



**Globalization and Neo-colonialism: A Postcolonial Perspective to Mohammed
Hanif's *Red Birds***

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Abstract

This article explores Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018) in terms of globalization as an enterprise of neo-colonialism through a postcolonial perspective. This research project aims to reveal how globalization extends colonial legacies, reinforcing economic, cultural and political dominance over marginalized post-colonial societies. This study will apply post-colonial theory, particularly drawing from the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, to examine neo-colonialism in globalization, narrative resistance and subalternity as represented in the novel. Through a close reading of the text, this study uncovers the ways in which Hanif presents the struggles of the characters against colonialism. The study reveals how

globalization is portrayed through the characters as a neo-colonial strategy meant to sustain economic, cultural and political dominance. The findings aim to expose the power dynamics of neo-colonialism, the urgency of decolonizing globalization and reclaiming local agency. This study will contribute to the role of globalization in perpetuating neo-colonialism through cultural, economic, and political dominance, especially in post-colonial nations.

Keywords: Edward Said, globalization, neo-colonialism, postcolonial, resistance

Introduction

Mohammed Hanif, born in 1965 in Okara, a prominent British-Pakistani writer and journalist, is best known for his satire and storytelling technique as evident in his novels, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* and *Red Birds*. He has written for stage, film and BBC radio. He worked for BBC in London, wrote articles for “The Guardian” and “New York Times” as well as his own literary works. He has received many international awards for his remarkable literary work. Mohammed Hanif’s *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, shortlisted for the Guardian First Book Award, and won the Commonwealth Prize for Best Book. His second novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* won the Welcome Book Prize. He has also been awarded with *Sitara-i-Imtiaz* in 2018. He was the head of the BBC Urdu Service in London and now works as their special correspondent based in Karachi. Mohammed Hanif’s writing offers a powerful critique of human condition, making him one of the most thought-provoking writers in contemporary Pakistani literature. Hanif is widely known for his contribution to war writing” (Sadia, 2023, p.1). Published in 2018, *Red Birds* by Hanif is a satirical and darkly humorous novel that explores globalization’s entanglement with neo-colonialism from the perspective of postcolonialism. This is a powerful novel about war, family and love. The novel is set in an unnamed country where American forces rain down bombs in order to destroy the country. Throughout the novel, Hanif explores the consequences of military intervention in marginalized societies that continues the neo-colonial domination of weaker nations. “*Red Birds* is an incisive, unsparing critique of war and of America’s role in the destruction of the Middle East. It combines modern and ancient farcical traditions in thrilling ways” (Nayeri, 2018, p.1). The two terms globalization and neo-colonialism are closely related to each other. The 21st century has witnessed rising wave of globalization. This research applies a postcolonial perspective to explore how globalization serves as a modern iteration of colonial control, reinforcing economic and cultural

dominance over marginalized societies. The study aims to reveal the mechanisms through which neo-colonial power is sustained. This article is not only significant for postcolonial studies but also for understanding the implications of globalization on local cultures and identities such as in *Red Birds*, highlighting the need for a critical evaluation of global systems that continue inequality. While focusing on the objectives, the study will try to answer the following research questions:

1. How are globalization and neo-colonialism represented in the novel, *Red Birds*?
2. How does Hanif's *Red Birds* represent the impact of globalization on marginalized communities?

Literature Review

Red Birds is a satirical and postcolonial novel with a mixture of comedy and tragedy. It explores the negative impact of globalization and colonialism on dominated societies. Hanif Kureishi (2020) describes it as “The funniest tragedy I’ve read in years” (Hanif Kureishi, 2020) whereas another study views the novel as “Hanif’s greatest accomplishment lies in how he successfully mashes together two diverging prospects—comic and tragic” (Farhan, 2019). Moreover, the novel is viewed as a “satirical novel about a lost American fighter pilot and a teenage refugee is a high-wire act” (East, 2018, p.1). The discipline of globalization has been studied widely and is celebrated as means of economic integration and cultural exchange. However, scholars and critics in the field of postcolonial studies, view globalization as a continuation of imperialism and colonization. Tomlinson (1999) is of the view that “Globalization lies at the heart of modern culture; cultural practices lie at the heart of globalization” (Tomlinson, 1999, p.1). On the other hand, neo-colonialism is the indirect control of colonized nations through economic, political and cultural mechanisms, maintaining the former colonial states on a global scale. Kwame Nkrumah (1965) defines neo-colonialism as “an attempt to export the social conflicts of the capitalist countries....” (Nkrumah, 1965, p.5). The novel is set in an unnamed country somewhere in the middle East. The desert in the novel symbolizes the marginalized spaces of East, subjected to the political, cultural and economic agendas of global powers. “*Red Birds* is an incisive, unsparing critique of war and of America’s role in the destruction of the Middle East. It combines modern and ancient farcical traditions in thrilling ways” (Nayeri, 2018, p.1). Razia Iqbal (2020) conducted an interview with Mohammed Hanif at The London Library, where he said that *Red Birds* is set in an unnamed country located in his head. The novel *Red Birds* is analyzed by applying

postcolonial theory which is seen through the lens of multiple postcolonial theorists and scholars. By applying Orientalism, the novel will be analyzed in terms of the representation of East seen from the eyes of Westerns especially Americans. The novel exposes how people of East and their culture, traditions and religion is viewed by Americans. Karim (2020) suggests that “Hanif’s dark humor proves to be an appropriate means of exposing wrongdoing, as well as dramatizing cultural misconceptions” (p.1). However, as “an Orientalist piece, *Red Birds* serves the narrative of the Neo-Orientalists. For, it’s a ‘mouthpiece in depicting and representing Muslims as backward and savages” (Tilwani & Hassan, 2024, p.7). *Red Birds* is a novel that is based on war and its aftermath in an unknown desert. Shah (2023) comments that “the language staged by Hanif in *Red Birds* (2018) plays an emphatic role...casting a rigid critique and presenting the untold and unseen picture of the colonized as well as that of colonizers’ perspective of war and its aftermaths” (Shah, 2023, p.12).

It is pertinent to note that multiple studies have been conducted to analyze the novel. However, hardly any study has dealt with the topic of globalization and neo-colonialism by applying postcolonial theory. Some of them have elaborated the idea of colonialism, but the idea of globalization and neo-colonialism was away from their studies. The researchers could not identify any on US military intervention in postcolonial societies. Hence, this study will provide a detailed study on the impacts of globalization and neo-colonialism on colonized people from the perspective of postcolonialism. The main aim of this literature review is to provide background support for the content of Hanif’s novel *Red Birds*.

Theoretical Framework

Globalization is described as the interconnection or interdependence of world cultures and economies. “Globalization refers to fundamental changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence, according to which the significance of space or territory undergoes shifts in the face of a no less dramatic acceleration in the temporal structure...” (Scheuerman, 2023, p.1). On the other side, neo-colonialism is the practice of a great power to maintain and extend its control over marginalized colonies by justifying colonialism. Kwame Nkrumah defines neo-colonialism as “Neo-colonialism, like colonialism, is an attempt to export the social conflicts of the capitalist countries...” (Nkrumah, 1965, p.5). Some scholars define neo-colonialism as it is the indirect control of colonized nations through economic, political and cultural mechanisms, maintaining the former colonial states on a global scale. Globalization and neo-colonialism are similar as both shape the political, economic and cultural landscape of the contemporary world. *Red Birds* by

Hanif has been explored by multiple researchers worldwide. However, the area of exploration of this study aims to examine Hanif's *Red Birds* from a postcolonial perspective, analyzing how the novel critiques globalization as a neo-colonial force.

The concepts of globalization and neo-colonialism are important to understand the power dynamics in postcolonial literature. Globalization is often known as a process that promotes economic integration, cultural exchange and technological advancement. However, it seemingly reinforces the socio-economic inequalities. Neo-colonialism is a term that refers to the indirect control of colonial powers over marginalized societies as it can be seen in Hanif's *Red Birds*. The novel critiques neo-colonialism by showing how foreign aid and military intervention serve as instruments of control in the unnamed desert in the novel. This study will apply postcolonial theory developed by scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha. It provides a foundation to examine neo-colonialism in globalization, narrative resistance and subaltern representation through the characters of Hanif's *Red Birds*. Throughout the novel, Hanif critiques that how intervention of US military forces in marginalized societies become a basis of control and domination of these societies. Concepts like 'Orientalism' by Edward Said is used for understanding the concepts of Western people about Eastern. As in the novel *Red Birds*, Colonel Slatter describes the people of desert as "Basically a real bad place full of bad people" (Hanif, 2018, p.8). Moreover, in the novel *Red Birds*, a stereotypical representation of Muslims is also given. Orientalism also defines how these concepts lead to the domination of Eastern communities. According to Said (1978), "Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told... Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European Atlantic power over the orient..." (Said, 1978, p.6). This representation justifies colonial domination. Homi K Bhabha's theory of hybridity is also used. Bhabha introduces the idea of cultural hybridity, which suggests that postcolonial subjects adapt and resist imperial forces which creates hybrid identities that mix colonial binaries. In simple words, hybridity refers to the mixing of identities, cultures and traditions as a result of colonial and postcolonial interaction. Bhabha's concept of hybridity can be seen in Hanif's *Red Birds* in how characters of marginalized community interact with the Western culture, military and humanitarian aid (USAID). Hanif has used this concept of hybridity to highlight the complexities of globalization. Frantz Fanon's work on psychological concept of colonialism is also used to understand the trauma experienced by the characters in *Red Birds*. After Said's orientalism and Bhabha's hybridity, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of 'Subaltern' is also

used as a theory in this study. Subalternity refers to the marginalized groups in society whose voice have been suppressed, particularly in colonized and postcolonial societies. Subalterns also refer to those colonial and marginalized people who are socially, politically, economically and geographically dominated and are excluded from power structure. Subaltern, according to Spivak (1988) in an interview, “refers to those who don’t give orders; they only receive orders” (Paulson, 2016, p.1). Spivak argues that the subaltern, or the oppressed groups in society, are often spoken for or misrepresented in dominant narratives, rendering their agency invisible. In Hanif’s *Red Birds*, the idea of subaltern highlights how voice of marginalized people is suppressed and they are treated as slaves. “Some people are born to be slaves. He had to become a corporate slave. And slaves, by the very nature of their profession, are not supposed to be very good at bargaining” (Hanif, 2018, p. 40). This theoretical framework is grounded in postcolonial theory that provided a way to have a look on the impacts of globalization and neo-colonialism in Eastern societies. This paper will also explore how Hanif’s novel shed light on the complex relationship between power, resistance and identity in a globalized yet divided world.

Discussion and Analysis

The novel follows multiple perspectives including those of Major Ellie, Momo and Mutt. The novel starts with an American pilot, Major Ellie, whose plane crashes in the desert. He meets there with Momo, a teenage boy who is inhabitant of desert refugee camp. Momo has a dog named Mutt who is one of the narrators in the novel. Mutt is a keen observer and has philosophical thinking with a very good sense of smell. He always warns Momo of the danger by smelling it. As he says: “The smell of rose water is the smell of sudden death after a well-lived life” (Hanif, 2018, p.29). Momo is on a mission to find his elder brother Ali who is carried away by Americans at the nearby Hangar.

Mohammed Hanif’s *Red Birds* is a satirical and critical examination of globalization and neo-colonialism in marginalized societies specially in East. Globalization is presented in the study as a force that is used by powerful nations to extend their influence, maintain control and dominate weaker nations. The novel is set in an unnamed country, somewhere in the middle East, after war as throughout the novel, the consequences of war could be seen through character’s dialogues. It has multiple narrators but major voice is employed by Momo, a teenage inhabitant of desert and Major Ellie, an American pilot whose plane crashes in desert and is rescued by Momo. Throughout the novel, Momo makes plans to rescue his brother Ali, who is carried away by US military to the nearby hangar. He is in anger and irritation throughout the novel because of the

missing of his elder brother. In *Red Birds*, Hanif portrays how globalization reinforces cultural and economic inequalities. In postcolonial terms, neo-colonialism represents the control of western powers over colonized areas through economics, politics and culture instead of direct control. Hanif's novel is full of ironic and satirical remarks on Western powers such as Momo says "An American in pain, God help us. An American in pain is a fucking pain in the ass of this universe" (Hanif, 2018. p.88). Mother Dear views love with Americans a disease, she says to Momo: "I suspect you have inherited your father's love for white people. It's a disease.....I can tell you love of white people is a special kind of disease" [Hanif, 2018, p.228]. Momo views Americans as selfish and self-centered as it has been mentioned in the text that "Sometimes white people only understand things when their self-interest is gonna be involved" (Hanif, 2018, p.167). The study views the novel from postcolonial perspective. Postcolonial theorists' work such as Said's Orientalism, Spivak's idea of subaltern, Frantz Fanon's exploration of psychological colonization and Bhabha's concept of hybridity provide a lens to analyze how Hanif's *Red Birds* questions and deconstructs Western concepts of the East. The study also analyzes the novel's major themes, its characters and its setting to understand how Hanif critiques the Western narratives that dominate globalization. Said's 'Orientalism' is applied to the novel. Orientalism is actually a book written in 1978 by Said in which he used the term *orientalism* to describe Westerns' commonly views about the Eastern marginalized communities. Through orientalism, it becomes clear that in the novel, East is represented as dependent, bad and inferior to the Americans. Spivak's concept of the 'Subaltern' is also applied to *Red Birds*. Spivak (1985) suggests that subalterns cannot speak. Subalterns refer to colonial and marginalized people who are socially, politically, economically and geographically dominated and are excluded from power structure. However, the novel also shows that how the marginalized voices are misinterpreted by those who are in power. In *Red Birds*, characters like Momo and his family represent marginalized voices. This is how, the works of postcolonial theorists provide a detailed framework to understand globalization and neo-colonialism from the lens of postcolonialism. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity is also applied to *Red Birds* to analyze how people of desert like Momo and his family and doctor interact with Western culture, military and humanitarian aid (USAID). The term 'hybridity' has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha. "Hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Mambrol, 2016, p.1). Moreover, Fanon's work on psychological concept of colonialism is also used to understand the trauma experienced

by the characters in *Red Birds*, such as Mother Dear, Father Dear and Momo. Momo's hate and bitterness towards American forces reflects his awareness of their role in the suffering of his community and it also reveals his inner struggle with feelings of anger and inferiority. Momo, his family and even Major Ellie is also a victim of the system he represents. His confusion shows that colonization affects even those who serve it. Major Ellie even satirizes his own culture when he is lost in the desert by saying that "I also hate that culture now; any culture that cares for whiney mutts more than it cares for starving humans lost in the middle of a desert" (Hanif, 2018, p.88). Hanif's portrayal of Ellie represents a system that prioritizes power over human beings or people. In *Red Birds*, Hanif explores the theme of psychological impact of colonialism. As Sadia (2023) claims that "the novel's protagonists have mental illnesses brought on by the conflict... overkill bombing, a lack of essential services in conflict areas, homelessness, the murder and kidnapping of family members, and excessive bombardment" (Sadia, 2023, p.1). It addresses how neo-colonialism impacts the psyche of local communities. "Characters in *Red Birds* experience dislocation, physical and psychological torment, anxiety, sadness, hostility, and difficulties with post-traumatic stress disorder during times of conflict" (Sadia, 2023, p.4). Colonialism impacts the psyche of local communities particularly younger generation like Momo, who struggles against neo-colonial powers with disappointment and anger such as when Momo was taking Major Ellie to his home, he says in a sarcastic tone: "Guess who is coming home, Mutt. Our war hero" (Hanif, 2018, p.94). This dialogue of Momo is actually critique of war, imperialism and neo-colonialism. Hanif uses Momo's anger to criticize how globalization disrupts identity and creates inner conflict in local and marginalized societies and how it leaves them feeling caught in two worlds. Momo also mentions the globalization's effect on people through the use of technology as it is evident from the novel when he says "I have got two people with friend brains. One is a native mutt, victim of a technological advance...And the other one is a victim of the failure of war technology, a man separated from his machine" (Hanif, 2018, p.169). Theme of resistance can also be seen through Momo's character as postcolonial theory analyzes narrative resistance in *Red Birds*. Another major theme is identity and cultural displacement, which is also a major concern of postcolonial theory, that critiques how globalization threatened identity and culture of local communities. Hanif has used the character Momo as a lens through which he examines the identity and cultural displacement. Momo, the young protagonist, does not like the colonial intervention in his desert and grapples with the removal of his culture and identity. Momo's interaction with Major Ellie explores the tension between local identity and global

influence. Throughout the novel *Red Birds*, there are multiple examples that show how US intervention in marginalized societies like desert becomes a basis for the domination and culture displacement of the people of desert. Through characters, themes and satire, Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* critiques the intersection of globalization and neo-colonialism, bringing to light the complexities of power, identity and exploitation in war-stricken world. In short, this study is very crucial text for understanding the complexities of globalization and neo-colonialism in today's world. The novel, *Red Birds* hints at the complexities of globalization and neo-colonialism in today's world. *Red Birds* by Hanif is one of the postcolonial texts that explores the aftermath of war and colonization. It is a powerful critique of globalization and neo-colonialism in dominated societies and it criticizes Western powers especially Americans for their exploitation and marginalization of these communities.

Conclusion

Hanif portrays globalization as a tool for economic and cultural domination, where the interests of powerful nations like Americans are prioritized over the needs of marginalized communities. Through its satirical tone, multi-perspective narrative and complex characters, *Red Birds* challenges the dominant narratives of globalization and how it extends colonial legacies, reinforcing economic, cultural and political dominance over marginalized post-colonial societies. Through its postcolonial perspective, *Red Birds* not only critiques globalization but also provides a foundation to examine neo-colonialism, narrative resistance and subaltern representation through the characters of Hanif's *Red Birds*. This study offers a thought-provoking commentary on the psychological impacts of colonialism, identity and cultural displacement and narrative resistance. Psychological and cultural impacts of colonialism drawing from Frantz Fanon's work is major theme that is used to understand the trauma experienced by the dominated characters of *Red Birds*. In simple words, this research project aims to reveal how globalization extends colonial legacies, reinforcing economic, cultural and political dominance over marginalized post-colonial societies. This study is an attempt to offer an insight into the subject of globalization and neo-colonialism, elaborated by postcolonial theory of Said, Bhabha, Spivak and Fanon. This research helps to explore multiple themes in novel *Red Birds* such as identity, aid dependency, exploitation and global hegemony.

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