

LOST CHARISMA: THE OTHER(ED) HEROES IN ZADIE SMITH'S WHITE TEETH AND ELIF ŞAFAK'S HONOUR¹

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ABSTRACT

Britain has turned into a multicultural structure soon after the World War II. It is beyond doubt that immigrants participating in this society, especially those from the first generation, have experienced a number of disappointments and racist attitudes. Likewise, the following generations of immigrant families have suffered from similar dismissive attitudes. Moreover, the younger generations mostly remain in cultural in-betweenness as a result of growing up under the influence of both home and host cultures. In spite of their prior tendency to the host culture, they are reminded of their original culture, religion and real position. Then, they begin to shadow forth their rebellious behaviours, take part in some kinds of organizations referring to their otherness and cultural in-betweenness in the society. In this regard, such novels as Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Elif Şafak's *Honour* foregrounds such themes as 'immigration', 'otherness', 'cultural in-betweenness' in a multicultural society. While analyzing the both novels, this paper firstly aims at examining the first generation male characters like Samad and Adem and then discussing the similarities between the second generation male characters such as Millat and Iskender who firstly seem with their charismatic and dominant posture in the groups of their peers but gradually lose their power and fall out of favour as a consequence of deeds leading to their otherness. In this context, the characters specifically exemplify and embody the concepts of 'otherness', 'cultural in-betweenness' and the subversion of 'cultural identity' in the multicultural Britain.

Key words: Otherness, cultural in-betweenness, first-generation immigrants, second generation immigrants, Zadie Smith, Elif Şafak.

ÖZET

İngiltere, II. Dünya Savaşı'ndan hemen sonra çok kültürlü bir yapıya dönüşmüştür. Bu topluma daha sonradan katılan göçmenlerin, özellikle birinci kuşaktan olanların, bazı hayal kırıklıklarını ve ırkçı tutumları deneyimlediklerinden kuşku yoktur. Benzer şekilde, sonraki kuşak göçmen aileleri de aynı dışlayıcı tutumlardan muzdarip olmuşlardır. Dahası, genç kuşaklar, hem ana hem de ev sahibi kültürlerin etkisi altında büyümenin bir sonucu olarak, çoğunlukla, kültürel açıdan arada kalmaktadırlar. Ev sahibi kültüre gösterdikleri öncelikli eğilime rağmen, bu kuşağı temsil eden göçmenlere asıl kültürleri, dinleri ve toplumdaki gerçek pozisyonları sosyolojik açıdan hatırlatılır. Daha sonra kendi isyankar tutumlarını belli ederler ve toplumdaki ötekiliklerine ve kültürel uzlaşmazlıklarına dikkat çeken bazı örgütlere katılmaya başlarlar. Bu bağlamda, Zadie Smith'in *Beyaz Diş* ve Elif Şafak'ın *İskender* adlı romanları, çok kültürlü bir toplumda "göç", "ötekilik", "kültürel arada kalmışlık" izlekleri ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Bu çalışma, iki romanı da incelerken, öncelikle Samad ve Adem gibi birinci kuşak erkek karakterleri incelemeyi daha sonra da akran gruplarında karizmatik ve baskın duruşlarıyla göze çarpan fakat kademeli olarak güçlerini kaybeden ve ötekiliklerine yol açan eylemlerinin sonucunda gözden düşen Millat ve İskender gibi ikinci kuşak erkek karakterleri ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, söz konusu karakterler belirli bir biçimde, çok kültürlü İngiltere'de, "ötekilik", "kültürel arada kalmışlık" ve "kültürel kimliğin yıkılışı" kavramlarını kendi içlerinde barındırıp, örneklendirmektedirler.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ötekilik, Kültürel arada kalmışlık, Birinci kuşak göçmenler, İkinci kuşak göçmenler, Zadie Smith, Elif Şafak.

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INTRODUCTION

Britain turned into a multicultural structure right after the rush of immigrants had gathered pace, especially after the World War II. In spite of the fact that Alastair Bonnet (2000:90) describes multiculturalism as "the eradication of racism and the recognition of cultural diversity", within multicultural England's adopted social system; it is beyond doubt that immigrants participating in this society, especially the first generation ones have undergone countless difficulties, disappointments, racist and biased attitudes. They have not been able to free themselves from the prejudices of being "the other" in the "host" English society. Likewise, the following generations of immigrant families encounter with similar dismissive attitudes. Moreover, the younger generations mostly remain in cultural in-betweenness as a result of growing up under the influences of both home and host cultures. In spite of their prior tendency to the host culture, they are reminded of their original heritage, religion and real position, then, they begin to shadow forth their rebellious behaviours, take part in some kinds of organizations referring to their otherness and cultural in-betweenness in the society. In this regard, Zadie Smith's impressive novel, *White Teeth* and Elif Shafak's *Honour* take part in groups of such works that are interwoven with problematic themes and issues like 'immigration', 'otherness', 'cultural in-betweenness', 'cultural identity' and 'integration' in a multicultural society. Hence, while analyzing the both novels, in this study, it is aimed at firstly focusing on the first generation male characters like Samad and Adem and then the rest of the paper will discuss situational similarities between the second generation male characters such as Millat and Iskender who firstly seem with their charismatic and dominant posture in the groups of their peers but gradually lose their power and fall out of favour as a consequence of deeds leading to their otherness. In this sense, aforesaid characters are those of the most successfully portrayed ones who specifically exemplify and embody the concepts of 'otherness', 'cultural in-betweenness' and the subversion of 'cultural identity' in the multicultural Britain.

Mostly renowned for her first and brilliant novel, *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith is considered as a third generation hybrid, postcolonial writer who was born to a British father and a Jamaican mother having side effects of immigration, cultural diversity and being other in the multicultural society. As a consequence of this, Smith at first hand exemplifies cultural, religious and racial reflections of the experiences of immigrants setting foot in Britain after World War II in *White Teeth*. As Laura Moss states, "Smith has created characters of mixed races, mixed cultures and mixed languages; in short, she has created a portrait of hybridity in a North London borough" (2003:11). In this sense, the cultural and historical heritage of Smith led her to examine some kinds of cultural and social issues which are adroitly described in the novel.

When examining its plot, *White Teeth* is regarded as both comic and realist text focusing on the connections among three families that reflect the transformed social conditions and the subjects in the contemporary London: the Iqbals, an immigrant Bangladeshi family with a pair of British-born twins called Magid and Millat; the Joneses, consisting of a British father (Archibald), a Jamaican mother (Clara) and their British-born mixed-race daughter Irie; and the Chalfens a Jewish-Catholic family with four children. The novel at large revolves around the friendship of Archibald Jones and Samad Iqbal and their families. Samad is Archibald's wartime buddy, and the two friends maintain their friendship when Samad moves from Bangladesh to England after the Second World War. Their families soon become very close and their children grow up together.

In spite of not being biologically hybrid figure like Zadie Smith, Elif Shafak has been considerably affected from the immigration. Considered to be one of the most widely read and prolific female writers in Turkey, Elif Shafak is also regarded as one of the most distinctive voices giving place to cultural dilemma of hybrid subjects having experienced identity crises in her literary texts. As part of her divorced diplomat mother's job and her education, throughout her life, Shafak has lived in various parts of the world including Madrid, Ankara, Cologne, Amman, Boston, Massachusetts and Arizona. Thus, she may in a way be considered as the embodiment of the experiences such as immigration, hybridity, identity crisis and the sense of multiculturalism that have consistently characterized both her life and her novel, *Honour*.

Honour concerns and focuses on the hearth-breaking tragedy and the experiences of a half-Kurdish and half-Turkish, immigrant Toprak Family stretching back to three generations. Chronology of the story

begins in a Kurdish village on the edge of the Euphrates, proceeds to Istanbul with the marriage of Adem and Pembe then their destinies lead them into multicultural London with their children Iskender, Esma whom Yunus join in later on with his birth and finally the novel comes to an end with the second death of Pembe. In the novel, by medium of the Topraks, Shafak strikingly emphasizes the familial and social relations of 'the others' in London. In fact, most of characters included throughout the novel, in a way, can take part in the group of others or marginalized. For instance, Pembe, Esma, Yunus, Roxana, the dancer for whom Adem left his family, nearly all friends of Iskender, are some of those undergoing pre-judgements and some dismissive attitudes that remind them of their 'otherness' and undermine their 'cultural identity'. However, Adem and his disobedient, ill-tempered son, Iskender are men of action who move within the psychology of 'otherness', 'cultural in-betweenness' during the process of adapting, integrating into the multicultural, host society. Therefore, they are thrown out and labelled outcast as a result of their mistakes in the novel which centres on 'an honour killing'.

THE FIRST GENERATION

Samad

As the typical representative of the first generation immigrants, Samad is the embodiment of disappointment and losing. In the beginning, Samad arrives in the multicultural London in an attempt to turn over a new leaf with a higher situations and better payment for both himself and his family. However, as John Mcleod states, just like all of other immigrants, Samad arrived in the adopted country not only with 'his own physical baggage but emotional and cultural baggage' as well (2000:211). Therefore, as a typical immigrant, Samad struggles to fit into London with his Bengali (Bangladeshi) background. However, his cultural and emotional baggage deter him from integrating into the idealized situations of the adopted country, and hence, Samad is obliged to have a low-paid job as a waiter in his cousin's Indian restaurant in spite of his education of engineering in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, he mostly encounters with the same facts reminding his lower position, 'otherness' as in the parent-teacher meeting of his children's music teacher. During the meeting, Samad makes intellectual comments about music and some other daily issues that the music teacher, Poppy Burt-Jones amazedly asks the following question: "Are you, I don't know, a professor of some kind, Mr Iqbal? 'No, no; said Samad, furious that he was unable to lie because of Archie and finding the word 'waiter' stopping in his throat'" (2000:135). It seems that Samad's third world background and his immigrant status deters him from attaining a higher position, in spite of his intellectual level and higher education from the home culture.

The gap between Samad's idealized and real life is the initial obstacle to integrate into the host culture and such situation leads him to lament for his cultural heritage rather than initiating a new cultural identity. Similarly, racist and discriminating behaviours towards Samad's family and other immigrants also mostly occur throughout the novel and such attacks making them move from Whitechapel to Willesden, undoubtedly remind Samad of his background, which obstructs his integrating process and degrades him into in-betweenness. Thus, Samad flings himself again into the doctrines of Islam in order to pull through cultural identity ambiguity, and also intend to prevent his sons, Magid and Millat, from falling into same problems and talks about this issue in his meeting with Archibald: "I looked at my boys, Archie. [...] and my heart cracked. [...] how can I show the straight road when I lost my own bearing?". Samad seeks sending both sons to Bangladesh in order to be brought up with their original culture and he accordingly succeeded in only sending Magid without notice of Alsana. Unfortunately, he is not able to attain his aim because, six years later, Magid turns back to London, as an English gentleman.

Being caught between two worlds as the other(ed) immigrant figure, failing in the struggle to maintain his Muslim male superiority on his wife and children, which intensifies his feelings of in-betweenness, Samad gets stuck in the middle cultural identity dilemma and meaninglessness of inhabiting multicultural London as 'the other' as follows: "Who would want to stay? In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated, just tolerated. Like you are an animal finally house trained [...] it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere" (2000:407). Shortly after realizing that he has not been able to stay away from being regarded as the other, Samad primarily identifies himself as a Bengali man with his own values. Nevertheless, the British culture also has an impact upon him. This change affects him in a negative way and he finds himself

and his pure cultural heritage as stained. Moreover, two cultures do not harmoniously “coincide; negotiate within Samad, consequently, his loyalty to the cultural heritage has weakened and he no longer pinpoint where he belongs, thus Samad cannot initiate a new sign of identity but remain labelled as ‘the other’ and ‘in-between’ in the multicultural London.

Adem

Even if he has not been able to take higher education in his home country as Samad, Adem also set foot on multicultural London on the purpose of elevating his and his family’s place, status by immigration. However, as the head of the Topraks, Adem cannot provide his family with a comfortable standard of living and situations oblige them to live in a little flat with only two rooms around Eastern part of London, where is mostly populated with ‘the others’ of the city coming from the third world. In the present situation, Adem cannot get the cultural transmission and therefore cannot get rid of the psychology of ‘otherness’. As Winkelman says, “If the immigrant cannot adapt into the new culture she/he enters in, she/he experiences an increasing amount of disappointments, frustrations and that life gradually makes no sense to her/him”(1995:122). In this regard, when realizing that his unpromising job at the packing service of a biscuit factory, his dreams towards future are shattered with respect to his status being regarded as ‘the other’ in the host culture. In fact, the most important reason of Adem’s permanent ‘otherness’ and ‘in-betweenness in the novel is that he is psychologically the most fragile figure living with the past. As a consequence of his childhood tragedy caused by violence of his drunken father and abandonment of his mother with another man; Adem has hardly held on to life. Unlike Adem, his wife, Pembe is used to seeing life through an optimistic perspective in spite of their marriage which is not founded on love and tries to do her best in order to provide her children with a brilliant future. On the other hand, Adem day by day becomes much more addicted to gambling and the Bulgarian dancer, Roxana, and finally leaves home for her. This separation also paves the way for the tragedy and the destruction of the Topraks needing a head during the process of integration in the host society, which is also reproachfully stated by Iskender:” My father- said Iskender, not quite knowing where he was going with this’. As we grew up he was never around. Then he left the house. Just like that. It’s been almost a year” (2012:226). As an outcast and a loser father who does not take the responsibility of his family, Adem is also ashamed of meeting his children, although he sometimes hides himself in the shadow like a criminal in the hope of coming across Iskender, Yunus or Esma; he cannot dare speak to them because he is sure of being regarded as a shameful man abandoned his family for a dancer, that is, he is considered as the other(ed) and banished figure of the others of eastern London. Thereafter, he commits suicide in Abu Dhabi while in the hope of regaining Roxana who left him for another man, being sitting pretty. By this way, he disappears in the silence of being ‘the other’ and ‘outcast’.

THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Millat

Being both charismatic and rebellious second generation figure, Millat appears with his ‘double consciousness’, at the same time, he is ‘both in UK and in Bangladesh, in the midst of two culture’, unlike his father who brought his emotional and cultural baggage. However, through his personal progress in the novel, Millat mostly loses the balance in his “cultural identity”, which, according to Stuart Hall, formulates people as ‘one’ with common historical encounters and shared cultural codes (1993:394). Thus, he oversteps the bounds of hybridity and falls into the position of in- between and otherness. During his progress from his early teenage to adolescence, Millat behaves with full of discrepancy and inconsistency in his ‘cultural identity’. He firstly displays a typical English rascal, who do not step outside without popular British clothing in fashion, he insistently attempts to sing the songs of Michael Jackson or those of some other popular western singers rather than authentic Southern Asian songs in spite of his music teacher’s request. Even though Millat shows western posture, some kinds of stereotypical² and racist attacks, utterances put the sense of being ‘the other’ into his mind. Moreover, by means of such generalised expressions as “man worshipping elephants and wearing turbans, bloody Pakis,” pave the way for his identity dilemma and he is condemned to ‘displaced situation’ just in his

² According to Stuart Hall, such bad representations of the minorities like being idle, lazy, troublemaker and incompatible are called as ‘stereotyping’. To Hall, stereotyping tends to occur where there are huge inequalities of power as in the case of ‘the East’ and ‘the West’ (Hall, 258). In this regard, stereotyping for Hall categorizes people in accordance within a model.

childhood, because his 'home' is irretrievably lost when his parents left Bangladesh for England and yet England, the place he wants to call 'home', does not welcome him because of original culture.

In spite of his prior tendency to Western popular culture and identity, he realizes his original heritage and real position as an 'oppressed other' which is mostly said to his face. As he grows older and becomes more experienced, he begins to shadow forth his rebellious, status-demanding world-view referring to his in-between and lower status. Accordingly, he takes part in groups, and plays the first chair in organizations that challenge the order of the host culture. As a result, Millat is promoted from the leadership of the youth at school to that of the Raggastanis. The Raggastanis are culturally multifarious group, made up mostly of non-British, immigrant youngsters from lower status. The Raggastanis also employ cultural diversity, prefer such diversity to spread over the British society. In addition to this, the use of a mixture language of hybrid teenagers of immigrant parents is common among Raggastanis, which refers to in-betweenness, cultural dilemma of youngsters. This group also testifies the shift of Millat's cultural identity from British culture towards his lower, oppressed identity, Bengali one, which is also apparent in his speech emphasizing his loss of hope as follows: "Millat was a Paki no matter where he came from; he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state. In short, he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country" (2000:234).

Unlike Millat, his twin, Magid is willing to be adapted into western, scientific environment and he calls himself with English name, Mark Smith, he participates in Christian activities such as harvest festival, thanksgiving. On the other hand, Millat who has realized his 'oppressed otherness' and destined status, intends to head back his original, Bengali culture, as a binary opposition of Magid. Moreover, Millat's identity dilemma and subversion of his cultural identity have intensified when he is introduced to KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation), an Islamic fundamentalist group, which is more serious and radical than the Raggastanis. According to Stuart Hall, "the transition to a religious fundamentalist movement is yet another protest to the threat of hybridity and cultural identity in the host culture (1999:73). Millat's membership in KEVIN, in a way, demonstrates his rejection of western values and his struggle to recreate his limited identity because of his cultural heritage as Bengali. In this respect, to Millat, fundamentalism is the solution to the suppressed, lower status that he and the rest of dislocated people have been enduring in the country where they are born and grow up but are not welcome. Just like a hero, Millat takes the responsibility of turning the history around by means of his second generation attitude, which refers to his great-great grandfather Mangal Pande failing in a mutiny against British Government in India. Nevertheless, his previously planned attack to Marcus Chalfen's Future Mouse Project, which symbolizes the superiority of western culture and identity, do not result in success because of Millat's overshooting the target. Consequently, in spite of his charismatic stance, self-confidence of leadership in groups of youngsters and radical religious thoughts aiming at recreating his 'oppressed identity', Millat cannot carry out his second generation mission but is thrown out of the multicultural society as outcast.

Iskender

As for Iskender, the rebellious representative and leader of immigrant youngsters from Eastern London, the most striking difference between Millat and Iskender is that Iskender was born in Turkey and at the beginning of his childhood, his family immigrated to London. Although he makes an effort to adapt into the 'host society' and create the 'cultural identity', he also keeps in mind that he is a member of London's others. In this context, Mehmet Ali Çelikel claims that "identity seek of any immigrant in multicultural societies shows parallelism with the process of remodelling of communities in colonial period, suggested by Ania Loomba and any immigrant surmounts such identity crisis by reconstructing her/his identity" (2011:63). It can be argued that the psychological state of 'otherness' deters Iskender from creating his new cultural identity. Even though he can speak English better than most of native speakers, aspires to various western habits and attends to box training organized by an ex-para trainer having battled in North Ireland; Iskender has also become conditioned that all immigrants in the city are destined to be in lower status and 'oppressed identity'. For instance, while having a chat with youngsters in his group, he explicitly emphasizes this situation in his comment about Arshad's dreams on future: "He could fill his pockets with pictures of the Queen and his car with gorgeous birds, but people like us would always be outsiders" (2012:50). This problematic situation also perplexes Iskender's thoughts

on his love affair with Katie. Even if he loves her, he has hesitated a lot whether to go out with her or not.

When compared to Millat's psychology, it is not possible to observe any sharp and notable transition of Iskender into Islamic fundamentalism because he is mostly the victim of his bad temper, cultural responsibilities and heavy burden of his family caused by fecklessness and disappearance of his father. Yet, fundamentalism and the orator who Iskender knows from some meetings about assaults towards immigrant groups of London are turning, points of his 'honour murder'. At the beginning of his friendship with the orator, Iskender aims at taking some precautions on the purpose of protecting all immigrants from lower status against racist attacks and discriminations: "They wanna kick us out of this bloody country... 'You, me, him, Arabs, Turks, Italians, Jamaicans, Lebanese, Pakistanis. Are we just gonna sit and joke about it [...]" (2012:214). Just like Millat's Raggastanis, Iskender plans to found a structure giving place not only to Muslims but also some other youngsters from different cultures. He wants to show the second generation attitude and to recreate the 'oppressed identity' of immigrants. At this point, Iskender can be regarded as the heroic figure taking the responsibility of the 'others' in his environment unlike his father who is the binary opposition of his disobedient and responsible son. However, learning about his mother's extramarital but non-sexual affair with a Canadian chef cook, Elias; Iskender's heroic plans change direction towards his mother. After that time, the orator, the member of a fundamentalist sect, leads him to the murder: 'well talk to your father. It is his duty, more than yours. But if he is not in... then, it is down to you. I'd never let my mother or sister or wife shame me" (2012:254). Radical, provocative counsel of the orator and his cultural heritage take Iskender's previous title as the charismatic leader in the group of youngsters; instead, stigmatize him as the murderer of his aunt, Jamila-Yeter, the twin of Pembe who is the real target of 'honour murder'.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Immigrants, who had come to live in England after the Second World War, faced with the bitter realities of England and they could not escape from the prejudices for being 'other'. It can be said that aforementioned characters in both novels undergo and experience some problems in adapting themselves into the socio-cultural environment of the English society by means of integration. In the view of this fact, they are regarded as 'the other' and their dreams, wishes fall into pieces. Similarly, the second generations of the immigrant families are also lost in between the traditions of the 'home' culture and the 'host' environment, which is strengthened with biased and racist attacks, abuses. In spite of their second generation attitude to reconstruct 'the oppressed identity' of the other(ed) people, they are thrown out of the multicultural society as outcasts.

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