POST-MIGRATION BRITISH LITERATURE: AN ANALYSIS OF SPACE AND HYBRIDITY IN HANIF KUREISHI'S *THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA* (1990)

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Abstract

Black British literature is the space of representation of the migratory flow. It analyses the effect of emigration on literary productions. The present study is an investigation on the second generation of writers with the case of Hanif Kureishi, a writer from the Indian diaspora born in the United Kingdom, who portrays the conditions of Indian immigrants in England. It seeks to scrutinize *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and takes as a starting two different axes based on the works of Homi Bhabha and John Searle. Consequently, Bhabha's notion of hybridity serves as a theoretical tool to reveal Kureishi's strategy to minimize the border between the native and the host culture and to resolve diasporic difficulties. John Searle's illocutionary acts are also used to analyze the discourse of the hybrid characters as well as the impact of space in the creation of a new identity.

Keywords: hybridity, identity, migration, post-migration, space.

Résumé

La littérature noire britannique est l'espace de représentation du flux migratoire. Elle analyse l'effet de l'émigration sur les productions littéraires. La présente étude revisite la deuxième génération d'écrivains avec le cas de Hanif Kureishi, un écrivain de la diaspora indienne né au Royaume-Uni, qui dépeint les conditions des immigrés indiens en Angleterre. Elle cherche à examiner *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) et prend comme point de départ deux axes différents basés sur les travaux de Homi Bhabha et de John Searle. Par conséquent, la notion d'hybridité de Bhabha sert d'outil pour révéler la stratégie de Kureishi visant à minimiser la frontière entre la culture d'origine et la culture d'accueil et à résoudre les difficultés de la diaspora. Les actes illocutoires de John Searle sont également utilisés pour analyser le discours du personnage hybride ainsi que l'impact de l'espace dans la création d'une nouvelle identité.

Mots-clés : espace, hybridité, identité, migration, post-migratoire

INTRODUCTION

Hybridization and migrant identities are the cornerstones of the discussion related to migrant literature. The moving of individuals from home to the host country has impacted literature. This led to a new kind of writing called the literature of migration. According to F. Pourjafari & A. Vahidpour (2014, P.2), "the term migrant literature implies that the subject matter will be about migration and the culture and tradition of the host nation". The literature of migration owes its development to postcolonial theorists, who brought a lot of contribution to its extension.

Theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Edward Said with the concepts of hybridity and subalternity established the foundation of migrant literature. They try to understand and describe migrant identities. Contrary to French literature in which a lot of survey has been undertaken to undermine the different principles of migrant writing, few studies deal with the issue of migrant identity in the literature from the English Speaking-World. However, as far as this study is concerned, a light will be shed on the idea of space and hybridity in post-migration literature with the special case of *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi. Post-migration literature can be defined as any kind of literature that comes from migrants' writers or migrants' son writers which deal with migration in their works. According to P. Szczur (2021), this kind of literature is defined on the basis of spatial criteria, mainly the space of origin of the authors and their displacement in the host country. Therefore, this study will use Kureishi's post-migration novel to analyze the issues of space and hybridity.

Published in 1990, *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a novel of Hanif Kureishi, a British novelist of Anglo-Indian origin also considered as a postcolonial writer. In the novel, hybridity is used as a strategy to resolve diasporic problems. After decolonization, people from the ancient British colonies migrated to England to improve their living conditions and seize various opportunities. They were invited to England to provide labor. On their arrival in the foreign land, they encountered many problems related to culture and identity. Kureishi offers in this novel, through the narrative of the protagonist- narrator Karim, a description of pre-and post-migration problems and how migrant characters overcome them. The study attempts to identify the different diasporic problems and the strategies of change suggested by the author. Three central questions will be raised: How are diasporic problems reflected in the novel? How do characters overcome these problems in their place of living? Why do space and hybridity play an important part in the resolution of diasporic problems? As a theoretical framework, John Searle's illocutionary acts and Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity will be used.

1. The First Generation of Immigrants and the Issue of Hybridity

Hybridity is a term that originally comes from the field of botany; it refers to the mixing of two species. Hybridity can be defined as the mixture of a culture of origin with another culture. While the concept of racial hybridity was deployed to demarcate assumed absolute differences between races in order to prevent any mixing, the concept of cultural hybridity, according to H. Bhabha (1994) reflects on how cultures interact with each other. For H. Bhabha (1994, P.3): "Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects." Bhabha's concept of hybridity seems to be closer to the experience lived by the characters of *the Buddha of Suburbia*. In fact, he stipulates that hybridity implies the "creation of a totally new cultural identity which is "*neither the One* [...] *nor the Other* [...] *but something else besides* which contests the terms and territories of both" thus, involving a "negotiation between them" (Ibid). For A. R. Chakraborty (2016, P.149), "this new concept of identity creates a "third space" or a culture "in-between" that "suspends the limits of the boundaries".

Bhabha's notion of hybridity is useful to understand how characters of the first and second generations negotiate their identities while facing diasporic problems in the multicultural society of Britain. Precisely, it enables to describe how Haroon, the representative of the first generation, brings the cultural tradition and highlights the dynamic process of cultural hybridization. Moreover, it helps us to analyze the way in which Karim, a character of the second generation, shifts between British and Indian culture and uses cultural hybridity as a solution to diasporic problems. In addition to the pragmatic analysis of identity discourse through the illocutionary acts proposed by J. Austin (1962), this study intends to reveal the traces of hybridity in the novel. It shows how, through illocutionary acts namely assertives, expressives and directives, the characters perform their identities.

Illocutionary acts are acts produced with the aim of asking questions, giving an order, promising, affirming the truth of a proposition. It has been classified by J. R. Searle (1975) into the following five categories: assertive, directive, promissive, expressive, and declaration. In this study, illocutionary acts will not only permit to understand how characters assert and perform their identities but especially the cultural implication of their utterances. The assertive act will depict how hybrid characters assert their identities and reveal the gap between their identities and others. While the directive acts reveal how they challenge others' identity and assert their authority, the expressive acts specify the emotional dimensions of their identities and how they put forward nostalgia and their cultural roots.

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* offers background information on the difficulties encountered by Indian migrants in the United Kingdom. It depicts two generations of migrants: the first one deals with those who left their countries and migrated to England for a better living condition. The second generation tackles the children of Indian migrants who are split between two cultures. In order to overcome the diasporic problems, people of both generations adopt many cultural options, but the prominent is hybridization. Indeed, through Karim's narrative, the diasporic problems of the first and second generations of migrants are enlightened. Kureishi uses space to put forward the diasporic problems encountered by the immigrants and their children, as well as the impact of the space on their psychological state and identity.

In Hanif Kureishi's novel, the suburban space portrays the cultural conflict and diasporic problems of the first-generation immigrants. The characters Haroon, Anwar, and Changez are caught between their home culture and the culture of the host country in the suburbs. This space exemplifies both the convergence and clash between Indianness and Britishness. Haroon, after his immigration, tries to keep his Indian culture safe, but he has to face the opposition of his family. Indeed, his wife and son want him to adopt British culture and be more invested in society. It allows characters to discover their own identity and experience a kind of freedom.

The novel reveals that the first generation of migrants is more rooted in their Indian culture than acculturated. In fact, coming from India and being raised in Indian society, they have implemented Indian social norms and beliefs. That is why even if they try to adopt English culture, the memory of Indian culture and their experience still have an impact on their behaviors. Haroon's assertive illocutionary act elucidates this fact as follows: "'We old Indians come to like this England less and less, and we return to an imagined India'" (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.74).

First of all, Kureishi, through the character of Haroon, reveals the subordination of the diasporic subject as a result of the British complex of superiority. Indeed, focusing on the living condition of Haroon, Kureishi's narrative highlights the contrast between life in India and in London, precisely in the suburb. He reveals the good memory of Haroon's great past, where he used to experience a wealthy life. Indeed, Haroon lives as a king and has servants to accomplish all his wants. It is mentioned that he came to London in order to get an education and seize opportunities. He wants to accomplish his British dreams. He thought that life in the metropolis would be better than in India. Unfortunately, he encountered many difficulties. For instance, the English people in London perceive the immigrants still as the other, a disturbing subject.

They seem to be resentful of the loss of the colonies and see the presence of the Indian's Immigrant as a threat. The following passage illustrates this idea:

> In Britain the loss of the colonies brought about a feeling of nostalgia for the good old time, following that many British feared the end of the nation. Thus, a reaction occurred against the immigrants who had settled in Britain, and whose existence was perceived as a threat against the purity and high-class of the British culture. (C. Cornea, 2010, P.2)

As a consequence, Haroon becomes in London a victim of racism and is disappointed by the poverty and illiteracy he witnesses. In order to escape or overcome his diasporic problems, he tries to find various solutions that will be accepted by the English. He appears as a kind of clown, namely the "Buddha of Suburbia" and pretends to have magical power in order to impress and be accepted by English people.

It can be noticed in the novel that Indian immigrants attempting to adopt English culture fail at the end and rather return to their Indian culture. That is the case of Haroon's father, who at the beginning of the novel, seems to have at some extent English culture through his education and knowledge of English literature. But he definitely comes back to his Indian culture with his yoga performance. In the same vein, Anwar, his friend, while trying to adopt English culture during his arrival in the suburb, now tries to adopt Indian culture through the performance of Indian patriarchal norms. In fact, he imposes a husband on Jamilia, his independent daughter.

2. Space, Home and Racism in the Second Generation of Immigrants

In Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the second generation of immigrants is represented by Karim. The suburb is described from his perspective as the poorest part of London, a place where people try to escape and go to a better environment. This is why he argues through the following assertive that he is "from the South London Suburbs and going somewhere" (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.3). Karim feels alienated and discriminated against in the suburbs, a place where people experience racism as this part of London is mainly white. Indeed, he could not go to his friend Helen's house without being persecuted by their dog. He was hated by Helen's father because of his skin's colour. Moreover, for Karim, people in the suburb lack ambition and fake being happy. He wants to seize more opportunities and assert his English identity. According to S. Sedláková (2018, P. 44), the suburb can be linked to Bromley, where Kureishi, the author of the novel, experiences racism:

> Hanif Kureishi talks about his experience with Bromley and racism in an interview filmed at Doughnut: The Outer London Festival. He describes similar experiences with racism and the suburbs as portrayed in The Buddha of Suburbia. In his view, Bromley at that time could be described as "entirely white, homogenous, post-war, bombed out wasteland".

For her, Kureishi and other authors of his generation used to negatively describe the suburb in their writing. It can be noticed, that like the first generation of immigrants who live in their country to the host one in order to accomplish their "British dreams", those of the second generation also dream of a better life outside their place of living. When Karim arrives in London, he does not feel at home and does not know what to do, as justified by the following descriptive illocutionary act:

> 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 necessarily 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 yet see how the city worked, but I began to find out. (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.126)

This highlights his ambiguous character; he is always caught between two places, as if his identity cannot be fixed to one space. The choice of coming to the suburb by his father Haroon affects not only himself, but especially other children. Karim becomes disappointed by the miserable living conditions in London. The following expressive reflects his emotional state; he feels angry with his father, who had the choice to live a suitable life in India but was blinded by his British dreams:

> Dad had had an idyllic childhood, and as he told me of these adventures with Anwar I often wondered why he'd condemned his own son to a dreary suburb of London of which it was said that when people drowned they saw not their lives but their double-glazing flashing before them. It was only later, when he came to England, that Dad realized how complicated practical life could be (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.50).

Karim's troubling identity is first symbolized by his misunderstanding of his father's behavior. Indeed, living in a British society that expects the immigrants to be acculturated, he becomes confused when he experiences his father's indigenization moment. This latter performs his Indian culture as a kind of "Guru" at Eva's house:

> He was speaking slowly, in a deeper voice than usual, as if he were addressing a crowd. He was hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent. He'd spent years trying to be more of an

> Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads. Why? (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.21)

Karim does not understand the need to perform Indian culture and Yoga in front of white people while they try to adopt English culture in order to enjoy a good position in society. The same Haroon told him not to befriend other Indians except his parents. As a consequence, he was really confused, and his Englishness led him to oppose himself to this forced marriage. For Karim, people in general and specifically women have to be free to choose their future husband; he thinks that this attitude is "old-fashioned". S. Sedláková (2018, P.1) notes that both Karim and Jamilia are confused with their parents' behavior:

> Maybe there were similarities between what was happening to Dad, with his discovery of Eastern philosophy, and Anwar's last stand. Perhaps it was the immigrant condition living itself out through them. For years, they were both happy to live like English-men.

On the other side of their parents, the second generation, represented by Karim and Jamila, seems to be more attached to the English culture since they do not have a real knowledge of Indian culture unless they have had the experiences of their parents. This is why they attempt to rebel against Indian culture. For instance, Jamila does not understand his father's desire to make an arranged marriage. For her, this attitude does not match with England's modern view of marriage. According to S. Sedláková (2018, P.19), Jamila "has more feminist beliefs and views arranged marriages as obsolete and patriarchal".

Furthermore, in London, Karim feels uncomfortable when dealing with both cultures. When he is surrounded by Indian people, he behaves as an assimilated subject since he seems to exhibit some characteristics linked to the dominant culture. In the same way, the British have a complex of superiority vis-à-vis the Indian, Karim feels superior to his half-Indian counterpart. But the Indian does not consider him as such because of his mulatto status. This hugely affects Karim: "because of his roots, Karim feels like an outsider, never succeeds in surmounting the barrier of race" (C. Cornea, 2010, P.3).

As compared with other English characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim has a good education and great knowledge of English culture. The following expressive act shows that his mixture of cultures makes him confused about his national identity: "Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored" (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.3). He experiences racism at school because of the various names conferred on him by his classmates and teachers, as testified by this assertive: "I was sick too

of being affectionately called Shitface or Curryface, and of coming home covered in spit and snot and chalk and wood-shavings" (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.63). The expressive illocutionary act that follows reveals that Karim was peaceful and did not defend himself when he was harassed by people: "If people spat at me I practically thanked them for not making me chew the moss between the paving stones" (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.53). Despite the racial trouble that Karim encounters, there are other people in the suburb who like Indian people and their culture. For instance, through the following assertive, Helen, the friend of Karim, acknowledges the benefit of Indian culture in Britain: "'But this is your home,' she said. 'We like you being here. You benefit our country with your traditions'" (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.74). Many other people really enjoy Indian people in terms of Buddhism and religion. They like Haroon's performance as the Buddha of Suburbia.

Another identity conflict Karim experiences is when thanks to Eva, he earns an audition with the director of a theater named Shadwell. Karim wants to be an actor. During the exchange with the director, he feels lost since Shadwell asks questions about Indian culture and the issue of racism. Their exchanges can be summarized in the following directive act of Shadwell: "That must be complicated for you to accept – belonging nowhere, wanted nowhere. Racism. Do you find it difficult? Please tell me.' . . . 'I don't know,' I said defensively. 'Let's talk about acting'" (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.141). Karim seems frustrated in front of these questions because he has no a real knowledge of Indian culture, as confirmed by the following assertive act: "What he wants is just to be hired as an actor and not be confronted to questions about India".

Karim feels caught between the two cultures; at the beginning of the novel, his behavior seems to be closer to English culture, and his audition confirms his lack of knowledge about his Indian's origin. Moreover, when he knows that he will play the character of Mowgli, he feels uncomfortable since Shadwell and his staff want him to perform an Indian's identity and mimic an Indian's accent and outfit as attested by the next directives: "A word about the accent, Karim. I think it should be an authentic accent."; "What d'you mean authentic?" ;"Where was our Mowgli born?" "India." "Yes. Not Orpington. What accent do they have in India?" "Indian accents". (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.147). Wherever he goes, Karim undergoes an identity crisis; in the suburb, he is not considered English and now in the theatrical world, where he expects to be part of, he is expected to perform Indian stereotypes. It is as if he has no other choice than to practice hybridity in order to overcome his difficulties and improve his condition in society. Karim's performance of Mowgli disappointed his relatives, specifically Jamilia and Haroon. They think that Karim's representation of Indian culture is faked and follows western

stereotypes of India, as these expressive and directive acts underline: “And it was disgusting, the accent and the shit you had smeared over you. You were just pandering to prejudices –” “Jammie –” “And clichés about Indians. And the accent – my God, how could you do it? I expect you’re ashamed, aren’t you?” (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.157). However, Karim’s performance seduces another director, who decides to cast him in Pyke’s play. This success arouses jealousy among the former staff of Karim. Indeed, Shadwel, through the following assertive argues that it is Karim’s inferior status that allowed him to acquire this job: “‘If I weren’t white and middle class I’d have been in Pyke’s show now. Obviously mere talent gets you nowhere these days. Only the disadvantaged are going to succeed in seventies’ England’” (H. Kureishi, 1990, P.165).

At the end of Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim acknowledges his half part in the funeral of Anwar. The union of Indian people gives him a feeling of belonging to these people. He identifies himself as part of this community. However, her mother wants him to only belong to English culture and rejects his Indian identity, as testified by these assertive acts: “Who gave birth to you? You’re an Englishman, I’m glad to say’” (P.232); “You weren’t in a loin-cloth as usual,’ she said. ‘At least they let you wear your own clothes. But you’re not an Indian. You’ve never been to India. You’d get diarrhoea the minute you stepped off that plane, I know you would’” (P.232). When he decides to perform his English identity, he is criticized by English people like Charlie who sees him as “looking so English” (P.254). In all these situations, Karim has no choice but living in a “third space” where he can freely practice his identity.

CONCLUSION

This study has derived its interpretative paradigms from Bhabha's concept of hybridity and Searle's illustrative acts in order to analyze the issues of space and hybridity in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. It appears that in the novel, Kureishi challenges readers to reflect on the complex aspects of post-migration identity, the deep relationships between space and hybridity, and the transformative potential of cultural blending. The diverse experiences of the first and second generations of immigrants navigate the tensions between belonging and displacement, tradition and modernity. Haroon’s struggles and changes as he attempts to assimilate into British society while preserving some of his South Asian roots are reflected in his experiences. Karim’s identity is influenced by the interaction of South Asian and British influences, illuminating the challenges of growing up in a multicultural setting. On this basis, *The Buddha of Suburbia* serves as a testimony to the breadth and variety of post-migrant writing. As post-migration

literature evolves and expands, Kureishi's writing offers a stimulating and enduring contribution to the ongoing conversation on identity, space, and hybridity in contemporary connected world.

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