

## Colonizer's Double Vision in *Camp X-Ray*

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**Abstract:** Twenty-first century has been endowed with the appearance of a new art form which is the cinematic language. And by the beginning of the twenty-first century cinematic language has thoroughly pervaded the world and became the best way of conveying new artistic messages. In this respect, a film can be demonstrated like a literary work in the lenses of different critical theories. Likewise, one can explore postcolonial perspectives not only in the literary works but also in different films produced lately. *Camp X-Ray*, directed by Peter Sattler in 2014, is among the films screened after 9/11 attacks dealing with this issue. It revolves around the story of a group of innocent Muslims who have been arrested and detained accused of implicating in the 9/11 attacks at Guantanamo Bay. This film can be examined from the postcolonial perspective which shows the influence of the colonized on the colonizer. In this research, it is tried to show how a colonizer (a female soldier), who wants to bring the colonized under her own control, is herself soaked into the colonized's world. Thus, "double consciousness" or "double vision", which is a way of perceiving the world divided between the colonizer and the colonized as two antagonistic cultures, can be highlighted in this study. In this case, Homi K. Bhabha's theories of "hybridity" and "ambivalence" are applied to show the impact of the colonized on the colonizer.

### I. Introduction:

Before and toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in each era there was a specific art form for conveying new messages to the audience. In the ancient time, these messages were transmitted to the audience through oral presentation of epic poems, songs, puppet shows and finally theatrical performances. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of fiction to the public a new kind of art form appeared. Novel became the popular art form of those eras. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the art world witnessed the emergence of a new gate to the art forms. Since then, radio, film and television have been known as the best and prominent forms of art among which the film is the most versatile one to convey the message of art and literature to the audience. The role of vision, indeed, is a crucial one in the popularity of this new form of art. Consequently, living in the era of visual culture arouses the directors to make films and critics to analyze and criticize them. Likewise, twenty-first century has been endowed with the appearance of a new art form which is the cinematic language. And by the beginning of the twenty-first century cinematic language has thoroughly pervaded the world and became the best way of conveying new artistic messages. In this respect, a film can be demonstrated like a literary work in the lenses of different critical theories.

Cinema of the United States started from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Hollywood inaugurated as the city of film industry in Los Angeles. In those days short motion picture films

were shot there. Later with the development of cinema many films and TV productions were produced in Hollywood and now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it can be claimed that Hollywood is known as the best producer of cinematic productions. Accordingly, the name “Hollywood” is given to any film or TV production made in the Greater Los Angeles. *Camp X-Ray*, directed by Peter Sattler in 2014 in Los Angeles, is also a product of Hollywood which is among the films screened after 9/11 attacks dealing with this issue.

### A. *Camp X-Ray*

On September 11, 2001, there were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States. *Camp X-Ray* revolves around the story of a group of innocent Muslims who have been arrested and detained accused of implicating in the 9/11 attacks at Guantanamo Bay. These Muslims, who are called “detainees” in the camp, are watched by the guards every three minutes to be prevented from committing suicide. And this shows the exertion of power done by the colonizer on the colonized. As mentioned before, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by the development of the cinematic language a film can be considered as a literary work to describe its concept and message to the audience. In this case, one can explore postcolonial perspectives not only in the literary works but also in different films produced lately. Thus, *Camp X-Ray* can be examined from the postcolonial perspective which shows the influence of the colonized on the colonizer. In this research, it is tried to show how a colonizer (a female soldier), who wants to bring the colonized under her own control, is herself soaked into the colonized’s world. Thus, “double consciousness” or “double vision”, which is a way of perceiving the world divided between the colonizer and the colonized as two antagonistic cultures, can be highlighted in this study. In this case, Homi K. Bhabha’s theories of “hybridity” and “ambivalence” are applied to show the impact of colonized on the colonizer.

### B. The interaction between colonizer and colonized in postcolonial criticism

In the early 1990’s and after the Second World War, postcolonial criticism has been brought to the fore and became a major force in literary studies. The most part of this criticism deals with the relationship and interaction between the colonizer and the colonized. During the history, colonizers who believed in their own superiority over the colonized peoples tried to internalize the colonized’s inferiority and rule over them. As Lois Tyson in his *Critical Theory Today* says:

The colonizers believed that only their own Anglo European culture was civilized, sophisticated or as postcolonial critics put it, metropolitan. Therefore, native peoples were defined as savage, backward, and undeveloped. Because their technology was more highly advanced, the colonizers believed that their whole culture was more highly advanced, and they ignored or swept aside the religions, customs and codes of behavior of the peoples they subjugated. So the colonizers saw themselves at the center of the world, the colonized were at the margins [1, pp. 419].

In this regard, colonizers use simulation, or as Bhabha calls it “mimicry strategy” or “sly civility”, as a strategy to have the control over the colonized and prove their superiority. According to Homi K. Bhabha, “mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” [2, pp. 85]. Colonizers through this strategy want to civilize the colonized by asking them to repeat and imitate their cultures but they do not mean to adopt the colonized into their equals. In other words, colonizers want the colonized “almost the same but not quite” [2, pp. 86] just to make the colonized internalize their value system. “The fundamental purpose of the colonizers to use the simulation is to keep enough distance from the colonized and maintain their hegemony of rule over them” [3, pp. 776]. On the other hand, simulation is also a strategy of resistance for the colonized. Colonized peoples by using this strategy rebel against the hegemony of the colonizer. As Annie Reich says, “It is imitation... when the child holds the newspaper *like* his father. It is identification when the child learns to read” [qtd. in 2, pp. 61]. And this learning can be terrifying for the colonizers because it blurs the boundary between the colonizer and the colonized.

Therefore, the exertion of power is not a straightforward one from the colonizer to the colonized, from top to the bottom, but it is also from colonized to the colonizer.

Homi Bhabha in his seminal book *The Location of Culture* deconstructs Edward Said's notion of the way that the colonizer straightforwardly treats the colonized as the Other and inferior. Bhabha argues that although the colonizer wants to internalize inferiority in the colonized, at the same time he is afraid of the refined colonized. The refined colonized, indeed, influences on the colonizer too and this is a mutual complex relationship between these two. Bhabha believes that "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" [2, pp. 123]. The colonized resists the colonizer, exerts power on it and intimidates it. In the other words, as Huddart says, "the play between equivalence and excess makes the colonized both reassuringly similar and also terrifying" [4, pp. 41].

The colonizer through his hegemonic power tries to make the colonized aware of the difference between them and themselves. This awareness, indeed, causes both the colonized and the colonizer to understand themselves with the help of "Otherness". Therefore, the identity of these two groups can be related to each other. Iser stipulates:

Otherness turns into a mirror for self-observation, and such a relationship sets the process of self-understanding in motion, because the alien that is to be grasped realizes itself to the extent to which one's own dispositions come under scrutiny. The knowledge thus obtained is twofold: by getting to know what is different, one begins to know oneself [5, pp. 36].

Similarly, in *Camp X-Ray* the identity of the colonizer is revealed through her interaction with the colonized and his influence upon her (the female soldier). Consequently, the colonizer finds herself in a hybrid and ambivalent situation, between the world of the colonizer and the world of the colonized.

### C. The concept of "hybridity" and "ambivalence" in postcolonial criticism

"Hybridity" is a considerable concept in Postcolonialism which is introduced by Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha in *The Location of Cultures* defines hybridity and says:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination [2, pp. 160].

It can be explicated that in Bhabha's view the interaction between the colonized and the colonizer does not just affect the colonized, but the colonizer as well. Thus, the colonizer sees himself in a space between two worlds, the world of the colonizer and that of the colonized. Bhabha calls this the "third space", which is full of contradictory and ambivalence. Accordingly, "in the colonial encounter, it is not just the colonized who are subjected to Western ways, the colonizers too are transformed, while the colonized deploy borrowed forms to tell their own, distinct narratives which unsettle and subvert the cultural authority of the colonizers" [6, pp. 136]. In fact, it can be argued that 'hybridity' is the result of catching between two different things. It is a kind of dilemma arisen to the one's mind and heart which brings a sense of ambivalence.

Hybridity is a mixture of two opposite things, often two opposite cultures or identity, which brings a "double consciousness" or "double vision" with itself. Accordingly, in *Camp X-Ray*, Amy Cole, who is a female soldier and in the figure of a colonizer, becomes involved in such a sense when she speaks with one of the detainees named Ali, who can be considered as a colonized. Thus, in this article, it is tried to investigate the colonizer's double vision and the impact of the colonized on the colonizer based on Bhabha's theories of "hybridity" and "ambivalence".

## II. Colonizer's "double vision" in *Camp X-Ray*:

*Camp X-Ray*'s story happens eight years after the 9/11 attacks and starts with arresting a group of innocent Muslims immediately after the attacks, as the agents of these terrorist deeds, and transferring them to Guantanamo Bay where the Camp X-Ray is. The guys, who are called "detainees" instead of prisoners, are kept in very small cells in the camp and the guard soldiers are asked to watch them every three minutes to prevent them from committing suicide. As Ransdell, the corporal in the camp, says to the new soldiers, "Some of you might think you're here to prevent them from leaving. You're not. The walls do that for us. You are here to prevent them from dying" [7, Ransdell-speaking scene]. Among the soldiers there is a female one, Amy Cole, who has left her small town and joined the Army to do something important. While doing her job, one of the detainees named Ali Amir starts speaking with her and gradually influences on her. Ali, a Muslim from Germany, is an educated man who spends his time reading books and is asking and waiting for Harry Potter's last book for two years to know its end that whether Snape, a character in Harry Potter, is a good guy or not.

Pursuant to the above information, *Camp X-Ray* can be considered as a film which deals with the mutual interaction between the colonizer and the colonized. In earlier writings of Colonialism, such an interaction had often been denied and just the colonizers had influences upon the colonized. As Bertens notes:

Aime Cesaire, for instance, claimed in his 1955 *Discourse on Colonialism* that between colonizer and colonized there is no human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production [8, pp. 206].

But, in Postcolonialism, based on Bhabha's view, the interaction between these two antagonistic groups does not just affect the colonized, but the colonizer as well. And because of this fact, the colonizers often do not want the colonized know anything about them. Likewise, on the first mission of Amy Cole in the camp, when she and three other guards go to calm down one of the detainees, Ransdell takes off Amy's name from her uniform and mentions her, "No names on the block... You can talk to 'em, but do not let these guys know anything about you. Do not let them get inside your head" [7, putting on guard's uniform scene]. Indeed, it can be argued that the colonizers are afraid of the colonized. Regarding themselves as civilized and the colonized as savage, degenerate, and brutal, the colonizers are not glad to contact with the colonized too much, because they fear the colonized to be like them and endanger the colonizer's superiority. As in the initial discourse, Ransdell tells the soldiers about the detainees:

Suicide watch every 3 minutes. Do not let that repetition lower your guard. That's exactly what these guys are looking for. You got to remember... some of these dudes have been locked up in here for eight years. They've been here before some of you were even in high schools. They know the procedure better than you do. They will test you and they will best you [7, Ransdell-speaking scene].

Thus, in the camp the soldiers are not allowed to speak with the detainees more than it's needed and even when they speak with them they are not permitted to give any information about themselves to the detainees. Accordingly, on the first days of her shift in the Army, Amy Cole is really serious and strict in her confrontation with Ali, who is called the detainee 4-7-1. Amy, who is called "Blondie" by Ali, avoid talking with him and just answers him in a coolly way which enrages Ali to throw a shit cocktail to her. He shouts: "You Americans treat us like animal? Okay, I am an animal!" [7, Ali's-shouting scene]. As a penalty for Ali's action, the guards move him from cell to cell every two hours for a week. And this is after those moments which Amy Cole starts making connection with Ali. She reads his dossier which is filled by the guards and from now on, her ambivalence and hybridity begins.

Amy describes the camp's situation as a "weird situation" [7, Amy & Rico-speaking scene] and tries to approach the detainee, Ali. She finds the colonizers, the guards, as brutal persons. She imitates Ali's routines. Like him, she eats in her private, plays football alone, and avoids being in the guard's gathering. As Homi Bhabha articulates, "The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" [2, pp. 88]. Accordingly, Amy plunges into a duality of manner and identity which is indeed the "double vision" or "double consciousness". Ali and other detainees, who are considered as the colonized peoples, resist upon their freedom even in the prison. They go on a hunger strike for five days only to get an elliptical machine which none of them will use it and their purpose is just to resist the colonizer's rules. Huddart argues:

Bhabha's close textual analysis finds the hidden gaps and anxieties present in the colonial situation. These points of textual anxiety mark moments in which the colonizer was less powerful than was apparent, moments when the colonized were able to resist the dominance exercised over them. In short, Bhabha's work emphasizes the active *agency* of the colonized [4, pp.1].

In this regard, Amy who does not believe in the colonized's inferiority anymore and somehow sees herself in the position of a colonized also wants to be like them. Eating detainees' food is forbidden for the guards, but Amy eats them in order to have her own freedom. She does not repeat the Army's motto anymore which is "To defend freedom" [7, Army's standing at attention scene]. She believes that keeping these guys in such a condition and reporting them all the moments is just "like a waste of time" [7, Cleaning Ali's cell scene]. In a scene when Ali is playing football alone in a cage and Amy is watching him, a conversation happens between them,

-You know compliant detainees get to play on a real field together?

-Uh-huh. They are lucky.

-If you stop acting up, they'll transfer you. You know that, right?

-Mm-hmm.

-And you don't care?

-It's those guys who don't care Blondie. You know they don't care about anything, just the things that make their life easier. You guys always say, "follow these rules... we will let you watch TV," huh? But if I follow your rules, what does it mean? It means that I'm agreeing that you have the right to give me rules, huh? Well, you don't. You don't have the right to give me rules. So, me... I never agree to follow your rules... never. You know, maybe you think I'm stupid for this.

-No, you're not stupid.

-No. I mean, maybe you're right, but...

-You're definitely not stupid.

[7, Ali's playing football scene]

Indeed, Amy comes to such a belief that the detainee is not a stupid person, he is not inferior. She learns that she is a colonized too. "The colonized returns the colonizer's gaze" [4, pp. 45] and she sees herself in an "in-between" space. Pal Ahluwalia in *Politics and Post-colonial Theory: African inflections*, refers to Bhabha as arguing that "there is an in-between space which characterizes identity" [9, pp. 128]. Amy is oscillating between two worlds, the world of the colonized and the world of the colonizer. And this oscillation brings her a hybrid identity and a 'double vision'. It can be exclaimed that "the colonized are the only victims of colonial system; however, there is a problem in front of the colonizer which makes them victim as well. This problem may be: fading identity" [10, pp. 137].

In the final minutes of the film when Amy is doing her job watching the detainees, a conversation happens between Ali and her which makes Ali aware that Blondie (Amy) is leaving next month.

-I don't like this month. Always these new guards... Treating us like very bad guys.

-They'll learn... Like I did.

-What did you learn? Huh? Tell me. You must learn something, huh, when I throw that shit on you... you learned something, huh? Or when we're trying to kill ourselves here, with hunger strike, you learned something... huh? ... You said. So tell me... what is that? I want to know. What did you learn? Only you think you know, but you know nothing. You know nothing about me. You and me... We are at war.

-I don't see it like that.

-Then you see nothing.

[7, Ali & Amy conversation scene]

The news that Blondie will never sign up again there makes Ali upset so that he decides to commit suicide. Amy hesitates whether to call the guard or let the detainee choose his way, and finally she does the second one. Indeed, outside Amy is a colonizer and inside she considers herself in the place of a colonized and has a sense of sympathy toward Ali. "This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double-edge [...] which provides hybridity" [11, pp. 148]. As Bhabha says, "[The] importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" [12, pp. 211]. Amy is caught between two different identities: to be Blondie or to be Amy, to understand the colonized or to be a colonizer. Although because of Amy's words Ali gives up killing himself, in that scene Amy's ambivalence can be seen obviously. Actually, in her view, the detainee (the colonized) is a good guy and the guards (the colonizers) and their deeds are brutal. She introduces herself to Ali: "It's Amy. You keep calling me "Blondie", but... My name's Amy Cole from Moore Haven, Florida. And I like you, Ali. I really do" [7, Ali's suicide scene]. And she decides to never join the Army and travel instead. It can be explicated that Ali, as a colonized, changed the identity of the colonizer, Amy, into a hybrid one. He penetrated into her mind with his words, influenced her, and turned her view. And the proof of this was the last book of Harry Potter which Amy put among the cart books with a sentence written on the first page of it, "To Ali; I don't know if Snape's a good guy. But I know you are. Love, Blondie" [7, Ali opening Harry Potter's book scene].

### III. Conclusion:

Postcolonial criticism revolves around the study of those works of art, which are dealing with the postcolonial discourses and issues. Accordingly, the interaction between the colonized and the colonizer, which is one of the major discourses in Postcolonialism, can be analyzed in such studies. In Colonialism, the interaction between these two groups, the colonizer and the colonized, was a despotic master-slave relation and the exertion of power was straightforwardly from top to the bottom, from colonizer to the colonized. Then, after the downfall of colonial regimes, in Postcolonialism, the interaction between these two antagonistic groups changed to a mutual one so that the colonized also could exert power to affect the colonizer. As Homi K. Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* speaks about the exertion of power done by the colonized on the colonizer and rejects the inferiority of the colonized in this way. He emphasizes on the "mimicry strategy" as a strategy used by both the colonized and the colonizer in two contrary directions so that the colonized uses it as a way of resistant and the colonizer uses it as a strategy to internalize the colonized's inferiority.

*Camp X-Ray*, directed by Peter Sattler, deals with the story of a group of Muslims, who have been detained innocently accused of implicating in the 9/11 attacks, and the Army soldiers, who are watching them to prevent them from committing suicide. More specifically, it is the story of Ali and Amy, who can be considered as the colonized and the colonizer, and their interaction which brings

Amy a hybrid identity and an ambivalent situation that finally leads to her 'double vision'. In fact, in this film, the impact of colonized on the colonizer can be seen obviously. The colonizer, under the influence of the colonized, mimics the colonized and becomes involved in the colonized's worlds. Therefore, in this study, our focus was to investigate the influence of the colonized on the colonizer and the double vision of the colonizer as the result of this influence.

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