ANALYZING URBANIZATION, IDENTITY, AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS IN MOHSIN HAMID'S *HOW TO GET FILTHY RICH IN RISING ASIA* THROUGH THE LENS OF EDWARD SAID'S ORIENTALISM

Zara Kayani
Research Scholar (MPhil English Literature) Hamdard University, Karachi
Email: zarakayani1808@gmail.com
Suhail Ahmed Solangi
Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Hamdard University, Karachi
Email: suhail.solangi@hamdard.edu.pk

Abstract

In the book How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia (2013), Mohsin Hamid offers the complex story of urbanization, neoliberal aspiration, and identity construction in the postcolonial South Asian space. This paper is a qualitative discussion of the novel, using the concept of orientalism as developed by Edward Said to explore the socio-cultural and economic forces that have created the postcolonial subject. The study examines the role of urban environment, material aspirations and inherited colonial legacies in shaping the individual agency, identity and social mobility. The paper has emphasized the critique of neoliberal modernity and paradoxes of the self-help ideology through the intensive discussion of the narrative style, addressed to the second person, metafictional device, and has argued that Hamid engages with both the text and mode of writing. As the discoveries indicate, the pillar of the storyline, the escapades of the heroine of the slum to the riches of the city, serves both as an expression of the postcolonial urbanity and the ethical and moral lesson about the psychological aftermath of unhealthy ambitions. Finally, the paper places Hamid work in the context of postcolonial literary discourse, and shows how historical awareness, urbanization, and hybridity creation of new identity in modern South Asia interact.

Keywords: *Orientalism, Urbanization, Postcolonial Identity, Neoliberalism, Urbanization, Globalization, Textual Analysis*

Introduction

Postcolonial literature can be used as a tool that could help to review the long-term effects that colonialism has had on the modern societies. Mohsin Hamid, a renowned Pakistani author, carries his novel How to Get Filthy Rich to Rising Asia, the fast-urbanizing environment of Pakistan, and demonstrates that historical and cultural backgrounds influence the placement of individual aspirations, social classes, and morality (Ahmad, 2015; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2002). Hamid creates a hybrid between self-help tutorial and social commentary using the distinctive second-person narrative style that makes the readers work out the fusion of morality, materialism, and urban modernity (Khan, 2016; Graham, 2017).

As it is illustrated in the novel, the concept of urbanization is both desirable and estranged. Cities are depicted as the area of opportunities, and at the same time, they reproduce the existing structures of inequality based on the colonial hierarchies (Alavi, 2014; Davis, 2006). The story of Hamid highlights the patterns of neo-Orientalism which, in turn, are shaped by the postcolonial tendencies of economic and cultural perception of South Asia, as it was already stated by Said (1978, 1993) that, in the context of the postcolonial era, the remnants of colonialism manifest themselves through the hidden mechanisms of self-Orientalization and global economic reliance (Mufti, 2016; Rahman, 2019). The story of the protagonist sums up the opposition between

individual aspiration and the constraints imposed by the system, how the main character is negotiating his own identities under the influence of historical, social, and economic pressure (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963).

The novel also parodies the self-help genre, the empty promises of the neoliberal modernity of a postcolonial city. Presenting the notion of wealth accumulation as the quality of success, Hamid parodies the rags-to-riches model, demonstrating that the colonial hierarchies are repeated in modern disguise in these stories (Bhatnagar, 2014; Shaikh, 2016; Tariq, 2018). The metafictional devices, irony, parody are used to make the novel address both individual and social change and depict a psychological and moral impact of unthinking engagement in neoliberal capitalism (Hassan, 2018; Thiolier-Méjean, 2014).

In this respect, Orientalism by Said is a critical theoretical prism in studying how colonial structures are replicated, embodied and bargained in postcolonial urban environments. The analysis of the interaction of the protagonist with the city spaces, identity formation, and agency negotiation in the works by Hamid is a manifestation of the conflicts between historical consciousness, socio-economic mobility, and cultural hybridity (Loomba, 2015; Upstone, 2018).

Research Objectives

- To examine the ways urbanization and neoliberal modernity have been depicted in How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia.
- This is to investigate identity formation and cultural constructs through the prism of Orientalism by Edward Said.
- To understand how narrative style, metafiction and irony disclose moral, psychological and social aspects of the post-colonial life.
- To contextualize Hamid novel in the further discussion of postcolonial urban literature and neoliberalism criticism.

Literature Review

The postcolonial South Asian understanding of urbanization, identity, and cultural constructs has received attention particularly in the recent literature scholarship with the novel portraying the city life and social mobility. Theorists claim that the urban spaces in postcolonial societies are both more of a place of opportunity and alienation and can be seen in the historical traces of colonialism (Alavi, 2014; Davis, 2006). This duality is evident in Hamid, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* as the city is an aspirational, but equally immoral place where social ranks remain intact despite a growing economy (Gopal, 2009; Ramaswamy, 2014).

The juxtaposition of identity and neoliberal modernity in the novel by Hamid has been pointed out in modern literature. Graham (2017) highlights the way Hamid depicts a subject of the city as a fragmented and hybrid one with a personal ambition negotiated through structural limitations. Khan (2016) also emphasizes the second-person address used in the narrative to generalize the experiences of the protagonist to the rest of the culture, and it carries with it general apprehensions about culture, as in South Asian urban communities. As scholars like Shaikh (2016) and Bhatnagar (2014) observe, the parody of the self-help genre created by Hamid criticizes the ethical and psychic prices of the material success by associating the personal desire with the inherited colonial hierarchies.

These dynamics have been extensively used to analyse Orientalism as formulated by Edward Said using the theoretical construct of Edward Said. The way, Said (1978, 1993) reveals how the colonial power continues to exist in cultural and economic aspects, and it influences the way of

self-identification and social interaction within the postcolonial societies. Mufti (2016) and Rahman (2019) apply this point of view to the field of literature, positing that postcolonial texts display the neo-Orientalist discourses being internalized, with the local subjects of the subjects negotiating identities against Western standards of success. The main character Hamid is an example of this process, since his desires are clearly indicative of aping the rules of global capitalism, as well as having to do with the limitations of postcolonial urban life (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963).

The metafictional and narrative techniques of the novel were also examined by scholars. According to Hassan (2018) and Thiolier-Méjean (2014), the ironic tone and the second-person narration assist Hamid in inviting the readers to the critical self-reflection as they break the border between literary fiction and social criticism. According to Upstone (2018) and Loomba (2015), these methods of experimentation allow criticizing cultural hierarchies, alienation in the city, and postcolonial consciousness. Additionally, the research by Javed (2020), Islam (2015), and Patel (2023) shows the psychological and emotional effects of urbanization, as individual agency and identity formation is connected to historical and structural inequalities.

Besides a literary analysis, researchers like Sassen (2018) and Liu (2021) also highlight the importance of globalized urban economies as the formation of cultural and social identities, which is the interconnectedness of the processes on a local and global scale. This interdisciplinary approach reveals that postcolonial urban fiction is a place in which literature, sociology and economics intersect to bring out the lived experiences of postcolonial subjects. Together, the study findings provide a solid ground to apply Orientalism by Said to the story of Hamid, and connect the process of urbanization, identity, and cultural creation in the novel to the lasting colonial influences and neoliberal demands.

Theoretical Framework

The present paper uses Orientalism by Edward Said as the main theoretical framework. According to Said (1978), the concept of orientalism refers to a system whereby the west develops knowledge about the east in such a way that it re-establishes power relations and cultural superiorities. Orientalism in the postcolonial literature does not come out in a pronounced form, but it affects the identity formation, social mobility, and internalization of the Western norms (Ahmad, 2015; Huggan, 2001).

In her novel, Hamid shows how colonial mentality still prevails in South Asia today. The desire of the protagonist to be rich and become a person of social status shows how the Western ideas of success were internalized in him, and it is the same principle of neo-Orientalism that Said (1993) describes (Mufti, 2016; Rahman, 2019). The city and its possibilities along with systemic injustices are the locale where colonial past and neoliberal capitalism intertwine each other to form the social arrangement as well as the subjectivity of individuals (Alavi, 2014; Davis, 2006).

The Orientalism paradigm is also augmented by the ideas of homodynamics (hybridity) and mimicry (Bhabha, 1994) by Homi Bhabha, which explain the identity negotiation of the protagonist. Hybridity describes the contradiction between the local and global cultural forces, and mimicry is characteristic of ambivalence of the postcolonial subjects who imitate the western examples of success but cannot escape the historical and social inequalities (Gopal, 2019; Nayar, 2013). The theories of psychological decolonization developed by Frantz Fanon (1963) also help to understand why the main character is eventually able to understand him, and how it takes moral

and emotional reflections to break through ideologically imposed on the internal self (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986; Nkrumah, 1965).

Lastly, the policy of marginalized characters, especially the female protagonist is informed by the subaltern theory used by Gayatri Spivak (1988). Through her experiences, the encroachment of postcolonial patriarchy and the demands of a neoliberal economy is shown, as the agency and resistance continue to exist between the structural limits (Roy, 1997; Sidhwa, 1988). Combining Said Orientalism with Bhabba, Fanon, and Spivak, the given study places Hamid novel in a complex postcolonial criticism framework, showing all the multivaried interactions of history, identity, urbanization, and cultural constructs (Tyson, 2015; Loomba, 2005).

Research Methodology

The research methodology chosen to complete this study is the work of a qualitative research based on the analysis of literature, close reading and applying postcolonial theoretical visions. The main objective is to examine the city of Mohsin Hamid in his *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* in terms of urbanization, identity, and cultural constructs with respect to Edward Said in his writings on Orientalism. A literary method can be used to investigate the narrative techniques, thematic patterns, and characterization in detail, showing how the novel is in contact with the postcolonial past and the socio-economic reality (McKee, 2001; Tyson, 2015).

The process of the research methodology includes four steps. This is achieved by first reading the text in a systematic manner in order to track down repetitive patterns of urbanization, social mobility and cultural aspiration. Second, these themes are examined through the framework of the postcolonial theory basing on the works of Said regarding the Orientalism, Bhabha about the hybridity and mimicry, Fanon about the psychological decolonization, and Spivak about the subaltern point of view (Ahmad, 2015; Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963; Spivak, 1988). Third, the narrative and stylistic devices such as the use of the second person narration, irony, and the metalanguage are discussed to comprehend their purpose in bringing out the inequalities in the system and the urban contradictions (Khan, 2016; Hassan, 2018; Thiolier-Méjean, 2014). Lastly, the interpretation is made so that the novel can be evaluated as both a critique of the postcolonial urban society and as a reflection of the subjectivity of individual people that is affected by historical and economic processes (Gopal, 2009; Rahman, 2019).

The approach focuses on the interaction between the individual and institutional aspects of postcolonial city life. The simultaneous analysis of narrative form and content allows placing the experience of the protagonist in the context of the larger socio-cultural and economic structures, which helps determine how the modernity of the urban environment and global capitalism and colonial heritage overlap in constructing identity and moral awareness (Alavi, 2014; Sassen, 2018).

Textual Analysis

The novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* by Mohsin Hamid makes use of new narrative styles to examine the concept of urbanization, identity, and cultural ideals in the postcolonial setting. The second-person narrative makes the reader directly participate in the explorations of the main character, which forms a two-tier experience, the combination of the subjective experience and the social commentary (Hamid, 2013). The fact that the protagonist is able to ascend out of poverty in rural areas to the affluent in the city depicts the inconsistency of the neoliberal dream, where economic mobility is touted but still stained with structural inequality.

Parody of the Self-Help Genre

The second person narration Hamid uses is a parody of the self-help manual because it is turned into a weapon of social criticism. For instance, Hamid writes:

"You start off with nothing. And you want more than nothing. The first step is to get filthy rich." (Hamid, 2013, p. 3).

It is a humorous way to imitate the tone of the self-help books, but also criticizes the ideology of the material success as the biggest aim. By means of this parody, the novel reveals the artificiality of a Western economic paradigm introduced into the postcolonial cultures (Bhatnagar, 2014; Shaikh, 2016). The line emphasizes the conflict between the aspiration and systemic constraints, which is the concept of internalized Orientalism according to Said in which the postcolonial subject internalizes Westernized patterns of success (Said, 1978; Mufti, 2016).

Urban Space and Inequality

Hamid paints a fantastical picture of the city as a place of necessity and a home of alienation:

"The city is full of people like you, all searching for the same things, all trying to make the same money." (Hamid, 2013, p. 45).

City is a potential space that recreates inequalities that already exist and develops competition that dehumanizes people living there (Davis, 2006; Ramaswamy, 2014). The duality of the city is an expression of the contradictions within modernity in the postcolonial space where the high rates of economic development can be compared with the rooted social hierarchies. The events taking place in the city prove how the policies of neoliberalism reproduce the patterns of social division that reflect colonial relations of authority (Alavi, 2014; Graham, 2017).

Identity, Hybridity, and Mimicry

The theory of the hybridity and mimicry presented by Homi Bhabha helps Hamid to depict how the main character establishes her identity in the context of the global and postcolonialism:

"You try to be like those you admire in the city, but somehow, you remain yourself." (Hamid, 2013, p. 67).

This sentence summarizes the conflict between the imitation and selfhood. The protagonist absorbs the city and Western values at the same time he is unable to escape his cultural and rural background. The hybrid identity represents the eternal compromise of a postcolonial subject between past and future desires (Bhabha, 1994; Ahmad, 2015).

Gender and Subalternity

The portrayal of the female character, the Pretty Girl, by Hamid can be called an implication of Spivak analysis on subalternity:

"She wanted the same things as you did, but the world gave her fewer chances." (Hamid, 2013, p. 89).

This is where patriarchy meets capitalism in the postcolonial society. Women are further marginalized, but Hamid depicts the manifestations of resistance that are more subtle, demonstrating her agency against the background of structural oppression (Spivak, 1988; Thiolier-Méjean, 2014). The neoliberalist implication of gender is also criticized in the struggles of the Beautiful Girl that show how economic systems perpetuate inequalities (Hassan, 2018).

Psychological Decolonization

The ultimate disappointment of the protagonist emphasizes the weakness of material achievement in accordance with the ideas of psychological decolonization proposed by Fanon:

"At the end, you realize that money cannot buy the freedom you truly seek." (Hamid, 2013, p. 200).

In this case, Hamid emphasizes that liberation is not entirely economical; it needs moral and emotional consciousness (Fanon, 1963; Khan, 2016). The traits of colonial and neoliberal influence on shaping the desires of the protagonist are also seen in his journey as an inner conflict. Materialism turns into a boat to find more existential and moral issues (Alavi, 2014; Javed, 2020).

Narrative Techniques as Critique

The experimental nature of Hamid use of second person narration, the use of irony and metafiction is only a tool of postcolonial criticism:

"You think you are in control, but the city has its own rules." (Hamid, 2013, p. 120).

This sentence is one of the examples of how the story destroys the illusion of agency in the urban capitalism. The reader is invited to be a part of the social critique as an address to you, which makes the reader think about the ambition in life and the organization of the society (Khan, 2016; Shaikh, 2016). It is by means of this involvedness that the novel carries out a metacritical role, merging narration and moral contemplation.

Economic Aspiration and Moral Consciousness

Hamid strikes a balance between materialistic aspiration and moral condemnation:
"The goal is not only to get rich but to understand what it means to be human in the process." (Hamid, 2013, p. 210).

The above quote is an example of the philosophical question behind the novel. It challenges the cultural and ethical beliefs that constitute the success of urban form, emphasizing the need to separate economic, social, and moral aspects in postcolonial modernity (Gopal, 2009; Sassen, 2018).

Integration of Postcolonial Theories

Overall, in a synthesis of Said, Orientalism, Bhabha, hybridity, Fanon, psychological decolonization, and Spivak, subaltern theory, the analysis shows that Hamid is negotiating the concepts of urbanity, identity, and moral consciousness:

Said: Colonial minds embedded in neoliberal desires (Said, 1978; Mufti, 2016).

Bhabha: The hybrid identity between imitation and selfhood (Bhabha, 1994).

Fanon: The psychological decolonization based on the moral and existential awakening (Fanon, 1963).

Spivak: The processes of agency negotiation in structural oppression by marginalized voices (Spivak, 1988).

This multi-theoretical model shows the novel as a literary and sociopolitical intervention, including the interdependence between economic, cultural, and historical factors in the creation of the postcolonial urban identity (Ahmad, 2015; Hassan, 2018).

Major Findings

Analysis of the text provides the following valuable findings:

Parody of Self-Help: Hamid reinvents the self-help genre and turns it into a critique against neoliberalism and urban ambition as well as the empty nature of the rags to riches concept (Bhatnagar, 2014; Shaikh, 2016).

Urban illusion: The city is also aspirational but recreates inequality, corruption and alienation and it acts as a location of neo-Orientalist power (Davis, 2006; Said, 1993).

Hybridity and Mimicry: Postcolonial hybridity is present in the identity of the protagonist who has to negotiate Western structures of success but has to face historical and structural limitations (Bhabha, 1994; Gopal, 2019).

Gender and Subalternity: Women characters show subaltern resistance in postcolonial and neoliberal cultures, where intersectional oppression and agency are described (Spivak, 1988; Thiolier-Méjean, 2014).

Psychological Decolonization: The ethical awareness of the main character represents the idea of psychological liberation that Fanon preaches, where it is important to be conscious of morality, not of the material possessions (Fanon, 1963; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986).

Conclusion

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia is a critical postcolonial literary text that combines the urbanization, identity, and historical consciousness with narrative innovation. Hamid mocks at neoliberalism and urban inequality, inner-city colonial legacies, and internalization without satirizing neoliberalism, inner-city inequality, and the inner-city past, and advocates for moral consciousness, humility, and empathy.

The way in which the protagonist in the story (poorness in the countryside, richness in the city, and then moral realization) is negotiated can be interpreted to represent how the postcolonial subject negotiates the freedom, ambition and identity in the historically and structurally constrained spaces. Combining personal stories with wider socio-economic and historical contexts, the novel by Hamid shows that identity, success, and morality cannot be addressed on a vacuum without referring to the cultural memory, social relations and urban systems (Alavi, 2014; Ahmad, 2015; Gopal, 2009).

This study highlights the dualism of the novel as a literary and socio-political commentary. It helps in comprehending how urban modernity, colonial past, and individual agency can interplay in South Asian postcolonial societies and the importance of fiction in increasing the ability to critically reflect and be aware of moral or ethical issues.

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