

## Tripartite Globalization in Afghanistan in Rahman's *In The Light Of What We Know*

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### Abstract

*Globalization is the instrument of disintegration and weakening of nations through a vast network of transnational companies and their monopoly on global markets that destabilize a nation's economy by enhancing the interdependence of the countries and weakening the nation-state's grip over its geographical borders. Rahman in his novel In the Light of What We Know (2014) shows Afghanistan as a victim of tripartite – economic, cultural, political – globalization. Using Spencer & Wollman's (2002), Appadurai's (2005) and Giddens' (1990) critique and analyses of globalization, this study explores how Afghanistan has been gripped by the forces of globalization. Raemdonck's (2013) conceptualization of three dimensional global games of chess – great game, little game, and domestic game – being played by America, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, ISI and NGOs in Afghanistan chalks out the American designs of getting access to the oil and gas reservoirs in Afghanistan and Central Asian states.*

### Key Words

Globalization,  
Economic liberalization,  
Capitalist Globalization,  
Afghanistan

### Introduction

Globalization purports “dilution of national borders, [establishment of] a global government and reductive role of nation-states in the interest of transnational corporations” (Majidi, 2005 qtd. in Khan, 2010). Globalization has posed a serious threat to national identity, culture, and resources. Zia Haider Rahman, a Bengali diaspora writer, exposes in *In The Light of What We Know* (2014) the issue of the exploitive global ventures of the First World in Third World countries, specifically Afghanistan and its destructive effects on the country's economic, cultural and political sovereignty. The novel explores how global forces muster up their economic, cultural and political energies, the repercussions of 2008 financial crisis and [so-called] ‘*European enlightenment*’ by which they originated ‘*new humanity*’ (2014) and the Western outlook to Muslims still imprisoned in the cage of the ‘*Orient*’. Rahman's unnamed narrator tells the story of his friend Zafar, composed with the help of the Dictaphone and Zafar's scrupulous notebooks the story of this global citizen as he journeyed from London to Kabul, from New York to Islamabad, and from Afghanistan to Dubai.

## **Literature Review**

Improved international living standards and cultural products pressurize nation-states to adopt a 'golden straitjacket' and thereby reinforce political and economic free trade framework. Transnational Companies' power grows with an increasingly large influence on world economy (Geogantzias, et al., 1984). Different societies receive different effects of globalization, initiating a hierarchical system on societal, personal and institutional levels. The nation-states have one edge over TNCs: they have lands that TNCs do not have (Giddens, 2007).

Global modernity believes in de-centering the state but the entity of a nation as a geopolitical reality still exists, though modified under the strong influence of globalization. Contemporary Anglophone fiction attempts to resolve the multifaceted mess between the nation and globalization in a number of diverse ways. Fictional works (of Hamid, Naqvi, Shamsie, Aslam, etc.) show the deep marks of hybridization and transnational identities on the lives of those who sustained contact with other cultural environments through the processes of globalization. Novelists (like Adiga) depict the negative effects of economic globalization on developed and developing nations alike, although in different ways and different degrees. But many contemporary novelists (Delilo, Updike) engage with the continuing political sovereignty of the nation-state in spite of human rights violations and planetary catastrophes, reflecting on the role of literature in evading the authority of the state and bringing far-flung suffering to a global audience (Ho, 2019).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Globalization encompasses physical, social, economic, cultural, political, and even ecological aspects of life's multifaceted dynamism. After the 2008-9 world financial crisis, the process of globalization is not confined to economy (Geogantzias, et al., 1984). Globalization has its blessings in education and facilitation of life, but it has a corrosive effect on the solidarity and integrity of nation-states. Spencer and Wollman (2002) have presented the concept of tripartite globalization – economic, cultural and political. In principle, economic globalization, also known as neo-liberal globalization, is the product of the prevalent set-up of multinational companies. Currently running hegemonic system of globalization is but a form of neo-empire which expands its domination through financial monetary bodies like WB, IMF etc. with the goal to launch McDonaldized institutional set-up for rendering western cultural superiority: there is a fierce argument about what has replaced the old territorial empires and that is the United States and its allies, transnational companies, financial and media institutions, or more broadly the forces of 'globalization', have constituted a new imperial system (Howe, 2002).

The global forces are working through a systematic network of MNCs, TNCs, and NGOs to contribute to the world capitalist economy, sometimes through world military order to level the field for economic globalization (Giddens, 1990). Destabilizing the economies, decision power or even the autonomy of others, they safeguard the interests of the most powerful and financially prevailing nations. Economic actors around the globe such as IMF and WB are concerned not only to stabilize global capitalism but also to maintain debt payments to Western Banks (Spencer & Wollman, 2002). All this renders economic globalization as a venture, not unlike colonialism (Kamruzzaman, 2017) – an enterprise initiated by neo-empire like past empires, though without a land, unlike the past empires which had tasked at captivating both 'soil and the sons' (Giddens, 1990). TNCs'

power grows with an increasing influence on the world economy. As a result, individual citizens may lose their sense of influence on shaping the political agenda (Giddens, 2007; Geogantzas, et al., 1984). Cultural globalization is set by injecting the cultural flows of the McDonalized norms and values into the nerves of the victimized nations incapacitating them to resist. This is achieved through what Giddens has conceptualized as the international division of labor comprising qualified but unskilled workers (1990). Besides running development projects, the aid workers of NGOs, MNCs, TNCs, etc. prove to be the harbingers of global culture to a victimized country by establishing ethnoscaples, financescaples, mediascaples, technoscaples and ideoscaples (Appadurai, 2005). Demolition of national barriers, to Francis Fukuyama (1992) is the universalization of the liberal, Western values – the “end of history”, the endpoint of human ideological evolution. Arif Dirlik thinks that the Eurocentric modernity of globalization causes political liberation and serves as the guiding force to universalize the institutional structures with a target of yielding production and consumption by amending the infrastructure to suit the technologies and values of development (Connell & Marsh, 2011). The replacement of local culture with global culture leads to the clash of civilizations since being deficient in modern skills, locals suffer from employment-loss.

The political dimension of globalization does not lag behind if economic and cultural are set. The global culture puts the local movements in cultural clashes with global forces, yet it also blows the wind of political opportunities to catch the blustery air conducive to ‘otherize’ the enemies of global forces. Harvey (2006) says that the weak sense of the ‘others’ has taken the place of strong sense of ‘other’. Held construes globalization as an originator of both the fragmenting and unifying forces because it not only familiarizes us with political disparity but also acquaints us with common identity (Held et al, 1999). The global war on terror is the new version of ‘Orientalizing’ the anti-global forces for attainment of global agenda. West had accumulated knowledge about the Orient, which changed over huge durations of time. This was closely related to the management of both the people and the territories of the Orient by the West (Sklair, 2002).

Keeping the agenda of capital economic globalization at the core, a global game is being played in South Asia, with Afghanistan as the chessboard (Rahman, 2014) in this game. According to Raemdonck (Watson, Covarrubias, Lansford, & Van Raemdonck, 2013), the global game has three dimensions: in the first dimension of the chess game, the international players of globalism – USA, USSR, China, and India (here it is the US alone in case of Rahman’s *In the Light of What We Know*) – are involved in capturing the board and pieces (soil and sons), to use the metaphor of chessboard in Raemdonck’s theory (2013). After crushing Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the US appeared on the Central and South Asian scene to watch the increasing power of China and the nuclear capacity of Iran while gaining its due share from the oil and gas enriched area of Central Asia (2013). The new discoveries in Afghanistan and Central Asian states have increased the strategic importance of the region.

On the second level, the little game is being played among the regional powers: Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the South and Central Asian states (In Rahman’s novel, the game is played by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia). Pakistan is moving ahead haltingly due to its strategic position and momentous role in the Great Game because of the divergence between the strategic interests of Pakistan and the global and regional strategic interests of the West. Numerous ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, tribal, clans are playing on the

third level of chess games. Pakistani ISI seems to be playing a local game in Afghanistan. Besides, terrorism runs through all levels of the Central and South Asian chessboard.

### **Analysis: Tripartite Globalization in Afghanistan and *In The Light of What We Know***

Globalization intrudes upon the nation-state, challenges its writ and forms a supranational government to soften the geographical borders, thus weakening the nation-state for economic, political and cultural gains (Spencer & Wollman, 2002). Rahman's *In The Light of What We Know* (2014) demonstrates the victimization of Afghanistan pushed into the blind alley of financial misery wherefrom America receives enormous amounts of money (Rahman 2014). Emily, the assistant of Mohammad Jalaluddin, the "most senior Afghani at the UN, WB, and IMF" serving in her new reconstruction institute, calls Zafar who is busy in negotiations with Bangladesh, to come to Afghanistan and work for the lives of millions of Afghans, a burden of a 'neo-civilizing mission' of the global forces.

### **NGOs: Economic Globalization in Afghanistan**

Economic exploitation has been the top Western priority in the guise of development in Afghanistan that may never be conquered with "silk roads that crisscrossed this stretch of Central Asia", but economically hungry Americans would "maintain permanent bases in the thick of it, a slingshot's distance from Central Asian oil wells, and on the border with Iran" (Rahman, 2014). The stakeholders of borderless globalism i.e. America and its allied global actors create a "neo-imperial system" (Howe, 2002; also qtd. in Naqvi, 2010) under their supervision. Battalions of the aiding agencies' organized workers, trained like army soldiers "in all but name" have come with missionary zeal to actualize global economic ventures with carrying guns, rather than food or medicine, for their own uplift: "We're not put on this earth to fuck around. We have to make something of our lives" (Rahman, 2014).

Zafar sees AfDARI (Afghan Development and Reconstruction Institution) founded by Australia's overseas aid agency" (Rahman, 2014) and UNAMA working to transform economic and cultural spheres in Afghanistan and challenging the writ of the nation-state (Giddens, 1990). The world capital economy is strengthened by an investment acquired from pouring finance in unlikely remote places through coordinating cultural flows of ethnoscape and finanscape (Appadurai, 2005) set by NGO workers/advisers who run the financial projects while doing small aid and development activities (Rahman, 2014) to hunt backward areas like Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Kabul. The role of the world military order (Giddens, 1990) is to develop a suitable environment for economic globalization, managed through ISAF soldiers (Rahman, 2014) deputed to serve the purpose while technoscapes i.e. offices equipped with advanced technologies of transportation, satellite phones, internet, etc. facilitate the mechanization of global economic enterprise. AfDARI and UNAMA challenged the autonomy of Afghan nation-state after the removal of Taliban regime. Under ISAF soldiers, NGOs' network established a *supranational government* (Hardt & Negri, 2000) to exploit in the name of welfare projects. Emily, an English lady is enthusiastic enough to be "the soldier of beneficence in search of a just war" under "the power vested in her by the UN, ISAF, NATO, the West and her white skin" (Rahman, 2014). America, AfDARI and UNAMA have an economic agenda wrapped up into the fascination of western culture. The Afghans are entrapped into the illusionary snare of their educational, economic and health uplift at the cost of local culture. The champions of *European enlightenment*' and *'human rights'* exploited "[t]heir repugnance at the unequal

treatment of women [and] homosexuals” by Afghans (Rahman, 2014) just to occupy the board of Afghanistan to play chess upon it with the privileged selection of who would be a white and who would be a black piece.

### **Carriers of ‘Neo-Civilizing Mission’**

Zafar draws a dismal picture of Emily’s meeting with attentive whites doing “Lord’s work”: they pretended general welfare (Rahman, 2014). They were liberal enough to sympathize and seek the salvation of the war-afflicted people upon whom they had recently wreaked havoc. It is the same open-mindedness, which helps them fight for individual’s “private spheres” by stampeding the rights of a nation. NGO workers help establish a new empire’s hegemony in the name of ‘civilization’, wherewith they had already defined new sets of “the rights of the self”. Afghans do not concur with westerns on gay sex nor do they entertain norms of a fast life annihilating the sanctity of the four walls of home. Rahman (2014) criticizes the orientalist *enlightenment* and human rights since, by humans, they mean only the white human race and by rights they mean only the rights of whites to enjoy unrestricted rule over others. Zafar critiques that the “pungent admixture of alcohol and human bodily order” is not part of local culture rather “[i]t came from another world” (Rahman, 2014). Western enlightenment is confined to “fight their wars of reconstruction under the banner of *let him be* or *let her be*” rather than “*let them be*” – promotion of individual liberty at the cost of the writ, norms, and codes of a nation-state – since ‘dividing policy’ helps them position on the self-assumed role of ruling, civilizing and rebuilding the disunited nations by disposing off the wreckage particularly the ruins of undesirable non-state actors.

### **Marks of Feminising Globalism**

The NGOs intrude upon the local norms and values through the nasty game of ‘feminizing’ the country. Spencer and Wollman (2002) observe that transnational networking has deepened the economic, cultural and political divisions by feminizing and politicizing the global phenomena. Globalization has given birth to a class of men (Rahman, 2014) and forced women, too, to work for [white] man, not only as attendants but also to serve his desire in these ‘troublesome corners’. Needy women engaged at low wages are exploited to run into prostitution and compelled to do all types of ‘mean jobs’ (Rahman, 2014). Maurice Touriver, the director of AfDARI had been “screwing” the women after drinking. Discrimination and destitution have enhanced the locally undesirable immoral business of prostitution besides improper commercial activity (Acker, 1988, 1990). The sex industry seems to be active in Crane’s case – a lackey in the embassy, a mariner and on “Armed Service Committee” respectively – as Suleiman accuses him of drinking and prostituting a thirteen-year Afghani girl outside Kabul (2014) for her parents “don’t care so [Sic.] long as he sweetens the deal”; obscenity becomes inevitable for women if children are dying of war. Suleiman’s anger represents local reaction: “kill this son of a pig” because “they rape our girls and ... humiliate our men” (2014). The impending danger of the clash of cultures leads to the ‘clash of civilizations’ (Huntington, 1997) as Suleiman’s reactionary response shows:

Afghanistan doesn’t have the oil of the Khazars, and we’re not ready to prostitute our women like Thais. Unlike the Westerners, ours is not spiritual poverty but a material one

[Sic]. When our needs in that area are met, we will not have the dilemma or crisis of Western man. (Rahman, 2014)

Harvey (1990) finds the revelation of the aestheticisation of politics in places where culture as a merger of signs and significations joins the local norms. All this is recognized in terms of money and commodification that transmit cultural codes since they are tied up absolutely with capital flow. The name 'AfdARI', for instance, contains the name of a local language, Dari, spoken in Afghanistan, cleverly named by the Australian NGO proprietors to pervade Afghani consciousness without resistance. The US-led network of global forces is *civilized* Afghans who were previously acceptable in Soviet-Afghan war as '*jihadis*, the enemy's enemies (Rahman, 2014). This time the Neo-Orientalist project is working in the name of rebuilding and helping war-afflicted Afghanistan.

### **Global Economic and Political Game of Chess**

According to Raemdonck (Watson, Covarrubias, Lansford, & Van Raemdonck, 2013), Afghanistan is being treated as a chessboard by globalizers where great, little, and local players are playing tridimensional political and strategic games of their desired economic ventures at different levels. The first dimension is that Afghanistan is "the land of lost facts" (Rahman, 2014), one of which can be traced in the American great game of chess in South and Central Asia. Zafar, the UN *rappporteur* observed the unexpected movement of UN soldiers along with local and US security forces showing the movement of world military order because everything in-universe was constituted for serving human beings. General Firdous Khan says that Americans always hire surrogates to fight wars for them. As they cannot tolerate their own bloodshed, Americans seek mercenaries and therefore, the use of drone technology to avoid indigestible civil and military casualties. Reza Mehran taunts that when large containers carrying dead bodies are received at the Dover airbase, they run off their wars (2014).

UNAMA's Land Cruisers ran all around in Kabul and the US helicopters laden with UNAMA staff members were landed in the backward districts to initiate rehabilitation. AfdARI received a major part of the funding from the US and in response it facilitated her overlooking the writ of the nation-state; speedy financing on all sides of the state is made possible by violating geographical borders. Besides publicity through self-admiring posters, AfdARI runs projects ranging from irrigation and drinking water to the construction of educational institutes with infrastructure to enlighten the once Taliban-occupied region through preaching freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty and democracy (Rahman, 2014).

America played in collaboration with two little players – Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Saudi Arabia cooperated with the USA to fulfill its need for oil. Steve Coll (2004) reveals that the United States had decided to attack Afghanistan two months earlier than the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Rahman unveils the chief motive behind American attacks on Afghanistan and courageously criticizes the hypocritical role of Saudi Arabia: "Oil is at the root. Oil and business" (Rahman, 2014). Tariq Ali also points out: "oil, oil, oil" (2002). Forewarning the impending danger, Rashid exposes (2000) American favor for the UNOCAL's (Union Oil Company California) pipeline planned to transport oil/gas from the Caspian Sea region to Indian Ocean via Afghanistan and Pakistan. Delivering his consciousness, Rahman asks (2014) how many had read Rashid Ahmed's book entitled *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* before September 11, 2001.

### **Little Game(S)**

Authenticating Rashid's prediction (2000), Rahman (2014) criticizes the most shocking role of Saudi-Arabia after 9/11: "On September 12, 2001, the Saudis pumped out an extra nine million barrels of oil, most of it for the American markets" to support the American economy sunken by the incident of 9/11. The Saudi royal family "keeps oil prices low" to win American favor for its own interests. Also, Britain and America tried to validate their incursion of Afghanistan with banal excuses of liberating the Afghani people who, ironically, sought to live in "peace and security" (Rahman, 2014). Under the leadership of "American lackey *Bush-arraf*" i.e. President Musharraf, Pakistan cooperated for '*strategic depth*' and allowed the Americans to use its airbases. Raemdonck (Watson, Covarrubias, Lansford, & Van Raemdonck, 2013) says that the US efficiently propped up Pakistan all through the Cold War as the strategic partner. Pakistan took this co-partnership as an indemnity from India (Rahman, 2014).

### **Domestic Game**

AfDARI and UNAMA workers/soldiers such as Emily and Crane play individually. Pakistani ISI, too, plays domestic games as is revealed from talk among its officials. One such game is lock-picking played successfully by Colonel Mushtaq (ISI) to determine the reality of Zafar; both are spies and each does the job as "confidential informant" for his employer. The characters even play sub-games by setting their own rules apart from performing duties on behalf of their employers. The colonel alerts Zafar about the impending game of '*envelopes*' and about Crane (Rahman, 2014) which he does not understand. The reception of parcels, comprising alleged American military plans and addressed to Crane, is ensured through Suleiman to create suspicion in him to trace his loyalties. Crane's pedophilic game also deepens suspicions. Suaif tries to stop Zafar from going to Café Europa; Zafar, however, shows his anger at the American belligerence in Afghanistan: "We should get out and steer clear. I have no place here!" (2014). What he realizes after the blast at Café Europa, in which Crane loses his life, is the miserable state of Afghanistan.

### **Conclusion**

Globalization, with its capitalist designs, is injurious to world peace since its cultural and political dimensions undo the administrative writ of the nation-state. Orientalizing the Third World continues for covert economic purposes with globalizers reverting to binaries. Fascinating missions to civilize the nations are furnished with a long evolutionary history. America had to change its founding belief of a perfect union in favor of its current belief of reconstructing "another country in the image of its hopes for itself" (Rahman, 2014). But in covering this distance from pride to narcissism, it had to extend its military might and the road of this destiny is filled with innumerable "corpses" by a universal military order used by global capital forces to attack the places where they confront hurdles in the way of attaining capital designs (Rahman, 2014). Zafar questions: how could the claimants of liberty, the campaigners of freedom and the champions of human rights, by any human measure, justify their infiltration and take the affairs of a sovereign nation-state into their hands, thus posing a challenge to the very writ of the state? Brunyate reviews the novel as a "story of the breaking of nations, [and] war in the twenty first century" (2016). The diaspora intellectuals, settled in the First World, belittle their own Third World country in

their academic institutions (Dirlik, 1992; cited by Spencer and Wollman, 2002). Having no perception of the ground realities of their country, three Afghan-born men living as diasporas (Lakhdar Brahimi, Hamid Karzai and Muhammad Jalaluddin), working for UN organizations and NGOs pretend to be settling the Afghan issues on behalf of global forces as if they were the real representatives of the Afghan nation and yet, “[e]very one [of them] is playing the game and this [Afghanistan] is the board” (Rahman, 2014); the diaspora communities have their due share in breaking the nation.



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