



Volume & Issues Obtainable at The Women University Multan

International Journal of Linguistics and Culture

ISSN (P): 2707-6873, ISSN (O): 2788-8347

Volume 2, No.2, December 2021

Journal homepage: <http://ijlc.wum.edu.pk/index.php/ojs>

The Interplay of Simulacrum, Hyper-reality and Distorted Identity in Hamid's Fiction: A Postmodern Paradigm

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Abstract

The present research is an exploration of the interplay between simulacrum, hyper-reality and identity as presented in Hamid's fiction. Simulation and hyper-reality created through media and globalization profoundly affect the socio-cultural identities of the various male and female characters in the novel in both positive and negative ways. Furthermore, consumer capitalism, westernization and hyper-mediated experiences make the characters believe in false realities thus leading them to chaos and identity crisis. These hyper-realities push the characters to undergo mental, emotional, psychological and socio-cultural conflicts. Thus, in an attempt to seek their identity and true self through blind imitation of the western culture, they are led further away from their cultural roots. The theoretical insights for this study shall be drawn from postmodern theory, specifically Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum and hyper-reality. This qualitative inquiry shall be carried out by close reading and analysis of the selected textual lines in the context of the chosen framework. The significance of this research lies in the fact that it demonstrates how fictional characters specifically and humans generally are increasingly pushed to dwell in a hyper-reality created through simulation due to globalization. The repercussions of which are far reaching including a crisis of one's own identity and perception of self in a society that is increasingly being disoriented due to the flux of globalization.

Keywords: Hyper-reality, postmodernism, hyper mediated experience, capitalism, Identity Crisis, globalization

Introduction

Hamid's fictional works, including *Moth Smoke* (2000), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) and *Exit West* (2017) are based on characters that are hugely influenced by globalization and its inherent ability to draw people into consumerism and indulgence. The fictional narratives and the life trajectories explored in his novels reveal the deeply felt dissatisfaction by the characters who are eager to bring a change in their lives. They are shown to challenge and negate their identities and desire to carve out their own positions in a world that is increasingly engulfed by media, technology and globalization. However, as this paper will demonstrate the media backed hyper-real simulacrum of a posh and modern life that these characters hanker after actually leaves them in deeper crisis and meaninglessness.

Moth Smoke (2000) demonstrates the life of the main character Daru who falls in love with his best friend's wife Mumtaz. The characters become the victim of clash of cultures that brings annihilation for them. His second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) depicts the life of the main character Changez who is trapped between two worlds that are entirely different with each other. Two worlds here refer to eastern and western part of the world. This novel gained immense popularity due to its unique treatment of 9/11 incident. Hamid tries to bring the harmony between two different worlds by involving the reader to let go of their false assumptions about each other. His third novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) is written from second person point of view who leads the protagonist 'you' on the journey of becoming rich and wealthy. The protagonist reaches to the heights of entrepreneur from just being a DVD seller through swift transitions in his life. The protagonist 'you' falls in love with the 'pretty girl' in his teenage but she leaves him to pursue her career as a model and actor. They become the victim of hyperreality due to massive proliferation of media images.

His fourth novel *Exit West* (2017) has a very intriguing story about the life of migrants. He mixes the real and fiction in his work to give a tint of fairy tale magic. Nadia and Saeed are the main characters who meet in the university and soon become acquainted with each other. Nadia is a bold lady who wears black robe, lives alone in a flat, works in an insurance company and rides a motorbike. She challenges all the metanarratives of patriarchy in her life. Saeed is a humble character who works in an ad agency and lives with his parents. The story is set in unnamed country where the situation is getting worse day by day due to war inflicting threats. Nadia and Saeed travel through magical doors to different parts of the world where refugee camps are installed. Magical doors become the source of global entry and exit.

In the times of war, they are only connected through mobile phones. In their refugee camps, Nadia contacts her acquaintances through social media. Hamid shows how characters are immersed in their cell phones that affect their real life. They prefer digital life over real life.

All the male and female characters in the above-mentioned novels are shown to be in some sort of conflict relating to their identities. They are unhappy with their present conditions and desire to bring a change in their lives economically, socially and psychologically. Daru yearns to become a part of Lahore's elite class and believes that in order to be truly happy he needs to have a Pajero like his rich friend Ozi. Similarly, Mumtaz wants to break free from the dull married life and motherhood which she feels are emotionally draining her. Changaze in *The Reluctant Fundamentalism*, is pushed into identity crisis as he fails to assimilate in the American society. His self and identity undergo a huge challenge and crisis as he becomes the victims of hate crimes as after 9/11. The pretty girl and the male protagonist in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, are mesmerized by the competition of money making, fashion, beauty and glamorous city lives as depicted through media. The change that these characters desire to bring in their lives is mostly an inspiration of media-created hyper-reality and simulacrum which results in, as will be demonstrated in the analysis section, delusion, misery and alienation. These characters seek refuge in hyper-created realities and this dwelling in the simulacrum leads to identities that are unstable, ambiguous and distorted.

Literature Review:

Baudrillard's ideas of simulacra, simulation and hyper-reality basically stresses that the constant bombardment of images by the media shapes our perceptions of reality in such a way that it seems authentic and real when in reality they are just simulated and fake. According to Antony and Trambo (2020), Hyper-reality has pervaded every field of human existence including, art, literature, media, politics, architecture, so much so that the "consumers are confused with realities and artificialities" (p.3315). Ucar (2008) in his study of Paul Auster's *Timbuktu* analyzes the novel in the light of Baudrillard's concept of simulation and hyperreality. The difference between real and imaginary, truth and false, signifier and signified has collapsed. Identity itself has lost its meaning so it has become impossible to define someone's identity. Every character enters into a world of simulation to create their own individuality. The main character Willy in *Timbuktu* tries to copy American boys to change his identity. He tries hard to convince himself that the parents were not his real parents. He attempts to simulate being an American but his upbringing by his parents was a hurdle in his wish. Willy accepts the

influence of media technology that compels people to follow the trends set by western societies. He becomes submerged in hyperreal world that he forgets his own real self.

In another study, the researcher Liktor (2012) studies Don DeLillo's two novels *White Noise* and *Players* by employing the theories of Baudrillard, Lyotard and Jameson. The study outlines the main causes of sociocultural condition in which consumerism, technology and mass media brought the change in the contemporary society. American culture is widespread in the world due to media technology. In the novel, characters are presented as emptied beings as they lack authenticity. Jack is shown as a hollow being devoid of empathy and sympathy and this is shown through his relationship with his five wives. De Lillo in his novel also gives the impression that reality in its true sense does not exist. Disasters that are shown on T.V are just simulations that has no contact with reality.

Shabrany and Hemmat (2019) study the novel, *A Scanner Darkly* by Philip K. Dick. Dick constructs the world that is saturated with media images and media technology. This study incorporates Baudrillard's concept of simulation and hyperreality to analyze the portrayal of hyperreal world. People create their realities by following media technology. His novel revolves around the effects of technological commodities that has made the lines between real and fake disintegrated. Due to the disappearance of reality and truth, personal identity is shattered.

Yazdizadeh (2018) examines Heller's *Catch-22* by applying Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality and simulation. Characters in the novel are allotted different high army ranks such as General, Lieutenant, Major but their appearances and behavior are quite childish. This rampant childishness of characters eclipsed American image centered society. The main character, Yossarian is afraid of flying missions so he fakes his illness. It is hard to find out if he is really ill or not because simulators do not identify if symptoms are artificially produced or not. Yossarian does not conform to patriotic sentiments and moral values. He challenges justice, heroism and patriotism through hyperreality. He internalized hyperreality and embraced it as his reality that worsens his paranoia. He takes full advantage of precession of simulacra and cancels a dangerous mission.

Moin and Qasim (2015) have analyzed *Moth Smoke* by using Baudrillard's theory. This article highlights the role of media that has inculcated hyperreality in the minds of the people to regress the meaning of reality. Western media creates a hyped atmosphere that leads the way to chaos and unrest in the characters. Aurangzeb ignores the reality of his life and considers his money and luxuries more

important. His cash and Pajero do not only signify wealth but give him high status and respect. Material things are preferred over moral, social and cultural values due to the obsession with consumer goods.

All of the above-mentioned studies from the researchers show the impact of simulation and hyperreality on the lives of different characters in a different way. All of these studies bring into light that how postmodernism is changing the outlook of the people in the contemporary society. All the actions and thought patterns are influenced by the consumption of media images. This present study will look deeply into the evolving identities of main characters in Hamid's novels who are under the huge influence of media and technology.

Theoretical Framework:

Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) is a cultural critic who studies the relationship between reality and its representation in the contemporary society. He is one of the famous writers of postmodern age who emphasizes on the study of culture and media. In the early days of his career, he was influenced by Marx's ideas of political economy and Barthes's concept of Semiotics. Later on, he deviated from Marx to develop his own theory of hyperreality in which images have become more real than the physical reality. He criticized consumerism and capitalism in his work that are the true causes of collapse of cultural values. He also mentions that media has altered the realities and is erasing the distinction between gender, race and class. Media images are consumed by people and this consumption of media images and signs leads to simulation. Simulation has no contact with reality and this is called simulacra. Baudrillard wrote many books to present the reality of consumerist society but his famous books include *Simulacra and Simulations* (1994), *Simulations* (1983), *America* (1986) and *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (2016)

This present study focuses on explaining his concept of simulacra, simulation and hyperreality from his major works. In postmodern world, it is necessary to decode signs, symbols, codes and images to derive the meaning. Humans have lost contact with each other and have formed a strong relation with objects. New trends in the postmodern world have given consumers new meaning as the consumption of particular things gives them a sense of distinction and superiority over others. Baudrillard's work focuses on the consumption rather than production. He also talks about the influence of media that is molding cultures, and has induced never ending desires in a person. Needs of the consumer have taken a backseat as it is only about satisfaction that commodities bring for them. He opines that freedom of

choice does not exist in the hyperreal world as all the choices are under the huge influence of media technology. The decision of a consumer depends on the consumption of advertisement. As it is rightly mentioned in Baudrillard's work:

“You never consume the object in itself (in its use value); you are always manipulating objects (in its broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status”. (Baudrillard, 1989, p. 62)

Moth Smoke perfectly describes the same situation in which the main character Daru wants to have luxurious objects such as A.C and Pajero to have a status symbol in the society. Ozi owns all the luxuries in his life so he was respected and powerful. The entire focus is on the possession of commodities that symbolize wealth and status. Baudrillard's writing centers around the hyperreality and simulation. He calls postmodern age as an “age of simulation” (1983, p.4) as it is almost impossible to discern reality. People experience only created realities through the powerful effects of media technology.

Simulacra, Simulation and Hyperreality:

In the age of postmodern, it is difficult to stick to one reality. Reality in its true sense does not exist. Baudrillard (1994) describes reality as fictional and fairytale as it has become impractical to set apart real and fake. The conventional definition of reality looks for objective existence and it includes the interplay of signifiers and signified to render meaning. The concept of signifier and signified has lost its value due to pluralistic point of views that generate multiple realities. The difference between real and unreal is faded out as there is no clear distinction between the things where one begins and the other ends. This condition is referred as hyperreality. It is hard to distinguish a reality from a simulation of reality due to highly technologized world.

Simulation bears no relation to the real image and copy. In the world of massive proliferation of images, it is difficult to draw the boundary between real and copy as both implode with each other. Simulacra is an image with no original. Media technologies are the main source of altering our perception towards reality by presenting things that do not have any connection to reality. Media constructs realities by using special effects that make people unable to distinct between real and illusion. Luxurious life style, glamorous and enhanced looks have a huge impact on people's mind. Media encourages people to pursue their materialistic goals. False sense of satisfaction is achieved by following the ideals shown on T. V. Fabricated reality motivates people to act and feel in a certain way. Media constructs ideologies

to direct people's thoughts and actions. Virilio (1991) calls it a "crisis of representation" because it has become so difficult to recognize the difference between object and its image.

In the postmodern world, it does not matter what is real. The only thing that matters is how the thing is presented to invoke the audience's attention. Baudrillard defines hyperreal as more than real. The experiences or realities that are caused by media technologies are more intense and thrilling than real life experiences. Signs, images and codes of hyperreal world regulate thoughts and actions in contemporary society. Hamid's characters become the victim of consumerism, capitalism and globalization. They consume media images that fabricate their reality. They consume false version of reality as real and gets trapped between religion, culture and world of technological images. He presents his characters in the perplexed state of consciousness in which they are unable to distinguish between what is real and what is not real.

Analysis:

Moth Smoke:

Baudrillard is of the view that in the postmodern world, there is no singular reality or truth. Hamid's novels also do not stick to one singular reality but presents egalitarian plurality. Characters in *Moth Smoke* are under the influence of globalization and consumerism develop deceptive and baffling identities. Ozi, Daru and Mumtaz are trapped in the world of images and they see nothing outside this technological world. They live with gadgets that carry symbolic meaning as their lives become hollow and machine driven. Human emotions such as love, trust, pity, respect and responsibilities have lost their true meanings for characters in *Moth Smoke* who only relate to each other for seeking temporary relief and enjoyment. Ozi loses interest in his childhood friend Daru and does not even hesitate to falsely accuse him of the accident that he commits. Mumtaz also shows self-centered tendencies for whom duties such as mothering and nurturing her own child seems unnecessary and demanding. Hamid's characters do not feel the need of human relation and seem too occupied by the obsession of the materialistic things that is shown in the start of the novel as Daru goes to Ozi's home for the first time, "Access obtained, I cruise down a driveway too short to serve as a landing strip for a gateway plane, perhaps, and pass not one but two lovely Pajeros" (*Moth Smoke*, p.10). This is clear evidence that simulation and virtual reality have surrounded the human beings. These luxurious objects catch the attention of Daru and compel him to go after them at any expense. Hamid criticizes global capitalist

system as it does not help common man to lead a prosperous life. Characters in the novel act like false copies of westerners. They are involved in all the forbidden activities such as dancing, drinking and drugs. Daru also describes his feelings when he is in the party, he calls it “a vision of paradise” (p.99). In other words, they are miserably intoxicated by this environment of images, symbols and signs that they lose sense of themselves and the true value and meaning of life.

Hamid shows how these signs and images give power to the people. Ozi owns Pajero so police do not feel the need to stop him. Daru was not allowed in the party just because he had Suzuki. He was on the mercy of Ozi’s request to make an entry in the party. He describes the scene as, “The deep thuds of the Pajero and Land Cruiser, the nervous cough of my Suzuki” (ibid, p.98). These materialistic commodities hold significance as they have a sign value. Baudrillard opines that sign value holds more importance than use value and exchange value as it heightens the social status. Ozi does not care about fulfilling the emotional needs of his wife as he thinks that women only care about cash.

Characters are so lost in their hyperreal world that they are unable to find solace in religion. They have lost their connection with religion and are immersed in technological commodities. Daru is either lost in watching T.V or in the thoughts of Mumtaz. He even sells hash to school going kids after becoming jobless. He criticizes media images in which smoking is glamorized. Smokers are shown as cool dudes that gives false sense of reality about the harmful effects of smoking on health. Media has stirred people to adopt a better lifestyle. In the persuasion of western living style, characters are caught in the conflicting situation. Daru and Ozi were like brothers, but Daru does not feel content about his financial condition. His persuasion towards gaining materialistic commodities puts him in trouble. He was unable to get financial freedom like Ozi had. He gets involved in robbing the money. This shows that moral values are on the decline. Hamid questions the existing societal value where everyone’s focus is to get power, money and elevated social status.

Globalization has not only brought drastic changes in the identities of male characters but it has the same impact on the identities of female characters. The continuous bombardment of liberal western figures in media has led to the modification of cultural values. Women in Pakistan are amazed by the western portrayal of females that resulted in the rapid increase in financial independence. Cultural and religious values are on the compromising situation. Female characters under the influence of sexually liberated western people follow the same lifestyle. They challenge the existing traditional institution of sexual regulations. They now consider the traditional role of marriage as crushing as it is a hinderance to live

their lives according to their potential. Mumtaz in *Moth Smoke* is a bold character who lives her life according to her own will. She does not conform herself to the boundaries of sacred relationship of motherhood and wifeness. She wanted to explore her sexual freedom early on in her life. She loses her virginity when she meets Ozi. Later on, she marries him but gets involved in extramarital affair with her husband's friend Daru. She feels like nothing can cage her freedom. She lived first half of her life in America. After moving to Pakistan after marriage, she gets trapped into two different social, cultural, moral and religious worlds. These two worlds that are poles apart with each other create a problematic situation for her.

Mumtaz feels relieved when she gets a nanny for her son Muazzam. She feels burdened while doing household chores. She says, "at least Muazzam's nanny was a blessing. For the first time...he wasn't completely dependent on me and that was liberating" (*Moth Smoke*, p.193). It's not only that she finds relaxation from mothering duties as liberating but she finds her working as a journalist as liberating and healing for herself. She says, "And the more I wrote, the more I loved home. I was back, I was finding myself again... Childbirth had hurt me inside, and I was finally starting to heal" (ibid, p.196). She creates a hyperreality for her when she starts working as a journalist under a pseudonym to mask her true identity. Moreover, she also says, "my affair with Daru was, at first at last, the most liberating experience I have ever had" (p.195). Her sexual freedom brings more chaos than she expected. She does not only destroy Daru's life but also leaves her family in order to find her real self.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist

We live in a digital world where every tiny news is sensualized to grab the attention of the audience. In this novel, Hamid talks about the tragedy that brought America to its knees. He challenged all the existing 9/11 narratives that were solely based from western point of view. He presented the same incident through a different perspective in which Americans were not shown as victim. Through his novel, he criticizes the homogenization of western point of view in the world. He does not accept the American exploitation of common people through media. Media is a powerful source of spreading information. Informational discourse is controlled by powerful countries. America shows the world what it wants to show. Media never truly presents the true factual story but adds up some spice to make the story look thrilling and exciting for the audience. Changez also becomes the victim of economic globalization in the novel. The novel shows the emptiness and hollowness that Changez feels in the most

exciting city of the world. Media plays its part in constructing or deconstructing certain views in the minds of the people.

Simulation and Hyperreality are the aftermath products of globalization. Globalization has turned the whole world into a global village. People from different social, cultural and religious backgrounds adapt new culture and explore new things. Hamid does not celebrate globalization in his novel but he presents it as a hegemonic institution. He points out that globalization does not help in the eradication of ethnic and racial division. He informs the world that global capitalist system of America is a way to rule the world.

In the novel, the main character Changez goes through different experiences that change his perspectives towards eastern and western world. Just like others, he was an admirer of America but 9/11 incident helps him in questioning the role of media that is controlled by America. He does not see the reality of 9/11 tragedy from the perspective that was presented in the media by the western news channels.

In the beginning of the novel, he endorses American economic globalization and becomes a part of false copy of American culture and values. He makes it clear to his addressee not to be frightened by his beard and says, "I am a lover of America" (TRF, p.1). This statement from him denies the general notion of westerners about people who have beard. He questions the representation of people who have beard in the western media. Western media links beard with terrorists and extremists. After 9/11 incident, he does not remove his beard even after his parent's disapproval of his beard look. He keeps his beard as a protest to give the awareness that beard is not a symbol of terrorist. He defies the symbol of beard that is propagated by western media through his resistance to shave it. That is how, he alienates himself from the false version of reality that is constructed by media images.

America holds power over rest of the world due to its economic power. Hamid controls the narrative in the novel through his character Changez. He controls, guides, silences and leads his addressee throughout the novel in other words, forces him to look at the world from his perspective. At first, Changez was unaware of the real motive of America but soon he realized that America benefits itself from the likes of capitalism, consumerism and globalization. He divulges the real agenda of America. Hamid shows the world the real victims of 9/11 incident. The dominant western discourse in media created a heated sentiments against Muslims. America's biased treatment with Muslims all over the world disturbed Changez the most. He gets inflicted by the media images of Americans destroying

Afghanistan on T. V. He doubts America's intentions of supporting Pakistan if India versus Pakistan clash happens. Moreover, the story of janissaries helps him in realizing his distorted identity. He was no more able to identify himself with Americans. Hamid exposes America's agenda of holding power in the name of war on terror. He does not only deny western's created identity of Muslims as fundamentalists but also proves with his actions that media projects biased views in the minds of people. He takes his addressee to the streets of Lahore where they see some girls are wearing jeans and some are wearing shalwar. This shackles the image of imposition of Islamic values on the women of Pakistan.

The impact of simulation and hyperreality is visible through the characterization of Changez. He describes himself as a hero of the movie but in reality, he struggles hard to maintain his position in American society. He says, "Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible" (TRF, p.3). Changez was immersed in the hyperreal world of America to an extent that he was unable to distinguish between his real life and life that watches on T.V. Likewise, he could not decide about the reality of 9/11 incident on T. V. He describes the event as, "I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news" (p.82). He was unable to feel the sympathy towards Americans who got affected in the incident. Furthermore, he says that fictional characters move him when he develops a connection with them. This shows that people in the hyperreal world gets moved by the death of their favorite fictional character but remains unmoved by the death of real people in real life. It is because of the spread of proliferation of tragic images that people have stopped getting affected by the real tragic incidents. He says, "My thoughts were not with the victims of the attack—death on television moves me most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over multiple episodes" (p.83).

His true identity is torn and can be seen when he was unable to decide what to wear to meet Erica's parents. He narrates his feelings as, "I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged- in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither" (TRF, p.168). His meeting with Erica's father does not go well as Erica's father had stereotypical biased views about Muslims and Pakistan. This shows the fact that media is playing a significant role in inducing negative image off Muslims in the minds of the whole world. Hamid tries to unmask the American's ethnocentricity through the treatment of Changez from Erica's father.

America played a victim card after 9/11 incident for a long time and kept presenting Muslims as terrorists. America through its media corrupted the reality and truth about terrorism. America masks the reality, hides the news of its own people and propagates only the positive news about its country. Hamid is against the portrayal of Americans as heroes and Muslims as terrorists. He is at odds with the presentation of singular reality by American media. America controls the minds of the people through its skillful use of media technology. Baudrillard (2002) predicts that, “Fourth World War is elsewhere. It is what haunts every world order, all hegemonic domination – if Islam dominated the world, terrorism would rise against Islam, *for it is the world, the globe itself, which resists globalization*” (p.12).

It's not only Changez who becomes the victim of simulation and hyperreality. Erica, the female character in the novel creates a false copy of her ex-boyfriend in the image of Changez. She lets herself stuck in nostalgia. In the novel, Hamid criticizes the conniving role of western media. He does not present TV reports or documentaries to narrate tragic incident. Through this event, he shows the world a true face of America who played the role of sufferer but in real acted as assailants.

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia

In this novel, Hamid presents the consequences of globalization on the life of characters. This novel shows that how global culture with the help of media erases local culture. People have started migrating from rural to urban in the pursuit of getting prosperity and wealth. Hamid talks about the modification of the cities to meet global ends in under-developing countries.

Characters in this novel has to face a lot of problems due to lack of powerful resources. The protagonist ‘you’ moves from village to city and his social status goes from poverty to wealthy. Protagonist ‘you’ gets influenced by the perfect and luxurious life that is shown on tv and billboards and creates a false sense of reality for himself. He forgets the difference between real and fictional way of living. To pursue his false sense of reality, he gets involved in water-bottling business in which he sells boiled water in mineral water bottles. People buy mineral water bottles to remain healthy but the availability of clean water is an illusion. They use mineral water bottles to give themselves a false sense of satisfaction and mark themselves different from lower status people. Hamid satirizes the consumerist society in which the goal is to accumulate wealth and display higher social status. The consumption of false media images motivates him to become a filthy rich without maintaining a distinction of virtue and vice. As a teenager, he worked as a DVD delivery guy and was aware of latest hits and popular actors of

Hollywood. Baudrillard (1989) says, “The cinema and TV are America’s reality” (p.101). The protagonist ‘you’ and ‘the pretty girl’ model their lives according to America’s reality. He goes through a swift transition in his life from being a delivery boy to university student, to local business man and to entrepreneur. He falls in love with ‘the pretty girl’ who leaves him after a one-night stand. She is shown as a passionate girl who wants to become famous model. She leaves behind her family and gets involved in illicit relationship with a photographer to make her way to the world of fashion.

The protagonist ‘you’ and ‘the pretty girl’ cross each other’s paths over the years and get involved in sexual affairs but think that love is a distraction to be avoided if they have to survive in the fast paced and challenging world. They do not allow love to divert them from their ambitions. They achieve their goals by sacrificing their happiness and virtue along the way. They blinded themselves from the reality and remained in the pursuit of fame and wealth. The sense of pleasure and comfort that is induced by media images had a long-lasting effect on the characters. They become the victim of simulation and hyperreality. Their undaunted desire not just for wealth but for freedom leads them to damaging ends. Both characters follow immoral route to get the success in life. The protagonist ‘you’ triumphs over poverty by getting involved in violent and corrupt acts while ‘the pretty girl’ raises her celebrity status by losing her innocence. Hamid points out the harmful effects of media technology that lead people to immoral and unethical way of living. In the pursuit of globalized world, people have forgotten their social, cultural and moral values. The narrator distinguishes between the previous generation and the current generation on the basis of availability of media technology that has become the driving force of life. He says, “You boys, unlike your fathers, have grown up in the city, bombarded by imagery from television and billboards” (p.38). This is the reason that people are following western ideals without taking care of moral grounds.

Hyperreality is not only created by media images but also through the use of technologies. Hamid uses technology in the novel to show the difference that they bring in life. The protagonist ‘you’ in the end of the novel is on hospital bed and feels like a fictional character Cyborg (1998). He says, “you have become a kind of cyborg, part man, part machine” (p.185). He considers himself the part of machine and his reality starts disappearing. These machines manipulate his reality as narrator describes, “the last half decade of your life were mere a fantasy” (p.228). He starts considering his life as a fantasy and relates his reality with fictional character Cyborg. He is so immersed in his false reality that he starts

thinking death is an illusion. He is so disillusioned that he lost a touch between reality and illusion on his deathbed.

Exit West

In this novel, Hamid narrates the existing global migration crisis. He used the technique of magical realism to create a world that has no strict borders. He uses magical realism to give a tint of fantasy and reality. He combined different elements of absurdity to present the hyperreal world. His characters are torn between two worlds. They are not sure where they actually belong to. Nadia and Saeed overcome the challenges faced due to migration crisis.

In the novel, he blames media for portraying refugees as a potential threat. He discusses the issue of global migration crisis and highlights the biased treatment of white people against immigrants. He criticizes the closing of borders as narrator tells, “flow of migrants that was hitting the rich countries who were building walls and fences and strengthening their borders, but seemingly to unsatisfactorily effect” (p.71). To bring the ease in the life of immigrants, Hamid formulates a simulated reality by creating magical doors for everyone. Nadia and Saeed visit different parts of the world through magical doors after war crisis in their country. The narrator describes about the acknowledgment of magical doors by media and says, “Even the most reputable international broadcasters had acknowledged the doors existed, and indeed were being discussed by world leaders as a major global crisis” (p.83). These magical doors proved to be a survival kit for many immigrants. All the immigrants live under one roof and show compassion for each other.

Nadia shows open attitude towards different cultures. Hamid tries to portray that religion, skin color, language, ethnicity and social status do not matter in the age of globalization. He “...advocated a banding together of migrants along religious principles, cutting across divisions of race or language or nation, for what did those divisions matter now in a world full of doors” (p.152). He tries to show the world that people from different social, cultural and national background can live together peacefully under one roof. Media needs to work with more responsibility in order to create a positive image of immigrants. The impact of media can be seen on the lives of characters. They are either connected or disconnected from each other through their phones. They were transported to different places mentally through their cell phones as described by the narrator:

In their cell phones were antennas, and these antennas sniffed out an invisible world, as if by magic, a world that was all around them, and also nowhere, transporting them to places distant and near, and to places that had never been and would never be. (*Exit West*, p.35)

Nadia creates a fake id on social media in order to hide her true identity. Hamid points out the negative consequences of media as it leads people to become addicted to false reality. This virtual world makes teenagers and adults the victim of hyperconnectivity. He writes, “Online there was sex and security and plenty and glamour” (p.39). This gives a proposition that media technology is affecting people all over the world but more in a negative way.

Hamid through his portrayal of female character Nadia busted many myths related to the image of Muslim women. She was a part of strict religious family but she was liberal in her thoughts. She is shown as a woman who wears black robe. Black robe is a symbol of oppressed and submissive women in the eyes of western media. Nadia debunks the image of black robe when she tells the reason why she wears black robe, “so men don’t fuck with me” (p.16). Black robe is a symbol of religious piety but west takes it as a symbol of oppression. Saeed perceives Nadia as a religious girl when he sees her in black robe. She tells him that she does not even offer prayers that shocks Saeed. She is shown as a bold and courageous girl who rides a motorbike too, Policemen assume her a man disguising as a woman so ask her to remove the helmet. She overturns patriarchal structures through her costume as narrator says, “to resist the claims and expectations of the world” (p.45). She questions the stereotypical tags for Muslim women by showing how her costume helps her to get freedom and overthrow male domination.

Conclusion

In Hamid’s novels we can easily identify the inability on part of the characters to identify with the simulated realities created by the postmodern world. This inability of their consciousness leads them to their mutated individual strikingly different from their old identities. The characters unaware of their fabricated false realities consume their new identities as a way of survival in the postmodern world as if their new identities are real. In *Reluctant Fundamentalist* we see how Changez desires for a new life in the west inspired by an ‘American dream’. Baudrillard suggests that fulfillment or happiness is found through simulation and imitation of a transient simulacrum of reality. Changez strives to be accepted by his American friends by transforming himself to simulated personality of a New Yorker, “the feeling that my life was a film in which I was a star and everything was possible.” (Hamid, 2007) but is

ultimately disillusioned when the reality hits him hard hence, ending up as an anti-US lawyer back in Pakistan.

In *Moth Smoke* a conflict and tension arises between the characters due to the postmodern society where television and mass media play a pivotal role in enacting narratives and maintaining social status. Luxuries are through of as a sign signifying rich class. Daru is constantly made aware of his inferior status by access to luxury and facilitations provided by science and technology to his old friend. The characters in the protagonist's surroundings undergo through the stages of hyper reality i.e., order of malefic, order of sacrament, order of sorcery and finally that of simulation to achieve their individuality (Baudrillard, 1983, p.9).

Similarly, in the novel *How to get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* globalization and late capitalism with the historical and cultural forces build the contested self of the protagonist who is eager to rise from economic disparity and inequality. The fittest of all individuals gets to survive the new hyper real world created in name of globalization and neo-liberalism. This new notion of slippery simulated self is considered as a vital tool for material success. Temporal distortion created by the introduction of new technologies and means of communication also speaks of the exquisite hyper real atmosphere in Hamid's fiction. Thus, Hamid's characters are influenced by hybridization, westernization, globalization, capitalism and consumerism constructing their concocted simulated selves which makes them disillusioned and miserable. The analysis has clearly demonstrated that the interplay of simulacrum and hyper-reality misleads the various characters who live disillusioned lives structured by media and technology. Both male and female characters subvert the normative socio-cultural identities and roles traditionally assigned to them in favor of self-centered and hyper-real personas. Thus, the interplay of hyper-reality and simulacrum while offering temporary recluse proves to be hollow and false, which in turn, creates distorted identities.

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