

The Post-Post Colonial Condition: Globalization and Historical Allegory in Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*

Paul Jay

I certainly think there is a post-post-colonial generation. I'm sure a lot of voices you're seeing coming out now are people who never had a colonial experience. We don't place a burden of guilt on someone who's no longer there. So it's like, what are we doing with where we come from, and how can we address issues here. It's our fault if things aren't going well. That's a very different stance than a lot of what's come before. Also, people are writing about the subcontinent with eyes that are not meant to be seeing for someone who doesn't live there, people who are not exoticizing where they come from. I try not to mention the minaret, because when I'm in Lahore, I don't notice it. The basic humanity is not different from place to place.

Mohsin Hamid (*The Chronicle Online* np)

I. Locked Out of the Kitchen

With its sustained focus on the effects of economic globalization, Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* stands apart from many South Asian English-language novels popular with readers and academics in the West. While the fiction of Bharati Mukerjee, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Chandra, Ardashir Vakil, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Manil Suri deals tangentially with economic change, these writers are primarily interested in the nature of cultural production and identity in an increasingly hybridized postcolonial world. Some of these texts are set in South Asia and deal explicitly with the postcolonial condition. In *The God of Small Things*, for example, Roy writes about the myriad cultural dislocations visited on her characters by British colonialism, and she

develops a sustained examination of Anglophilia as a cultural phenomenon in India.¹ Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* offers an exhaustive analysis of the cultural effects on India of the collapse of the Mughal Empire and the rise of the British Raj.² Other writers of South Asian descent working in the West, like Mukherjee and Lahiri, have written principally about diasporic experience, about the cultural dislocations that accompany migration, immigration, or exile.³ Many of their stories are either set in the United States or depict (as does Suri's *The Death of Vishnu*) an India profoundly disrupted at the cultural level by colonization. Economic change and material conditions connected to colonization and postcolonization play a role in each of these texts, but the emphasis in most of them is on the cultural effects of British colonialism as they continue to manifest themselves under postcolonialism.

In *Moth Smoke*, however, Hamid sets out to analyze contemporary Lahore through a "post-post-colonial" framework, one less interested in foregrounding the persistent effects of British colonization than dramatizing how economic globalization has transformed Lahore and the characters populating his novel.⁴ Unfolding during a few months in the spring of 1998, *Moth Smoke* focuses on a group of thoroughly Westernized young men and women from financially well-off families with American Master of Business Administration degrees (MBAs). The protagonist, Darushikoh Shezad, has clung to the fringes of this group. Too poor to study abroad, he earned his MBA in Lahore and, at the outset of the novel, is working as a mid-level functionary in a local bank. His best friend, Aurangzeb ("Ozi"), is the son of a well-off, corrupt, money-launderer (184) and has just returned with his new wife, Mumtaz, from studying in New York. While Daru works at his bank for modest pay, Ozi is following in his father's footsteps, creating "little shell companies, and open dollar accounts on sunny islands, far, far away" from Lahore (185). The main contrast at the outset of the novel is between Daru's struggle to work through the system and Ozi's belief that corruption is so widespread that prosperity can only come through corruption.⁵ Ozi muses at one point that "people are robbing the country blind, and if the choice is between being held up at gunpoint or holding the gun, only a madman would choose to hand over his wallet rather

than fill it with someone else's cash" (184). "What's the alternative?" he asks:

[T]he roads are falling apart, so you need a Pajero or a Land Cruiser. The phone lines are erratic, so you need a mobile. The colleges are overrun with fundos who have no interest in getting an education, so you have to go abroad. And that's ten lakhs a year, mind you. Thanks to electricity theft there will always be shortages, so you have to have a generator. The police are corrupt and ineffective, so you need private security guards. It goes on and on. People are pulling their pieces out of the pie, and the pie is getting smaller, so if you love your family, you'd better take your piece now, while there's still some left. That's what I'm doing. If anyone isn't doing it, it's because they're locked out of the kitchen. (184–85)

Ozi has the luxury of his father's wealth while Daru, in effect, is "locked out of the kitchen" because his family is poor. Daru's position at the beginning of the novel is precarious. He quickly loses his bank position when he mishandles an important client by inquiring about his deposit of thirty thousand U.S. dollars. The novel chronicles Daru's slide into poverty, drug dealing, burglary, and his illicit affair with Ozi's wife, Mumtaz (who writes newspaper articles under a male pseudonym and eventually tries to gather evidence to exonerate Daru). By the end of the novel Ozi discovers the affair—which is already over—and sets Daru up to be arrested for the hit-and-run death of a young boy Ozi has actually killed. The novel is framed by references to Daru's trial, and throughout the narrative Daru's first person story is countered by testimony from others, including Ozi, Mumtaz, and Daru's partner in crime, Murad Badshaw. In the end, the reader's sympathies are clearly directed toward Daru and Mumtaz, but the whole narrative is calibrated to call into question the truthfulness of all the characters.⁶

While the novel is about financial, social, cultural, and personal corruption in Lahore, Hamid, as the quotation at the outset of this essay suggests, does not connect this corruption to Pakistan's colonial and postcolonial history. If readers are tempted to draw such a connection

Hamid is quick to discourage it by creating a historical context for the novel that circumvents any link between the Raj, its aftermath, and the events chronicled in *Moth Smoke*. This happens at the very outset of the book (and is reinforced in its conclusion) when Hamid draws a connection between the characters in *Moth Smoke* and the sons of one of the last Mughal Emperors, Shah Jahan (1628–1658). South Asian readers will be immediately familiar with this story, which creates a quasi-allegorical structure for the novel. Ill and worried about the future of his empire, Shah Jahan asks a Sufi saint to reveal which of his sons will rule when he dies. The two principal heirs are Aurangzeb and Dara Shikoh. The Sufi saint reveals it will be Aurangzeb. This revelation accords with the historical record, for Aurangzeb, a staunch and intolerant Islamist, imprisoned his father, took over the Empire, declared a Fatwa against his brother, and eventually had him imprisoned and killed. Aurangzeb's rule was despotic and ruinous and it effectively ended the Mughal Empire. The struggle between Ozi (Aurangzeb) and Daru (Dara Shikoh) in the novel is set up to mirror the historical struggle between the intolerant Islamist son (Aurangzeb) and the more sympathetic, secular, pantheist son (Dara Shikoh).

This kind of historical contextualization downplays the relationship between British colonialism and the plight of the characters in the novel, something that is reinforced by the novel's complete inattention to the British occupation of South Asia and the economic, cultural, and political effects of the Raj. Asked why he chose to connect his contemporary narrative to the end of the Mughal Empire rather than to British colonialism, Hamid explained he wanted a story that "bypasses the colonial experience" (*The Chronicle Online* np). Why? We need to recall that Hamid sees himself as part of a "post-post-colonial generation," as someone who has "never had a colonial experience" (*The Chronicle Online* np). Colonialism does not get the blame in *Moth Smoke* because Hamid sees his characters, as he sees himself, in "post-post-colonial" terms. This is why *Moth Smoke* draws our attention away from the after-effects of British colonialism and toward the new regime of globalization.

Hamid's desire to bypass colonialism implies a clean historical break between the eras of colonialism and postcolonialism, on the one hand, and globalization, on the other. The so-called post-post-colonial moment becomes identified with globalization defined as a thoroughly contemporary phenomenon that, like the novel itself, seems to have begun well after colonialism. Before taking a closer look at how this historical point of view informs the novel we need to assess its accuracy. Can we in fact mark a clean break between the histories of colonialism, postcolonialism, and globalization? There are a number of problems with this formulation. First of all, as critics like Ania Loomba and others have argued, there is a real problem with the prefix "post" in postcolonial. "Post," she notes, "implies an 'aftermath' in two senses—temporal, as in coming after, and ideological, as in supplanting" (7). However, "if the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased, it is perhaps premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism," for a "country may be both post-colonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent) at the same time" (7). From this point of view, it certainly seems wrong for Hamid to suggest that he and his generation have "never had a colonial experience" (*The Chronicle Online* np). Born well after independence (1971), Hamid is certainly right in observing that he grew up in a Pakistan where the British were no longer present as a governing force, and that in this sense he has never had a "colonial experience." But this ignores Loomba's point that colonialism always persists past independence in profound and sometimes very subtle ways, in the concrete forms of institutions (educational, cultural, political), ideologies, cultural practices, and in the less concrete but very real psychological forces that flow from subjugation. It is one thing to want to stop blaming the British for Pakistan's contemporary problems, but it is another thing to suggest there is no connection between British colonialism and the world in which Hamid and his generation have grown up.

If there is in fact a significant connection between Hamid's "post-post-colonial generation" and the legacy of colonialism, there is also a historical continuity between colonialism and globalization Hamid ignores. The book stands out from many recent South Asian novels writ-

ten in English precisely because it focuses sustained attention on the economic forces of globalization, but it fails to draw a link between economic globalization and the history of colonialism and postcolonialism. While some globalization theorists insist that globalization is in many ways a contemporary phenomenon, others, like Roland Robertson and Malcolm Waters, argue it has a long history dating back to the rise of modernity, that forms of transcontinental trade, military conquest, colonization, the rise of the nation state, and the emergence of technologies of travel and mass communication, are all a part of the history of globalization. According to this analysis, while globalization clearly accelerated in the last half of the twentieth century it actually has a long history.⁷ Moreover, as critics like Masao Miyoshi, H.D. Harootunian, and others have argued, globalization is not a postcolonial phenomenon but rather an extension of colonialism. Miyoshi has argued repeatedly that “the so-called globalized economy” is an “outgrowth, or continuation, of colonialism” (247), that globalization represents the hegemony of Western capitalism and thus has to be understood as a new phase of colonial domination.⁸

From this point of view, the global system at the center of *Moth Smoke* does not mark a clean break from the colonial system. Rather, it is connected in the ways Miyoshi suggests to the linked operations of colonialism and western capitalism. Hamid invokes the Mughal Empire at the outset of the novel in order to “bypass colonialism” (*The Chronicle Online* np) but the Mughal Empire was itself a colonialist empire. The history of colonialism in South Asia did not begin with the British Raj but in fact has a much longer history, one that includes Persian and Islamic invasions from the North and suggests that the forces of globalization were at work on the continent long before global capitalism and the internet came along.⁹ While *Moth Smoke* marks an important departure from some of the earlier texts I referred to above because it focuses attention on the forces of economic globalization and international finance, the novel remains problematic for its failure to draw a link between colonialism in South Asia, Western capitalism, and contemporary forms of globalization.¹⁰

II. The Air-Conditioned Classes

In order to assess the significance of this blind spot in the novel we need to take a closer look at its exploration of the world of international finance, class divisions fueled by globalization, and how it sees its characters as generic inhabitants of an international city that could be located almost anywhere—New York, London, Berlin, Tokyo. Hamid's comment in the epigraph that "humanity is not different from place to place" seems calculated to underscore the homogeneity of urban experience in cities like Lahore, where American capital and culture have taken hold. Virtually all of the characters in *Moth Smoke* have either been educated in the United States or at elite, Westernized prep schools in Lahore, so that their experience gets characterized in ways nearly indistinguishable from the lives of students in Boston or Los Angeles. When the novel's main character, Daru, reminisces about cruising with his best friend, Ozi, he describes his experience in terms that would be thoroughly familiar to many American teenagers:

I remember speeding around the city with Ozi in his '82 Corolla, feet sweating sockless in battered boat shoes, following cute girls up and down the Boulevard, memorizing their number plates and avoiding cops because neither of us had a license. Hair chopped in senior school crew cuts. Eyes pot-red behind his wayfarers and my aviators. Stickers of universities I would never attend on the back windshield. Poondi, in the days of cheap petrol and skipping class and heavy-metal cassettes recorded with too much bass and even more treble. We had some good times, Ozi and I, before he left. (25)

This passage evokes the homogeneity of urban youth culture in the age of globalization. Save for the reference to Poondi, a local term for flirtation, it could be describing teenage boys cruising the boulevards of any major American town or city. Hamid's Lahore is thoroughly Westernized and bourgeois. Parties in the book, attended mostly by Lahore's "ultra rich young jet set" (77) feature sushi from Japan, talk about multinational import-export deals, wine, scotch, and characters on cell phones who want to "do lunch" (78). Much of this behavior is patently self-

conscious, an effort by characters who have lived in the West to create the illusion they are all still there. When a drunken young woman shouts that they should all go swimming in the pool a chant breaks out: “Forget that you’re Over Here! Pretend that you’re Over There,” and the narrator interjects that “*the utopian vision of Over There or Amreeka promises escape from the almost unbearable drudgery of the tribe’s struggle to subsist*” (79; italics in original).

The “unbearable drudgery” of this “struggle to subsist” gets dramatized in the class-conflict pervading the novel and is at the core of its central conflict between Ozi and Daru: Ozi has the prestige of an American MBA and can draw on his father’s wealth, while Daru has neither. Daru, for example, begins the novel working for a large bank and loses his job because he mishandles a transnational financial deal. We learn from Daru’s former economics professor that though he was “a bit of a seat-of-the-pants economist” who liked to “assert rather than prove,” Daru “could have done some good work” and earned a PhD (36–37). The socially progressive nature of his research (“Small loans to low income groups, guaranteed by the community. The Grameen Bank model and variations.¹¹ Explaining low default rates, analyzing claims of paternalism, social critiques, that sort of thing” [36]) suggests his bank job represents a real compromise with ambition and principle. Once he has lost his job, Daru’s tumble into poverty and crime (he begins to peddle dope and, in a pivotal scene in the book, participates with a friend in the robbery of a trendy boutique) is connected less to his own abilities than to the fact that Lahore has a glut of foreign MBAs and that “the banking sector” is in very bad shape (53). The more he spirals into poverty, the more crucial it is that he hang on to his servant, Manucci, whose service is less important than the class status of having a servant.

The class conflict marking Daru’s relationships with Ozi and Manucci is part of a wider set of economic and social divisions brought on by the uneven infusion of western capital in Lahore. In the novel’s most witty analysis of these divisions, 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)

Access to air-conditioning measures the degree to which “elites” are plugged into a global economy characterized by class division and homogenization. Wealth means access to sameness; the “elites” share air-conditioned space which is the same no matter where they go. Money buys comfort, distance from the masses working at the margins of the global economy, and the prestige that comes from triumphing over local conditions. After Daru loses his job his months of unemployment lead to the ultimate crises in class identity: his servant abandons him and his air conditioning is shut off because he cannot pay his electricity bill. Daru's fall from the lower rungs of the international banking sector in Lahore to the margins of its criminal economy highlights the new class structure in Lahore and connects it to the whims of an emergent global economy.

Professor Superb's analysis of the structure of social classes in Lahore appears morally neutral. It lacks, for example, the kind of critique we find in the ruminations of Murad Badshaw, a friend of Daru's who runs a rickshaw service in Lahore but supplements his income by robbing

shops and boutiques. Badshaw's take on the disparities between social classes, unlike Professor Superb's, is calculated to justify his own moral intervention, as self-serving as it turns out to be. "You see," he explains to Daru,

it is my passionately held belief that the right to possess property is at best a contingent one. When disparities become too great, a superior right, that to life, outweighs the right to property. Ergo, the very poor have the right to steal from the very rich. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the poor have a duty to do so, for history has shown that the inaction of the working classes perpetuates their subjugation. (64)

Badshaw uses this reasoning to justify a variety of criminal activities, from organizing the robbery of yellow cabs threatening the viability of his rickshaw business to robbing a boutique with Daru later in the novel (because "high-end, high-fashion exclusive boutiques" have "symbolism: they represent the soft underbelly of the upper crust, the ultimate hypocrisy in a country with flour shortages" [213–14]). "Inaction," it seems, would guarantee his continued subjugation. Daru's tumble down the social ladder marks his shift from the world of Professor Superb to the world of Murad Badshaw, from a world of social and economic privilege fueled by a newly emergent global economy to a world in which the disparity between his former and present social classes has become so great, his ability to act to change it so limited, that he is driven to petty drug dealing and robbery. He cannot steal conditioned air, but he can steal the means to produce it.

III. "It's a bit paradoxical"

I have been arguing that the "post-post-colonial" condition in *Moth Smoke* is driven by economic globalization. While Hamid sets out to develop a critique of its impact on his own generation, this critique is complicated by his own non-fiction writing on globalization, and by the fact that he has rather spectacularly benefited from it. Hamid was a student at Lahore's prestigious International School, and he drafted *Moth Smoke* while studying at Princeton with Toni Morrison. He developed

another draft while in Law School at Harvard, and finished the novel while working as a highly paid management consultant in Manhattan for McKinsey and Co., a transnational consulting firm, where he reportedly specialized in developing “strategies for media and financial-sector clients” (qtd. in Houpt globebooks.com). *Moth Smoke* thus traces the lives of young people connected to Hamid’s own world, one defined in terms of his education at Lahore’s International School, Princeton, and Harvard, and shaped by his own experience in global management and finance (see Gross np). So while the novel may be critical of globalization, Hamid himself has done well by it. He is not unaware of the paradox his situation suggests:

It’s a bit paradoxical to be somebody from a country like Pakistan—which you can sort of see being ground up by the global system—and to be working at the core of the system . . . You can’t blindly accept that if everyone plays by the rules, all men will be equal and all countries will be better off. (qtd. in Houpt globebooks.com)

The paradox of Hamid’s having written a novel about young Pakistanis of his own generation being “ground up by the global system” while working for a company perpetuating that system is compounded by what seems like his embrace of globalization in his non-fiction writing. In “Mistrust in the West,” written after the 9/11 attacks, Hamid wrote that Pakistan needs more globalization, not less. According to Hamid, his country needs “jobs and access to the markets and knowledge and entertainment of the wider world. . . . We need access to purchasers for our goods, investors in our industries. With these things come greater growth and stability, which then become self-reinforcing” (*Dawn* np). In the novel, of course, it is precisely the rapid introduction of “markets,” “knowledge,” and “entertainment” from the “wider world,” along with foreign investment in local industry, that lies at the root of the disruptions Daru, Murad Badshaw, and even Ozi experience. On the one hand, exposure to global markets and the cultural forms accompanying them seems to be just what post-post-colonial Pakistan needs, but on

the other hand, *Moth Smoke* represents the effects of that exposure in profoundly negative terms.

Some readers might be tempted to see this as hypocrisy. I would argue that it simply reflects Hamid's own ambivalence about globalization, the vexed, uncertain position he takes toward the issues he is dealing with both in the novel and in his commentaries. On the one hand, Westernization and globalization have been good to Hamid; indeed, they helped position him to write *Moth Smoke* and find a prestigious position in the world of global management services. But on the other hand, he is clearly moved by the devastation the global economy and Westernization have brought to the lives of those he left behind in Lahore, men and woman of his own generation fascinated by Western culture and the large sums of money to be made (and lost) in world trade or global banking. In this respect his criticisms of the negative economic effects of globalization are nearly as strong as Miyoshi's. These contrasting views of globalization get written into the novel in a variety of ways. The more Daru struggles to find a way back into the system the more he is ground down by it. Murad has been marginalized by the global economy but thrives on it through extortion and burglary; the more wealth it produces in Lahore the more there is for him to "expropriate." Ozi thrives on forms of illicit trade related to global flows of capital, but he is arguably the most corrupt figure in the novel. Hamid's poorer characters seem trapped in a world where the local economy is a dead-end, but where the opportunities offered by the global economy are both profoundly uneven and deeply tied to corruption. The wealthier ones, like Ozi, make money from the global economy, but in ways that contribute to the poverty of the middle and lower classes. In his social criticism Hamid is torn between seeing globalization as a potentially productive force and one that is simply grinding down his own country. His novel dramatizes the latter view, so that taken together, his writings present a profoundly ambivalent relationship to globalization.

This ambivalence is, of course, shared by many critics writing about globalization. Arjun Appadurai, for example, writes that he is "deeply ambivalent" about globalization (9). He recognizes the radically uneven economic development it fosters, yet much more than Miyoshi he resists

the idea that globalization is a homogenizing force and remains optimistic about its potential to actually liberate people from forms of domination. His study of globalization, he writes, “predisposes me strongly toward the idea that globalization is not the story of cultural homogenization” (11). He insists, rather, that “there is growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and in general, agency. . . . T-shirts, billboards, and graffiti as well as rap music, street dancing, and slum housing all show that the images of the media are quickly moved into local repertoires of irony, anger, humor, and resistance” (7).¹² Fredric Jameson is also torn between conflicting views of globalization. According to Jameson, if (like Appadurai) “you insist on the cultural contents” of “new communicational form, I think you will slowly emerge into a post-modern celebration of difference and differentiation: suddenly cultures around the world are placed in tolerant contact with each other in a kind of immense cultural pluralism which it would be very difficult not to welcome” (56–57). If, however (like Miyoshi), “your thoughts turn economic, and the concept of globalization becomes colored by those codes and meanings, I think you will find the concept darkening and growing more opaque” (57).¹³ For Jameson, globalization becomes an “ambiguous ideological concept” with “alternating contents” through which “we may now provisionally explore a few paths” (58). Hamid’s divided view of globalization, then, is not necessarily hypocritical. Rather, it reflects debates about globalization on both sides and a form of ambivalence we can observe in many of its critics.

IV. Fundos

Ambivalence about globalization is reflected in the seeming contradiction between the novel’s focus on the systematically negative role globalization plays in the lives of its characters and Hamid’s insistence on personal responsibility, on the need, that is, not to blame colonialism but to realize that “it’s our fault if things aren’t going well” (*Dawn* np). *Moth Smoke*, however, makes it plain enough that Daru, Ozi, Murad and the other characters, though they bear personal responsibility for their actions, live in a local world almost wholly determined by the structures

of globalization, transnational markets, and cultural commodities and behaviours imported from the West. As we have already seen, Hamid avoids drawing a link between these structures and the history of British colonialism, historicizing contemporary events instead by connecting them to the last years of the Mughal Empire. The novel's opening pages, as I noted earlier, invoke the struggle for succession near the end of the reign of Shah Jahan between his sons, Aurangzeb and Dara Shikoh (3–4). Drawing on the fact that Aurangzeb, who triumphed over Dara Shikoh, was a rigid and thoroughly repressive Islamist while Dara Shikoh embraced pantheism and was much more secular in his outlook, Hamid suggests a link between the struggle for power of these brothers and the tension between Islam and secular modernism in Pakistan in his own time. Although this dichotomy gets blurred in the novel, where the characters Aurangzeb (Ozi) and Dara Shikoh (Daru) seem equally modern and secular, Hamid has said that the novel is about the dangers of “intolerance” in the past and in our own time, and that Ozi and Daru represent, respectively, the struggle between an Islamic and a secular state (Gross np). The outlines of this idea are a little hard to discern in the novel, however. Even though Daru falls into drug dealing and burglary, Ozi emerges as the more corrupt character. But corrupt and ruthless as he is, it is difficult to see how Ozi can be associated with the historical Aurangzeb, since he is thoroughly Westernized and secular, and his “intolerance,” when it comes to Daru, is rooted in jealousy, not religion.

Hamid gets around this problem by updating the historical story into a contemporary allegory in which Aurangzeb wields the power of secular elites, while Daru's criminal tendencies stand for the violent elements of Islamic fundamentalism:

My story posits that Pakistan faces a similar choice today. But my Aurangzeb represents the entrenched elite—an impediment to the country's development. Darashikoh in my story is his opposite, the violent backlash to that system. He's secular, but his angry reaction stands for Pakistan's religious movements, its violent crime. (*Newsweek* 62)

Where in the historical source Aurangzeb is the violent religious fundamentalist and Dara Shikoh the enlightened secularist, in Hamid's allegory Aurangzeb is figured as a corrupt secularist while Daru's "crimes" supposedly indict religious fundamentalism. And yet, the problem with seeing the novel in the allegorical terms Hamid has in mind are exacerbated by its ambivalence about Islamic fundamentalism (dramatized in the above quote by Hamid's wanting to have Daru be literally secular but symbolic of "religious movements"). In a series of asides that dot the novel Hamid's characters are thoroughly dismissive of "fundamentalism." Young men with beards in Lahore are derogatorily referred to as "fundos," or simply dismissed as "new populists" (32). Near the end of the novel, however, Hamid seems much more sympathetic to the fundamentalists' assessment of Lahore's problems and how to solve them. Late in the novel Daru, thoroughly undone by his addiction to drugs, dealing, and burglary, runs into an old acquaintance who has embraced Islam. Their exchange is worth quoting at length. Daru is in a movie theater where he has been watching a Hong Kong-produced Kung Fu film. During the screening fights have broken out between members of the audience and Daru ends up lamenting that Pakistanis "can't even watch a film together in peace" (224). Daru narrates what follows:

The cinema is almost empty when I realize someone is watching me. I stare at him, and he hesitates for a moment before walking over, motorcycle helmet in hand. Thick black beard. Intelligent eyes. Looks about my age. Salaams.

I return the greeting.

"Have we met before?" he asks me. Calm voice.

"I don't think so."

"Were you at GC?"

"I was, as a matter of fact."

"I remember. You were a boxer."

I nod, surprised.

"So was I," he says.

I extend my hand. "Darashikoh Shezad."

He shakes it firmly. "Mujahid Alam. I was a year junior to you. Middleweight."

"Now I remember. The beard is new."

He looks around the deserted theater. "I came over because you looked upset."

"I'm fine," I say, a little taken aback.

"Did you find today's spectacle disturbing?"

"What do you mean?"

"All the shouting, the fighting, the disorderliness. Our brothers have no discipline. They've lost their self-respect."

"One can hardly blame them."

He lowers his voice and continues in a tone both conspiratorial and friendly. "Exactly. Our political system's at fault. Men like us have no control over our own destinies. We're at the mercy of the powerful."

Normally a speech like this from a virtual stranger would seem odd. But something in the way he says it makes me comfortable, drawing me in. I lean forward to hear him better.

"We need a system," he goes on, and it sounds like he's quoting something, "where a man can rely on the law for justice, where he's given basic dignity as a human being and the opportunity to prosper regardless of his status at birth."

"I agree." (224–25)

Daru realizes at this point that Alam is a "fundo." He refuses Alam's invitation to attend a meeting of "like-minded people, brothers who believe as you and I do that the time has come for a change" (225), but Daru says he has "taken a liking to him and I'm reluctant to let him down . . . In the car I take an aitch out of the glove compartment. Prerolled. I thought I might need one after the movie. I light up, thinking about Mujahid. What a nice guy. I hope he doesn't get himself killed trying to make things better for the rest of us. I guess there are all kinds of fundos these days. And they're obviously well organized if they even have a sales pitch for people like me. I can't say that I entirely disagree with their complaints, either" (226).

Daru's sympathy toward Mujahid, and his feeling that there is much to agree with in what he has to say, comes as a surprise, since in the earlier portion of the novel "fundos" are dismissed out of hand. It also complicates Hamid's comment, above, that Daru represents the "violent crime" of Pakistan's religious movements. Here the fundamentalist analysis of social division is given at least as much weight as Professor Superb's disquisition on air-conditioning or Murad Badshaw's assessment of class power and property rights. If the logic of the novel's historical source seems to position Ozi as the intolerant fundamentalist and Daru as the potentially liberating secularist, then what are we to make of Mujahid Alam's position and the way Daru seems to accept it? It is easy to see Ozi's corruption, but difficult to associate it with the kind of fundamentalist intolerance practiced by the historical Aurangzeb. Alam is the only practicing Muslim in the book, and he seems far from intolerant. Indeed, he presents an analysis of what is wrong with the social and political fabric of Lahore that Daru finds fairly compelling. Mujahid Alam's presence in the book complicates the already shaky allegory Hamid creates around the figures of Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb and Daru Shikoh. While it makes sense to see Ozi, as Hamid wants us to, as representing a corrupt and entrenched secular elite, this puts Hamid in the awkward position of transferring the historical Aurangzeb's destructive fundamentalism to the sympathetic hero, Daru, who in fact is receptive to the fundamentalist analysis of what is wrong with Pakistan.

From Alam's point of view, globalization would represent only the latest episode in the history of modernization and secularization in South Asia that began with Western colonization. If Hamid wants to champion the responsible administration of globalization in Lahore ("access to the markets and knowledge and entertainment of the wider world" [*Dawn* np]) and to warn against the intolerance of Islamic fundamentalism, Alam's presence in the book seems to complicate those efforts in a way Hamid fails to explore. Since Alam's dissatisfaction with Westernization would logically derive from a historical perspective that sees contemporary globalization as an historical extension of British colonization, it also undermines the difference Hamid posits between colonialism and globalization. For Alam, the link between colonialism,

postcolonialism, and globalization would be clear. All three are linked together in a kind of continuum that contradicts Hamid's desire to see a clear break between colonialism and his post-post-colonial generation.

Moth Smoke, I have been arguing, stands out from much recent South Asian fiction in English for its engagement with the economic dimensions of globalization. Hamid is, to be sure, interested in the cultural disruptions globalization causes, but his own experience in international finance leads him in very productive ways toward a novelistic analysis of the uneven effects of globalization. In its attempt to sever the "post-post-colonial" condition from the long impact of Western colonization, however, the novel oversimplifies the historical context of that condition. Hamid's decision to link his story to the last years of the Mughal Empire extends the history of colonialism in South Asia so as to underscore its origins in a time that long predates the establishment of the Raj, but the value of that historical link gets undercut by Hamid's refusal to see contemporary globalization as an extension of Western colonialism, and to deal more forthrightly with the pressing (anti-colonialist and anti-globalizationist) challenge of Islam. The story *Moth Smoke* so adeptly chronicles does not stand apart from the history of colonization in South Asia, which has always been characterized at the cultural and economic levels by the conflict between religion and secularism. It is its latest installment.

Notes

- 1 See in particular Chacko's lecture on the subject (50–54).
- 2 By utilizing two narrators, one to tell the historical events covered by the novel (from the late eighteenth century through the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857) and the other to register the more contemporary dislocations of diasporic experience in the 1990s, Chandra draws a clear link between colonialism and the forces of globalization.
- 3 See in particular Mukherjee's *The Middleman and Other Stories* and Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*.
- 4 My point is not that the other writers I have mentioned *ignore* economic change, but that they give decided prominence to the cultural dislocations that stem from it. Hamid, in effect, reverses the trend, giving prominence to economic change as the source of cultural dislocation.

- 5 For an up-to-date overview of the problem of corruption in Pakistan, and efforts to curb it, see the website for Transparency International Pakistan, an organization dedicated to monitoring and uprooting national and international corruption in Pakistan, at <http://www.transparency.org.pk/index.htm>.
- 6 The novel is framed by the story of Daru's trial, and the sense that we are reading "testimony" is underscored by Mumtaz, who implies the novel we have read is her own "half story" of Daru's "innocence" (245). However, at the outset of the novel, Daru refers to the witnesses at his trial as "liars all" and includes Mumtaz in the list. According to *Newsweek International* (July 24, 2000), Hamid submitted a version of the story as his J.D. thesis at Harvard. The philosophical and legal issues treated in the book deserve the kind of lengthy analysis that falls outside the scope of my own.
- 7 See Jay, "Beyond Discipline? Globalization and the Future of English," 35–36, on the historical dimensions of globalization.
- 8 Loomba also articulates this position. See in particular 1–19.
- 9 This history is dramatized in Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*.
- 10 For a variety of perspectives on Pakistan's experience with globalization see Husain, Hasan, Shirazi, and Ahmed. Husain, a former senior economist and director with the World Bank and Governor, since 1999, of the Central Bank of Pakistan, argues that Pakistan has not benefited much from globalization because it failed to shift from a reliance on foreign aid and international financial institutions to a focus on international trade, foreign direct investment, labor flows, and technology. Shirazi, more skeptical about the benefits of globalization than Husain, insists that "local ownership and involvement must be central to any structuring of the economy" in Pakistan. Hasan, on the other hand, sees globalization as a direct threat to the autonomy of Pakistan, a new economic and political order imposed by the U.S. and Japan, "a threat, in many ways akin to the one posed by the English 200 years ago." Here, of course, the link between colonialism and globalization I have been stressing is made explicit.
- 11 The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh began in the late 1970s with the aim of designing a credit delivery system aimed at supporting the rural poor. The Bank lists the following as its main objectives: Extend banking facilities to poor men and women; eliminate the exploitation of the poor by money lenders, create opportunities for self-employment; assist disadvantaged women form poor villages to develop techniques for household management. For background information on the Grameen Project see <http://www.grameen-info.org/>.
- 12 As we have already seen, of course, no such thing happens in *Moth Smoke*. Appadurai sees globalization as resulting from a rupture related to migration and the media, and while Hamid focuses on how his characters migrate from Pakistan to America and back (as part of Appadurai's *financescape*), he pays no attention to the media and tends to see the cultural effects of globalization as homogenizing.

13 This “dark side” looks a lot like Miyoshi’s view of globalization and mirrors many of the effects of globalization Hamid foregrounds, effects that might usefully be studied in terms of what Appadurai calls “financescapes” (33–34). What comes “to the fore” on the dark side of globalization, Jameson writes, is the “rapid assimilation of hitherto autonomous national markets and productive zones into a single sphere, the disappearance of national subsistence (in food, for example), and the forced integration of countries all over the globe into” a new “global division of labor” dominated by a “world-system from which ‘delinking’ (to use Samir Amin’s term) is henceforth impossible” (57).

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sultan. “The Ill-Effects of Globalization.” *Dawn: The Internet Edition*. 2 March 2000. 5 July 2006 <http://www.sbp.org.pk/about/speech/Impact_of_globalization_Mahboobul_Haq.pdf>
- Alva, J.J.K. de. “The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: a Reconsideration of ‘Colonialism,’ ‘Postcolonialism,’ and ‘Mestizaje.’” *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*. Ed. G. Prakesh. Princeton: Princeton UP: 241–75.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Chandra, Vikram. *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*. New York: Little Brown, 1995.
- Dirlik, Arif. “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism.” *Critical Inquiry* 20.2 (1994): 328–56.
- Grameen: *Banking for the Poor*. 5 July 2006. <<http://www.grameen-info.org>>
- Hamid, Mohsin. “Mistrust in the West.” *Dawn: The Internet Edition*. 1 November 2001. <<http://www.dawn.com/2001/11/01/op.htm#4>>
- . *Moth Smoke*. New York: Farrar, 2000.
- . “A Call to Arms for Pakistan.” *Newsweek International Online*. July 24, 2000. <http://www.msnbc.com/news/nw-int_front.asp?cp1=1>
- Hasan, Mubashir. “The Menace of Globalization.” *Dawn: The Internet Edition*. February 5, 2000. <<http://www.dawn.com/2000/02/25/op.htm>>
- Haupt, Simon. “Novelist by Night.” *Globebooks.com*. 5 July 2006. <<http://www.globebooks.com/interviews/mohsinhamid.html>>
- Husain, Ishrat. “Impact of Globalization on Poverty in Pakistan.” February, 2000 <http://www.sbp.org.pk/about/speech/Impact_of_globalization_Mahboobul_Haq.pdf>
- Jay, Paul. “Beyond Discipline? Globalization and the Future of English.” *PMLA* 116.1 (January 2001): 32–47.
- Jameson, Fredric. “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue.” *The Cultures of Globalization*. Ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. Durham, Duke UP, 1998: 54–77.

Globalization and Historical Allegory in *Moth Smoke*

- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Boston: Houghton, 1999.
- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Miyoshi, Masao. "Globalization, Culture, and the University." *The Cultures of Globalization*. Ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. Durham, Duke UP, 1998: 247–70.
- . "Mohsin Hamid." *The Chronicle Online: The Independent Daily at Duke University*. February 18, 2000. <http://www.chronicle.duke.edu/vnews/display.v/ART/2000/02/18/3d768e32061ef?in_archive=1>
- Mukherjee, Bharati. *The Middleman and Other Stories*. New York: Grove Atlantic, 1999.
- "Pakistani Novelist and New Yorker Mohsin Hamid." 20 September 2001. Interview with Terry Gross. *Fresh Air*. 5 July 2006 < <http://freshair.npr.org>>
- Robertson, Roland. *Globalization*. London: Sage, 1992.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New York: Random, 1997.
- Shirazi, Usuf. "'Glocalization'—Not Globalization." *Dawn: The Internet Edition*. December 31, 2001. <<http://www.dawn.com/2001/text/ebf6.htm>>
- Suri, Manil. *The Death of Vishnu*. New York: Norton, 2001.
- Transparency International Pakistan. 5 July 2006. < <http://www.transparency.org.pk/>>
- Waters, Malcolm. *Globalization*. London: Routledge. 1995.