Life, Art, and Politics: Pakistan and Social Misrepresentations

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Abstract

This paper critically analyses how Mohsin Hamid in 'Discontent and Its Civilizations' delineates the rupture lines prompted by a decade and a half of tectonic change, from the 'war on terror' to the struggles of individuals to maintain humanity in the inflexible physiognomy of repressive ideology, or the apathetic face of globalization. Whether he is discussing ritual love affairs or pop culture, drones or the pattern of day-to-day life in an extended family, he carries us beyond the doomsayer headlines of a perturbed West and a turbulent East and helps to bring a dazzling manifold world within spiritual and intellectual reach. The classifications under which the essays are congregated: Life, Art, and Politics may be considered universal, as the themes of these segments are wide-ranging. Hamid's nonfiction pieces of writings are deep-rooted in the shifting nature of his homeland. He talks about the way in which Pakistan "plays a recurring role as villain in the horror sub-industry within the news business" (Hamid, 2014). He believes that in Pakistan, Islam has been as a binding force for developing unity for strengthening nationhood. Although Pakistan; "a test bed for pluralism on a globalising planet" (Hamid, 2014), is still struggling for "more pluralism" (Hamid, 2014). American drone attacks have had a deeply detrimental effect by refusing the sovereignty of Pakistan and Pakistani society, and by demanding 'do more' to accost the problem of extremists who tyrannize Pakistanis/Muslims or non-Pakistanis/ non-Muslims in the same way. Such social misrepresentations, for some selfish self-interests, neither only shatter the image of a nation in the world, but also play a vital role in transformation of the nation alike with the help of such vague reflections. Pakistan and Islam both need to be reviewed without any "makeup and plastic fangs" (Hamid, 2014) or else future generations will look back at our era and think of us with the same perplexity that we think of those who lived in societies that legalized slavery.

Keywords: Discontented Civilizations (3rd World Countries), Social Misrepresentations, Pluralism, Humanism and Humanity

Introduction

"To exist, it requires the presence of more than one point of view" (Hamid, 2014, p.

xix). This difference of opinion establishes healthy cultural societies. There are points of apprehension and uniformed fragmentations within a culture and it is around these rupture lines in the representational system of a culture that new social representations evolve. These points of cleavage indicate that there is a lack of meaning, a point where the unfamiliar appears. So, just as nature abhors a vacuum, culture abhors an absence of meaning, it sets in train some kind of representational work to 'familiarize the unfamiliar' (Moscovici, 2001) to re-establish a sense of solidity and stability. But if the same representational system undertakes the unfamiliar with discriminative social misrepresentations, the originality of the unfamiliar evanesce with passage of time and its misshapen, disproportioned familiarity ensues as psychological corporeality.

Islam, Muslims and Pakistan have been obsessively under discussion in the mainstream media and scholastic colloquy in the past decade and a half. This current obsession is varnished by negative impact with the global media's predominantly discriminative representation of all three of them, portraying Islam as a religion of coercion and terrorism, Muslims generally as barbaric, extremists, intolerant, narrow-minded, frenzied and terrorists while Pakistan as an epicentre of terrorism, a state that 'sponsors terrorism' (Byman, 2005, Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism, Cambridge University Press), a state of extremist fundamentalists that 'promotes the export of terror' (Cameron, 2010, UK PM Cautions Pakistan Over Terror Export, BBC News).

Islam has been consistently represented by international media as a violent-prone religion that is utterly averse to the West. The theme of 'Islam and the West' has been the hotly debated issue on higher academic forums for the last 15 years. It has also been the theme of inquisitive writings, reports, dissemination, and publications. It has become a trend that signifies the topic, which definitely has certain importance for other countries in Asia and Africa where Muslims are in majority.

Fear of Islam and Muslims in form of Islamophobia has intensified with the 9/11 incident of the World Trade Center in New York, the Taliban's fundamentalist proscriptions and restrictions in Afghanistan, the series of terror attacks in France, the emergence of the ill-inclined so called Islamic State group (ISIS/ISIL) which allegedly shows videos of the beheadings of the Muslims who do not follow 'their version of Islam' as well as the journalists who publish something against them. Consequently, "Muslim identity and the concerns of Muslims are increasingly being defined in terms of an oppositional dialectic that pits Islam and Muslims against the rest of the world." F.A. Noor's (2007, p. 261) argument seems right as Islamophobia has become the mainstream media conversation "where images of Muslims as murderous fanatics abound in movies, videos and computer games" (F.A. Noor,

2007, p. 267).

Similarly, in the shifting soils of our homeland Pakistan, we may fantasise about having the freedom 'to invent ourselves' in Hamid's (2014, p. xi) words for becoming a different person, even a different kind of human but the transnationalism of us; Pakistanis, is informed by a globally de-centred Pakistani perspective and, additionally, a growing interest in post-national collectivises and the utility of our country's Asian inter-connectedness. So, it is necessary to have a bird's eye view of the current political scenario to understand the goals of global power politics of the day.

Art has been considered the most influential medium to form the opinion of the common people. However, contemporary art is often criticised for being overvalued. So is the case with art of social misrepresentation. There are artists (in this case, I will focus on socio-geopolitical actors) who create the difficulties to make the lives of the common people of some particular regions/countries more difficult that they end up with the conclusion to accept these global actors (artists) as their saviours (miserable life in politically unstable Egypt, Libya, Iraq and now Syria is the evident example). Here we will examine the particular artistic social misrepresentations in which the socio-political actors deal with contemporary reality by using the art of social misrepresentation to bring their geopolitical strategies into practice. Nowadays most of the art of social misrepresentation reflects the socio-geopolitical fabricated reality through either by mainstream media or purposefully hyped intelligence reports (e.g., CIA Reports against Iraq for having weapons of mass destruction, to invade Iraq were based on exaggeration, according to facts finding Chilcot report). Caoimhghin who is an Irish artist explains the significance of art in words, "When we see art that is trying to depict contemporary reality we can easily be drawn into the content of the picture without realising that the very forms used are themselves a result of conflicts of differing styles for formal and ideological reasons arising from within the artistic 'community' itself (Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin, 2016)."

Power Politics and Its Goals

The fall of the USSR led the world towards the end of the cold war. US emerged as solo superpower on the global map and that ushered it to implement a new world order that neither only includes the change of imperial regimes in the Middle East but also introduces the possible change in geographical boundaries. Christine Fair (2014) expressed this notion of Americans in words: "We love this idea that [...] we can transform a problematic state" (youtube.com). The West in general and the Americans in particular are obsessed with this idea that they can transform countries.

They believe that there would be no problem if the world will be transformed to fit into the Western ideological framework, ignoring the natural phenomenon of social psychology that varies from region to region, country to country, religion to religion, culture to culture, logic to logic and so on. These political goals of the global powers are rooted in the clear notions; 1) to sustain power, 2) to control petro-dollar, 3) to empower Israel by obliterating all who can ever possibly be a threat for Israel (Hillary, 2016, YouTube). As a matter of fact, the Muslims are antagonist to the West in their theocentric way of life while the West is signified by the disconnection of church and state that is spreading secularism. Some of the fundamentals on which modern civilization was originated are:

1. Might make right;
2. Self-interest and competition;
3. My race and nation are superior;
4. I have a right on whatever I want (T. Michel, 2005)

It means whoever has the power may claim to be always right because supposedly might is always right. No matter what fair justice demands, might's preference for self-interest is justifiable. Because of holding power, one may claim and be considered more civilized even if it is ushering the illegal invasions to any country, conducting carpet-bombing for undefined target, attacking with drones violating another country's sovereignty, fuelling the fire of civil wars for so called freedom fighting against unlikely regimes, and then quitting, leaving behind anarchy, chaos and instability. All is well and you are still civilized because you are powerful. So, for the continuation of their power politics, the global game changers try to prevail misrepresentation through their geo-political strategic ideology (Chilcot, 2016, Finding At-A-Glance, BBC News) neither only through blame game but also by creating the circumstances in which assumption becomes truth. Revisionism takes place anyway.

Art of Social Misrepresentations

To change the social psychology of the people for transforming the revisionists' ideas into practice, the art of social misrepresentation is used. In a study by the University of Birmingham, Muslims and the Media: Headline research findings (2001 & 2012) found that:

1.   64% of the British Public claim that what they do know about Islam is

'acquired through the media'

2.   91% of the coverage was deemed negative

These are the shocking facts, when more than half of the British Public acquires the knowledge about Islam and Pakistan through the media that mostly portrays them negatively. This feeding of incorrect fabricated information helps setting a cynical opinion of the large number of people, regarding the beliefs of a religion that has nothing to do with any of the above-mentioned notions.

Media opinion is fashioned through forged intelligence reports, fabricated media briefings and escalated leaks revelations. The chairman of The Iraq Inquiry committee, Sir John Chilcot, published committee's findings declaring that military action against Iraq at that time was not a last resort before the exhaustion of all the peaceful options for disarmament (Chilcot, 2016, iraqinquiry.org.uk). There is no justification for the uncertain judgements regarding WMD, inadequate planning and preparation for the aftermath situation and the failure of the stated objectives. It is hard to believe that these drawbacks were not plotted intentionally. They rather appear to be undeniable evidence of the artistic political move through social misrepresentation by the global game changers. The public endorsement for this dirty political gain game is attained through media. The Western media analyses Islam, Muslims and Pakistan with their discriminative set standards, the biased liberal lens and the modern principles. After the 'successful' transformation of the most problematic states of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, next target of this revisionist ideology is Iran and then Pakistan (S. Michael, 2016, youtube.com).

Hamid (2014) talks about the way in which Pakistan "plays a recurring role as villain in the horror sub-industry within the news business." In Pakistan, Islam has been a binding force for developing unity, for strengthening nationhood. Pakistan as "a test bed for pluralism on a globalising planet," is still struggling for "more pluralism" (Hamid, 2014, p. xiv) through this binding force. In this regard, Pakistan has been putting in hard efforts to fail the extremist elements, by bringing the non-state religious actors into the mainstream of the nationhood through negotiation so that they may play an important role in diminishing the extremist ideology of terrorism by uniting the nation on a platform against extremists. These efforts turn useless when America strikes Pakistan with drones. American drone attacks have had a deeply detrimental effect to the efforts by refusing the sovereignty of Pakistan and Pakistani society. These attacks lead those religious non state actors not to trust on any commitment of the Pakistani Government that cannot react against American drone attack. And by demanding 'do more' (America has been repeating this phrase 'do more' while appreciating Pakistan's efforts for war on terror since 9/11) to accost

the problem of extremists who tyrannize Pakistanis/Muslims or non-Pakistanis/ non-Muslims in the same way. Paradoxically, still Pakistan, which has been fighting the global 'war on terror' and in result deems terrorists its enemies, is blamed for supporting the terrorists involved in 9/11 attack in 2001. But Pakistan's Do's and US's repetition of 'do more' have led Pakistan to face uncountable 9/11's. Pakistan has been sandwiched between the US 'do more' and terrorists' encounter revenge attacks. According to Global Index Terrorism 2015 by Institute of Economics & Peace, Pakistan is one of the five countries which are highly concentrated with terrorist activities after 9/11 with 57% of terror attacks and 78% of deaths. Still Pakistan is misrepresented artistically as a country that 'promotes the exports of terrorism' (Cameron, 2010, UK PM Cautions Pakistan Over Terror Export, BBC News).

No matter what the representations are, political or social, cultural or religious, these are certainly the targets of discriminatory revisionist ideology. The representations of such aspects as Kashmir Conflict between Pakistan and India, Pakistani media, language controversy in Pakistan, cultural gender discrimination or radicalized fundamentalism are polarized with artistic misrepresentational revisionist ideology, some of which are taken into account in the critical analysis below.

1. Political Representation of Kashmir Conflict

The intentional 'artistic' effort to sabotage Pakistan's stance of plebiscite in Kashmir can be observed in erroneous representation about UN resolution 1948 by Christine Fair in which it is declared that first three steps of the resolutions were sequential and conditional and Pakistan failed to follow them that is why Pakistan has no legal claim on Kashmir for plebiscite. But artistically overlooked fact is: firstly, these steps were not mandatory directives but were based on recommendations as this resolution was passed by UN Security Council under chapter 6 and not under chapter 7 of the UN charter; secondly, ceasefire and line of control were established accordingly but when UN commission came to the subcontinent to implement the terms of the resolutions for plebiscite in February 1949, India refused to cooperate with an excuse and extra condition to abandon the 'Azad Forces' (Korbel, 1954) were made up of the demobilised soldiers of the British Indian Army, belonging to the Poonch and Mirpur districts, who rose in revolt against the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, so, it was India (not Pakistan) that refused to follow the UN resolution because Pakistani forces or nationals were to be evacuated, and not the Kashmiri freedom fighters. Pakistan does have legal and moral grounds on Kashmir because contrary to Fair's legal or moral standards with the purpose of social misrepresentation, neither Pakistan was declared as aggressor, nor Kashmir's accession to India was considered

legal for the reason, Kashmir resolution was and still is under chapter 6.

2. Cultural Representation of Language Problems in Pakistan

Another example of misrepresentation is of Urdu, the national language of Pakistan that is used as a tool for instigating the unrest among the folks by seeping the ideology that the importance of their mother tongues is being ignored and Urdu is being imposed upon them that is the mother language of only 7.59%. To hype the language controversy, a BBC columnist, M. Ilyas Khan, found a tweeter's tweet worthy enough to quote in his column that says, "Urdu is not the language of majority, still it is the national language of Pakistan. Even in linguistics, minority is imposed on majority" (M. Ilyas Khan, 2015, BBC News). It is simply an indication towards the intentional attempt of instigation for creating ethnic controversy because provincial legislative assemblies have the right to acquire its own local/ regional/ provincial language according to the Language policy in Pakistan. The natural phenomenon behind its extensively flourished status is intentionally ignored. As a matter of fact, Urdu is almost like the first language of all Pakistanis and it is not because it is imposed after Pakistan came into being but since it evolved in the subcontinent with the necessity as the source of communication among the Indian soldiers from all over the subcontinent. It is neither only understood all over Pakistan but also all over India. That is why "it is considered an emblem of unity that helps out to display the unified identity of Pakistanis" (NAQVI, 2016, Urdu Imperialism: Myth or Reality).

3. Representation of Gender Discrimination

When we look at places like Pakistan or the Middle East, different political agendas are involved which use Islam as the force to gain popularity and to either implement a fanatical form of Islam, as ISIS has been trying to do in the Middle East while Taliban had been practising the same in Afghanistan or in Pakistan, where the old culture of subcontinent has neither only permeated but also mixed its ideas into the social practices and has changed many Islamic traditions. For example, women's education and job is not prohibited in Islam. Islamic teachings encourage everyone to seek education. "Seeking education is obligatory for all Muslims (AlQuran)". A woman has the freedom of choice to make her own decisions. Patriarchy has no value in Islam, so no man has the right to dominate a woman. The Prophet Muhammad (SAWA)'s first wife Khadija (AS) was a businesswoman for whom the Prophet was an employee and he never objected to this. So, when we see in Pakistan the intentions of some radicalized fundamentalists to force the women to stay at home and not to work it is not something Islamic but cultural and the same applies to education, which is obligatory for every man and woman in Islam. It is the culture of

subcontinent that obstructs the woman from getting education or employment. Undoubtedly, gender discrimination is practised, but either by religious fanatics or by the ignorants who confuse subcontinental culture with Islam.

Why Is Pakistan the Target of Social Misrepresentations?

The country or the community that does not template itself to fit into the global power's democratic frame is presented as a 'problematic' one. Pakistan was/is (and will always remain, I guess) the most 'problematic state' for the global revisionists. The revisionist idea is to provoke the civil war in Pakistan, take the existing civil war inside Afghanistan and massively exported it towards Pakistan. The global powerful actors may have possibly thought about the option of direct attack on Pakistan, too, but they can't do it for multiple reasons like its being an atomic power, its geographical strategic importance in the region, its durable friendship with China that is a hurdle in the way to tackle China against its merging status as an economic superpower in near future and its best secret force ISI. Webster Tarpley an investigative journalist highlights the reluctance of global game changers in words: "The US have, will possibly consider direct attack on Pakistan but they can't because Pakistan is too big and it has nuclear weapons so they have nuclear deterrence. So the only way to do it is to take Pashtun population of Afghanistan and Pakistan, royale them up into Independence Movement and do the same thing with people in Balochistan (Webster Tarpley, youtube.com)." According to Webster Tarpley what would be achieved with that is "you have carved Afghanistan, you have broken Pakistan into four pieces or three, you have even started to carve Iran." First question pops up in the minds going through this revisionist ideology is why is Pakistan the target of destruction? The answer is very simple; the goal is to destroy Pakistan as an energy corridor between Iraq, Iran, other countries of the Middle East that produce oil and China because that is where the pipeline can go. The pipeline can start in Iraq, can go to Iran, it can go up through Pakistan, cross Himalayas above Kashmir going to China. It is like oil going towards China and Chinese economic influence coming into the Middle East; cutting out the angle of Americans. That is the reason China Pakistan Economic Corridor is like a red robe for the mighty bull; Uncle Sam.

Transformations of Life: Radicalisation and Islamophobia

Consistently with such social misrepresentations, revisionism is taking place as an undeniable fact. However, contrary to the targeted goals, global revisionist ideology, imposed by global dictators, is causing a transformation that is based upon twofold

revisionism:

a) Radicalization is increasing day by day and, consequently, terrorism.

b) Islamophobia has shaken up the liberal/secular approach in the West and, consequently, harmonious human connectivity is in trouble.

The results of BrExit and US elections in 2016 are the evidences of this psychological revisionism. Unfortunately, both transformations have disastrous effects on the common man's life all over the world. *Discontent and Its Civilizations* (2014) that appears to foreground Hamid's discontent or contesting stance in relation to the general comportment of contemporary geopolitics is not a treatise, though, but many of his essays, however, point to ongoing concerns, such as the malicious bureaucracy confronted by even the well-dressed Pakistani trying to secure a tourist visa to enter the closely guarded gates of Europe. Dressed in his 'white shirt, blue tie, brown face, brown eyes', his documents all in order, Hamid is both tormented by an uneasy awareness of the deceitful sign of an apparently 'fundamentalist stubble' which he failed to shave from his chin, and ashamed that his deference to such sartorial norms 'tacitly acknowledged an accusation [that he] would have liked proudly to ignore'. Here, his sentiments echo those of other contemporary writers who, on account of their affiliation with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, have been called upon in the decade after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre to apologise in some measure for their anticipated guilt by association with a Muslim nation 'deemed prone to poverty and violence' and thwarted by the phantom of Islamic terrorism.

Conclusion

Muslims' and Pakistanis' anger towards the West, particularly towards America, is due to the latter's neo-imperialist actions such as its unjust invasion of Iraq, its war in Afghanistan, its backing of Israeli intrusions in Palestinian camps, its backing of civil wars in Libya and Syria and its spread of global capitalist values throughout the world. Its next target is to attack Iran and to fail Pakistan as have been discussed earlier (S. Michael, 2016, youtube.com, and Webster Tarpley, youtube.com). Apparently, just as the religions are perfect, the believers are not, similarly, there might be some policies of Pakistan to accomplish its own national interests instead of US' that is done by most of the sovereign states but Pakistan must not be made the victim of such social misrepresentation that distorts and shatters its image. Islam and Pakistan both need to be reviewed without any 'makeup and plastic fangs' or else we will not be able to seek forgiveness from future generations for seeding and

breeding slavery through this art of social misrepresentation. Hamid (2014) reinforces this point by warning that "Civilisations are illusions, but these illusions are pervasive, dangerous and powerful. They contribute to globalisation's brutality" (p. xvi). According to Hamid, the reality of these assumed advanced socio-cultural systems can be disputed. But the significance of their apparitions, in providing a justification for violence or excuse to confrontation, in curbing self- invention, and in denying the possibility of holding hybrid identities, cannot be dismissed. Cutting the branch is not the solution, feeling the pulse may help towards the righteous diagnosis and then positive remedy. The predominantly negative media portrayal through the art of social, political and religious misrepresentations of Islam and Pakistan, Muslims and Pakistanis needs a revised reflection through widespread knowledge of peace-loving Muslims and Pakistanis who sincerely pursue the path of holiness to attain love, peace and harmony for humanity and humanism throughout their lives. Hamid sounds logical when he says, "The world will not fail if Pakistan fails, but the world will be healthier if Pakistan is healthy" (Hamid, 2014, p. xiv). In T. Michel's opinion (2005), Said Nursi rightly saw that Christians and Muslims need to unite in a common mission to bear witness to the divine values in the midst of modern civilization for the sake of peace and harmony in the life. Belinda F. Espiritu who is an associate professor of communication and Coordinator of the Mass Communication Program of the University of the Philippines Cebu 31, researched and presented her results in words: "there are really deep commonalities in Islamic spirituality and Christian spirituality, and it is on the level of spirituality that these two major religions can find their unity and convergence" (2016, Islamophobia and the Negative Media Portrayal of Muslims, Global Research).

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