

**Migration, Culture and Cross Cultural Identity as discussed in Globalized
World of the Novel: *The Black Album***

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Abstract

This paper delineates on the issue of identity among cultures, specifically cross cultural identities given to migrants in a metropolis. The researchers by focusing on English novel 'The Black Album' written by Hanif Kureishi in 1995, discussed identity as more a matter of practicality than philosophy. Philosophies and critical notions concerning hybridity and cultural globalization are focused and it is argued that migration is also a part of a transnational culture. The researcher through dominant discourses on culture and identity of globalized nations explored the selected literary writing with a purpose to find out whether English literature particularly literature writing on migrants are also dealing with same philosophies of identity or they are promoting diverse issues. The research established that no doubt cultural purity is significant and essential to survive but in a metropolis where multiple nations are living, this cultural purity must be guarded ambivalently to control and normalize the issue of multiple identities. Different factors that are involved in globalization of cultures are explored in this paper that promote cultural hybridity with an influence on identity of an individual, and community, as well as a culture.

Key Words: colonialism, multiplicity, migrants, culture, Identity, progress, globalization

I- Introduction

The case of multiple identities has become a master trope in many sphere of social science research. This case became apparent due to manifold cultural encounters in metropolitan areas like America and UK. It is an interesting fact that the term 'Multiple Identity' stemmed from the field of biology that explains a crossing of Species, without any negative connotation of being inferior, racial, and contaminated,

as scientific discourses has discussed in nineteenth century. Currently, the concept of multiple identities or hybridity (as many critics call it) has become a power word to negotiate cultural representation of identity especially in the field of postcolonial studies (Zapf, 1999: 302-310). Burkhardt and Foerster (2016) have defined the case of multiple identity as a life process through a mixture of diverse traditions that brings signification related to a particular individual or community living in a foreign state. It links a variety of discourses as well as techniques like collage and bricolage etc. The awareness of the world as "becoming smaller" is growing an individual's sensitivity towards difference in cultures and various cultural-turns that reflect the modernity in cultural identity. The process of Modernization is not only erasing cultural and biological diversity, but also the loss of reason, standardization, and control has become apparent. These losses gave rise to alienation, disenchantment, displacement within a culture (Ritzer and Atalay, 2010). Cultural diversity should be promoted because its elimination brings a regret of being in a world of multiple nations. At present, the concept of cultural difference has changed its form to national difference, that gave rise to much more discussions on national identity or I may call it nationalism. This changed concept has foregrounded the rationale of talks on gender, identity politics, and rights of religion and indigenous as well as minor groups of people. Another argument is that we are experiencing a "clash of civilizations" (Huntington, 1995), that brings encounters and enmity between cultures. Hence, when the case of identity arises, cultural change is absolute but it generates rivalry and conflict between different cultures. At the same time, there is an extensive acceptance of the concept that growing global interconnectedness leads toward increasing cultural standardization and uniformization, the example is the impression of McDonaldization (Ritzer and Atalay, 2010). It is a third positioning that relates different cultures across different locations and identities as one.

Koreshie's novel *The Black Album* discusses in detail the lives of the immigrants from Asia, especially Pakistan. The novel reveals a clash of civilization in 'society' as well as 'psyche' of its characters with a purpose to highlight the real life situations at present. The immigration depicted in the plot of the novel, is parallel to the diasporic migrations of the people because of colonialism that results in cross cultural conflicts giving rise to new ideologies like globalization and cosmopolitanism. Homi K. Bhabha (1992) takes these conflicts and confused identities as a spice of life, yet it takes a lot of toil by people living in hybrid culture to assimilate a new identity for them, because these new identities do not take place over the span of months but of years and sometime may even take centuries to develop so that it may not be questioned by the existing identities: an ideal state indeed. London, the metropolis of colonial empire, itself undergoes such a conflicting and troubling shift of identities. It does a lot of struggle to maintain an existence to different cultures merged in its landscape now. The struggle is two way in the current state of affairs. One is the struggle which the white culture wages against the ever pervasive indigenous cultures migrating from all over the British cultures and the world cultures; and secondly the struggle that the migrants from all over the world attempt to mould for bringing a change in their indigenous identity, as well as, for getting a space in imperial culture. This struggle can be viewed with reference to Fanon and Bhabha's discussion

who insist in ever-changing identities because of such constant shifts of land and the people (Fanon 1963, Bhabha 1994).

II- Ambivalent Identities and power game

The shift in the identities can be understood in terms of the stages of assimilation of the migrants in the host societies. For instance, Edward Said (1994) asserted, “The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, constitutes one of the main connections between culture and imperialism. From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself”. M. A. Raja (2014) has suggested three stages of assimilation observed for migrant people in relation to their metropolis’ masters. This representation reflects “European ways of being and knowing” (Said, 1994). Raja has explained these three stages as (a) one that involved a deep obsession with the masters and naive acceptance of their superiority; (b) an effort to learn master’s culture and an effort to imitate the assumed source of the master’s power in the native land, (c) and native intellectuals, having direct experience the injustices of the colonial system, endeavored to write and theorize a path separate from the one offered by the master’s institutions (Ashraf 2014).

Boelhower (1981) has suggested similar stages of assimilation, in which he has described three stages of colonized subject, that are (1) Expectation, (2) Contact/separation, (3) and Resolution as the potent stages to be considered for comprehensive understanding of immigrant studies. During these stages the colonized subject undergoes a situation of lust and envy and “Dreams of possession: every type of possession: of sitting at the colonist's table and sleeping in his bed, preferably with his wife” (Fanon 1963). Not only it takes a toll on the immigrants from the colonies to the center but also the center is effected because of the negative mimicry as suggested by Bhabha and expressed by William Dalrymple in his book, *Mughals of India* wherein Dalrymple makes a case for all those, especially Kirk Patrick, who interact with indigenous cultures and so undergo a change of identity and as a result suffer in the same as the migrant would do in the center.

III- Tempered identities

The shifting of places and sets of values due to the change in geographical situations created the shifting and diluting identities of both men and women, never resulting into a sure and concrete identity and so created identity crises about women and always causing the characters to face their native people as well as the Londoners because neither of them would accept them as a whole. Koreshie, in the novel *The Black Album*, portrays Londoners reeling under the load of shifting of identities on both the side through hybridity and positive and negative mimicry. He does so through the male and female characters in his novel. Shahid and his brother Chilli on the one hand and Deedee and Zulma on the other hand represent these constantly shifting identities. Through these main characters, Koreshie tries to identify the struggle of the immigrants into London to get them a better, safer and fitter place to live.

The shifting of identities was also caused by shifting landscapes of the lives of these characters, especially women. As soon as a woman reached London, she would don a different style of dressing for her and so also carried a different set of values and

when she would move to her native country she would a different set of dress code and a different values. For example, Koreshie tells about Zulma that she looked different in London and different in Pakistan. Koreshie writes in *The Black Album*:

“In Karachi she (zulma) zipped around the camel-carts and potholes in an imported red Fait Uno, a Hermes scarf knotted around her head. In London she went to her friends’ houses and pursued the shopping, gossiping and general trouble-making-in-other families she enjoyed so much” (85).

In London, Deedee is the supremerepresentative of this frustrating yet dynamic force that goes to decide number of human behaviors. Deedee is portrayed as a married woman but she is very seductive and feels pleasure in seducing her young student, Shahid.

“Deedee, his red-headed, free-spirited tutor, seduces him with sex and structuralism”. (*The Black Album*)

IV-Perseverance of identity or Escape from identity

It is early to argue that migrants from third world country always give ambivalence to identity provided to them by some metropolis. There are certain characters in the novel that are shown to accept and reject such identities simultaneously to preserve their own cultural freedom. I take the case of Shahid in the novel *The Black Album*. The western freedom if on the one hand has allowed this to happen successfully in case of Deedee then, on the other hand it has allowed the Muslims like Shahid to criticize the western society as pornographic. The interesting matter is that even after being a Muslim, the young Pakistani Muslim boys are shown to fall a victim to adultery for the sake of becoming a part of that culture. Jackson (2009) while appraising the character of Shahid asserts the same truth that though Shahid feels himself absorbed in western identity, yet he could not switch off his brain because of his religious as well as indigenous cultural values. In the end of the novel he is shown to realize that western freedom is so alien to Islam and it is impossible for him to merge his life truth (religion) in a western culture. So it should be noted by the thinkers and critics that indigenous ties of a culture are much stronger than assimilating it in some foreign culture and people observing a foreign culture are more in struggle to preserve their identity than to assimilate it.

The portrayal of women, as given by Koreshi in his *The Black Album* is different from the portrayals of women given in most of the novels under the umbrella of Pakistani fiction in the sense that the women living in London are well aware of their position and rights. When this position and rights are denied, they are not likely to keep silent, rather are expected to be violent and rebellious. *The Black Album* demonstrate a crisis of identity among women as well but they are also struggling to fit in the culture they do not belong to. This is true in case of Pakistani immigrants in London as well as the residents of the white London. Deedee being a western woman reflects her uncertainty with life and even tries to connect with her students with the help of music. She does not remain confined to her family life and does not feel satisfied with

her life. She feels disconnected with her Marxist husband and so attempts to fill the gap by connecting with her students. Her connection with Shahid is purely of this type. The immigrant students around her still feel themselves inferior to the white people and so are discontented and uncertain about their lives. But Deedee even after being a western girl does not feel happy with her life. Charles Taylor (1992) claims that the attitude of the western individuals towards migrants has created the impression of being hypocrite and self-deceiving and are not trustworthy. This deficit of trust increases the anxiety and tension among the immigrants and so is the case with the English.

Although there are many cases of abuse and domestic violence against women, yet Western and American world is considered more civilized and freer world where not only men but also the women are relatively freer to exercise their right of self-will and life. I persist that the western world is comparatively safer and conducive to the growth of women than Pakistan because it has freedom for women. But the women brought up in Pakistan get confused and are likely to make painful decisions because of the price they have to pay for achieving freedom. The novel *The Black Album* (1995) is basically about the life of such expatriate Pakistani women as have migrated to England. The writer has very dexterously analyzed the psychological, social, and moral dimensions of the life of Pakistani men and women expatriated in England. He focuses on the psychology and the behavior of Pakistani women in England who become totally free from the Pakistani influences of tradition and culture. One of these woman characters in the novel is Zulma. Zulma is shown to be the woman who can use her life after her choice. She roams about, dines, and hops in various clubs with Shahid to relieve herself of the troublesome feelings she harbors in her mind because of her separation from her husband. But all this was possible for her only in a relatively free world, which is a direct antithesis of Pakistani society.

The setting of the dialogues represented by the character Zulma, visibly portray her as neither afraid of the society nor of the habit to take any care of her husband. In the context of Pakistani culture, it is obvious that she may not be taken as a good woman. But Koreishi is with an attempt to reflect the psychic self of her. He has tried to point out what happens when a husband ignores his woman for his obsession and does not fulfill her psychological and physical needs and becomes ignorant of her or tries to rule over the destiny of a woman, he is bound to lose her. Undoubtedly, the novelist is with a particular concern for an identity that is individual to a person's self than a cultural or hybrid representation. The way Deedee got freedom from her husband indicates as if she was willing to do so. In fact, her portrayal is not one sided, it is two sided. On her other side, she shows that she wanted freedom and enjoyment in her life and that no one should stop her from doing so. Koreishi tells us about her desire for freedom in the following words,

“She liked music, clothes, men, going out. She was speeding towards what she had no idea. Nothing would hold her; velocity was all. She went to punk clubs; Louise's in Soho where Vivienne, Westwood and Malcolm McLaren held court, and to Roxy, where Elvis Costello and the police played. She worked in bars, ending up in a small topless place in the West End.” (Koreishi 1995)

Deedee was involved with one of her students, Shahid, without any serious intention towards him. Like the character Razia in Ghose's novel (1967), she takes in the driving seat with Shahid to fulfill her desire. She was a charismatic woman who communicates her students to see the world with the prism of contemporary culture. She offered one of her student sexual experiences by giving the rationales that has never heard. Her relationship with her student is based on her desire that she developed as a major preference in her life. For her self-fulfillment is the end of everything. The experience and the environment of her life has developed her character into a woman with no regard for social norms and values; rather self-fulfillment is her prime motive. The following lines of the novel, *The Black Album* (1995) will throw more light on this aspect,

“He felt a little bad about taking. She said it was OK; she liked pleasing him in that way, she'd had plenty of practice. Right now she was satisfied, she was not asking for anything. When she wanted something she would put in a request. She stood naked in front of the mirror, wet a flannel and washed herself. He handed her the clothes she had laid out and helped her into them.” (Koreishi 1995)

It is a fact that self-identity is a real identity and the only issue in a culture. For the sake of getting an identity for one's own self, a person tries to get rid of indigenous culture as well as religious influences. Deedee, in this case, is facing the same conflicting attractions that have created the main tension in the novel. She wants to transform the religiousness present in Shahid that hinders her desires. She is more absorbed in her pursuit of pleasure and therefore takes religion as a restraint to life goals: pleasures and desires. Riaz, on the other hand, demands that Shahid should focus on the insult that he feels Islam has received "from the author of *Midnight's Children*".

In *The Black Album*, Koreishi (1995) shows us that the working people usually develop a particular type of mindset with reference to their freedom and independence when they are forced to live in the unbearable environment, as Deedee and Shahid had to live. They act and react according to metropolis mindset. On the one hand, there is the demand of work and, they have to cope with the demands of their families. The type of psychology exhibited by Deedee is very common in the lives of the migrant workers who live and work in the advanced societies of the West. There is tension and conflict between what they were trained and what they have to undergo, especially when they have their own demands of body and soul. Such influences bring destruction to the potential energy of a person and they fail to utilize them because of multiple demands of a society, that is not their society but the adopted one i.e. Metropolis. If Deedee had been treated with love by the people around her, she would use her mind and body more properly. However, unless they have a strong support to overcome these difficulties, they remain upset and behave in a psychologically disturbed manner. They do appreciate and are proud of their work but ultimately their disturbed and confused nature stresses itself to make them realize that career or work was not all.

The ending of the novel has clearly indicated that by changing indigenous norms, specifically the norms that have defined an individual's presence in some indigenous culture and according to a religious set up, one will devastate his/her personal identity. Deedee was left with no companion because of her fight for so called freedom. She got an identity by sacrificing her specific cultural identity, but met with devastation as a foreign culture did not support her. But this realization comes only at the time of night when such women as Deedee, have no one with them as their permanent companion. They begin to depend upon non-human sources, like the books or magazine and while reading they feel the deficiencies of their lives. Deedee misses the company of some real friend or a loved one. The portrayal of Deedee shows that she was at first not interested in marriage and took it as a frivolity because she thought that it created bondage but finally she comes to the reality that marriage was the only way to keep the relations firmly cemented. The women living in the advanced society do want to run away from the control of the men. If the man with them is really cooperative and sincere, they would like to make a family. The writer portrays the difficulties of the migrants who have conservative set up behind in their family and have to cope with the free society in any advanced country, face confusion, and disturbance. Although Koreishi (1995) portrays Deedee in London, yet this is also the story of every young Pakistani woman in Pakistan. For example, now because of higher rate of education among young women and an increased tendencies of employment for them, economic independence and social freedom of women is gaining ground but men, around them, are not ready to accept this raised status of women and so they would prefer to exercise their control by using the tools of religion, custom, tradition, culture, *Purdah*, shame and honour. The women, who resist this, have to face the situation like Deedee. But if proper encouragement and counseling is available for such young women, they may make even better use of their freedom and work. Ultimately, Shahid chooses to stay with Deedee "until it stops being fun." In other words, he chooses to live for the moment and for himself and rejects the exhortations of politics and religion. Shahid and Deedee, at the end of the novel, leave the restrictive atmosphere of London and flee to the South coast of England

Zulma is another character in Koreishi's novel *The Black Album* (1995) but she is entirely a different case when compared with Deedee. She may be taken as the other side of Deedee. She is shown living with men folk of her family but on equal grounds. Instead of accepting a subservient position, she gives advice and is capable of influencing the decisions of her society. But she is not so obsessed with fire of success which dulls the realistic qualities of her brain. She is actually the woman who represents that ideal woman who can take care of her virtues quite well and can use her freedom to make something good for her people. She does not waste her life in the useless pursuits like Deedee. Koreishi (1995) comments on the nature of Zulma that "intelligence was a requisite for such women, so, it was significant that after marrying Chilli she didn't stay in bed or practice aerobics, but accompanied him to work, where she learned everything she could about the business" (Koreishi 1995). All this goes to prove that, according to the author, if the women of/from Pakistan are given the rightful freedom, they are also capable of performing as good for their society as their

men can; and sometimes more than their husbands. This portrayal is an antithesis to the portrayal of Deedee. It is done so to prove that if a person whether man or woman has a proper and supportive environment around him/her, they can retain the positive values of life, and culture while working in an advanced and free society. Zulma's depiction as a rich working woman is an example for migrant women who would not want to lose their values even though working in a progressive, civilized, and free society like England.

Conclusion

Through the textual analysis of the major characters in the novel *The Black Album*, it is concluded that people are living in a polarized world where different cultures meet at one place with an obvious contrast but there is an overlapping of this hybrid culture because of a particular cultural identity, specific to the indigenous culture the person belonged. This specific cultural identity can be in the form of dress, norms, language and religion and not easy to get rid of, and are very roots of an individual's existence, that if left, then the life tree may wither. Present world is a globalized world that is facing the culture-mixedness as a part of it. It resulted in a regeneration of a culture in different poles of the earth. Hanif Kureishi has focused on a multicultural city and highlighted the efforts done by migrants (from a postcolonial country to the metropolis) to assimilate multiple identities conferred upon them by a metropolis. Through women characters, the writer has endeavored to show that a migrant woman attempts to shed her weakness and inabilities—a trademark on them by their indigenous culture—and become strong enough in a hybrid culture. They are destined as inferior to their male patriarchs in their locale, but they are equal to them in metropolis where, the writer asserts that, the women enjoy their liberty and the world of their own. Similarly, the character of Shahid is a representative of postcolonial man in a metropolis. He adopts the ways of life in London but unsatisfied because of his indigenous cultural clash as well as religious clash. A kind of alienation from hybrid culture is obvious through this character. He was a revolutionary migrant, and has done a lot of efforts to cope with his multiple identity but his cultural obligations and religious responsibility fails him badly in his practical life but motivates him to acknowledge himself with the goods of life. There is a freshening revival in Shahid's character but a cultural devastation in Deedee's character. In short, a culture never loses its identity but they are made globalized due to the necessity of people living in a foreign culture. Different cultures have exerted their influence on the characters in the novel, and resulted in a reflective identity rather than an adoptive identity

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