the Syria, Afghanistan and the Yemen wars can be compared to the conditions of the janissaries who kill their own kinsmen. Frantz Fanon also diagnoses devotion of the colonized people who serve the imperial power by becoming their "interpreter" and "messengers" and in this way they relish certain kind of privileges and respect (9). He also pinpoints the mania of absorbing "whiteness" by becoming the epitome of their manners, styles and attitudes. "He (the colonized) becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness"(9). Though Fanon proposes solutions to inferiority complex and wearing of masks by "reclaiming the past" through violence. But with the passage of time, the narratives are being interrogated through poststructuralist stances where subversion and indeterminacy do not let anything be defined precisely but I believe the inferiority complex of Fanon has reclined in our



blood even the generations who have not experienced the direct colonialism are impressed by the manners of the West. It can be argued on an abstract level as well that our souls get recruited into the army of the colonizers during our childhood and we act like their janissaries without direct training. We love following their trends and buying their fashion commodities so that we look alike them. In doing so, we are helping the economy of the West while ignoring our own domestic products. Along with this, we love shifting to the colonizer's countries and serve there. Our bank balances are more secured in the western banks. In one way or another, we are still the janissaries of the colonizers.

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