

Global Capitalism as a Metanarrative: Debunking the Structuring Force of World Capitalist Societies in Mohsin Hamid's Postmodern Fiction

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Abstract

The purpose of the present research is to develop the postmodern theoretical understanding of Mohsin Hamid's novels to debunk the filthy face of global capitalism. This study adopts qualitative research approach. The findings reveal that Hamid's novels are in accordance with Lyotard who shows skepticism towards the metanarrative of global capitalism i.e. capital circulates globally. And through global capitalism each country has an equal chance of becoming rich. The integration of Waller Stein's World System Theory in analyzing the texts further proves helpful. The findings reveal that Moth Smoke deconstructs the capitalist tactics of American capitalism at the national level. The text depicts Pakistani society as a society where power and sovereignty are granted only to those who have accumulated USA dollars. The Reluctant Fundamentalist challenges the dirty face of American capitalism at transnational level and the way it disrupts the lives of people in other countries through its capitalist traps. There is a potential exchange of capitalism from USA to Asia in How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia. This is Hamid's only novel which represents capitalism directly. In the fourth novel Exit West, there is a mass migration of people from underdeveloped countries to core countries which are economically stable. The findings suggest that global capitalism results in subjugating the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries.

Key Words: Metanarrative, Capitalism, debunk.

Introduction

They talk about the failure of socialism but where is the success of capitalism in Africa, Asia and Latin America? It is filthy, it is gross, it is alienating... because it causes war, hypocrisy and competition. The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries. When I was saying, 'White people go to hell,' I never had trouble finding a publisher (Castro, 2000).

Capitalism is a metanarrative for business and economics. Mohsin Hamid is a one among the contemporary postmodern authors who have explored the history of economics and challenged the metanarrative ideology and power of capitalism through the lens of literature. He has employed his art of words to unmask the filthy face of capitalism. His ingenuity and intelligence in fiction enables him to take higher space in postmodern literary circles. The main objective of the present research is to deconstruct metanarrative ideology related to capitalism in general and global capitalism in particular with particular reference to Mohsin Hamid's novels.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research takes the postmodern approach in order to situate the research in a particular context and this helped in validating the findings of research. In this research Mohsin

Hamid's novels i.e., *Moth Smoke*, *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* and *Exit West*, will be used as primary texts. The purpose of the research will be to debunk the structuring force of world capitalist societies in Mohsin Hamid's novels while incorporating Immanuel Wallerstein's and Lyotard's theoretical underpinnings.

Research Question

The overarching question of the present research is:

- How do Hamid's novels deconstruct metanarrative ideology related to global capitalism?

Research Objectives

- To explore ways through which Mohsin Hamid's novels debunk the structuring force of world capitalist societies
- To develop Lyotard's and Wallerstein's theoretical understandings of these selected novels.

Theoretical Framework

Lyotard argues that metanarratives retrench historical events to sole and exclusive trajectory i.e. the phenomenon of progress through rational values. For example, the inevitable success and progress of working class in capitalist societies becomes a metanarrative. So is the metanarrative that global capitalism result in economic equalization at global level. The postmodern economist Immanuel Wallerstein's ideas are in accordance with Lyotard in showing considerable skepticism towards global capitalism. Wallerstein can be placed among postmodern theorists as he has shown skepticism towards the imperial capitalist hierarchy. Immanuel Wallerstein in his theory of *The Modern World System* (2011) presented: "an alternative model (mininarrative in Lyotard's terms) with which to engage in comparative analysis, one is rooted in the historically specific totality which is the world capitalist economy". He defined capitalism "as an endless accumulation of wealth" (Wallerstein, 2011). He talked about three types of countries or areas: core, periphery, and semi-periphery. It suggests that first types of countries are countries with highly developed technology with are countries with capital intensive, high wages, high technology and most power in world economic system. They exploit the semi-periphery and periphery countries' citizens with their capitalist tactics mainly through limiting them on the provision of labor and raw materials. A deep study of wealth distribution at global level during 1987-2013 debunk the increasing disparity between the rich and poor countries with only exception i.e., China. The supremacy of developed countries is maintained through the tactics of American model of capitalism which works globally with its two fundamental financial institutions i.e., International Monetary Fund and The World Bank. This process of global capitalism results in the commodification of each and every thing such as seeds, genes, water, knowledge and even human beings. Robert Bruce defines a global novel as the novel which provides the readers lens to look at the superstructure, infrastructure or structuring force of world capitalist system. In accordance with this working definition of global novel, almost all the novels of Mohsin Hamid can be categorized as global novels which unmask the American hegemony through its capitalist tactics. Moreover, in recent era of global capitalism, Lyotard's ideas have been proved in showing skepticism towards the myth that capital circulates globally.

An Analysis of World Capitalist Societies in Mohsin Hamid's Fiction

The analysis of selected novels exposes a world of mininarratives regarding American model of capitalism while deconstructing its metanarratives along with integrating Wallerstein's world system theory. *Moth Smoke* debunk the American hegemony at national level while tracing its hegemonic decline with a sense of economic injustice in providing unequal opportunities between those who have US degrees along with foreign wealth and those who have less important local degrees. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reveals the filthy face of American capitalism at the international level while showing the distrust of rest of world. This novel unmasks the phenomenon of potential exchange of capitalism from US to Asia. *Exit West* represents a world of migration from unstable economies to developed stable economic countries with a hope of better prospect.

Hamid's debut, *Moth Smoke* represents a hierarchy of Wallerstein's world capitalist system while placing US in the core, India at the semi-periphery and Pakistan as peripheral country. It traces the story about the class struggle of the protagonist, Daru and his ultimate decline over the course of years in 1998. The textual analysis reveals that as a neo-liberal country Pakistan widens the gap between rich and the poor with pro-capitalist, free market policies which privilege a few. The novel exposes the disastrous vices such as corruption, political manipulation and social injustice prevalent in the contemporary Pakistan. It also highlights the effects of global capitalism in a neo-liberal country like Pakistan. The novel explores Daru's struggle and rage against the world of big bellies to climb up the social ladder. One of the metanarratives of capitalism is that capitalism comes as reaction against oppressive and exploitive system of feudalism in which workers have very few rights. The novel reveals that capitalism is just another name of feudalism with subjugated working class. The fictional portrayal of Malik Jiwan an MPA with half million US dollars is an example of the supremacy of American capital i.e., dollar and feudalism. The metanarrative that capitalism is the end of feudalism is just an illusion. The capitalist society privileges the self-interest of individuals who have capital. Daru proclaims that "Mr. Jiwan attempts to impose his feudal hierarchy on my office" (Hamid, 2000, p.21). Daru says to Mr. Jiwan: "This is bank, not your servant quarters, Mr. Jiwan. If you want better service, maybe you ought to learn some manners" (Hamid, 2000, p.22). But he is unaware of the bitter fact that his office runs under the control of people like Mr. Jiwan with US dollars. He fights with Mr. Jiwan at a trivial issue of a cheque as a result he is fired without being given any chance to clear his position. He is humiliated by his Branch Manager. He loses his job in the bank. The job which he has been granted with the reference of his best friend Ozi's father Khurram Shah, a man with huge amount of wealth attained through forbidden sources. Ozi resettled in Pakistan after enjoying good fortunes in USA while having a USA highly valued degree and wealth. He, with his capital, has an enormous benefit with which he has easily manipulated the justice system. As a result, Daru ends in suffering in jail for the murder which he has not committed. Daru's fate represents the situation of lawlessness where poor have a greater chance of being arrested and charged. On the other hand, both Ozi and Malik Jiwan represent the greatest power in the form of accumulation of US dollars and enjoy a life above law. Within the social structure the police and judiciary system are not objective; rather they serve those who have accumulated USA dollars or power.

The novel also represents a strong resistant female figure against capitalism and corruption in the character of Mumtaz. She transgressed from the norms of society and her writings represent the muffled protest of bourgeoisie against the elite and global economics policies. In her articles,

she tried to unmask that there is huge difference between public and ideological representation of global economic policies and their material practice. Mumtaz as member of elite class is an apparent beneficiary of capitalist system of society but she feels suffocated and disgusted with hypocrisy and corruption of the ruling class. She works as a journalist under the pseudonym Zulifqar Manto and debunk the hypocrisy and corruption of elite class. Her newspaper articles disturb the corrupt members of upper class as a result the office of her relevant newspaper is stoned. Mumtaz's article represent the voice of bourgeoisie and poor class. She argues with her husband, Ozi about the corruption of her own father-in-law, Khurram Shah. The novel represents a critique of American supremacy through Mumtaz's disillusionment. She studied and married Ozi in New York and then left it for Pakistan. She says that the people who look towards New York as the center frustrate her a lot. New York is not the center rather everywhere there is a sphere. She states about herself: "I don't quite fit into what's expected" (Hamid, 2000, p. 167).

The textual analysis reveals that pro-capitalist societies sustain feudalism and privileges the interest of very few individuals. Daru as a confirming actor in the world capitalist hierarchy lives in peace as a middle-class member of the society as he has given up his PhD dissertation in favor of accumulating capital. Daru is fired from his job for misbehaving with Malik Jiwan who is a politician with lands and USA dollars. Daru becomes a non-confirming actor as a result loses his job. The metanarrative that capitalism replaces the feudalism is an illusion. People like Ozi and Malik Jiwan are privileged and empowered because of accumulation of USA dollars and remained above law. Their capital enables them to turn the law enforcement institutions to their own benefit. The police and judicial system are just puppets in the hands of people like Ozi and Malik Jiwan. Capitalism favors only accumulation of capital. Daru enjoys peaceful life until he prefers money to each and every other aspiration. He left his academic career and prefers to do job. But his two simultaneous non-confirming actions in the scenario of capitalism put him in the abyss of destruction i.e., his illicit relationship with his capitalist friend Ozi and his misbehavior with a politician and capitalist Malik Jiwan. Mumtaz acknowledges that extramarital affair was a sort of liberating experience for her from her amoral wealthy husband and for Daru it was a sort of revenge from his capitalist friend Ozi who enjoys all the luxuries of life with which he is deprived of. The novel brings to surface Daru's structural violence through wife of his capitalist friend Ozi as his body becomes a commodity for her. The novel states:

I'm at once furious and ashamed, furious because people give money after sex to prostitutes and ashamed because I'm so hungry that I have to take it. But I make a decision. To hell with handouts. I'm ready for a little justice (Hamid, 2000, p.210).

Hunger is so strong that he is ready to sell his body and accept handouts. Daru drinks Black Label at Ozi's house and talks about the quality of Black Label "I have a headache and an upset stomach, signs that last night's Black Label might have been fake" (Hamid, 2000, p.18).

Black Label is an icon in the world of whisky. It hints toward the reliance of global capitalism on the recycling of products, images and commodities for greater profits. As a result, nothing is pure and original and in Jameson's view people are lost in the world of global capitalist societies. Pakistan's neighboring country; India (never mentioned in the novel) sits on the semi-periphery because of its technological, industrial and economic development greater than Pakistan. India begins nuclear testing and Pakistan undertakes counter nuclear tests. Pakistan is positioned

throughout the novel at the periphery that must have eyes turned into two directions: one towards the threat of economic sanctions by the core and one towards the threat of war by the semi-periphery. The threat of war by semi-periphery is greater than the threat of economic sanctions.

Hamid's second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* unmasks the dirty face of American capitalism at transnational level and the way it disrupts the lives of people in other countries through its capitalist traps. Changez narrates his story both first as a confirming agent in American capitalism and then as non-confirming agent which results in shattering his American dream. Wallerstein's World system theory analysis place America at the core, Marin at the semi-periphery and Pakistan at the periphery. The findings reveal that the metanarrative ideology of capitalism that capital circulates globally is just an illusion rather core countries are the sole beneficiaries of global capitalism. The fictional portrayal of Underwood Samson and Company as a valuation firm represents the capitalist traps to undermine and disrupt the lives of countries in semi-peripheral and peripheral countries.

The initials of Underwood Samson might be abbreviated as US, the violent capitalist face (Waterman, 2009). That firm specializes in ascertaining the fundamental value of companies prior to recommending their ultimate collapse. Such sort of valuation occurs in the form of either amalgamation of large companies or downsizing. As a result, its valuation ends in spreading unemployment at global level while primarily functioning as an acolyte of an Empire of transnational capital. Initially, Changez enjoys the luxurious life provided by such capital. However, later during his business trip to Manila in Philippines, he began to realize the fundamental violence of the capital and his own complicity in perpetuating that violence. Changez is also shocked to realize that Manila as an American colony is richer than Pakistan. In Wallerstein terms Manila is semi-periphery and Changez's homeland is at the periphery. It was one thing to accept that New York was richer than Lahore but it was hard pill to swallow that even Manila an American colony was richer than Pakistan. Here, Changez deliberately attempts to mask his identity as Pakistani and look more like New Yorker. While travelling in Limousine and making an eye contact, he shares a 'third world sensibility' with a Filipino jeepney driver. Changez tries to repress his disillusionment with the violent capitalist strategies of his adopted country and his identity as a native from a peripheral country. During his stay in Manhattan, he develops affair with Erica (a beautiful novelist manqué from the city's rich Upper East Side) and enjoys in the exceptional demonstrations of spatial-temporal continuity that New York City offers. It seems to host a seamless adjacency of the Pak Punjab Deli and Wall Street's Cathedral to high finance. Before the fall of twin towers, New York could be said to be the habitat the form of cosmopolitan modernity. Changez settled in New York which was an authentic financial core in the world capitalist system where differences reign. On his last evening in Manila, he watches on TV the news of collapse of World Trade Center and his first reaction was that of pleasure. And pleasure because someone has put US on its knees. In the wake of 9/11, Changez's disenchantment with his adopted country USA increases. He was consistently humiliated by the unknown people because of his brown skin and Muslim identity in USA. Moreover, America attack on a Muslim and neighboring country Afghanistan and creation of crisis in his own country aggravated his disenchantment. American's invasion of Afghanistan seems to Changez in a way an encouragement to India to invade Pakistan. There was a danger of war between Pakistan and India in the wake of 9/11. Changez is disgusted with America's intervention regarding this. He started

to realize that he is serving the wrong master. This realization put him in a position of non-confirming agent in capitalist world system. The turning point in his life comes when he visits Valparaiso on the behalf of Underwood Samson Company to value a book publishing company. This company has been run by Juan Bautista for many years but he was not the owner of that company. The owner wants to sell the company and one who wants to buy that company is the client of Underwood Samson and Company. The company has to determine either to shutter the doors for Juan Bautista or not. Juan Bautista with the books published by his company is non-confirming agent in the world capitalist system. He asks from Changez's boss Jim, "What do you know of books? He replies, "I specialized in media industry. I have valued a dozen publishers over two decades" Juan Bautista requited, "That is finance. I asked what you knew of books" (Hamid, 2007, p.141-142).

Changez seems to have a sense of mutual affinity with Bautista same as he has while having an eye contact with a jeepney driver in Philippines. A private meeting with Juan Bautista proved to be final eye opener for him. The filthy and cruel face of American capitalism fully revealed to him. He let Changez to realize his role in disrupting the lives of peoples in non-American countries and cultures. He discusses with Changez about Christian janissaries of Ottoman Empire. Changez comes to realize that he is a modern-day janissary because he is playing his role in assisting the Americans in disrupting the peace and prosperity of his true comrades. The metanarrative that in capitalism, capital circulates globally and each country has an equal chance of prosperity is an illusion. The country which is at the periphery and semi-periphery are overturned by the core countries for their own benefits. In Manila, Changez represses his realization. But here with Juan Bautista, reconsiders his decision to serve this cruel capitalist master and becomes a non-confirming agent in capitalist world system. His reluctance to focus on the fundamentals of Underwood Samson and Company comes on the surface. As a result, he resigns from his job, comes back in Pakistan and start to serve his country as a university professor. Changez's campaign against America gets worldwide publicity as international television network arrives at the university. Later he realizes that political is personal as Erica might be watching him doing so. For four and half years, he has strived and served as confirming agent of capitalist system. But he ends with as a non-confirming agent. The texts state that during the course of the novel Changez becomes a victim of what Zizek called the 'systematic violence' of liberal capitalist society. Primarily, his mortification is accompanied by his gradual realization of his own role in this violence unto others, his own part as an unaware agitator, a chieftain in the eventual removal of business and disrupting lives of people across the globe. What aggregate his increasingly aggressive clash with USA are resentment, humiliation and shame. Resentment at America's self-conceit, humiliation from his failure to fulfill his dream and loss of stable core (he was forced to play the role of Chriss in order to get the sensual gratification from Erica) and shame at his collaboration in the oppression of those who share his third world sensibility. In much the same way Changez is shocked by the 'symbolism' of the demise of 9/11 as some brought USA at its own feet. In the same way, the readers can evaluate the 'symbolism' of the novel's apparent remission from violence. It is comprehensible to regard the standoff as an act of hostility on the part of American listener. No doubt, he seems to be a stranger, silent and naïve to the surroundings. It is through Changez's narration that the readers lead to believe him as CIA agent sent to

assassinate him. The readers can envision the position of force on the part of American listener reprisal to the perceived resistance.

Hamid's third novel explores globalization and capitalism in a caricature of the self-help genre. It unfolds the rags to riches story of the protagonist 'you' that how the narrator becomes a successful entrepreneur in his journey from darkness to light. There is a detailed discussion about the protagonist's brother and father who bind their hands, bow their heads and avert their eyes at the appearance of their landlord's SUV. As the narrator says that:

"Meeting the gaze of a landlord has been a risky business in these parts for centuries, perhaps since the beginning of history. Recently some men have begun to do it. But they have beards. They walk tall, with chests out. Your father is not one of them. In fact, he dislikes them almost as much as he does the landlords, and for the same reasons. They strike him as domineering and lazy" (Hamid, 2013, p.8).

Hamid here unmasks the political manipulation of forbidden gaze which is theorized by Bell Hook. Gaze has always been political. Black slaves were punished for looking at their white owners so through generations black spectatorship and black parenting has been affected through this absorption (Hook, 1995). In the same way people in south Asia have been forced to lower their gaze and fold their hands in front of their landlords since centuries. Hook's oppositional gaze is in accordance with Foucault's thought about power that power coexists with resistance. The oppositional gaze of people with beard in Hamid's novel is a way of finding agency through resistance. Capitalist practices are legitimized with religious institutions as the people with beard in their seminaries.

While studying in the university, the protagonist 'you' has joined a religious organization. George Bernard Shaw once said, "All religious organizations exist by selling themselves to the rich" (Shaw, 1907)). Hamid's third novel denies the metanarrative that in a capitalist country the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. Here the protagonist belongs to a very humble origin and once becomes the richest person of the country. How he becomes rich while adopting filthy ways is another question. Lyotard, in his critique of capitalism, suggests that the State has found its only credible goal in power in so-called global mixed economy in the form of bureaucratic or state monopolistic capitalism. Bureaucratic or technocratic are the dynamic form of new ruling strata within the bourgeoisie. He states:

"One hears talk everywhere that the great problem of society is that of the state. This is a mistake, and a serious one. The problem that overshadows all others, including that of the contemporary state, is that of capital" (Lyotard, 1984).

Hamid's third novel is in accordance with this stance regarding capitalism by Lyotard. In the chapter named as "Befriend a Bureaucrat" the narrator says that becoming a confirming actor is necessary to succeed in the imperial hierarchy. The protagonist requires a state license to start a municipal project but his application was rejected. He attains license by bribing the bureaucrat. In this way bureaucrat leaves his viceroy throne and sits on a salesman stall. So state is not a neutral agent rather state is an integral part of global capitalism and haggling over a fair price which will satisfy both sides. Moreover, the claim that global capitalism is based on free market is also an illusion because intellectual property has become a prime source of rental income. The spread of trademarks, license, copyright, design rights, geographical indications, trade secrets and above all

patents create the market power. As the protagonist 'you' gain a license through bribery for his fake product. So, in capitalist world system states do not directly control the global market but they play an important role in shaping it. State does not stay above or outside the capitalist world system rather it functions within the system and becomes an integral part of it.

The protagonist 'you' is introduced in the very second page of the book as a child with anguish about the things which he has not seen in his life rather these things are typically associated with Americans.

“To find you, huddled, shivering, on the packed earth under your mother’s cot one cold, dewy morning. Your anguish is the anguish of a boy whose chocolate has been thrown away, whose remote controls are out of batteries, whose scooter is busted, whose new sneakers have been stolen. This is all remarkable since you’ve never in your life seen any of these things” (Hamid, 2013, p.4).

In Hamid’s third novel, the master of the protagonist let them to sell expired products with low prices. As the narrator states:

“Your costs are low because your master source recently expired goods at scrap prices, erases the expiry date from the packaging, and reprints a later date instead. You have never heard of anyone dying as a result” (Hamid, 2013, p.91).

Frederic Jameson proclaims that capitalism not only affects the economies but also the cultures. Commodity culture, consumerism, globalism and mass media have invaded more and more areas of everyday life. For example, the protagonist 'you' try to contact her beloved and she did not respond than he takes a capitalist tactic to attract her and succeed. As the protagonist comments when he is unable to let his beloved to attend her call,

You do not know much about women, but you know a fair bit about sales, and it is apparent to you that this is a case when you must let the customer seek you out, lest you devalue your product completely. So, you wait. And she does call (Hamid, 2013, p.88).

The twelve steps to become filthy rich in rising Asia can be taken as a step-to-step guide to become a good capitalist. This is the only novel by Mohsin Hamid that directly provides the pros and cons of the world capitalist system.

Hamid’s fourth novel, *Exit West* can be categorized as novel which provides a vision of post-capitalist future predicted by Immanuel Wallerstein. According to Immanuel Wallerstein that the period since 1970’s onward will be an era of transition which will result in future world system. The novel states the instability of the capitalist world system in the periphery by the breakthrough of civil war and violence and shifted to the core through the opening of black doors. The non-linear style of the novel narrates digressive stories where people seem to be passing through the black doors before Saeed and Nadia. These seem to be the evidences of Wallerstein’s structural crises. The infrastructure in Saeed and Nadia’s unnamed city has been broken down. Advertising agency, insurance agency, companies are shut down. Internet and mobile services are disabled. Travelling both by land and air becomes impossible. The militants are killing people of a particular sect of the same religion whom they identify by their names. This break down is transferred from periphery to the core through the presence of black doors which represent the sole possibility of movement, escape and potential safety. The novel writes: “even the most reputable international

broadcasters had acknowledged the doors existed and indeed were being discussed by the world leaders as a major global crisis” (Hamid, 2017, p. 88).

The novel not only states the movement of Saeed and Nadia and others from their unstable periphery to the refuge in a greater wealth, stable and secure core rather it also poses the question of destabilization and unpredictability of the core territory as well. These black doors once opened remained opened hence call for guards to protect these newly opened borders. The novel also examines the counter movement of capital, technology, imperialism whether by infection or imposition from the core to periphery along with the geographical movement of Saeed and Nadia to the core. This reversal disrupts the binary of east, north and south. The text narrates: “The whole planet was on the move, much of the global south headed to the global north, but also southerners moving to other Northern places” (Hamid, 2017, p. 169).

The multi-directional and circuitous feature of migration undermines the sole possibility of moving to the West or core. Even Saeed and Nadia’s city is crowded with refugees. There is both a movement to and an exit from the west. The capitalist world system is being broken down and remade. The possibility of movement through black doors from one country to another country without any formalities of passports or other requisitions can be seen as an analogy for an emergent post-capitalist system. The system which undermines the existing borders between states, core and periphery are meaningless. Wallerstein talks about the impending demise of world capitalist system in the following words: “Although the outcome is unpredictable, what we can all do is to try to analyze the historical options and make our moral choice about the preferred outcome” (Wallerstein, 2011).

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that Hamid’s novels deconstruct the metanarrative ideology related to American/global capitalism and the analysis comes to light that only priority in capitalism is loss or profit and nothing else. Neither morality nor commitment or relation seems to have any significance in capitalism. The findings further debunk the capitalist idea that capital circulate globally through global capitalism and each country has an equal chance of becoming rich.

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