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Moth Smoke: Novel of Globalization

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Research Guide

Abstract:

Globalization is the process of integration of economies and societies, and the intermingling of different cultures. In other words, globalization is the process of the mobilization and distribution of resources (tangible and intangible) from one geographic boundary to another. It leads to interdependence. In spite of the fact that the ongoing global changes are essential to human beings, these changes do not similarly affect everyone in society. Though globalization can have a positive impact on people, it can also drastically affect some sectors of society by widening the gap between the poor and the rich. This article proposes to analyze Mohsin Hamid's first novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) through the lenses of Globalisation. *Moth*



Smoke tells the story of a crime and its judgment through a multiplicity of voices. The effects of globalization can be seen as both positive and negative as Mohsin Hamid shows in his novel, *Moth Smoke*. Hamid shows these different effects of globalization through his characters, Mumtaz and Daru. There seem to be both positive and negative differences that come with globalization and it's difficult to pick a side.

Key Words: Globalisation, Post-Colonialism, Marxism, Class- conflict, Identity Crisis.

Globalization can be defined as "a process in which more and more people become connected in more different ways across larger distances". This worldwide integration permits people to travel, communicate, and invest internationally. It helps companies "market their produces widely, acquire capital and human resources more efficiently, share advanced technology, and enjoy economics of scale". Globalization also implies a shrinking of the world in terms of space and time, since it "increases the 'thickness' of human interaction and the impact this interaction has on the earth itself ". However, globalization has transformed our present social conditions and contributed to the weakening of nationality and the creation of globality. This rapid process of intercontinental, social, political, and economic integration has come with promises of equality and high standards of living for everyone. In spite of the fact that the ongoing global changes are essential to human beings, these changes do not similarly affect everyone in society. Though globalization can have a positive impact on people, it can also drastically affect some sectors of society by widening the gap between the poor and the rich.

The idea of globalization is deconstructed by critics like Chomsky, Falk, Petras, and Veltemyer, who argue that it is an adverse force. Poverty, financial instability, and inequality have been created by the "profound asymmetries between the center and the periphery" it creates.

As John Tomlinson conceives, "the impact of globalization in the cultural sphere has, most generally, been viewed in a pessimistic light. Typically, it has been associated with the destruction of cultural identities, victims of the accelerating encroachment of a homogenized, westernized, consumer culture. This view tends to interpret globalization as a seamless extension of – indeed, as a euphemism for – western cultural imperialism." Or as D. Ray



Heisey puts it, “on the negative side, as cultures are propagated and advanced, share and mix with one another, and are exposed to one another in our fast-moving world of media and transportation, they are vulnerable in the ways they may influence each other and become modified from their original and authentic form. When dominant cultures overtake and absorb marginal cultures in any part of the world, the danger of losing cultural integrity on the part of each culture is evident.”

In the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, globalization ushers in a postcolonial and postnational era. "Spivak argues that the popular conception of globalization as the financialization and computerization of the globe leads to a vicious system of exploitation," writes Katie Smith in her evaluation.

Homi K. Bhabha is without a doubt another known authority on the subject of cultural aspects of globalization. The term "hybridity," which has been defined as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization," has been one of the most controversial ones he used in postcolonial studies. A person who is hybrid is considered to be in a condition of "inbetweenness," being between two cultures that are different.

Moth Smoke is the best novel written by a prominent British Pakistani novelist Mohsin Hamid. He has depicted contemporary Lahore through the “post-post colonial” framework very successfully. All the characters of the novel are highly affected by economic globalization and that has transformed Lahore’s life completely. Unfolding during a few months in the spring of 1998, Moth Smoke evaluates the characters from Lahore who are highly influenced by western lifestyle and thus changed their personality thoroughly. They possess Business Administration degrees from west.

Darushikoh Shezad is the protagonist of the novel. He has clung to the fringes of globalization. He was unable to study abroad, he studied MBA in Lahore and works in a local bank for modest pay. His best friend, Aurangzeb (“Ozi”), is the son of rich and corrupt father who pursued his degree from abroad and recently returned from New York with his Wife, Mumtaz. Creating "little shell companies, and open dollar accounts on sunny islands, far, far



away" from Lahore, Ozi is carrying on his father's legacy. The primary contrast in the novel's opening is between Ozi's view that corruption is so pervasive that it is the only path to prosperity and Daru's battle to navigate the system.

Daru is literally "locked out of the kitchen" due to his family's poverty, but Ozi cherish the luxury of his father's wealth. At the start of the book, Daru's position is unstable. When he insults a significant client by asking about his deposit of thirty thousand dollars, he eventually loses his job at the bank. The story follows Daru's fall into destitution, drug use, break-ins, and an extramarital romance with Mumtaz, Ozi's wife, who eventually attempts to obtain proof to clear Daru by writing newspaper articles under a fake identity. By the book's finale, Ozi finds out about the extra marital love relationship—which is already over—and arranges for Daru to be charged with killing a small kid in a hit-and-run accident. The work is planned around allusions to Daru's trial, and Daru's first-person account is contested throughout by evidence from other characters, such as Mumtaz, Ozi, and Daru's co-conspirator, Murad Badshaw. Though the reader's attention is ultimately directed toward Daru and Mumtaz, the entire story is structured to raise doubts about the reality of each character. As the quotation at the start of this essay demonstrates, Hamid fails to connect Pakistan's colonial and postcolonial past to the corruption that is the focus of the novel—financial, social, cultural, and personal corruption in Lahore.

By creating a historical context for the book that doesn't draw a link between the Raj, its aftermath, and the events described in *Moth Smoke*, Hamid swiftly discourages it. This happens shortly after the start of the book (and continues at the end) when Hamid relates the sons of Shah Jahan (1628-1658), one of the last Mughal Emperors, with the characters in *Moth Smoke*. Readers from South Asia will be immediately familiar with the story, which gives the text a quasi-allegorical framework. Shah Jahan visits a Sufi saint, worried for the future of his empire, to find out which of his sons will be taking over after him. Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb are the two main heirs. The saint of Sufis says that it will be Aurangzeb. This revelation corresponds with history, since the ardent and intolerant Islamist Aurangzeb imprisoned his father, took control of the Empire, declared a fatwa against his brother, and eventually saw him put in a cage and executed. The Mughal Empire was basically wiped out



by the despotic and violent reign of Aurangzeb. The dispute in the book between Ozi and Daru is intended to parallel the real-life conflict between Aurangzeb, the prejudiced son of Islam, and his more compassionate, secular, pantheist son. (Dara Shikoh).

We ought to look deeper how it examines the subject of global financial services, how globalization feeds social stratification, and how it sees its characters as generic inhabitants of a global city that could exist anywhere, like New York, London, Berlin, or Tokyo. It seems that Hamid's remark in the epigraph—"Humanity is not different from place to place"—is meant to emphasize how similar urban experiences are in places like Lahore, where American capital and culture have been established. Nearly each character in *Moth Smoke* visited a highly esteemed, westernized prep school in Lahore or pursued an education in the United States.

Dr. Julius Superb, Daru's former economics professor, develops a commentary on class divisions in Lahore connected to the monied elite's use of air conditioning:

"There are two social classes in Pakistan. . . . The first group, large and sweaty, contains those referred to as the masses. The second group is much smaller, but its members exercise vastly greater control over their immediate environment and are collectively termed the elite. The distinction between members of these two groups is made on the basis of control of an important resource: air-conditioning. You see, the elite have managed to re-create for themselves the living standards of say, Sweden, without leaving the dusty plains of the subcontinent. They're a mixed lot Punjabs and Pathans, Sindhis and Baluchis, smugglers, mullahs, soldiers, industrialists united by their residence in an artificially cooled world. They wake up in air-conditioned houses, drive air-conditioned cars to air-conditioned offices, grab lunch in air-conditioned restaurants (rights of admission reserved), and at the end of the day go home to their air-conditioned lounges to relax in front of their wide-screen TVs." (102-03)

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, there are different viewpoints on globalization. Access to information and technology is seen as an advantage of changing circumstances, since it can be an invaluable instrument for mass communication (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and



Tiffin 111). It could help in educating people about important worldwide issues that affect everyone. In order to "treat global issues as a matter of personal and collective responsibility," it would additionally allow individuals to communicate with one another (Albrow 1994:4). (Griffiths, Tiffin, and Ashcroft 111). Globalization can offer an opportunity for various groups around the world to work together on ideas and solutions, while guaranteeing everyone involved carry equal responsibility.

Daru, one of Hamid's characters, is negatively impacted by the global economy. Daru observes that Mumtaz, Ozi, and his former friends have returned to Pakistan with their New York and English identities after obtaining their degrees from other nations. Because he was unable to pay for higher education in the United States or England like his fellow students, Daru is envious of them. This is something he keeps being reminded of, particularly during the few interviews his uncle managed to set up for him. He was told by the interviewer that not many new hires "have MBAs, actually." One also seems to have a foreign degree, now that I think about it. Nevertheless, you have a doctorate and some experience (Hamid 55). Daru's anger is expected given that his education is on par with everybody else's. Notwithstanding Daru's knowledge in both the business and professional sectors and his Master's degree from one of Pakistan's best colleges, it is still not as good as the degrees that students are leaving the nation to obtain overseas. One of the main reasons Daru finds it hard to secure a job that pays enough to cover his air travel costs is that he wasn't given any education abroad.

Along with having degrees from different nations, Daru's friends are hired by international companies and banks because their families benefit from the global economy. His former classmates are increasing the class gap between the first and third worlds by wasting their money on luxury in other nations. Daru is seen as being to the third world, and notwithstanding his anger, this group of individuals from the first world ignores him. He starts to view Ozi, his best friend, as a product of the first world and comments patronizingly, "He's rich." Everything he might possibly want. He is immaculate (Hamid 219). Daru rejects Ozi because he thinks he has it altogether and has nothing to be upset about. (Scott)



Daru's closest companion and fellow classmate, Ozi, rides a Pajeros, consumes alcohol with foreign labels on the bottles that sometimes turn out to be bootleg, and dressed in high fashion brand names. They only invite Daru to their parties because Ozi assists them out; as Hamid 82 describes it, "I was told to come late for drinks, while other guests came early and polished off an exotic air-transported meal." These brands are what make them a part of the first global culture. Daru's companions have made it clear to him that they are part of the first world, and he is irrelevant to it.

Unfortunately, Daru's life took an unexpected turn for the worst as he doesn't have a stable job or an invitation to a prestigious society in the first world. With an explanation that his "only fear is that some relative or unwanted visitor will drop by and see me and my house in the state we're in, which is filthy," he isolates himself from both his friends and his family (Hamid 238). As Daru becomes into a robber, he introduces more heroin consumers and junkies to the neighborhood. Daru feels the negative consequences of globalization, and he has no option but to turn to corruption, join a violent group, or become a drug dealer and addict.

Conclusion:

The apparent disconnect between the novel's focus on the constantly negative impact of globalization on its characters' lives and Hamid's insistence on personal accountability—that is, the need of recognizing that "it's our fault if things aren't going well" instead of placing the blame on colonialism—reflects ambivalence about the phenomena. However, Moth Smoke makes it readily apparent that, in spite of implementing personal responsibility for their actions, Daru, Ozi, Murad, and the other characters live in a local world that is almost entirely molded by globalization's structures, transnational markets, and cultural imports from the West.



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