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An M.A. Thesis in Literature

**Globalization and Cultural Disjunction in
Selected Novels by Salman Rushdie**

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Abstract

This study attends to the ways globalization causes different kinds of disjunction ranging from cultural cleavage to rifts in the human psyche due to a number of reasons especially commodification, terrorism and the global media spectacle. This thesis aims at tracing the signs of cultural disjunction in three of Salman Rushdie's novels: *The Ground Beneath her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). Through an analysis of these three novels, this thesis investigates the relationship between globalization and cultural disjunction and offers clues for bypassing disjunction in the present globalized world.

Key words: Salman Rushdie- globalization- cultural disjunction- cultural imperialism- media imperialism- terrorism-commodification- Americanization.

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The globalizing forces of the world are mainly the result of the great improvements, achieved in the field of communication, that have tremendously helped in the interaction among people, and therefore among languages and cultures. These forces are in ceaseless interaction; they overlap and borrow from each other. But risks occur when such interaction results in turning local and regional phenomena into global ones. Ashcroft defines globalization as follows: “Globalization is the process whereby individual and local communities are affected by economic and cultural forces that operate world-wide. In effect it is the process of the world becoming a single place” (*Post-Colonial* 110).

In fact, globalization is seen by some intellectuals and cultural critics as a positive process leading to development and prosperity. It is, however, seen by others as a negative phenomenon that threatens cultural integrity and authenticity. According to such anti-globalization activists, a local culture is obliterated by being forced to melt in a pot designed and manufactured by an allegedly superior culture. Both parties, i.e. supporters and opponents of globalization, agree to its direct influence on cultural identity. Whether it is another phase of imperialism or a step towards progress and prosperity, one of the key concerns of globalization is the “ survival of social and cultural identity” (Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial* 114).

The notion of cultural interaction in itself is not new, for human interconnectedness is prevalent throughout history. Examples of this are the spread of the world’s religions, the diffusion of European imperialism, and the dispersal of sciences and technology throughout the globe. This act of mutual effect between cultures could be seen as closely related to the notion of hybridity which refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zones” (Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial* 118). This form of hybridity, produced by cultural interaction, is deeply linked to the idea of transculturation, a process of exchange in which both cultures under contact are modified (Kraidy 53). This is also associated with the notion of glocalization “meaning that the local and the global are mutually constitutive” (Kraidy 154). However, this is not to deny hybridity the dimension of resistance assigned to it by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) who sees it as a means of destroying the colonizer’s dominant discourses by creating “cultures of postcolonial *contra-modernity*” (6).

In his influential essay “*Towards a Global Culture?*” Anthony D. Smith sheds light on the nature of global culture. Smith argues that "global culture is essentially memoryless"(280). Thus, the form of a global culture that presently exists is one that favors forgetfulness over history, since remembering will only bring about cleavage rather than the *memoryless* unity required by a global culture. As such, global culture can lead to what might be termed cultural disjunction. This is suggested by Ashcroft when he states that “individual distinctions of culture and society become erased by an increasingly homogeneous global culture” (*Post-Colonial* 111). This form of global culture is characterized by an unprecedented degree of American cultural primacy. This is prevalent in a number of dimensions. First of all comes the overt expansion of the American popular culture to every corner in the world due to the growing use of internet. Internet is closely related to the idea of consumption and commodification which can be regarded as a way of homogenization, a kind of “cultural convergence” (Robinson 140). In other words, the internet is viewed as a way to impose a dominant culture over all the cultures of the world. This is often referred to as a sort of Americanization, Coca-colization, and Mac-Donaldization.

In defense of waning cultural systems, anti-globalization and anti-Americanization movements arise. One form of anti-Americanization is the use of the very tools of globalization. These are embodied in three distinct features. First: the use of consumption to defeat global American consumption patterns. Second: the use of the internet to resist the forces of Americanization. An outstanding example is the 25th of January 2011 revolution in Egypt that made use of the internet, especially social sites like facebook and twitter, eventually leading to the uprooting of Hosni Mubarak’s political system. Third: the use of weapons to preserve a distinct cultural identity. This is closely related to the rise of terrorism in the world which could be explained in relation to a number of factors.

Literature is one of the fields that attempt to analyze globalization by depicting the influence of a dominant hegemonic culture. Salman Rushdie, the British-Indian novelist and essayist is one of the writers whose works may be read as challenging globalization viewing it as a source of cultural disjunction. Being a migrant and an exile makes Rushdie a transcultural writer who writes with the pen of a cosmopolitan. Almost all of Rushdie’s novels deal with cultural as well as historical issues from different perspectives.

This thesis aims at discussing the relationship between globalization and cultural disjunction in three of Rushdie's novels: *The Ground Beneath her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). Whereas the pre-1999 novels take place in India away from global cities, the novels chosen for analysis in the present thesis have global cities as their setting, something which makes them more apt for an analysis of the idea of cultural interaction. The spatial mobility of the characters in these novels is assumed to allow a closer analysis of the effect of globalization on culture.

The main questions of this thesis, therefore, are: Is there a relationship between globalization and cultural disjunction in the fiction of Salman Rushdie? And if such relationship is detected, have any of Rushdie's characters managed to bypass cultural disjunction in an increasingly globalized world? Do the novels offer any strategies of resistance to globalization and its harmful effects on cultural identity? Or do they merely present the harms of globalization and the manifestations of cultural disjunction?

This study is divided into an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. In the introduction, a detailed survey of the notion of globalization will be provided, the relation between globalization and culture will be set, then the link between globalization and Americanization will be highlighted. Key concepts such as cultural globalization, homogeneity, media imperialism, hybridity, mimicry, and transculturation will be dealt with and discussed.

Chapter one titled "*Crossing Borders to Hell: Disjunction The Ground Beneath her Feet*" investigates cultural disjunction in Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath her Feet* 1999. Through a close reading of the text, the chapter will attempt an examination of the influence of globalization on the three protagonists of the novel. Under the reign of globalization, celebrity culture and media are investigated as two major factors that may result in the cultural disjunction of the characters in the novel.

Chapter two entitled "*The Global Village as a Doll's House: An analysis of Fury*" addresses Rushdie's novel *Fury* 2001. In *Fury*, the theme of globalization and its relation to cultural disjunction in this novel will be dealt with through examining the satire of capitalism and commercialization reflected in media and pop-culture.

Chapter three, "*Signs of Globalization and Cultural Disjunction in Shalimar the Clown*", analyzes the third novel *Shalimar the Clown* 2005. The

novel will be read allegorically as an account of the cunning imposition of Western and American cultures on the authentic cultures of India. The effect of this imposition will be examined on the cultural identity of the different characters.

The conclusion proves the existence of a relationship between globalization and cultural disjunction. This is best portrayed in Rushdie's inclination to view globalization as being equal to Americanization; in the sense of cultural imperialism. In *GBF*, Rai, the narrator, points out to America's hand of Might which aims at shaping the face of the globe for her own interest. America, Rai says rules by turning poor countries into slaves in their own lands through imposing economic, cultural and political regimes. In *Fury* Solanka declares loudly "[e]verything was an American now, or at least Americanized" (*Fury* 87). In *Shalimar*, it is Max Ophuls, the American ambassador, who represents America's interference in the Third world affairs.

The three novels set clear the degree of disjunction resulting from Americanization/globalization. In a globalized world, this disjunction takes place not only from culture but also from the very humane feelings. For instance, from its very beginning *GBF* draws a repulsive picture of people voluntarily disconnected from their indigenous cultures when its narrator offers a link between globalization and the degeneration of mankind. Rai refers to the processes of loss experienced when humans turn "back into [their] skins and war paint" (*GBF* 343) which means that the human culture is being reduced to its barbaric state.

In fact, *Fury* has shifted the scope of this dehumanization process to another dimension which is turning human beings into mere futile representations. This is clear in the *dollification* of the three elite murdered girls, the iconic and irrelevant status (to borrow Jenkinson's terms) of their murderers as well as Jack Rhinehart's "Pet" (*Fury* 57) status in the white atmosphere of the S&M society. *Fury*'s inclination to see humans as mere representations is also present in *Shalimar*. Another dimension of this degeneration of human culture under the reign of globalization is to be traced in the turning of human beings into mere properties or fetishized slaves in the global capital market. In *GBF* it is Vina in her death who is used "to do business" (*GBF* 486) as her picture is put by her husband on milk and wine bottles, bread, vegetarian food and the VTO records (*GBF* 486).

The harm done by the blind faith in the global capital system are not directed to individuals in distant places of the world, they can rather touch whole economic systems causing their “shak[ing] and break[ing]” (*GBF* 554) because the global free market is but a weapon directed from the West in the direction of the East.

Moreover, the present capitalist globalizing effect tends to destroy people’s creativity as media and art are not immune to global profits and gains. In *GBF*, Rai points to the “French nuclear tests in the Pacific and the political unrest in the southern province in Chiapas” which have stained Vina’s “bare soles” (*GBF* 4). This is to say that in this global village dominated by capital and celebrities’ performance there is no escaping the tendency to trivialize global important issues for the sake of a celebrity’s “bare soles”. This is further sharpened by Rai’s description of art as a “hoax” (*GBF* 352).

In this age of globalized media forms, delusion and capital control, people are exposed to different psychological disorders. This is clear in Ormus’s hallucination episodes, in Solanka’s fury moments, in India Ophuls’s bad sleep nights, in Boonyi’s “stress, depression [and] hypertension” (*Shalimar* 202) and in Colonel Kachhawaha’s state of seeing sounds, hearing colours and tasting feelings (*Shalimar* 97).

The three novels in the present study expose the bleak fate of those who blindly surrender to the globalizing forces in the world, and who worship the American way of life while rejecting their own original cultures. In *GBF* Vina and her friends experience a deep disjunction from their authentic cultures as well as from their selves. *Fury*, on the other hand, ends by exposing the sad ends of the different characters living amidst the American third millennium. For instance, Jack Rhinehart turns from being a sincere Afro-American journalist to voluntarily stopping “hyphenating himself” (*Fury* 57), to be the “Pet” (*Fury* 57) of the whites in S&M club, to be a murderer, to be finally brutally murdered with a note ending with “This’ll kill you, doll” (*Fury* 204, italics original).

Finally, *Shalimar* ends up after exposing different kinds of disjunctions and losses. Top of these is Boonyi’s fatal murder after being disconnected from her culture and community as she is declared to be dead-alive. Then comes Max’s assassination as a punishment of his vicious deeds as the U.S.

ambassador, even India, his daughter, wonders if his fate is a kind of justice done to him.

Though displaying these bleak images of disjunction the novels, hint at some positive characters who try to defend their cultural uniqueness and who survives the damage of globalization. In *GBF* Rai often refers to the beauty of Bombay, he visits his country when he finds the chance to do it, and he is the only one among his Americanized friends who comments on the dangers of being uprooted from one's own culture. In *Fury*, Neela, though meeting a fatal end due to her naïve acts to gain her cause of cultural assertion, is the only character in the novel who tries to cling to her cultural roots. In *Shalimar*, it is India Ophuls and Yuvraj Singh who stands as the hope in defying cultural disjunction. The latter is portrayed as keen to preserve his cultural heritage and the former is seen to accept her hybrid identity and to re-evaluate the deeds of her parents, her American father, and her Indian mother.

Worth noting is that the novels hint at some strategies to bypass the state of disjunction experienced under the reign of this American-led globalization. For example, In *GBF*, Rai's claim that the memory of a lost "toy", "book", "garment" and "photograph" (*GBF* 16) is not only to direct attention towards the real losses, but also to urge them to cling to their authentic sense of innocence, history and culture, safety and memory. This is best illustrated in Rai's hope that Persi stay attached to her authentic culture (*GBF* 573). In *Fury* and *Shalimar* this same message is delivered in a number of ways.

A close analysis of the three novels, thus displays the world as witnessing a new kind of cultural imperialism, a form of globalization that favors the American melting pot over cultural variety and diversity. However, the three novels brilliantly expose that the danger of this form of globalization can destroy America along with its victims. Most of these victims, the novels reveal, have chosen whole heartedly to adopt the American way of life at the expense of their indigenous cultures. In doing this, people are oblivious of the fact that Allah has created different peoples with distinct ways of life and diverse languages, races, and environments to give humans a chance to know each other and to be creative in distinct ways:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

أَتَقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted. Al Hujurat (49:13).

Introduction

This study traces the ways globalization causes cultural disjunction in a selection of Salman Rushdie's novels. This cultural disjunction can be attributed to several reasons top of which are global media spectacle, global commodification system, as well as global terrorism. This relation between globalization and cultural disjunction will be delineated in three of Salman Rushdie's novels namely; *The Ground Beneath her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) respectively.

In the following lines a detailed survey of the notion of globalization will be considered, the relation between this notion and culture will be set, then the link between globalization and Americanization will be highlighted. After that comes a brief guide to how this study is chapterized and how the theme of globalization and cultural disjunction is dealt with in the three novels.

The globalizing forces of the world are mainly the result of the great improvements achieved in the field of communication, that have tremendously helped in the interaction among people, and therefore among cultures. These cultures are in ceaseless interchange; they overlap and borrow from one another. But risks occur when this process of interchange results in transforming the local and regional phenomena into global ones. When interaction reaches an extent of “dissolv[ing] the security of locality” (Tomlinson, *Globalization* 30), we have to stop and think about what is going on around us.

In fact, globalization is seen by some intellectuals and cultural critics (such as Joana Breidenbach, Ina Zukrigl, Ulf Hannerz, James Lull and Mario Vargas Liosa) as a positive process leading to development and prosperity. It is, however, seen by others (like Martin Albrow, Boyd-Barrett, Herbert Schiller, Dorfman & Mattelart, Cees J. Hamelink, Naomi Klein, Tyler Cowen, John A. Powel and S.P. Udayakuman) as a negative phenomenon that threatens cultural integrity and authenticity. According to these anti-globalization activists, a local culture is obliterated by being obliged to melt in the same pot imposed by an allegedly superior culture.

Both parties, i.e. supporters and opponents of globalization, agree to its direct influence on cultural identity. Whether globalization is another phase of imperialism or a step towards progress and prosperity, one of the key questions of globalization is “the nature and survival of social and cultural identity” (Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffin 114).

Globalization has become one of the topics at stake in recent times. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffins and Helen Tiffin define globalization as “the process whereby individual lives and local communities are affected by economic and cultural forces that operate world-wide. In effect it is the process of the world becoming a single place” (*Post-Colonial* 110).

Moreover, Anthony Giddens declares globalization to be “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles

away and vice versa” (181). Additionally, Robert J. Leiber and Ruth E. Weisberg state that globalization “can be described as the increasing global integration of economies, information technology, the spread of global popular culture, and other forms of human interaction” (274).

Likewise, Guhathakurta, Jacobson, and Delsordi assert that “Globalization is now a pervasive word that seems to underpin most discussions of cross-national flows of goods, services, capital, people, technology, ideas and culture” (201). Ronald Niezen claims that “globalization can refer to both powerful forces of social integration and to the internationalization of resistance to those forces” (57), that is to say that globalization is a process carrying in itself the seeds of its destruction. At the same time GoodMann sees globalization as “the spread of an invasive culture to the detriment of native cultures” and as synonymous to “cultural imperialism” (*Globalization* 333).

There are several points to be drawn from these definitions: Though often seen as an economic phenomenon, globalization is closely linked to culture and is viewed as a sort of cultural imperialism. As a process, globalization has to do with information technology regarded as one of the central facets of media. Finally, globalization bears its own anti-globalization seeds, as can be understood from Niezen's previous quotation.

Before exploring the dimensions of the relation between culture and globalization, it is essential first to highlight what the term “culture” connotes and then to explain its value. Some relevant terms such as 'global