
RESEARCH ARTICLE

***My Son the Fanatic* into Identity, Culture, and Integration: Third Space Manifestations**

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ABSTRACT

The current research paper intends to investigate the ambivalent aspects of postcolonial identity, culture, and integration, characterizing the fictional narrative of *My Son the Fanatic* by Hanif Kureishi. As it has not been addressed before, this study is going to examine such issues according to Homi Bhabha's concept of third space. Based on Bhabha's concept of third space, the intention of this paper is to explore how the postcolonial setting of supremacy and power causes the colonized through mimicking and imitation of the colonizer and through neither fully integrating nor fully withdrawing to preside eventually upon a third, contradictory, inconsistent, and vague positioning of identity and belonging. Vague, uncertain, and fickle, this third space of identity and belonging, therefore, resembles and differs from its model, but more importantly, as a result, poses a threat. In *My Son the Fanatic*, Parvez, Ali's father, has mostly been perceived to have completely mimicked and absorbed the colonizer's dominant culture while his son Ali has completely rejected it. The present paper, however, argues that both the father's and the son's models have been lacking in plenitude and thus are more closely located in a third positioning of neither complete adoption nor complete rejection. In addition, the research paper will show how such a third positioning of neither-nor resembles yet poses a threat both ways.

KEYWORDS

Identity, Ambivalence, Culture, Postcolonial, Integration, Colonizer, Colonized, Third Space

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1. Introduction

People migrating from previously colonized countries to the homeland of their former colonizers have been the subject of ample research and academic studies. All previous literature on this area has explored what problems integrating they encounter, whether or not they have truly and fully assimilated with their new communities, embrace and get along well with their new identities, or cling to and cherish their former identities, and whether they accept and live out the new culture, or preserve and practice their native cultures. More importantly, why do they have to go through such conflicts? And what could be the unseen driving force behind all that? To a greater or lesser extent, such topics have been investigated in Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic* and other works. However, the current research assumes an original position as it touches upon a novel aspect of such a dilemma. It investigates such concepts on the ground of Homi Bhabha's notion of third space within a postcolonial context nonetheless. It assumes that such concepts of identity, culture, and integration are fluid concepts that go beyond the colonized-colonizer binary relationship. However, since the current research paper is confined to the colonized-colonizer binary, it will investigate that the attitude of neither completely adopting nor completely rejecting the colonized leads to the establishment of a third location and how it breeds harm both ways within the postcolonial context.

In that order and due to the fact that many writers from past colonies have addressed the issue of colonialism and its repercussions, a new approach of literature called post-colonialism has recently prevailed and concerned itself with the perpetual and bearing influence left on former colonies by colonization. The present research paper examines Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic* within this context. It investigates the issues immigrants from previous colonies go through, such as experiencing an identity ambivalence as

a result of neither full integration nor full rejection. It is argued that those immigrants undergo internal conflicts of culture, race, identity, and belonging as well. The context of hybridity seems to be producing such a heavy load and unbearable affliction that those immigrants fail terribly to satisfy, ultimately positioning themselves in a compromising but troubled third space. Although desperately attempting to bargain a sense of belonging, the multiplicity of races and ideologies of the society obstruct their way with snowballing and cumulative difficulties. It is, thus, concluded in the current paper that those and other related issues come about because a postcolonial ideology of self is instructed and assumed by placing the West above the East. This rhetoric thus contributes to awakening a sense of belonging to and identification with certain roots. Failing both ways, nevertheless, brings about a third positioning of similarity but simultaneously of difference and threat.

Moreover, postcolonial contexts are ones of multilingualism and multiculturalism that, in due course, bring about a state of plurality in culture as well as in identity. Such a state of being, thus, leads to the overlapping of an original culture and a rooted identity over new forms of it. Such a model of being essentially generates inconsistency, doubt, and incongruity in culture, identity, and integration. Such placing of "neither here nor there" generates a state of being characterized by ambivalence and incongruities (H. K. Bhabha 123).

In a similar respect, it could still be assumed that Kureishi's narrative stretches beyond space and time as it principally represents and projects an uncertain and unsettled "conflict of generations" (Gilman 166). Kureishi's narrative in *My Son the Fanatic* addresses the internal conflicts and problems immigrants of all races and backgrounds experience and go through across generations. It highlights the issues of identity, integration, ambivalence, and the resulting positioning of that internal conflict. In *My Son the Fanatic*, most of the narrative presents Parvez's, the father, viewpoints and philosophy. Yet, Ali, his son, gets emphatically involved in the narrative, which indicates the active engagement of younger generations of immigrants in the matter as well.

The current research paper employs Homi Bhabha's concept of third space to explore the issues of identity, culture, and integration in Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic* with regards to ambivalence and third space as advanced by Homi Bhabha. In relation to those and other concepts, Homi Bhabha stands out as a prominent literary figure and theorist in the field of postcolonial literature in particular and literature in general. In terms of ambivalence, for instance, Bhabha contends that due to attempts and practices to maintain colonial supremacy and control over citizens of previously colonized territories, such attitude brings about ambivalence. As long as the colonizer's authority and superiority are vehemently compelled, it assumingly entails the imposition of identity as well, which, in turn, results in a sense of fear for identity. The concept of hybridity will also be referred to with relation to the previous concepts because Bhabha also assumes that hybridity paves the way for the aspects and practices of colonial supremacy to amalgamate with various literary works and discourses, eventually generating what he calls hybridization. This process of hybridization, according to Bhabha, enables and accelerates colonial dominance and superiority.

2. Ambivalence, Identity, and Culture

Bhabha states that in a colonial setting, a colonized is desired to be made into a passive and compliant agent, which is a colonial discourse. He further contends that such a discourse is compellingly characterized by ambivalence and inconsistency, which, in turn, is a menacing aspect. This practice of ambivalence and inconsistency thus leads to marginality and mimicry on the part of the colonizer and the colonized, respectively. It is a threatening irony for both the colonized and the colonizer. The colonized, in his earnest attempts to fit in and integrate with society, endeavors to mimic the colonizer's attitudes, practices, and lifestyle in general. The colonizer, in contrast, generates threateningly conflicting impressions; one of satisfaction and approval, yet the other impression is a feeling of getting marginalized by the colonized. The colonized, therefore, is made to experience ambivalence of identity, attitudes, and practices. This state of being compels the colonized to have illusions and disillusion all at once about their identity, ponder upon the assumption of pure identity, and eventually reside over a compromised position of belonging that Bhabha would assume the third space.

Such novel positioning of identity, as called third space by Bhabha, would assume connections to both roots and origins on the one hand and to the new home and culture on the other, on the part of the colonized. This is so because identity is constructed, according to Bhabha, out of people's relations to other people—in this case, the colonized relation to the colonizer—not through locality, culture, or the nature of human beings. He argues that the question of identity "is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy"; rather, "it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" in which Bhabha further asserts, "the demand of identification entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness," (H. K. Bhabha 131).

In view of that, the newly generated identity, positioned as a third space, is thus characterized by ambivalence and inconsistency. The process through which this new identity is formed thus takes account of fear and propensity. Tyranny, lust for power, and a sense of penitence are demonstrated by characters bringing about a sense of superiority in belonging and affinity on the part of the colonizer over the colonized. However, the colonizer perceives the feeling of regret and apology as a menace. The colonizer,

as a consequence, resorts to the practice of stereotyping the colonized in an attempt to safeguard their position of superiority and power.

Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic* demonstrates this attitude of identity ambivalence through the characters of Parvez and his son, Ali. Parvez, for instance, shows more consistency and less contradiction in the way he acts out and leads his life. It is shown in the narrative that he gets deeply immersed in and absorbs the colonizer's and Western attitudes and way of life. He even goes to the limit of holding negative opinions about his roots, his own people, and his background in a way that he stereotypes them. Nevertheless, Parvez neither feels completely taken in by the same society he looks up to and has adopted, nor does he receive full acceptance from his family, his wife and his son. Nor does Parvez himself make evident full conviction in what he does and in how he is modelling his life. Parvez exhibits certain qualities of identity ambivalence. For one thing, he still feels a longing for and an attachment to his roots of identity as a Muslim and as a Pakistani. Even though he goes as far as his potential and capacities would allow in acting out as a British citizen, he is still fickle when it comes to his family. He is neither fully prepared nor indeed willing to accept the same path he is leading for his family. For example, the sheer proclivity and liking to bestow his son with a Muslim name, Ali, would serve as a constant reminder of his roots and origin. This ambivalent practice exemplified by Parvez is assumed to have been generated by a colonizer's sense of superiority that is supposed to be reflected and modelled in a white culture. As a non-white, Parvez might not have felt full acceptance by or could not have fully assimilated within this white culture, causing him to eventually resort to this positioning of ambivalence.

Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic* is thus assumed to have reflected such ambivalence in its narrative through its two main characters, Parvez and his son Ali. The text offers a double-reading as Parvez would represent the model of full indulgence in a new identity—with difficulty and an assuming lack of full conviction though—whereas Ali would stand for the model of absolute rejection, after trial and fail, nonetheless. This attitude of doubleness and ambivalence would point to the hybridity of identity, as reflected by Parvez and Ali. Bhabha thus argues further that a colonial authority, through its practices and attitudes, tends to link discourses to texts in a process that, in due course, enables and accelerates colonial superiority. Furthermore, colonizers, too, tend to amend or modify their ways, attitudes, and life style in an attempt to bring together and amalgamate both their culture and the culture of the colonized. This modification of relations and articulation produces a shift and an alteration in power relations with regard to the colonizer-colonized binary position. Therefore, the colonizer's supremacy, power, and even identity itself becomes under question.

In his book, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha further asserts that hybridity itself serves as a means of perpetuating the colonizer's absolute supremacy and power. He carries on contending that all sorts of hybridity, be they cultural, linguistic, identity, and even religious, serve well in the process of authorizing and maintaining the colonizer's power and authority.

In *My Son the Fanatic*, the state of loneliness revealed by both Parvez and his son Ali indicates their internal disturbed identities as feeling homeless even at home. Such a state of being is generated because, according to Tyson, "unhomed people don't feel at home even in their own homes because they don't feel at home in any culture and, therefore, don't feel at home in themselves." Therefore, this state of being dubbed unhomeliness could evidently be detected in Ali as well as in his father, Parvez. Parvez constantly endeavors to demonstrate himself as a native citizen by adopting and acting out the colonizer's culture while simultaneously maintaining connections and channels of communication with his Muslim Pakistani heritage and culture. Giving his son the name of a Muslim while being born in England would serve just as one aspect of that communication.

By becoming a settler and a citizen in England, Parvez experiences a sense of place that is going to be different from the sense of those temporarily passing by England as a foreign and unfamiliar land. The idea of place Bhabha calls space is, he argues, an act and an expression of resistance not only to binary cultures and identities but also to unitary ones. Parvez, as well as Ali, would in England feel a certain sense of safety and belonging, yet their native land and background will continue ringing in the back of their heads. In their case, they have embraced the values, imaginations, and dreams of England, but this attitude has awakened a sense of anxiety for their roots, which has, in due course, made them feel like presiding over a third space.

The attitude of mimicking or imitating adopted by the colonized is, Bhabha assumes, a colonizer's strategy to further colonize and dominate the other, which in this case is the non-white colonized other. The resemblance and likeness on the part of the non-white colonized turns them into a similar colonizer, though different and other. The certainty of and faith in the colonial superiority is, however, reviewed and perhaps even taken apart through the colonized's mimicking. Despite functioning as a prevailing demonstration of opposition and contrast to colonial power and authority, such an attitude of imitating brings about a state of vacillation, insecurity, and doubt on the part of the colonized, nonetheless. A case in point to consolidate such an argument is again provided by Homi Bhabha, in which he cites the Bible through the words of an angry missionary as an example, stating that:

Still, everyone would gladly receive a Bible, and why? That he may store it up as a curiosity, sell it for a few price, or use it for waste paper.... Some have been bartered in the markets.... If these remarks are at all warranted, then

an indiscriminate distribution of the scriptures to everyone who may say he wants a Bible can be little less than a waste of time, a waste of money and a waste of expectations. For while the public are hearing of so many Bibles distributed, they expect to hear soon of a correspondent number of conversions. (H. K. Bhabha 147)

It is quite obvious through the missionary's quote above that he is not simply distributing copies of the Bible to the native Indians for charity or nothing in return. On the contrary, through distributing the Bible, the missionary principally instructs the native Indians to imitate the white colonizers' style of reading the Bible with high expectations of changing their religion and converting them to Christianity. Yet, the native Indians have welcomed the Bible but for their own purposes rather than the missionary's agenda. A goal that has not been successfully achieved, to the missionary's chagrin.

Parvez mimicry of the colonizer in *My Son the Fanatic* brings about tragic results. He has neither been a complete English nor a complete Muslim. His son Ali, as a result of his father's attitude of embracing Western English culture, has opted for a fundamentally fanatic path in life. For one thing, Ali has shown full willingness for hatred and revenge against the white colonizer as an outcome product of his and his father's mimicry and emulation of them. Ali is a vivid demonstration of the colonized's hatred and revenge against the white colonizer. Nevertheless, neither Parvez nor his son Ali typify their cultural models simply because not all Englishmen are drunk and lecherous taxi drivers. Nor are all Muslims the identical product of fundamentalists and fanatics (Said, "From Orientalism." 57). Therefore, both Parvez and his son Ali neither completely resemble nor completely differ. They thus preside upon a new projected location that does not either position. In contrast, such new positioning of identity and culture characterized by half-integration and half-rejection poses a serious threat to both identities and culture. This new positioning is called the third space by Bhabha.

The ambivalence thus traced in *My Son the Fanatic* not only supports Bhabha's reading of such contexts but also complies well with Lacan's concept of the mirror stage. Homi Bhabha embraces this particular concept of Lacan as a dominantly referent idea in his reading of ambivalence, stating that "the mirror stage encapsulates what happens in colonial discourse's stereotyping productions" and that it (the mirror stage) "is at least a good model for the colonial situation," (H. K. Bhabha). He further argues that just like the mirror stage, in the case of the colonized mimicking the colonizer, "the fullness" of the stereotype—its image as identity—is always threatened by lack" (id). During such a stage, both antagonism and fretfulness amalgamate, and in their amalgamation, they typify a colonial condition.

Such doubling contributes to a great extent to the modelling and constructing ambivalence of colonial awareness and understanding. It entails a two-edge demonstration: one of hostility and resentment to supremacy, and the other is the surfacing of anxiety over the self and its state of being. Therefore, while the white colonizer aggressively enforces their power and authority over the colonized, they constantly reflect upon their own identity, thus experiencing an endless sense of anxiety. Accordingly, there arises both "an aggressive expression of domination over the other and evidence of narcissistic anxiety about the self" (Huddart 58).

In *My Son the Fanatic*, the contact and friendship between Parvez and Bettina, the prostitute, can be assumed as an example of the established rapport between the colonized and the colonizer. Accordingly, the assumption that Lacan's concept of 'mirror stage' is central to Bhabha's idea of identity ambivalence is further validated. In the context of colonial discourse, Bhabha employs 'the mirror stage' to explicate the purpose of constructing stereotypes. In line with Bhabha, it is perceived that "the stereotype produces on the part of the colonizer both power and pleasure and also anxiety and defensiveness" (McRobbie 11). Bettina demonstrates a state of supremacy and power over Parvez as she advises him on how to address his son's problem.

Bettina's proclamation of superiority and power over Parvez through advising him is read as an act of constructing the binary stereotype of civil vs uncivil. Parvez, in this context, is indirectly perceived as a negative, uncivilized stereotype. In addition, his name is implicitly intended to signify a lack of civilization and refinement as well. According to Durrant, "the negative image of the Enlightenment subject" serves as "a sign of the uncivilized, the inhuman, the native, (and) the infant" (Durrant 13).

The state of feeling unhomey while at home that Parvez and his son Ali demonstrate in *My Son the Fanatic* is a further colonial stereotype which arouses both a sense of pleasure and anxiety, assumingly generating opposing feelings of pleasure and anxiety as well. Investigating the nature of Parvez's relationship with Bettina, it could be observed that such relation is characterized by inconsistency. In addition, Bettina is shown at certain times to be contesting her state of superiority and power over Parvez by apparently dealing with him as an equally and wholly fellow citizen.

Nevertheless, she spares no occasion to pride herself in/about her civilized origins and to exercise what she takes as her giving-right supremacy. Yet, Bettina herself is an image and a representation of the colonizer who experiences a sense of anxiety as a result of the ambivalence and doubleness of such stereotyping constructs. Such stereotyping is subtly traced in the way the

prostitute deals with Parvez as she, as a colonizer, "aggressively states (her) superiority to the colonized, but is always anxiously contemplating (her) own identity, which is never quite as stable as (her) aggression implies," (Huddart 73). Bettina could be professed a civilized woman; she seems to perceive her identity with uncertainty, though. In the context of the colonized-colonizer colonial relations, the identity of the colonizer is thus, Bhabha argues, disturbed by such ambivalence as well.

3. The Dynamics of Ambivalence and Third Space

In a hybrid context where culture, language, epistemology, and history clash, a conflict arises between the colonizer as dominant and superior and the colonized as other for defining identity. This conflict occurs because this discourse challenges the essentially secure and unchangeable definitions of those notions, particularly of identity and culture. This is so because to construct a new hybrid identity as the outcome of combining different attitudes, practices, and beliefs; it is indispensable to frustrate and defy such basic definitions. Therefore, what operates in such a context is that Bhabha elucidates, "When a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, and extend them" (H. Bhabha 216). In view of that, to counteract the resulting normalization, ambivalence, and domination, a third space of conflict, compromise, and articulation of new meanings is created. Therefore, the colonized never ceases trying to extend the definition of their identity in the face of that normalized and confined one.

According to Bhabha, a third space is a kind of liminality and halfwayness through which supremacy and normalization are defied, negotiated, and eventually have to be expressed over again. Being fluid, political, and fluctuating, the third space as a new positioning of identity repels and counterattacks polarizing binaries, tags, as well as identities of a unitary nature. Bhabha locates the third space where life is vulnerable and all its ambiguities get exposed and negotiated. It is also located where an identity is created and refashioned. This location of the third space produces with it new identities and new possibilities as well: "hybridity is the 'Third Space', which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority," (H. Bhabha 211).

There emerges a need to enquire and counterattack such colonial normalization that delivers confining interpretations of the colonized other so as to move across differences and pave the way for the rise and development of new meanings and definitions of identities and cultures. It is thus the third space that makes it possible for the disruption and questioning of the limiting formulas of meanings, therefore expressing new formulas of meanings and construction as well. In that respect, the third space could offer a remedy to the established and superior views of identity and culture as it proposes that such concepts are "complex, ambivalent, and negotiable entities, which reject fixity and polarization" (id). Despite its inconsistent, vague, and indecisive nature, the third space, Bhabha further states, facilitates negotiating inclusion and develops into a location of origination, association, and challenge of meanings as well. This process of negotiation might even lead to subversion and transgression in certain cases, like the case of Ali. He subverts and transgresses into a fanatic and fundamentalist who might possibly be rejected by his own culture and brand of affiliation. The case of Parvez could be interpreted as subversion and transgression from the values and traditions of English society as well. Additionally, his insistence and keenness to impose a particular life path for his son, Ali, is an indication of his fundamentalist and fanatic stance that contradicts his assumed position as a civilized British citizen; as his son notes, "So who is the fanatic now," (Kureishi 65). However, Bhabha asserts that "we are always negotiating in any situation of oppression or antagonism" and that even "subversion and transgression is a negotiation" (H. Bhabha 216).

Accordingly, because of the lack of completeness and fullness of any culture, and perhaps possibly of any identity, there will continue to be negotiation, contradiction, and contestation over established views and constructed meanings of identity and culture:

No culture is full unto itself; no culture is plainly plenitudinous, not only because there are other cultures which contradict its authority but also because its own symbol-forming activity, its own interpellation in the process of representation, language, signification and meaning making always underscores the claim to an originality, holistic, organic identity. (H. Bhabha 210)

In that vein, as a product of cultural hybridization, the identities of Parvez and his son Ali are positioned at a cultural impasse. They both demonstrate inconsistency, ambivalence, and uncertainty of identity, for they have both been attempting to relate to modernized and conventional cultures, respectively, and assumingly interchangeably, too.

Parvez, for instance, is observed to be diverging from his traditional culture and values, for he thinks those traditions and values are quite inferior, old-fashioned, and lacking in potential and qualifications to achieve the desirable success and prosperity for the individual in the world of fierce competition and rapid development of today. He thus attempts to remodel his life after modern England's life and practices. Nonetheless, he demonstrates certain reluctance and disinclination to break with them altogether. His concurrent attitude to relate to and model his life after both cultures while at the same time consciously and/or unconsciously

snubbing them positions him at a third space that negotiates and enunciates the difference. That third space, in turn, brings about new views, new understandings, and new meanings of his cultural identity and of Ali's. Yet, this novel positioning of the third space remains, according to Bhabha, a location of ambivalence and inconsistency in which cultural views, understandings, and meanings lack "primordial unity or fixity; that even the signs can be appropriated, translated, and read anew," (H. K. Bhabha 37). Therefore, Parvez, as well as his son Ali, in particular, have been made to rethink and extend their cultural views and meanings in different ways though.

In a similar vein, Parvez has shown noticeable pride in his son, Ali, for he thinks his son has succeeded in embracing and representing the best in both cultures, the English and the Pakistani: "Ali excelled at cricket, swimming and football, and how attentive a scholar he was, getting A's in most subjects. Was it asking too much for Ali to get a good job, now, marry the right girl and start a family?" (Kureishi 58). Parvez's satisfaction and pride in his son's amalgamation of both cultures is further evidence of his innate and perhaps unconscious cling to and pride in his roots despite him stating the opposite. It, furthermore, points to the positioning of neither here nor there of Bhabha's third space.

It is this new positioning of the third space that has caused Parvez and Ali to contest the long-held restrictive labelling of identity and culture. It is this third positioning that has as well empowered them to go beyond the colonized-colonizer binary. In addition, the third space has qualified them for the inclusion, and not the exclusion, of the two different cultures and identities that they embody and belong to, in contrasting ways though.

The narrative of *My Son the Fanatic* thus demonstrates how Parvez's ambivalent attitude of modelling after the English culture and of clinging to his roots, even slightly and unconsciously, has made him into "almost the same, but not quite," (H. K. Bhabha 122). He is supposedly an English citizen with a Muslim Pakistani name, though, who is pulled to pieces and is reduced due to his ambivalence by his own son, Ali. His son, likewise, has opted for a path of Islamic fanaticism, but a sort of fanaticism that he desires to exercise from Britain while maintaining his British citizenship.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it could be assumed that the limits and boundaries between the colonized and the colonizer are unsolidified and fictional instead of being permanent, secure, and typical. It could as well be proposed that other various categories of people experience and preside upon the third space as such, rather than solely the colonized. Moreover, despite the assumption that this third space is characterized by vagueness, ambivalence, and inconsistency, it qualifies for origination, collaboration, and the discovery of new meanings of life, existence, culture, and identity. Still, the position of neither here nor there produces a third location that actually belongs to and represents none. Besides, this third positioning could possibly pose more serious threats to its own brand of affiliation.

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