

KIPLING'S POST-COLONIAL AMBIVALENCE: WHO IS KIM?

*Mehmet Ali ÇELİKEL**

Özet

Makale Rudyard Kipling'in Kim romanında yer alan karşılıklı kültürel önyargılardan yola çıkarak, sömürge sonrası dönemin yazarlarında görülen kararsızlığa (ambivalans) benzer bir tutumun Kipling'de de görüldüğünü, Kipling'in dönemin kolonyal yazarlarından farkı bir bakış açısıyla yazdığını, bu nedenle sömürge dönemi yazarları arasında kategorise edilmesinin güç olduğunu savunmaktadır. Makale aynı zamanda, romanda Kim'in yalnızca ırksal bir melez olmadığını, aynı zamanda kültürel bir melezlik taşıdığını, Kim'in kullandığı melez dilden ve yazarın hem Urduca hem de İngilizce kullanımından örnekler vererek tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Melezlik, sömürgecilik, emperyalizm, kararsızlık (ambivalans), bağımsızlık, sömürge sonrası yazın, kimlik.

Abstract

The article argues that the mutual prejudices in Rudyard Kipling's Kim are also observed in the post-colonial writers' novels, and exhibits the same ambivalence as the post-colonial writers do. Therefore, it is argued that Kipling wrote with a different perspective and, therefore, can hardly be categorised among the colonial writers of his age. The article argues, at the same time, that Kim is not only racially hybrid, but also culturally hybrid, by examples of the use of hybrid language and the use of both Urdu and English in the narrative.

* Doç.Dr., Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı.

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Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* is one of the most renowned British novels about India. Written by a British imperialist author, it traces the story of a hybrid boy called Kim, the orphan son of an Irish colonial officer who dies before leaving India. Kim, functioning both as a native boy and as a sahib in the novel, is brought up by a native Indian woman. This premise of *Kim* immediately invites a consideration of the novel on the grounds of intercultural and interracial relationships. Kim's ambiguity and Kipling's ambivalence about the issues of Indian independence are the most important key points of this book that allow for a widespread debate.

Here, the purpose is to analyse Kipling's ambivalence in colonial writing by taking into consideration various identities suggested for Kim, and by contrasting his affection for India to his objection to independence. Another purpose here is also to highlight the question of "otherness" in *Kim*. Unlike the traditional approach of the mainstream writers of adventure fiction such as Rider Haggard and to some extent Daniel Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe*, the concept of otherness is not only attributed to the native Indians, but also to the British colonisers. In that sense, Kipling foreshadows and shares the presentation of mutual prejudices and ambivalence of the contemporary post-colonial authors like Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, whose post-colonial characters strongly recall Kim. In both Rushdie and Kureishi's novels, the protagonists suffer from the same problems of identity as Kim, with their problems of multiple mother and father figures and with their hybridity. *Kim* also focuses on the identity problems of its protagonist in the same way as the post-colonial writers in question. By reading it from both colonial and postcolonial perspectives, the present study also aims to argue that this novel could well have been written in the *post*-colonial era as Kim's identity problems are caused by imperialism.

Rudyard Kipling was an Imperial intellectual and was pro-imperialism. However, he did not write from the metropolitan centre, because he lived in India and had affection for the place. Despite that, his fiction was still Eurocentric, because his use of the vernacular within the English text contributes to the alienation of the natives in the European perspective, since that language stands out as incomprehensible by an English-speaking reader. Native words are used in such a way that they frequently make one question the meaning. Hence, Penguin's edited edition with Edward Said's 'Introduction' and explanatory notes (1987) makes the novel's vernacular language more comprehensible.

Although Kipling's use of native words in a straightforward way functions as an alienation of the native culture, the vernacular also highlights the author's affinity for the place and his familiarity with its culture and language. As a result, Kipling's competence in Urdu language puts him in a more ambivalent position than a mono-lingual writer would be, because this kind of capability enables him to observe both cultures as an outsider. Being English, Urdu is a foreign language for Kipling, but being fluent in Urdu, he knows how to represent his mother tongue as a "foreign language" through eyes of the natives by adding mispronunciations and grammatically ill-formed sentences produced by them.

Kipling never hesitated to proclaim the European right to colonise because of their civilised status and to write about the colonial experience in India and his desire for its continuity. He was never in favour of Indian independence although he admired and loved the subcontinent and the orient with their lifestyles and philosophies. Edward Said suggests that not only did Kipling write about India, but he was of it. Born there in 1865, he spoke Hindustani as his first language, and thus he was very much like Kim: 'a sahib in native clothes' (Said 1987: 8). Clearly, he could see colonialism from the native perspective, which enabled him to create a character like Kim. However, his Englishness still overcomes his upbringing in Urdu culture. Therefore, he defines the Indians as the "other" right at the beginning of the novel by calling them "natives": "He sat, ... opposite the old Ajaib-Gher – the Wonder House, as the *natives* call the Lahore Museum" (49, italics added for emphasis).

Despite his affection for India, and his personal ties with the culture, Kipling clearly foregrounds the superiority of the ruling colonial class and the inferiority of the natives in *Kim*. Don Randall clarifies that the subordinate relation of the East to the West persists in Kipling's fiction, and the native's inferiority is frequently emphasised in particularly *Kim*. Randall also traces Kipling's narrator making generalising and authoritative remarks about the Orientals and their customs. For example, Kim can 'lie like an Oriental' or Kim can sleep as the train roars because the Oriental is indifferent to 'mere noise' (Randall 79). By making such generalisations, Kipling remains faithful to the established, conventional Western understanding of the Eastern image in *Kim*. Negative characteristics like "lying", and uncivilised, nomadic behaviours like sleeping "indifferently" to noise are all attributed to the Orient.

Such representations above make one categorise Kipling in colonial writing in the conventional sense, in which all authors depicted the natives as "others" with a negative image. In the tradition of colonial writing, the native characters are not treated as individuals. For that reason, it is out of question to focus on their identity problems or ambivalence, which most

colonial writers were reluctant to do, but Kipling's Kim is an individual with a perspective. His identity is the rejection of both perceptions of inferiority and superiority. He has an identity of a sahib and a native, and he acts as a perfect in-between character for both cultures. He speaks English, if with an accent, in the same manner as a 'superior' Englishman and he also speaks a 'native' language. Kim is both white and native, and this hybridity gives him the ability to behave like a native (ability to lie and sleep indifferently to noise) while he works for the colonial regiment and justifies and protects the British holdings. Nevertheless, what makes Kim depicted as an individual, through whom the reader is presented with subcontinent, is his Irish genealogy, which makes him slightly more privileged in Kipling's representation. It is a slight privilege, because his whiteness is not due to Englishness, but Irishness: another British colony.

Who is Kim? This question gives the novel its ambivalence. As opposed to the context of colonialist writing, *Kim* departs from the stereotypes of that fiction. Teresa Hubel states that despite writing from a metropolitan perspective and privileging 'Eastern lifestyles and belief systems over those of the West'; nowhere in Kipling's writing 'do we see him affirming the legitimacy of the Indian nationalist aspirations' (Hubel 3). As aforementioned, the privileged native character is a hybrid boy with an Irish descent, and, thus, Kipling's writing cannot avoid being shaped by imperial and metropolitan ideologies that created the 'most fundamental dichotomy of imperialism' which is 'superiority and inferiority'. From the point of view of metropolitan ideologies, imaging of India as female and Britain as male was not unusual in the colonialist writing as Hubel suggests. Hubel also finds a similarity between the relations of colonised/colonial and wife/husband (4). Indian incompetence is frequently declared in Kipling's texts, which complies with the fact that the English masculinity is important in the imperial adventure fiction.

In this sense, as a study of cultural possession and dispossession, as Sara Suleri claims, *Kim* distributes 'cultural surprise' equally between the coloniser and the colonised (251). The ambivalence of the narrative leaves no place for easy resolutions in *Kim*. The protagonist is English, despite being 'burned black as any native' and being able to speak the vernacular by preference. Kim is the symbol of Kipling's indecisiveness between the East and the West. Kim both possesses the land as a sahib and is possessed by the British as a native. For Kipling, 'the reality of India is bigger than the reality of the West'; therefore, the relationship between India and Britain is impermanent. In Kipling's eyes, 'India will remain long after the British are gone'. It is, in a sense clear that, Kipling celebrates the permanence of India (Hubel 5).

Despite all, Kipling remains in favour of imperialism. Since only unknowable India was compatible with Imperialism, he depicted unidentifiable reality of the subcontinent. However, in such an unidentifiable environment, an in-between character is required, and that character is Kim. He acts as a cultural and lingual translator not only for the colonisers, but also for the indigenous. Only the unknowable India justifies the presence of the British, so Kim, who helps the colonisers cross the boundaries between themselves and the colonised, makes India knowable. His ability to serve both cultures makes Kim feel comfortable in India despite being presented as English. Michael Gorra observes that through Kim's identity, Kipling suggests that one must not know England to be comfortable in India, because Kim's Englishness remains tenuous throughout the novel, and this very Englishness makes him at home in India in a way that no Indian can be (632). A character like Kim is much needed for the British to make India controllable. Although he represents Englishness in the novel; he is unaware of England and does not belong anywhere, which makes him more obedient. His identity does not suggest any certain definition. However, the opening of the novel suggests that Kipling writes from a 'dominating viewpoint' of a white man, and Kim is white (Said 7). In the opening of the novel, the second paragraph declares Kim as a "white boy" although he prefers the vernacular, which turns him into "a poor of white of the very poorest":

He sat, in defiance of municipal borders, astride the gun Zam-Zammah on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher - The Wonder House, as the natives call the Lahore Museum. Who hold Zam-Zammah, that 'fire-breathing dragon', hold the Punjab, for the great green-bronze piece is always first of the conqueror's loot.

There was justification for Kim - he had kicked Lala Dinanath's boy off the trunnions - since the English held Punjab and Kim was English. Though he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain sing-song; though he consorted on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazar; Kim was white - a poor white of the very poorest. (49)

The fact that Kim speaks more comfortable in Urdu than in English, and he is burned black as a native indicates the ambiguity in his character. He is English, but both the English and the natives seem to be "other" for him. This representation atongly recalls the ambivalent approach in Salman Rushdie's novels, particularly in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem, the protagonist of the novel remains ambivalent throughout the novel as to whether denounce or appreciate the British Raj. Then, Rushdie prefers to satirise both the colonised and the colonisers.

Although there is no first-person narration in *Kim*, the narration particularly in the opening paragraph appears to be from Kim's point of view, because Lahore Museum is presented as Ajaib-Gher, and, as explained by the third person narrator, it is what the natives call Lahore Museum. Calling the natives' Ajaib-Gher as Lahore Museum here is an explicit 'linking of knowledge and power', because it is the presentation of Indian culture as a British possession, since the Lahore Museum is also 'the Government's house' (Randall 82). But it should not be ignored that the names given by loyal people are particularly used in order to make the text sound more unidentifiable. Despite that, it also provides a native perspective.

It is revealed in the second paragraph that he preferably speaks the vernacular. Therefore, it is clear that the name Ajaib-Gher is preferred in the first paragraph instead of Lahore Museum. There are two opposing points in the two paragraphs above. In the first one, Kim is presented more like a native boy. On the other hand, in the second paragraph his Englishness is emphasised, despite his equality with the other boys in the bazaar. The equality with the native boys suggests Kim's close and intimate relation with India and its people. This also indicates Kipling's own ties with the land.

Kim is culturally mobile and has an ability to imitate Indians. Such mastery of Kim, as Philip Holden states, results in the transparency of India to him and defends him against the natives. Ajaib-Gher or 'Wonder House' explains the novel's frame upon India (Holden 91). That is, India is not explainable. It is a 'wonder'. One can also argue that Kim symbolises India. His deliberately created hybridity gives the novel more of an unidentifiable character. Again, in the opening page of the novel, Kipling tells of Kim's roots:

... The half-caste woman who looked after him (she smoked opium, and pretended to keep a second-hand furniture shop by the square where the cheap cabs wait) told the missionaries that she was Kim's mother's sister; but his mother had been nurse-maid in a colonel's family and had married Kimball O'Hara, a young colour-sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment. He afterwards took a post on the Sind, Punjab, and Delhi Railway, and his Regiment went home without him. The wife died of cholera in Ferozepore, and O'Hara fell to drink and loafing up and down the line with the keen-eyed three-year-old baby. (49)

Thus, only by blood, Kim is an English boy. He grew up like a native boy in native culture. Moreover, Mavericks, the regiment his father worked for, was an imaginary Irish regiment. That is another problem of identity in Kim's roots. Kipling intentionally adds the ambiguous flavour to the content of the novel. The ambiguity he offers suggests inevitable comparisons with the postcolonial era. No matter how paradoxical it might seem, it is relevant

to argue that colonial and postcolonial worlds are interdependent in the case of Rudyard Kipling, because his ambivalence in *Kim*, and his protagonist's dualities may well be read from the perspectives of post-colonial assumptions.

Don Randall argues that the selection of Kim as the central and organising character in the novel allows for 'an imperial ethnography of British India'. Kim is a part of Kipling's narrative discourse that reinforces an 'Orientalist representation of India as part of a timeless, eternal East' (Randall 83). Kim remains in his teens throughout the novel. Lama is also an ageless and timeless character symbolising India's myths and legends. Kim's indefinable character is the otherness of India that the colonial writers confidently believed justified their rule. Kipling never raises the question of a political conflict between Kim's dual identity. He leaves Kim as a boy, so that the reader's inevitable expectation that he would grow up to struggle for independence is turned down. He may shift identities, but he always stays an in-between character. His abilities may be 'predicted on his whiteness, but the novel as a whole remains deliberately abstracted from history'. This was necessary for Kipling, because to imagine India 'as home, [he] had to exclude history' (Gorra 634). However, when considered in terms of Kim's dualities, no matter how alien and mysterious they might be depicted, the novel can never stay out of historical consideration.

The analysis of Kipling's text reveals the 'cultural and subjective hybridisation' of Kim. The hybrid Kim's place in 'his various cultural contexts, difference and opposition' must be understood in cultural terms. The hybrid boy is 'an instrument for imperial ethnography', because he serves 'to mediate cross-cultural colonial relations' occupying a 'middle ground' between the coloniser as male and European; and the colonised as non-European. He is identified 'both with the coloniser and with the colonised', and he is both of them (Randall 84). He is European by birth, and represents the imperial authority. On the other hand, his bringing up by a native woman, whose ethnic origin is not at all certain, represents his nativeness. Therefore, his identity is not stable. In a sense, his otherness and his undefinable hybrid character help the imperialist Kipling to present an unknowable India through a hybrid character that serves both as an informant for the colonial officers and as a translator.

Kim, on the other hand, is curious about his roots: "I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?" His soul repeated again and again."(331). He explicitly questions his identity, although he is presented as English and white. He cannot determine his cultural place. He serves loyally to the British colonialism, and maintains a sahib's status while remaining 'a graceful child of the bazaars and the rooftops' (Said 8). His cultural difference from the British is more obvious than his difference from the

natives in most cases. One of the sarcastic remarks about him is on his ability to lie 'like an Oriental'. Despite that, Kipling clearly aligns him with British authority, but he is somehow situated on both sides of the power divide. As an informant, he is an ambivalent figure representing imperial power as well as, 'at least potentially' the resistance to that power (Randall 84).

It is therefore relevant to ask: Is Kim's hybridity a result of colonialism solely, or is this kind of hybridity also seen in the postcolonial era? In the opening paragraphs of the novel, Kipling clearly employs significantly alien words such as 'Ajaib-Gher', or 'Zam-Zammah'. This language strikingly clarifies the cultural difference. In Randall's views, this is more than a cultural difference. It is a cultural differentiation, not only for Kim, but also for a 'we' that is proposed as the narrative enunciation. However different this 'we' might seem from the natives, it is clear that the proposed 'we' shares the native language. Therefore, the language of the novel is inevitably hybrid. This again recalls the conventional colonial dichotomy: 'We' is the colonisers, and 'they' is the subordinate natives. Nevertheless, in the entire universe of the novel, English is 'very rarely the spoken language'. Its language, as Randall argues, is more hybrid than it needs to be. The narrator, without italicising or providing the English translation chooses a variety of alien terms. This is certainly the narrator's 'easy familiarity with subcontinental languages' that supports 'his claim to ethnographic authority' (Randall 85).

In the course of the novel, the narrator speaks of the English as if referring to an alien group. The narrator's point of view changes its direction from the dominant English to a native's point of view. In a sense, the point of view of the colonised becomes the central standpoint of the narrative, as in post-colonial discourse. Remarks such as 'I do not understand the customs of white men.' (140), 'the careless, open-spoken English folk' (148), 'the dull fat eyes of . . . Sahibs' (118) evidently give the clues of a change of identification. The English, then, find their position as much as the natives in 'they' of narrative enunciation (Randall 85).

In the following paragraph, the hybridity of the colonised land becomes more outrageous in the same manner as the postcolonial identities that can become neither English nor Indian particularly after the independence:

Kim looked him over out of the corners of his eyes. He was a Sahib in that he wore Sahib's clothes; the accent of his Urdu, the intonation of his English, showed that he was anything but a Sahib. He seemed to understand what moved in Kim's mind ere the boy opened his mouth, and he took no pains to explain himself as did Father Victor or the Lucknow masters. Sweetest of all - he treated Kim as an equal on the Asiatic side. (199)

This is one of Kim's discoveries of the keys to his identity. He starts questioning his identity more: 'What am I? Mussalman, Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist? That is a hard knot.' (191) As a hard knot, this is the crucial question of the novel as well as 'Who is Kim?'. Kim is the symbol of the cultural hybridisation of the subcontinent. Kim's mother tongue is Hindustani in which he thinks whereas he speaks English 'in a clipped uncertain sing-song' as described in the opening page of the novel.

Andre Viola considers *Kim* as the novel born out of Kipling's 'nostalgia for his infancy and early childhood in India'; therefore, the book adopts an unusual mellow tone towards the East (160). Unlike the colonial discourse written from the metropolitan perspective, there is an unmistakable shift and ambivalence in the narrative standpoint. The English becomes 'the other' from the indigenous perspective. Kipling presents an inverted discourse of the colonial fiction.

Despite being English by birth, Kim's English is clumsy:

'There is a River in this country which he wishes to find so verree much. It was put out by an Arrow which -' Kim tapped his foot impatiently as he translated in his own mind from the vernacular to his clumsy English. (137)

The clumsiness of his English alone makes the English 'the other'. Despite being an imperial intellectual who depicts India as alien and mysterious in many of his stories, Kipling placed India's beauties in the centre of *Kim*, unlike any of his predecessors. Michael Gorra finds a similarity between Kipling and Rushdie in this sense. The marvels of India, its people, its ideologies, its belief systems are in the centre, rather than the colonisers (Gorra 633).

Gorra also links the hybrid identities of Kim and Rushdie's Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses*. He even sees Chamcha as a postcolonial version of Kim, because Chamcha is 'a professional mimic who can do a thousand voices precisely because no one of them is authentically his own' (Gorra 634). In both *Kim* as the representative of the colonial fiction and in Rushdie's fiction as the representative of post-colonial, the text is shaped by descriptions, and all these descriptions are ambivalent. As suggested so far, colonial and postcolonial fictions are interdependent, because there would not have been a postcolonial literature had there not been colonialism. Moreover, Kim's ambivalence adds more to this interdependence, because the central standpoint that shifted from the coloniser's to the native's in *Kim*'s universe could well be observed in postcolonial literature. The shifted perspectives in postcolonial discourse try to have the power of description.

However, postcolonial characters try to describe themselves rather than being described as other, like the ambiguous narrator in the centre of *Kim*.

In the light of these observations, one might conclude that although *Kim* was written during the colonial era by an imperial writer, its style and narrative perspective is not Anglo-centric. The author significantly highlights the mutual prejudices and misunderstandings between the two cultures in the same way as the contemporary post-colonial authors do, by employing the perspectives of both Kim and the British official. Kim, depicted as a hybrid boy, is endowed with a double-identity that provides him with both native perspective and “white English” perspective. Such representation provides the novel’s strong sense of ambivalence. In a sense, it foreshadows and influences most protagonists of the Anglo-Indian post-colonial writers who wrote in the post-independence era. Therefore, Kipling, though regarded as a pro-imperialist author during colonialism, presents an ambivalent standpoint similar to that of post-colonial writers in terms of his ambiguous approach to the ideology of colonisation and the idea of Indian independence. It is, therefore, hard to read and classify his fiction among the mainstream colonial British novelists, as his style does not present a determined approach of the colonisers in the same milieu.

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