



RESEARCH PAPER

Displacement, an Identity Crisis Metaphor: A Postcolonial Study of Kureishi's *The Black Album*

¹Shamshad Rasool, ²Amir Jamil and ³Tabassum Iqbal

1. Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan

2. Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan

3. Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** | shamshad.rasool@uog.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how displacement functions as a metaphor for identity crisis, with a specific focus on identifying the relationship between geographical locations and identity formation. For this purpose, the study analyses Kureishi's *The Black Album* applying the theoretical framework of Bhabha, particularly his concept of "Third Space". It also investigates the factors responsible for identity crisis – liminality, hybridity, mimicry, interstices, fragmented self, and narcissism – which contribute to the construct or deconstruction of an individual's identity. The study employs Textual Analysis methodology, utilizing Latent Coding to discover the underlying meaning within the texts. The findings reveal that the characters voluntarily choose to displace themselves from their homelands to the host land in pursuit of their aspirations, dreams, and desires. They struggle to assimilate into the host culture by mimicking the lifestyles and norms of the foreign people. Their attempts to adopt foreign norms and lifestyles fail. They become hybrid individuals trapped in the vicious cycle of belongingness – caught between two worlds, belonging fully to neither. This in-between situation accentuates a profound identity crisis. The analysis also reveals that the characters face intense discrimination and marginalization in their journey of dislocation and attempted relocation.

KEYWORDS Displacement, Identity Crisis, Assimilation, Belongingness, Relocation, Marginalization

Introduction

The world has witnessed a significant dispersal of population, capital, and technology in the aftermath of European colonialism. Colonial powers not only conquered foreign territories but also controlled their resources, economies, and ways of life. This process initiated a complex pattern of migration, from the imperial 'center' to the 'peripheral colonies' and vice versa. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1998) assert, colonizers established settlements in foreign lands, while the colonized natives were forcefully transported to imperial centers as enslaved people and indentured laborers. The colonizer's experience of displacement is considered better than that of the colonized people. They migrate from their home country with complete resources and power to exercise over subjugated people. Displacement, along with the resulting crisis of identities, remains central to contemporary cultural discourse (Bhugra, 2004). It is not a new phenomenon; it is as old as human civilization (Motherway, 2016).

The decolonization during the 20th century led to a rapid increase in the displacement of people from third-world countries to first-world countries. Voluntarily or involuntarily, people go to other parts of the world. Thus, once migrate from their

homeland and origin, people experience feelings of anguish and alienation. They start a futile struggle to relocate themselves in an alien land. They strive hard for assimilation through mimicry. Sadly, these people eventually accept their superficial existence in the host land. After a specific period of time, they become hybrid individuals and come across the ambivalent experience and existence in the host land. They are caught between two ideologies of their respective nations. They neither belong to 'here' nor 'there'. Physical displacement is not the single factor that perturbs the immigrants. However, the accompanying psychological imbalance proves to be more disastrous for immigrants, and, hence, they suffer from an identity crisis. The Displaced people become 'hybrid' individuals; neither do they belong to the 'homeland' nor to the 'host land' and, thus, come across loss of identity (Bhabha, 1994, p.44).

Diasporic writers have observed or experienced identity-related issues in the process of displacement and relocation. Though intellectuals, they also suffer from an identity crisis. Said (1979) suggests that "none of us is outside or beyond geography, emphasizing the fact that locations, surroundings, and spatial movement all over the time affect all of us" (p. 7). Migration and the resultant relocation, the enslavement, or the oppressions of the natives contribute to bringing a crisis in one's identity. Ashcroft et al. (1993) state that "an active sense of self is eroded by displacement... (p. 9). Displaced individuals in an alien land often grapple with questions such as "who am I?" and "where am I?" (p.9), reflecting a profound identity crisis. These questions are not merely rhetoric; they are crucial for psychological survival and self-understanding of those experiencing displacement. The quest for true self or identity is the central issue in today's multicultural world. Therefore, this study is devised to investigate how Kureishi has used the concept of displacement to represent and metaphorically form an identity crisis. The relationship between various geographical locations and identities is also highlighted.

Literature Review

The notion of hybridity challenges the idea of fixity and elucidates that everything is in a process, in a flux. This concept of hybridity is closely related to Bhabha's idea of identity. It occurs at the intersection of four different aspects: socially, linguistically, psychologically, and culturally.

Hall (1990) claims that identity is not an accomplished fact; rather, it is an incomplete production. It is a continuous process that is constituted within the representation. He divides identity into "being" and "becoming". The former is a sense of unity and commonality, while the latter relates identity to the unaccomplished goals and dreams. It emphasizes 'what we might become' and thus considers it open-ended. Hall explains the process of identity formation by using Derrida's theory of difference/differance. Derrida does not consider 'difference' in terms of 'otherness'. For him, 'difference' becomes 'differance' where meaning is constantly deferred for infinite 'sign' or 'signification'. His understanding of 'difference' challenges the rigid binaries that stabilize meaning and representation, illustrating how meaning is never finished or complete but continues to carry other unlimited meanings. Therefore, this study attempts to demonstrate that identities are never fixed; they are constantly in the process of making and unmaking, particularly when dealing with the identities of 'Displaced' or 'converted' people. The term identity is very problematic and encompasses various aspects and meanings, such as the search for identity, loss of identity, and the widely used concept of identity crisis.

Lawler (2008) also suggests that one comes to know the reality of one's identity when one experiences an identity crisis. Further, he states that 'identity crisis' occurs when

people are uncertain about their identity in a different culture, indicating a correlation between such a crisis and an individual's identity.

Social scientists regard identity as 'fluid' and 'multidimensional'. It has been observed that due to excessive migration across countries, the identity of a particular person at a specific time/space undergoes a crisis, and sometimes a threat. It is the threat of identity and existence of the migrant 'other' in the dominant class of people who deteriorate the situation in a society due to their presence. He/she (Displaced migrant) becomes either an unwanted 'alien' in a transnational culture or ultimately faces a sense of loss, alienation, and frustration, hence, an identity crisis.

Metaphor is a word or a poetic expression where one or more words for a concept or idea are used outside their literal meaning to describe a similar concept (Lakoff, 1995). Lakoff and Johnson (2008) describe that the generalization governing poetic metaphorical expressions is grounded in thought, not in language. Thought has preference over language. Metaphor gave depth to the perception of man. According to Deignan (2005), the conceptual theory of metaphor proves very helpful in detecting the underlying meaning of a text. The complexities that lie in this term rest on the types and degrees of displacement. Safran (1991) identifies six features of the Diaspora community: dispersal, alienation, respect, collective memory, a craving for the homeland, a belief in its restoration, and self-definition with this homeland. Baumann (2000) suggests that the term "Diaspora" is now free from its association with Jewish history. It refers to dispersion, which caused countless so-called displaced de-territorialized people.

Displacement is applied to all migrants, whether physically displaced or mentally displaced. The term refers to the experience of those who have willingly migrated from their homeland to a new land. However, it also includes all those affected by the process of colonization (Ashcroft et al., 1991). Bammer (1994) offers a concise definition of displacement, sharing with Diaspora the idea of physical displacement, banishment, and exile, but forcefully drawing attention to the cultural dimension. Anderson and Lee (2005) state that the displacement framework not only considers immigrants, refugees, and exiles as displaced people but also incorporates the often neglected group in diasporic studies, such as migrant workers, expatriates who, by choice and by occupation, live in a different culture, as well as externally or internally colonized people. At the advent of the twentieth century, they categorized four existing forms of displacement as the lived experiences of immigrants, refugees, exiles, expatriates, and migrants: cultural displacement, physical/spatial displacement, Intellectual Displacement, and Psychological/affective displacement. A displaced group can experience one form or several forms of it, and one displaced person can live a dislocated life differently from other members of the group, depending on the relative degree of his/her separation.

For displacement, Heidegger (1996) used the term *Unheimlich* or *Unheimlichkeit*, that is, 'not-at-home-ness' or 'Unhousedness'. It is also explained as 'uncanniness'. He defines it as unsettlement, rootlessness, nothing and nowhere, being 'not-at-home'. He declares that the uncanny is the opposite of homely, familiar, understood, and assimilated. Freud (2003) describes that "The uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-- established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (p.13). Displaced people feel that they oscillate between two worlds. They neither belong to their homeland nor to their host land, and it always results in unsettlement, alienation, and anxiety.

Finally, in a different sense, displacement occurs in all colonies as the native culture is often moved off its territory. They are metaphorically displaced, often ignore their

culture and customs in favor of the values and practices of a superior, colonizing culture. Before the advent of colonial rule, dispersion had been progressive, syncretic, and mutual. However, after imperial occupation, displacement had a more devastating effect on the psychological, political, and cultural lives of the colonies.

Mimicry is a term first introduced by Fanon (1967), a black skin psychologist, who aims to show the reader the impact of colonization on millions of people who have experienced it or are its descendants. In his book, Fanon openly discusses the prejudice of white society, racial discrimination, segregation, and alienation. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1994) describe mimic men as duplicate copies of the colonizers who adopted to a certain extent "their cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values ..." (p.139). However, the result of mimicry is not satisfactory, as the ending product is often vague and a deteriorated copy of the model. The displaced individuals start mimicking the ways of the host land. Their mimicry is the search for their own Asian English way of survival, which is usually a blend of both cultures.

The diasporic writers are chiefly worried about the experience of displacement, relocation, or assimilation, and identity crisis (Ashcraft et al., 1991). Postcolonial literature, criticism, and theory are replete with the experience of migrants. The primary concern of the diasporic writers is toward the fractured and fluid nature of identity. Several writers, critics, and theoreticians have expressed their thoughts about the problems faced by immigrants: Shamshi's *Burnt Shadows*, Mohsin's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Lahiri's *The Lowland* and *Namesake*, Markandya's *The Nowhere Man*, Sidhwa's *An American Brat*, Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird*, and so on.

Smith (1995), Monica Ali (2003), and Roy (1997) discuss the migration and suffering of immigrants in the host society in different ways. Roy's treatment of the theme of identity differs from that of other diasporic writers because her characters never want to change or assert their identity; they wish to return to their motherland. Roy's (1997) character Rahel is the emblem of her characterization. Smith's (1995) interest lies in exploring cultural diversity. Kureishi's fiction is all about location, displacement, and relocation. Characters in his novels are displaced from their home country and then try to relocate themselves in a foreign land. It means that the displacement of the characters fills them with an urge to relocate to the host land. Sometimes, immigrants feel happy in a foreign land because they find a sense of home in their search for 'location'. They feel they can be accepted in the host country as they have started to follow its culture, norms, and traditions.

Nevertheless, the struggle of relocation fails, resulting in nothingness as the host land rejects them altogether. Immigrants are uncertain about their past, present, and future. They are unable to break the shackles of past life and memories; they are not focusing on their present, and their future seems blurred.

Kureishi's work has been analyzed from different perspectives. Kaleta (1998) briefly analyzes *The Black Album* and its various drafts. He discusses the changes in Kureishi's style of writing, characterization, conflict between Western and Eastern relationships, gender portrayals, and the role of music. Kaleta firmly declares that "the novel openly questions religion in its depiction of the conflict between Eastern religious tradition and Western progressive philosophy" (p.139).

From the above-mentioned studies, the researcher has identified some gaps that she intends to bridge through this study. There is a lack of critical analysis regarding metaphorical interpretation. Therefore, this study attempts to analyze *The Black Album* (1995) from the perspective of displacement as a metaphor for identity crisis.

Material and Methods

This study investigates the metaphorical interpretation of the idea of displacement. The method of Textual Analysis is employed as it requires exhaustive and extensive study of the core texts. This methodology involves a kind of reading which intends to "uncover processes and structures at work in a text that may not be immediately discernible" (Kuhn, 1994, p. 82). It helps to probe into the author's mind and draw out the possible interpretations of a text (Neuman, 2007).

The critical ideas related to identity have been studied from the perspective of Bhabha (1994). Bhabha presents various factors that contribute to the loss of identity of displaced people: Interstices, Mimicry, Ambivalence, Hybridity, Marginalization, Displacement, and Liminality.

Displacement on the part of characters always results in change, and change always involves the risk of losing one's identity. Our identities keep changing as we adapt to location, culture, religion, and so on. Such identities are continuously in flux, and thus, subjects are facing the dilemma of an identity crisis. Bhabha (1994) discusses marginalization, displacement, mimicry, hybridity, and interstices as significant factors in the loss of identity, which ultimately constructs or deconstructs one's identity and serves as the framework for the research.

Results and Discussion

In Kureishi's *The Black Album*, three elements are interlinked: location, displacement, and identity construction, formation, or practices. The protagonists always embark on the journey, moving from one place to another to find their true selves. Thus, Kureishi's characters are of mixed origin and are unable to settle in one place. They fall into the category of the diasporic group, which consists of people living together in one country who acknowledge that a nation is often "... buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore...." (Cohen, 1997, p.207). One's location defines who one is or how one wants to be perceived. A location is a lucid tool in both identity construction and identity practices. For example, Kureishi has been identified in three different ways according to his and his readers' location. Kumar (2001) aptly states that "Americans think he is a Brit, Brits think he is an Indian, Indian thinks he is all westernized" (p.118). Kureishi believes that different locations serve as trigger points that construct or deconstruct one's identity. The forthcoming section describes how Kureishi's characters experience displacement and, as a result, suffer from identity crises. Once geographically and mentally displaced, they attempt to assimilate or relocate in the colonizer's world but achieve nothing, resulting in a crisis of identity.

Shahid Hassan, the protagonist, is born and raised in a white English cultural space in Sevenoaks, Kent. Kureishi pays little attention to Shahid's former location, emphasizing instead his identity formation and connection with the new location, the urban space of London. Shahid's family is the least interested in their roots, religion, or cultural practices, and has fully assimilated into Western ways of life. Once uprooted from the native homeland, it relocates completely to a foreign land by accepting its norms, traditions, and cultures. Shahid attempts to search for his roots in London, but he is divided between two sources of self-identification: music and ethnicity, and religious extremism and liberalism. Kureishi's work represents Thatcherite England with a temporal setting of the end of the 1980s. It explores the question of belongingness and the cultural identity issues faced by second-generation immigrants (Moore-Gilbert, 2016).

Shahid is a native of rural Kent. In Sevenoaks, his family runs a travel agency through which they make their living and thus assimilate into white England. The description of the house clearly explains their urge for assimilation. Being progressive, Shahid wants to tear down the old, specifically the latest and newest.

Shahid's desire to disassociate with the old actually denotes his attempt at displacement. As an assimilated immigrant, he cannot fulfill his wish of returning home. He has completely uprooted himself from his native country as "the place enraged him ... the bandits, corruption, censorship, laziness ..." (p.38). His indulgence in greed and drugs shatters his father's future dream. Shahid, on the contrary, strives to achieve a stable sense of self by pushing his potential to the limits on his own terms. Both Shahid and Chili share a cultureless, non-religious life with a capitalistic vision of freedom and the ability to make their own destiny.

Shahid's reading is wholly based on identity politics to look for his roots. Though he starts reading being utterly ignorant of racism or the history of the subcontinent, he eventually relates himself to the black minority. Degabriele (1999) mentions that Shahid's reading of the text generates a sense of resistance to the hegemonic English culture. Eventually, his awareness of himself as a child of a migrant in a new land results in an identity crisis, rootlessness, and a sense of being a 'stranger' or an 'outsider'. By identifying with Malcolm X's and Angelou's otherness, he begins to consider himself as 'freak', as 'stranger', and as 'other' in his own native location.

To resolve his identity crisis, Shahid opts for mimicry. He wants to become like the whites by adopting their racist attitude toward others. He likes to be a racist and abuse "Pakis, niggers, Chinks, Irish, any foreign scum" (p. 10-11), and he becomes one of them. His mimicry is actually a Bhabhaian mimicry but without understanding: he imitates white English racist- their behavior and stereotypical outlook- not because of shared hatred, but because he considers it a symbol of privilege and opportunity. It also reflects Fanon's (1976) claim that, "You are forced to come up against yourself" (p.307). His racism is a demonstration of the dual identity of the second-generation immigrants. He chooses displacement from the limited place of Sevenoaks because it cannot provide him with a sense of belonging or freedom. He relocates himself to London, where he experiences racial prejudice and thus faces an identity crisis.

Shahid's relocation to London shows his desire for intellectual challenges in every aspect of life. To assimilate, he begins attending a college in Kilburn. He associates himself with Professor Deedee Osgood, who encourages her students to study anything that interests them, like Madonna's hair and the story of the leather jacket. His attempt at relocation also fails, worsening his situation. Becoming a student aggravates his feelings of loneliness and social exclusion. His new location does not see him as a British man grown up in Kent; instead, he considers himself an ethnic minority who has migrated from the sub-continent. Shahid learns that London is divided based on ethnicity, religion, and kinship. His desperate need for a sense of belonging forces him to search for faithful Asian companions.

Shahid's attempt to start a new life in a new place and with a new community reflects the interrelatedness of location and identity, fostering a sense of belonging. There are two ways of belonging, religious and sexual. Riaz and the Muslim community urge him to adopt a religious approach, as they understand Shahid's uncertainty and ambivalent position in the host society. By belonging to this group, Shahid begins to feel as one of 'us', not as one of 'them'. His yearning for belonging and a stable identity seems to be fulfilled by his feeling of being with "his people" (p.125), with whom he can easily identify himself.

The other way of belonging is offered by Deedee Osgood, who provides him with an exciting sense of emotional and sexual connection. She asks him to play with his identity practice, enforces him with freedom through sex, music, and drugs. For identification, Deedee takes Shahid to Morlock (the local bar of drug sellers); to the decade party in the suburbs, which is described as a "savage place" (p.61), to her friend Hyacinth's flat in Islington (p.102), and to the White Room. White Room, as the name suggests, is mainly visited by white people. In the White Room, he does not feel excluded or as racially 'other'; Deedee's company gives him the confidence that he can find a place in white society. Shahid's inclination toward Deedee, who rejects any commitments to gender stereotypes and fixity, clearly reveals the flux associated with his identity.

Shahid is confused about the lifestyle. He wears 'Shalwar Kameez' to please and satisfy his Muslim friends, showing them he is one of them. It is considered a colonial mimicry because Shahid masks himself to hide his crisis of identity and search for cultural belonging. Shahid's 'Shalwar Kameez' reflects a layer of identity, both religious and cultural, which he has never experienced or executed before. As a mimic Muslim, he can identify himself with his native identity.

Another facet of his identity is explored by Deedee, who masks him as a woman during their sex adventure. He enjoys the experience of his feminist side and becomes Prince, his Pop Idol, who is half white and half black, half woman and half man, "feminine but macho too" (p.25). Shahid's choice of dressing as a woman is an exploration of identity; an act of sensual and artistic expression that reconstructs and reinvents his self. He shifts his identity based on his location and his relationship with people there. He is an embodiment of an unfixed identity that is defined and constructed according to the situations and the locations. His physical movement in Riaz's group and alternatively in Deedee's arm reveals his mental movement and the fact that his life oscillates. He is continuously wandering between the fixed conventional rules of fundamentalists and freedom associated with liberalism, between fixity and flux, and between displacement and relocation. He states that one day he ardently feels one thing; the next day, he does the opposite. The impermanent states shift from hour to hour, resulting in chaos in his mind and identity. He finds many conflicts within himself, unable to explore his genuine and natural self. Being confused, he tends to escape rather than face an identity split.

At the end of the novel, the famous incident of the burning of Rushdie's book compels Shahid to dig out a single and fixed identity. He has to choose between 'them' (the group, the book burners, and unified, fixed identity) and 'us' (Deedee, freedom, arts, music, and multiple identities). He asserts that he is not limited and chose pop culture and Deedee, which best suited his multiple selves. Again, he chooses to displace and relocate with Deedee Osgood to continue searching for his true identity until he is no longer fun. Shahid transforms completely into a hybrid character and ultimately experiences a crisis of identity.

Displacement is not a kind of identity crisis, but instead somewhat structured and constructed within the framework of an identity crisis. Some basic meanings of identity crisis may extend beyond the conventional understanding of displacement. However, the cross-domain mapping presented in the previous section suggests related meanings. The use of metaphoric interpretations allows one to focus on the predictable features of the target domain and avoid considering aspects that contradict them.

The analysis reveals elements of identity crisis, such as alienation, separation, marginalization, hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry, as different aspects of displacement. The displaced characters prompt readers to consider that their alienation,

marginalization, and hybrid existence reveal a trap in the vicious cycle of belongingness and identification, leading to an identity crisis. The experience of an identity crisis has a concrete meaning and becomes a metaphorical externalization of their displacement. In this way, the distances between the two cross domains, which are displacement and identity crisis, are minimized.

Conclusion

It is appropriate to conclude that Kureishi's fiction is a commentary on the diasporic people who have lost their identity in the process of displacement. The protagonist, Shahid Hassan, dislocates from their native homeland or familiar place in order to fulfill their dreams and desires. In the host land, he tries to relocate themselves by assimilating and adopting its ways of life, culture, and norms. He uses mimicry in the process of assimilation. Nevertheless, his effort is doomed to failure as he experiences the worst kind of racial discrimination in every sphere of life. He keeps on escaping from one location to another to relocate his authentic self. Neither the homeland nor the host land allowed him to assimilate. After experiencing discrimination and alienation, he tends to start living in the 'liminal spaces' or 'third' space, as Bhabha has suggested, which incorporates the culture of both worlds. The 'third spaces' offer him a new outlook and perspective on life, helping him embrace his hybrid identity. The process of displacement and the marginalization the characters experience during this process make them hybrid characters. Eventually, they become aware of their superficial existence and lose their true native identity. By exploring the process of displacement and the subsequent loss of identity, it becomes clear that Kureishi uses this conception as a metaphor for an identity crisis.

In short, the underlying idea conveyed in this fiction is that displacement (external or internal) refers to an identity crisis. The displacement and the resultant relocation make the individual a hybrid entity. Trapped in between, he neither belongs to his homeland nor to the host land. He experiences the crisis in his identity, and, hence, displacement becomes a metaphor of identity crisis. It is based on the blurring of class boundaries. Though the novel does not represent a direct clash of identities, it engages with a nuanced interplay of diverse cultural movements.

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