

# Beyond Borders: Afghanistan in Bengali Imagination

by

Jannatul Ferdous Mou

20263007

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Student ID:20263007

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1. Jannatul Ferdous Mou (20263007)

of Spring, 2022 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English on 18.09.22.

### **Examining Committee:**

Supervisor: (Member)

---

Prof. Firdous Azim

Chairperson and Professor

Department of English and Humanities

Brac University

External Examiner: (Member)

---

Dr. Ashim Dutta

Associate Professor, Department of English

University of Dhaka

Departmental Head: (Chair)

---

Prof. Firdous Azim.

Professor and Chairperson

Department of English and Humanities

Brac University

## Abstract

Syed Mujtaba Ali and Zia Haider Rahman are two notable authors who wrote on issues that transcend national boundaries and address universal themes of identity, domination, power and acceptability. I will be looking at Syed Mujtaba Ali's memoir *In a Land Far from Home* (2015) (translated from the original Bengali *Deshe Bideshe* (1948)) and Zia Haider Rahman's novel *In the Light of What We Know* (2014). This research aims to examine how these two authors (Mujtaba Ali and Zia Haider Rahman) represent Afghanistan by amalgamating fact and fiction altogether. The thesis proposes to trace their feelings of familiarity and unfamiliarity and to look at the construction of the uncanny in a space that is both familiar and unfamiliar. This will be done by looking at some characters from both *In a Land Far from Home* and *In the Light of What We Know* to understand how uncanny feelings develop to create distinct images of the self and the other while negotiating identity and culture in a "strangely familiar" (Freud 4) land. Besides, this study also critically evaluates the transition of global power relations to identify new forms of domination over Afghanistan, both the land and the people. To evaluate the characters' inner conflict, this study will use Freud's discussion of the uncanny, Homi K. Bhabha's idea of liminality, and Lacan's mirror stage. Besides, this thesis will also incorporate Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Louis Althusser's identification of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses ("ISA and RSA"), Edward Said's method of contrapuntal reading and ideas of cultural imperialism, Kwame Nkrumah's analysis of Neocolonialism, Michel Foucault's idea of power and dependency theory to trace the new forms of internal and global power operations in Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Uncanny, foreign land, mirror image, hegemony, power, neocolonialism.

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my dearest husband Parvez for his kindness and helpfulness and caring throughout the process of writing this thesis. His constant encouragement kept me going even when I was in low spirits.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

I have always been fascinated by what Bruce Springsteen calls “the darkness at the edge of town,” the thresholds, margins, or borderlands between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown.

—Michael D. Jackson

Syed Mujtaba Ali’s *Deshe Bideshe*, first published in 1948, is a classic travel memoir based on his adventures in Afghanistan from 1927 to 1929. The blend of Mujtaba Ali’s sense of humor and deep historical knowledge enables him to give us a picture of Afghanistan amid its cultural and social change in the early part of the twentieth century. Nazes Afroze later translated Syed Mujtaba Ali’s work *Deshe Bideshe* as *In a Land Far from Home* (2015). This travelog can be interpreted as a document exploring a mostly forgotten phase of Afghan history and nationalism in which the British and Russians played political games while barely concealing their imperialistic goals. On the other hand, Zia Haider Rahman’s *In the Light of What We Know* is a postmodern novel that integrates facts and fiction. Furthermore, this novel can be considered as an “everything novel” (Rushdie 2) that focuses on the contemporary global issues affecting Afghanistan.

Written in two different genres, both texts nonetheless represent Afghanistan in a manner that simultaneously draws the protagonists in a feeling of identification, while keeping a distance as they are merely sojourners in a distant land. Syed Mujtaba Ali and Zia Haider Rahman’s perspective on Afghanistan is the result of their exposure to various forms of colonialism and imperialism and a shared kinship with their fellow Orientals. Ali and Rahman’s depiction of Afghan nationalism in opposition to external colonial powers and internal upheaval is not only

exhilarating but also provocative, as it is not aimed at demystification, as were colonial works attempting to fathom the oriental. Rahman though born in Bangladesh, moved to Britain and is known as a transnational author whereas Syed Mujtaba Ali also born in what was later to become Bangladesh, is known for his travel narratives. These two authors with similar ancestry but different identities and locations (both in time and place) portray Afghanistan from a dual or multi-pronged perspective. Both texts display uncanny, unhomely and also liminal features, perhaps reflecting the ambivalent position of the authors.

Syed Mujtaba Ali's travelog delineates his stay in Kabul, including his journey from Peshawar to the Khyber Pass, and the colorful personalities he encounters along the way, all of whom come from different social and political backgrounds. This travelog is packed with wit, humor, sharpness, and complex observations. Mujtaba Ali's narrative is vivid and insightful, whether he is describing the harsh, unforgiving landscape of the Khyber Pass or a tranquil afternoon spent with friends in Kabul's verdant Nimla Gardens or attending a wedding ceremony or gossiping in the Kabul bazaar. While Syed Mujtaba Ali's *Deshe Bideshe* depicts the internal Afghan rebellion and colonial power games of the first two decades of the twentieth century, Zia Haider Rahman in *In the Light of What We Know* examines the recent global politics of the 21st century, particularly after the war on terror. Their narratives are significant due to their dual status as both insiders and outsiders, and their ability to provide a global or transnational perspective that adheres neither to the colonial or global hegemonic order nor to the nativist Islamic outlook. They both provide a much-required perspective in our ever-changing world. This thesis critically evaluates the connection of the real narrator Ali and Rahman's fictional narrator Zafar with Afghanistan to show how they create a liminal space and an uncanny feeling while negotiating and assimilating their tormented past, identity conflict and

culture with Afghanistan. Moreover, this study shows how a new form of internal and global power relations plays out in Afghanistan in the name of international relations.

### 1.1 Overview of the Narratives

Syed Mujtaba Ali's travel narrative *Deshe Bideshe* was originally published in 1948 in Kolkata; Nazes Afroz later translated this text into English in 2015 and named it *In a Land Far from Home*. Nazes Afroz translated Ali's flamboyant narrations about Afghanistan's geostrategic location, fiercely independent tribes, and cultures meticulously. This book is a Bengali travelog in which Mujtaba Ali exhaustively describes the distinctive landscape, race, and culture of Afghanistan between 1927 and 1929. Syed Mujtaba Ali moved to Kabul as a teacher during the reign of King Amanullah, who was striving to construct a modern, educated Afghanistan. Syed Mujtaba Ali's voyage to Kabul illustrates the ways in which the political turbulence and unrest in Afghanistan is tied to political rivalries between other nations, mainly Britain and Russia. Mujtaba Ali's recollection of his two years in Afghanistan reveals his adventurous nature, his friendship with the Afghan people, and his exploration of Afghan mores through his remarkable language abilities and sarcastic wit. Ali himself appears as a character in the narrative, making *Deshe Bideshe* a travel narrative, a memoir and a wonderful recounting of historical and political events of the time. Ali with his distinctive narrative quality and humour introduces us to real-life characters such as Ahamed Ali, Dost Muhammad, Abdur Rahman, Bolshov, Maulana Ziauddin amongst others to reflect upon the diverse social, political, local and global issues of that period. Ali's anti-British sentiments are also visible in his comments on the Great Game.

The second narrative under consideration, Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*, published in 2014, is a postmodern novel dealing with contemporary global issues. Zia Haider Rahman introduces the unnamed narrator, an investment banker by profession, from a privileged and educated Pakistani family. Rahman's other protagonist is Zafar, a "derivatives trader in the bank of Wall Street" (3) who later becomes an international human rights lawyer. The story of Zafar takes us from Bangladesh to London, from London to Kabul, from New York to Islamabad, meeting mysterious military leaders along the way, dodgy financial groups, and hard-drinking mercenaries. Rahman illustrates multiple transnational issues such as migration, race, identity, and multiculturalism. However, Rahman assiduously amalgamates the historical facts of Afghanistan, and the US with the fictional journey of Zafar that unfolds the post 9/11 global scenario, especially the war on terror, and the presence of global powerful forces in Afghanistan under the camouflage of various international and transnational organizations, NGOs, militaries and media agencies.

## **1.2 Chapter Outline**

This thesis has a total of five chapters that interact constructively with one another. This chapter, Chapter 1, outlines the purpose of this thesis, and its conceptual context, and provides an overview of the source materials. The second chapter discusses the theoretical framework and the concepts used in this thesis. The third chapter contains two sections. Each section focuses on the portrayal of Afghanistan in the two texts and traces the uncanny and liminal space that Ali and Zafar create while negotiating their own identities in a familiar/unfamiliar land like Afghanistan. The fourth chapter also contains two sections that discuss new forms of internal and global power over Afghanistan in the light of *In a Land Far from Home* and *In the Light of*

*What We Know*. Chapter five contains the overview and summary of the whole discussion of the thesis in brief.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this age of globalization, multiculturalism and transnationalism are the concepts that dominate discussions regarding a person's sense of belonging, or of displacement leading to unhomeliness, displacement, or the struggle to assimilate into a new culture. These issues of transnationalism and multiculturalism can be deconstructed through Jacques Derrida's approach to deconstructionism. Jacques Derrida, a postmodern critic, asserts that "a deconstructive reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of languages that he uses" (69). American literary critic Barbara Ellen Johnson in *The Critical Difference* (1980) claims, "deconstruction is not synonymous with deconstruction" (5). It is much closer to the original meaning of the word analysis, which etymologically means undo. "The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text" (Johnson 5). Hence, this study will deconstruct the two main primary texts *In a Land Far from Home* and *In the Light of What We Know* to create a connection between the sense of unhomely and uncanny.

## 2.1 The Nexus between Uncanny and Unhomely

Homi K. Bhabha discusses how the feeling of being unhomely creates an uncanny situation for someone who crosses the border of his/her own country in his essay “The World and the Home”. According to Homi K. Bhabha, “the unhomely is a paradigmatic post-colonial experience, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions” (142). He also asserts that “the unhomely captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place” (141). Furthermore, “to be unhomed be homeless, nor can the unhomely be easily accommodated by the familiar division of social life into private and the public spheres (Bhabha 141). Therefore, unhomely does not necessarily mean not having a home instead, it focuses on the feelings of being displaced in a whole new culture or sometimes within a familiar culture.

Homi K. Bhabha further creates a connection between uncanny and unhomely. According to Bhabha, in the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. “It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations” (Bhabha 141). Therefore, “the home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart” (Bhabha 141). Farahbakhsh & Ranjbar in one of the articles named “Bhabha’s Notion of Unhomeliness in J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*: A Postcolonial Reading” (2016) highlights how Bhabha’s notion of “the unhomely has more to do with the uncanny (the confusion between self and other)” (108). However, it is impossible to discuss the uncanny without mentioning Sigmund Freud’s theory of “Das Unheimliche” translated as “The Uncanny” (1919) by Alix Strachey.

Sigmund Freud's essay "The Uncanny" elaborates on how the concept of the uncanny works in literature. Writing in German, he uses the word "unheimlich" which is "obviously the opposite of Heimlich, meaning "familiar", "native," and "belonging to the home" (Strachey 2). However, to define the term uncanny in a detailed manner though "this definition is incomplete" (Freud in Strachey's translation 2). It undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a definable sense so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread" (Freud in Strachey's translation 1).

Freud's uncanny also brings the idea of "double" (9). In this context, he mentions that "one possesses the knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own—in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self" (9). While interchanging the self with others, the subject creates a mirror image of his/her own self.

Carrying Freud's theories further, Jacques Lacan in *Écrits; A selection* (translated by Alan Sheridan) discusses the process of the formation of the self in relation to the other during what he terms as the mirror stage. According to Jacques Lacan, "the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense, that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image whose predestination to this phase effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term imago" (5-6). The self and other negotiate cultural values and histories with each other and this negotiation gives birth to a liminal space. The term liminal derives from the Latin word limen, which means threshold and can apply to in-between or transitional spaces. These are non-physical spaces (that transcend international borders) that the reader must explore. According to Homi K Bhabha, the liminal space is the in-between location of cultural action/expression (4). Thus, the uncanny and unheimly feelings



accompany the liminal space in other sites and locations – such as a land, which reflects known terrains and at the same time unsettles by virtue of being foreign and distant.

## **2.2 The Rise of Neocolonialism: A New form of Global Power**

To trace the formation of new global power relations as they are played out in Afghanistan, Edward W. Said's method of contrapuntal reading enables us to unfold the two perspectives of the texts. According to Said, contrapuntal reading requires "a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (51). Said defines contrapuntal reading as "an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England" (66). In this process, readers need to "connect the structures of a narrative to the ideas, concepts, experiences from which it draws support" (Said 67). Contrapuntal reading is not only "the construction of the colonial situation as envisaged by the writers, but the resistance to it as well." (Said 79). Hence, contrapuntal reading illustrates two perspectives simultaneously and brings the submerged meaning out of the texts. Though neither *In a Land Far from Home* and *In the Light of What We Know* can be fully categorized as postcolonial texts, the power construction over Afghanistan can be scrutinized through this method of contrapuntal reading.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said mentions that his method is "to focus as much as possible on individual works, to read them first as a great product of the creative or interpretative imagination and then to show them as a part of the relationship between culture and the

empire” (24). Said emphasizes the writers’ historical and social context. His method of deconstructing a text reflects Jacques Derrida’s deconstructionist approach. Derrida asserts,

a text can be as saying something quite different from what it appears to be saying....it may read as carrying a plurality of significance or as saying many different things which are fundamentally at variance with, contradictory to and subversive of what may be seen by criticism as a single ‘stable’ meaning. Thus, a text may ‘betray’ itself (69).

A text may unfold opposite and contradictory when to read contrapuntally, and thus betray itself in the Derridean sense. This notion of plurality or simultaneous awareness in interpreting a literary text promotes the concept of contrapuntal reading. According to Said, contrapuntal reading requires “a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts” (51). Therefore, whether it's postcolonial or colonial texts, contrapuntal reading can help to discover the submerged meaning. Moreover, both Ali and Rahman comment on the underlying power politics and the sense of displacement that lies beneath the surface of *In a Land Far from Home* and *In the Light of What We Know*.

Through contrapuntal reading, Said shows that the self and the other get blended while maintaining a relationship “of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said 5). Antonio Gramsci in his essay “Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State” introduces the concept of hegemony. According to Gramsci, “the normal exercise of hegemony is characterized by the combination of force and consent, and the attempt is always made to

ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority” (210). Hegemony can be further related to Louis Althusser’s description of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). Louis Althusser coined the term “Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)” as a tool that was used to dominate the less powerful people hegemonically. Louis Althusser in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” mentions that “Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology but they also function secondarily by repression” (155).

Power has played a significant part in maintaining state affairs and international relations. According to Michel Foucault, “power is something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds onto or allows to slip away” (166). In this era of globalization, power is not only acquired or shared within one state but also shared and acquired globally. To share power globally, dependency theory works in the formation of international relations. In international relations, Dependency Theory talks about how domination works in the case of a weak state being dominated by a more powerful state not formally or directly, but in the name of aid, funds and military help with the full consent of that state. Global intervention in the name of international relations promotes a new form of power. Political theorist Kwame Nkrumah in *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, claims that this new form of global power is the last stage of imperialism or neo-colonialism. According to Kwame Nkrumah, “Neo-colonialism is based upon the principle of breaking up former large united colonial territories into several small non-viable States which are incapable of independent development and must rely upon the former imperial power for defence and even internal security” (6). Moreover, “their economic and financial systems are linked, as in colonial days, with those of the former colonial ruler” (Nkrumah 6). Hence, Afghanistan is economically dependent on other nations, which allows other nations to dominate Afghanistan giving rise to neocolonialism.

### Chapter 3: Portrayal of Afghanistan: Tracing Uncanny

Syed Mujtaba Ali and Zia Haider Rahman can be called transnational authors whose works cross national boundaries, engage with global issues, and seek to build bridges across diverse cultural traditions. Transnational literature highlights the issues of the migrant and looks at frontier states, and once-colonized countries, of trans-border experiences, most importantly the “freak displacement” (Bhabha 146). As both texts focus on transnational themes of identity, culture, displacement and home *Deshe Bideshe* or *In a land Far From Home* and *In the Light of What We Know* can be considered as examples of transnational writing. However, Ali’s *Deshe Bideshe* is a memoir or travel narrative that deals with the real events, and real characters experienced by the narrator whereas Rahman’s *In the Light of What We Know* is a novel that combines both historical, social or political facts, fictional characters, and events to form a fictional portrayal of contemporary events. Both Syed Mujtaba Ali and Zia Haider Rahman become historical agents because they had experienced colonial rule, therefore they feel a kind of attachment to Afghanistan. This chapter focuses on Syed Mujtaba Ali’ and Zia Haider Rahman’s portrayal of Afghanistan and also attempts to answer why Ali the character in the text and Rahman’s fictional character Zafar, feel a connection between their own land and Afghanistan that ends up creating an uncanny feeling for both characters. This chapter explores why both Bengali authors<sup>1</sup> can pen a sympathetic portrayal of this land in their writings. This section uses Freud’s theory of the uncanny and Homi K. Bhabha’s unhomely to argue how Ali and Zafar develop uncanny feelings in a strangely familiar land and create a liminal space while tracing the connection between Bengal and Afghanistan.

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<sup>1</sup> Here, Bengali authors include Syed Mujtaba Ali and Zia Haider Rahman.

### 3.1 Tracing Uncanny and Unhomely in *In a Land Far from Home*

“One would not understand the true nature of his own country unless he went to a foreign land”

- Syed Mujtaba Ali

In *In a Land Far from Home*, it has been shown that traveling to Afghanistan directly is not easy. To reach Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, one must first travel to Peshawar and then get permission to cross the Khyber Pass. Throughout this expedition, the narrator Ali's desire to discover a link between his native Bengal and Peshawar, Khyber Pass, and perhaps Kabul is notably evident. Ali's depiction of Afghans, their habits, personalities, and rituals are compassionate and interspersed with funny analogies and associations between dialects, cultures, and ideologies. Though the narrator Ali is a bit skeptical about the Pathans, he constantly keeps comparing the culture, dress code, language, trade, and histories of Bengal and Afghanistan throughout his journey. Ali's skeptical behavior can be seen when Ali met Ahamed Ali on the way to Kabul, and mentions, “I was a Bengali and he was a Pathan; so, what was the meaning of this elaborate reception? How much of this was genuine and how much was perfunctory?” (15). This skepticism is obvious as he struggles to find a home in the Afghan land where within even a few similarities he feels displaced. However, in this displacement, the line between “home and the world get muddled, and the private and public” (Bhabha 142) become inexplicably intertwined, forcing upon us an unsettling view.

“Pathan and Bengalis are very different” (Ali 36), still Ali’s urge of finding a connection is visible when Ali asserts that “the orange hue of sunrise from Bengal and the crimson red of the sunset in Peshawar identical, same colors” (36). Bengalis and Afghans share a bond as both regions were colonized by the British. Afghanistan had come under British domination after the Second Anglo-Afghan War that started in November 1878 and ended in September 1880. The spirit that galvanized the Bengali quest for independence and nationalism can be found among the Pathans and Afghans. The narrator Ali is also impressed by the Afghans’ sense of independence which he frequently praises throughout the text. This spirit of freedom can be seen when Ahmad Ali says “the Pathans have fought for their independence with their blood. That’s why it’s still called “no-man’s land” (40). While Bengalis “bomb British for Independence”, (Ali 18), Afridis save the rifles to “save the independence” (Ali 18).

The description of the land in Kabul from the narrator’s perspective is full of dread. The narrator Ali illustrates Kabul as filled with rock and pebbles and mentions “in the horizon, there were faint outlines of mountains. And he guessed that there was no life in those fields, cruelly battered by the sun for millions of years” (50), and “nature refused to create life in this land”, (50). Ali is comforted by “the cool evening breeze in Peshawar” which reminds him of “the first rain after the summer months in Bengal” (24). Ali also mentions how the spring of this country is similar to the monsoon of his native land as during spring “the parched earth waited eagerly to flourish into a new life” (199). The rocky land starts getting life which again reminds us of his green native land Bengal. However, Ali’s depiction of Afghanistan shows that Ali himself is unsettled as he finds similarities and dissimilarities at the same time. This unsettling view leads to an uncanny experience within “strangely familiar” (Freud 4) circumstances. According to Sigmund Freud, the familiar can become “uncanny and frightening” (2). Freud goes on to say

that the uncanny evokes the kind of terror which connects to something “long known to us, once very familiar” (2). Among all of these historical, geographical and cultural connections, Kabul, though very familiar, remains unfamiliar to the narrator. The commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar brings forth a sense of the uncanny.

According to Farahbakhsh & Ranjbar, “unhomeliness is an emotional state: unhomed people don’t feel at home even in their own homes because they don’t feel at home in any culture and, therefore, don’t feel at home in themselves” (107). Mujtaba Ali, as a professor, traveled to Kabul to contribute to the newly formed education system and to investigate the unknown land. Throughout his journey, he contemplates the awe-inspiring emptiness of deserts in comparison to the lushness of his hometown. Ali's narrative concludes with the 1928 tribal insurrection headed by Bacha-e Saqaw, the subsequent Afghan civil war, and the end of Amanullah's reign. Ali clearly depicts the days of agony he underwent in Kabul, as well as his own experience of near-starvation during this period. This internal Afghan turmoil makes the place so uncanny and fearful for Ali. According to Freud, any emotional effect can be transformed into anxiety through repression, therefore there must be forms of anxiety induced by something that was repressed but has now surfaced. This type of uneasiness is elicited by the uncanny. Ali had experienced social and cultural instability in his homeland and, fired by nationalist zeal, had refused to attend any institution following the British education system before enrolling in Santiniketan (Afroz 19). These emotions were again invoked as Ali observed the imposition of absurd rules and regulations on the Afghans under King Amanullah's reign. This recognition reminded Ali of his own protests, and despite the hardships that the rebellion brought about, Ali could recognize his own anti-colonial and nationalistic feelings. This led to the feeling of the uncanny, as he could

not, despite recognizing the sentiments behind the uprising, identify with it. This put him in an ambivalent position as well.

The narrator Ali had seen the reforms that Amanullah had imposed on the people, and Ali, along with his Afghan friends and colleagues, had felt unhomed because of the new rules and practices imposed by the State during that period. It is when Amanullah returned from his European tour that “the seasons of reforms started” (Ali 205). He started bringing changes to Afghan’s old traditional business settings, dress codes, education systems and other social and cultural mores. “The system of doing business sitting on the floor, on the carpet, is hereby forbidden” (Ali 205), as every shop was made to use chairs and tables. People were forced to wear “trousers” (Ali 213), and “Dereshi”<sup>2</sup>(Ali 214) instead of “salwar” (Ali 213). Ali illustrates how, “the city looks emptier than usual. Most men could not come out on the streets, as they did not have the dereshi” (215). These reforms are portrayed as absurd impositions, so the process of modernization, as it did not spring from the people, becomes a strange imitation of European ways, and their adaptation to Afghan soil renders them ridiculous.

Ali’s own views need reexamination at this point. He was in Kabul as part of the modernization process, bringing in modern education to the country. But the absurdity of the reforms makes him uncomfortable and question his own position. We can see this process of self-questioning as placing Ali in a space of liminality, which is the transitional point where the self and other negotiate between different sets of cultural values, and beliefs. Ali has to question his own beliefs during his stay in Afghanistan. His sense of freedom and anti-British sentiment

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<sup>2</sup> Dereshi mainly comes from the English word dress. During the reign of King Amanullah, he ordered the Afghans to wear Dereshi. By the king’s order, it was forbidden to wear traditional salwar, kurta and robe. In this context, Dereshi refers to European dresses like suit, tie, hat, trouser etc.



become evident while comparing Afghan perceptions of British intervention in their land. Farahbakhsh & Ranjbar mention uncanny as “the confusion between self and other” (108), and it is this confusion that Ali encounters in Afghanistan, where he encounters “a constant recurrence of similar situations” (Freud 2), character traits, a twist of fortune, the same crime, or even the same spirit of independence. Memories of home haunt him, and he frequently relives his own past. Through encountering similar situations, Ali starts to consider Afghanistan as a mirror image that helps them to develop his self. Thus, the negotiation starts between self and other. While negotiating between self and other, Ali creates a liminal space which according to Bhabha is a transitory, in-between state. Ali cannot accept Afghanistan as his home and neither can he deny the similarities or homely feelings he gets in Afghanistan. Hence, by interchanging the Bengali histories, cultures and customs with Afghanistan Ali creates a mirror image of his homeland.

### **3.2 Tracing the Uncanny and Unhomely in *In the Light of What We Know***

“Can historical time be thought outside fictional space, or do they lie uncannily beside each other?”

- Homi K.Bhabha

Zia Haider Rahman through his protagonist Zafar embellishes the Afghan story by combining historical and political facts that he himself “fears to confront” (39). In *In the Light of What We Know*, Rahman like Ali illustrates the dread-creating image of Afghanistan in comparison to his own land. Even though Rahman's depictions are imaginary, this fictional depiction corresponds to the vision that Mujtaba Ali delineated in his travelog *In a land Far from Home*. Zafar mentions, “there was no grass, not the least blade; it was a land of dusty, earthy tones. Whereas

my beautiful Sylhet sang the song of seasons, of a yearly cycle” (21). According to Sigmund Freud, “something has to be added to what is new and unfamiliar to make it uncanny” (2), and the new and unfamiliar environment of Afghanistan evokes the uncanny. Furthermore, not everything new and different is scary. The new can only evoke fear when combined with the familiar, so it is the mixture of the familiar with the strange, that makes the newness of the Afghan land scary to Zafar.

Sigmund Freud quotes Jentsch in “The Uncanny” to explain one of the most effective techniques for creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader uncertain and to do so in such a way that the reader’s attention is not directly focused on his uncertainty so that “he is not immediately obligated to investigate the matter and fix it, and, would quickly dissipate the strange emotional effect of the story” (5). Rahman follows the postmodern technique of using metafiction to blur the line between fact and fiction by reminding readers that they are reading a piece of fiction. This narrative approach includes self-reflexivity, open-endedness, and story within the story which blurs the line between truth and fiction. By blurring the line, the author keeps the reader in an uncertain or unsettling position. In this novel, the author shares Zafar’s feelings of an outcast in a foreign land and also in his native land. The unsettling feelings of Zafar are remarkably visible. While finding a home in a strangely familiar land, Zafar suffers from a psychological crisis. The repressive desire of finding a home in the world puts Zafar in in-between spaces of multiple identities and multiple cultures.

According to Homi K. Bhabha, these in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood, singular or communal that “initiate new signs of identity and innovate sites of collaboration, and contestation and defining the idea of society itself” (12). However, it

is not only in Afghanistan that Zafar is beset by uncanny feelings. For instance, Zafar feels equally unhomey in his own country. As the novel says: "I was twelve years old and traveling alone across a country that was neither home nor foreign to me" (59). Feeling "unhomey" (Bhabha 141) does not mean the absence of a home or the reverse of having a house; rather, it is the gradual realization of the blurring of the boundary between the world and the home.

Bhabha has noted the dualistic experiences of migrants. Through a variety of concepts such as half-life, partial presence, collecting the past, and the edge of alien cultures, he illustrates the uncanny nature of the migrant experience. Migrants live a half-life in a foreign country because they are unable to accept it fully. This sensation of living a fragmented existence can be rather distressing for migrants. This is the case for Zafar who has no fixed identity. Zafar is a fictional character who is neither British nor Bengali, but as the novel describes him, mainly "an exile, a refugee, if not from war, then of war, but also an exile from blood" (Rahman 51) who is living a half-life. According to Edward W. Said, "most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two" (2). This awareness of various cultures gives Zafar an uncanny sensation and pushes him to negotiate between the multiple cultures. Though born in Sylhet, Bangladesh, Zafar moved to Britain when "he was no more than five years old" (Rahman 3). To Zafar, "the unhomey is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world" (Bhabha 141). He feels unhomed in every space he is placed in.

Zafar's constant feeling of being an outcast in every culture, in every place, which Freud calls "inner repetition-compulsion" (12), can also be "perceived as uncanny" (12). This shock of recognizing his national identity blurs his "home" in the "world" (Bhabha 141). Tyson says, "to

be unhomed is to feel like you don't belong even in your own home, because you don't belong to yourself. Your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee" (14). Therefore, one person can feel unhomey even in his own home and that is what has happened in the Zafar case. When he returned to Sylhet at the age of "twelve or ten" (Rahman 3), he was not welcomed by anyone. Everyone at the train station was staring at Zafar as he was wearing "a jacket and tie" (Rahman 57) fitting neither him nor the scene. This form of dress, unfamiliar and strange to most Bengalis, turns him into a stranger in his own land.

Zafar encounters a similar "strangely familiar" (Freud 4) experience in Kabul. He describes his first sight of Kabul as "a heaving mass of heads, some with turbans and others with caps, surrounded by a white Toyota Land Cruiser with United Nations markings on its sides, in the heart of Kabul in Afghanistan" (57). He is neither welcomed nor rejected, and Zafar doesn't feel that he belongs to a particular nation or identity. This constant uncertainty can be related to the uncanny, which the text connects to the identity crisis of an exile, as illustrated by the excerpt from Said in *In the Light of What We Know* which says that exile is "strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (1). Zafar can be seen as a "psychological refugee" (Tyson 12) who does not feel at home anywhere.

The uncanny can be associated with Freud's idea of the return of the repressed, giving rise to the feeling of strange familiarity. Homi K. Bhabha associates uncanny feelings with liminal spaces where the self-negotiates with the other to create, but fails to find, a fixed identity. Zafar dwells in such a liminal space, where he suffers from ambiguity as he cannot deny his connection with Bangladesh nor the attachment he feels for Afghanistan. These in-between

liminal spaces and ambiguities create uncanny experiences, blending the known and familiar with the strange and unfamiliar. However, in each of these works<sup>3</sup>, the author's liminality cannot be avoided. The authors usually occupy liminal spaces of transition or in-betweenness due to their capacity to communicate as both insiders and outsiders. The traditionally common tunnel vision in many canonical literary texts is expanded to include peripheral or other perspectives.

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<sup>3</sup> Syed Mujtaba Ali's *In a Land Far from Home* (translated from Ali's original work *Deshe Bidehse* by Nazes Afroz) and Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*.

## Chapter 4: Tracing the New Forms of Global Power

Food, language, education, and commerce are all touchstones of identity that reveal how colonial powers dictated the social and cultural histories of those they conquered.

- Butler

The underlying structure of the power cycle mainly started getting attention globally after the Colonial era. Postcolonial critics theorize and analyze the effects of western representations of Eastern culture in postcolonial studies. However, the contemporary politics of power and hegemony that defines this period of late capitalism was largely overlooked. Hence Arif Dirlik in his essay “The Postcolonial Aura” criticizes postcolonial writers and critics for their inability to link postcolonialism with global capitalism and transnationalism. In this regard, Said’s notion of contrapuntal reading can be considered as a powerful tool to unfold these underlying power structures in literary texts. Contrapuntal readings involve looking at the text from various angles and seeing how it deals with itself as well as its historical or biographical background.

Robert Dahl, a political scientist, defines power “as the ability to get others to do what they otherwise would not” (1). During the colonial era, the powerful group used to dominate the less powerful group with the help of military or naval forces, technologies, and other social institutions. In today's world, direct domination is no longer used to maintain control over a single country; rather, it has evolved into the idea of global development. In the name of globalization, global development, international relations, global aid, and military help, the newly formed centers of power have started to spread their roots, not in the form of direct

domination, but rather by gathering the consent of the dominated states. The structure of this globally shared power is not simple, rather it is complex. As Foucault claims “there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives” (167). This chapter examines how the neocolonial dominance of Afghanistan combines a type of internal colonialism by a Pashtun ruling elite over the country's numerous ethnic minorities based on Mujtaba Ali's memoir *In a Land Far from Home*. This chapter will then go on to focus on the shifting nature of global power giving birth to neocolonialism and how that is reflected in Zia Haider Rahman's novel *In the Light of What We Know*.

#### **4.1 Tracing Internal Conflict and Rise of New Power in *In a Land Far from Home***

Syed Mujtaba Ali witnesses the greatest Afghan upheaval during his visit to Afghanistan which he delineates in his travelog *In a Land Far from Home*. Although Afghanistan avoided direct colonial rule from European countries in the 20th century, its history was nonetheless marked by external power and influence. Afghans credit their country's independence to the exceptional bravery of their forebears, who fought against the most powerful empire of the time in the Third Anglo-Afghan War.<sup>4</sup>

Antonio Gramsci in his essay “Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State” says that “supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways: as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership” (210). During the colonial era “supremacy” (Gramsci 210) was mainly based on domination to subjugate perhaps by armed force, but in this era of globalization supremacy is

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<sup>4</sup> The Third Anglo-Afghan War started on May 6, 1919, when the Emirate of Afghanistan attacked British India. The war ended on August 8, 1919, when both sides signed an armistice. In August 1919, with the end of the Third Anglo-Afghan War, Afghanistan was able to abandon its protected state status and undertake an independent foreign policy free from British influence. From 1919, the political elite energetically promoted two themes: anti-colonialism and nation-building, with King Amanullah laying the groundwork for a modern national bureaucracy and state legal system (1919-29). (Source: "Third Anglo-Afghan War - Wikipedia").

maintained through intellectual and moral leadership. King Amanullah's campaign to modernize Afghanistan in the name of "intellectual and moral leadership" (Gramsci 210) camouflages internal domination. It is unclear how ordinary people felt about Amanullah's reforms. Hence, direct colonial dominance is eliminated and the notion of an independent state becomes a reality. However, this independence is accompanied by the dominance of one group over another, and the exploitation and subjugation of other groups. The Afghan state began to legitimize its control not only through direct use of power but also through ideas and ideological means. These ideologies were implemented through the state's hegemonic institutions, including schools, the military, and ceremonies that promoted an Afghan national concept.

When Afghan nationalists drafted the country's first national constitution in 1923, they prioritized a unified national identity as Afghan over ethnic identities such as Pashtun, Tajik, Sunni, Shia, or Hindu. Everyone living in Afghanistan was thought to be Afghan, regardless of their religious views, affiliations, and ethnic identities. But in reality, the ethnic hierarchy, especially Pashtun<sup>5</sup> dominance over Afghanistan is undeniable. Louis Althusser's notion of Ideological State Apparatus provides an insightful thought on the state's ideological practices. To Althusser, the ruling class distort the dominant ideology as the national ideology, propagandizes citizens by regular injections of nationalism, and prevents them from recognizing the hegemony. Christopher Cramer and Jonathan Goodhand remark that "Pashtun nationalism is synonymous with Afghan nationalism" (903). Since there is no official ethnic population census in Afghanistan, the government has successfully persuaded the populace that Pashtuns constitute the vast majority of the country's population. Therefore, Pashtun culture should be embraced as

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<sup>5</sup> The Pashtun tribes, also known historically as Afghan tribes, are the tribes of the Pashtun people, a significant Eastern Iranian ethnic group who speak Pashto and adhere to the Pashtunwali code of behavior. Pashtuns have historically been the most powerful ethnic group. (Source: Wikipedia)



the country's official culture. However, the Pashtun dominance was visible even during King Amanullah's reign. Despite Dari is the official language, Amanullah Khan emphasized Pashto as an integral component. However, Amanullah's action demonstrates how the internal powerful group promotes their ideologies in the name of national identity.

Though King Amanullah believes he has saved his land from the western rule, in reality, he has merely bought "the foreign peace" (Rahman 31). After coming back from his European tour, "the seasons of reform started" (Ali 205). This reformation is like a "repeat show, but more painful, meaningless, only blind aping of European ways" (Ali 206). King Amanullah and his wife Queen Soraya blindly followed western customs and manners in a spirit of mimicry. To Homi K.Bhabha, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite"(3). Thus, the colonizer desires to develop the other and make him similar to himself, while preserving a strong sense of distinction. In this way, the Other becomes "nearly identical"(Bhabha 3) to the colonizer, but never exactly fits into the hegemonic cultural and political institutions that rule both of them. Therefore, being a mimicry man, King Amanullah is still part of the hegemonic power structure of which he is unaware, as many people in this world failed "to be independent" (Ali 209).

King Amanullah's intellectual and moral leadership resulted in modifications to dress codes, business rules, the educational system, and social, religious, and cultural customs. Mujtaba Ali describes how Queen Soraya "tore away the net hanging from her hat" in a "typical British way" (215). To Mujtaba Ali, education is necessary to enlighten society, but Amanullah's attempts to impose British manners on the Afghan people did not serve this objective. Ali brings in the example of Bengal and asserts his belief that the British were responsible for the "destruction of the muslin industry" as they "enter as a needle and come out as a scabbard" (215). The collapse

of trade in Kabul or the muslin industry in India as a result of incessant fighting over land does not bring prosperity. “Kabul’s bazaar was becoming poorer with the emergence of Russia and Iran” (Ali 121). Besides, “the silk, textile, and muslin industries were struggling too and the British had dug them all into their graves” (Ali 121). But there were no economic reasons for “foreign lands” (Ali 126) to crowd the city, but there were many “geopolitical reasons” (126).<sup>6</sup>

Mujtaba Ali resided in Afghanistan during a very turbulent time. He used this experience to compare the intervention of British colonial power in Bengal and Afghanistan, which had resulted in the ruination of the resources and wealth in both lands, and also *put* an end to the intercommunication between these regions. To Antonio Gramsci “the State must be conceived of as an educator, inasmuch as it tends precisely to create a new type or level of civilization” (215). Because “one is acting essentially on economic forces, reorganizing and developing the apparatus of economic production” (Gramsci 215). King Amanullah is mainly trying to “create a new structure” (Gramsci 215) with the full consent of the people of his state. Furthermore, this ideological domination is a concerning factor in *homi*, especially during the time King Amanullah ruled. While Ali appreciates King Amanullah’s efforts to modernize Afghanistan, he has no respect for the kind of western education Amanullah is trying to introduce. However, to Ali, “Kabul was trotting like a mad horse wearing dereshi” (170) but, what was the point of embarrassing “hundred and fifty elders in full public view in order to establish a false sense of modernity?” (175). Ali, due to Afghans’ willing acceptance of their rulers’ wish, asserts “I could not fathom this particular aspect of Kabulis; in India, we were accustomed to oppressions and

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<sup>6</sup> According to Merriam-Webster, geopolitics is a study of the influence of such factors as geography, economics, and demography on the politics and especially the foreign policy of a state. Because of Afghanistan’s geographical location between the Iranian plateau and the Himalayas, over the centuries it has served as a crossroads for numerous dynasties, none of which have been able to occupy the country permanently. Thus, there are many geopolitical issues attached to Afghanistan.

repressions by our rulers, not so much their whims” (206). However, Kabulis were angry at Amanullah’s reform movement but “they were used to the King's whims” (Ali 206).

According to Antonio Gramsci, “all men are intellectuals, but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (213). This particular group of intellectuals plays an important role in shaping an ideology. After the withdrawal of direct domination, economically and structurally powerful countries influence a bunch of intellectuals of the less powerful country to establish an internal hegemonic order which gives birth to internal colonialism<sup>7</sup>. The intellectual leaders start establishing new rules and order over their own nation as the main purpose of a State is to raise “the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, which corresponds to the interest of ruling classes” (Gramsci 214). King Amanullah wanted to uphold the value of Afghanistan to the whole world by changing and lifting the traditional cultural and moral values. To him, being modern means following the Western lifestyle and policies as Mir Aslam mentions, “rubbing his (Amanullah) skin against that of the French and the British, Amanullah’s body is full of dirt-he’s now attempting to spread that dirt all over Kabul” (Ali 206).

To Gramsci, “the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (216). This consent is obtained by the use of certain ideologies as the foundation of dominance and exploitation of the people, based on a distorted image of the world that Amanullah created in order to enslave other minds by controlling their imaginations. Mujtaba Ali with a sarcastic tone writes: “not everyone predicting a bleak future

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<sup>7</sup> Internal colonialism refers mainly to modern capitalist modes of oppression or subjection, typically of one ethnic group over another. It also leads to political and economic inequalities within a state. (Source:Gutiérrez, Ramón A. “INTERNAL COLONIALISM: An American Theory of Race.” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2004, pp. 281–295., doi:10.1017/S1742058X04042043.)

for the country” (207) as people were wearing “red, bloodshot red” glasses and to them “Amanullah is a gentle king” (207). Again to a few, King Amanullah’s ideas of women's attire, and education were much appreciated while others “took on different perspectives” (Ali 211) as Afghans are not accustomed to this practice. Therefore, it shows how with ideological domination, Amanullah can enslave other minds.

Since the era of globalization, powerful nations no longer fight directly with armies or military; instead, they provide a variety of financial resources and advice disguised as international aid and diplomatic partnerships. Continuing Western influence caused internal conflicts between Amanullah and the various Afghan tribes, which then led Bacha-e-Saqaw to "fight against Amanullah" (Ali 224). Afghanistan thus became a land of conflict, and this internal conflict, with its roots in the international or global arena, has historically rendered this nation economically impoverished and weakened it, in opening it to further foreign intervention. As a result, Western countries intervened in Afghan national policies and ideological domination proliferated through offers of aid and help. As Ahmad Ali says “When the British couldn’t kill us by fighting, didn’t they try to lure us by recruiting us into the army?” (39). However, it seems like “dying of hunger is the sole property of the Orient. To live forever is the white’s man burden” (Ali 61).

#### **4.2 Tracing New forms of Global Power in *In the Light of What We Know***

International aid organizations including Non-Government Organizations form the new kind of agencies used to further the cause of neo-imperialism or globalization. Zia Haider Rahman’s novel *In the Light of What We Know* reflects on how various international policies work. The text shows how in the name of “intellectual and moral leadership” (Gramsci 210), various

transnational organizations like UN (United Nations), AfDARI, UNAMA, (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan), and ISAF, (International Security Assistance Fund) work together to provide food, shelter, education, military assistance, and money to rebuild the country after the depredations of the American invasion of Afghanistan. The purpose of these organizations, such as the United Nations and the European Union, is to reduce the likelihood of international conflicts and promote international peace. However, their operation methods imply otherwise. These groups systematically seize control of a nation's governing structure to exert influence on its policies and maintain the nation's dependence on them. Afghanistan's cycle of peace and upheaval (148) as mentioned by Ali, shows that regardless of the progress, Afghanistan remains a war zone, and there is no way to refute the economic downturn and infrastructure destruction caused by the next conflict. The intrusion of the British, Russia, the United States, and even Australia was made in the name of peace and development but always results in the devastation of the land.

In *In the Light of What We Know*, Zafar, while discussing contemporary geopolitics, comments on the political implications of the projection of the global 'map'. He asserts that maps obliterate information to provide some information at all, and we, the general people of the country, do not really "care about geographical location or distances" (22). The world as represented through the world map serves an ideological and hegemonic purpose. By removing information about the geographical location of any nation it seeks to obliterate its particularity "that serves a need" (Rahman 25). Similarly, translators, educators, writers and intellectuals play an important role in the formation of new global powers. To Michel Foucault, power "is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation" (166). This complex strategy and its exercise of power is facilitated by "intellectuals"(Gramsci 210) that serve the purpose of the

“dominant group” (Gramsci 211). As Zafar says: “they cannot capture everything exactly, and they have to give up some things in order to convey anything at all” (Rahman 25).

*In the Light of What We Know* depicts how America under the name of “moral leadership” (Gramsci 210) intervened in Afghan political matters. This Afghan War however is not between the Afghan people rather it is between the USA and the Taliban while the Afghan people are just victims of this feud. This Afghan War is not benefiting the Afghan people in any way. This conflict is merely political propaganda to exercise power. The International Security Assistance Force was a military mission in Afghanistan, established to secure Afghan land and facilitate the formation of the Afghan Transitional Administration. The irony is, that this military mission is to save Kabul from its people. This intervention of the first world country into a third world crisis is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in the contemporary transnational world. Colonel Mushtaq, a character in *In the Light of What We Know*, who is represented as a Pakistani army officer, states that there is no difference between “Britain or America” (361), as all of them try to “justify their invasion of Afghanistan with platitudes about freedom and liberating the Afghani people” (361).

According to some critics, the process of global intervention in the name of international relations promotes a new form of power. Kwame Nkrumah in *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, claimed this new form of global power as the last stage of imperialism or sometimes as neo-colonialism. According to Kwame Nkrumah “the neo-colonial State may be obliged to take the manufactured products of the imperialist power to the exclusion of competing products from elsewhere” (3). Neo-colonialism is infused with militarism in a significant way. In addition to promoting the economic interests of a strong nation, military strength has a variety of other repercussions. This military power is sometimes provided in third-world nations that lack

enough military support. To the whole world, it seems like aid from the first world to third world countries but in reality, it is a new way of domination and taking control over another land as Zafar mentions,

They were an army in all but name, not the army carrying guns that cleared the path, nor one carrying food or medicine. But they came bearing advice and with the arrogance to believe that they could make all the difference (34)

Steven Kettell and Alex Sutton cite Meiksins Wood's comment that "regular exhibitions of military force" indicate to the rest of the world that "the United States may use its immense military strength at anytime, anywhere, with or without comprehensible purposes or tactics" (248). It is not always the US, previously Britain, and Russia as a global force also tried to take control over Afghanistan.

In international relations, Dependency Theory talks about this form of domination where a weak state is being dominated under the jurisdiction of a more powerful state not formally or directly, but in the name of aid and funds with the full consent of that state. The relationship of Afghanistan with AfDARI, an Australian Assistance Fund, can be clarified through the lens of the Dependency Theory. In *In the Light of What We Know*, we see the politics of naming the Australian assistance funds AfDARI. This "name of the institute troubled" (31) Zafar as "Dari is only one of the languages spoken in Afghanistan" (31). Thus, he asked Suleiman, a program manager of the UN, about the reason behind the Afghan name of an Australian organization.

Didn't anyone say anything? I asked,

You mean Afghans?

Yes.

I'm sure they did, he said. Something like: Well done,

a very clever name. Now Please give us the money (32).

This conversation between Suleiman and Zafar shows the working of this new form of power relations. This dependency in terms of maintaining transnational relations promotes hegemony as the Afghan people willingly accept the foreign countries' intervention in their land. Zafar's statement "there will always be locals to buy the foreign peace" (31), and "free will is an illusion" (300) reflects this situation.

Dependency Theory also brings in the idea of the balance of power where one nation supports its allied nations and balances its power against the power of the other side. This balance of power also plays an important role to form the new world power. Zia Haider Rahman in *In the Light of What We Know* brings out this point of balancing power between allied nations through the conversation of Zafar and Colonel Sikander Mushtaq. Colonel Sikander Mushtaq fought in the 1971's war, and he comments on how the Nixon administration ignored the genocide of Bangladesh due to its alliance with the Pakistani military Junta during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Khalid Hossain in his novel *The Kite Runner* also delineates a similar power game. In *The Kite Runner*, Khalid Hossain explicitly depicts the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the balance of power between America and Pakistan against the Soviet Union.

The balance of power is also found in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and America after the 9/11 attack which is depicted through Zafar and Reza's discussion about the many geopolitical issues. "In fact, right up to September 11, Saudis who applied for a US entry visa were not required to attend an interview at the US embassy" (Rahman 358), as America shares a



close relationship with Saudi Arabia. The General says to Zafar that “they are co-conspirators” (359). Zafar mentions how the “oil prices barely moved” (359) after the 9/11 attacks in exchange for US protection to keep the Saudi King in a stable situation. Antonio Gramsci in “Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State” claims that “class is dominant in two ways, i.e. leading and dominant. It leads the classes which are its allies and dominates those whose are its enemies” (210). Therefore, we see how America, Saudi Arabia, and sometimes Pakistan lead one another and dominate their enemies like the Soviet Union, China, and sometimes The Taliban.

Marxist theorist Louis Althusser introduces the term Ideological State Apparatus to define how various institutions such as media, education, and churches transmit the values of the dominant group in the society to dominate ideologically instead of direct domination with forces. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century’s transnational or global world, the practice of power has changed its way from its direct dominating nature to ideological domination. Media facilitates the formation of new global powers in this 21st century. According to Louis Althusser, media is part of the Communications Ideological State Apparatus. Media shapes ideologies. Media promotes a particular culture. People sometimes forget that media messages are constructed. Zia Haider Rahman in *In the Light of What We Know* incorporates the role of electronic media like television channels as well as print media like books, and newspapers in the formation of Islamophobia after the 9/11 attack.

In the name of the War on Terror<sup>8</sup>, which Zafar mentions several times in this novel, the United States launched an international military campaign particularly focusing on those countries which supported al-Qaeda. This war on terror is nothing but a diplomatic stand by the U.S. to directly exercise its power over Afghanistan.

Media as a communication tool helps to propagate the agenda of the dominant group. As they work as a means of communication, they spread the content first to facilitate some dominant groups. After the 9/11 attack, the U.S through creating fear against the Muslim community in the world tried to take control of Afghanistan. The global media joined in and started talking about this attack through books, newspapers, or television channels. Media messages are constructed and carry subtle messages about who and what is important, reflecting the values, attitudes, and points of view of the ones doing the construction. After the 9/11 attack, various Islamic books and historical books about Afghanistan became available in New York bookshops. Zafar says that “before September 11, 2001, how many do you think had read Ahmed Rashid’s book about Afghanistan?” (130). This is how the media helps certain groups or countries to forge a new form of world power. Zafar as a Muslim felt that before the attack, he was invisible and unsexed, and after the attack, everyone started noticing him. Althusser claims “ideologies” (155) always create “imaginary relations” (155); just like the 9/11 event has created a particular ideology regarding the Muslim community which creates “imaginary relations” (Althusser 155) between the world and the Muslims. People started to consider Muslims terrorists. Even movies, news, talk shows, and books contributed to the creation of

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<sup>8</sup> After the 9/11 attacks, George W. Bush proclaimed a global effort to eliminate terrorists. Afghanistan and Iraq were part of the Global War on Terror, or GWOT, which also included diplomatic, financial, and other efforts to deny terrorists funds or safe haven. World War on Terror allies also participated. On October 7, 2001, the President announced that U.S. military operations had begun in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda training camps and Taliban bases were attacked first. The US and its coalition allies would also offer humanitarian aid to Afghans. (Source: <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/global-war-terror>)

Islamophobia by projecting such violent activities of the Taliban, or Al-Qaeda. No one questioned the authenticity of these messages as everyone fell under this invisible trap and magic of the global media.

In *In the Light of What We Know*, characters such as Zafar, and the unnamed narrator show the transition of world power from the colonial to this global era. Through the various conversations of Zafar, the unnamed narrator, Colonel Mushtaq, General Firdous Khan, and Reza, the novel shows contemporary global powers and its connection to neocolonialism. Jean-Paul Sartre in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* defines neocolonialism as a process of indirect and ideological domination where the economically and politically powerful state does not use military force to control the less powerful country. Instead of direct domination, they take control of their land and foreign and political affairs in the name of international relations and global interconnectedness. Ania Loomba in *Colonialism – Post Colonialism*, states that neocolonialism also promotes exploitation and unequal social relations which remain unnoticed by the people. Zafar describes this as the new form of colonization, where the colonizers occupy land, claiming they need to repair “a goddamn war zone” (305) as the westerners still regard themselves as the “benevolent imperialists” (354). Furthermore, Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* claims that the cultural effects of colonialism exist even after decolonization. Colonel Mushtaq states that even while we hate westerners “we all wear Western military Uniforms” (Rahman 258), “we button up in their shirts and tie our laces in boots” (Rahman 258), and “we bought their values wholesale in exchange for our dignity” (Rahman 255); this statement shows how the cultural effects of colonialism persist.

In *In the Light of What We Know*, we see how America invades Afghanistan with global support. Edward Said claims that the main battle of imperialism is based on land. If we think critically, we will see that America's war on terror is also based on land. America established military bases as well as global organizations, and NGOs to ensure the 'human rights' of the Afghan people, and also to provide 'aid' as compensation for the war. Suleiman mentions that the Americans as well as "all these foreigners' own property here" (37), and how those NGOs and international organizations "put a bounty on the heads of locals who could speak English" (32). The welfare and hegemonic power building run side by side. On one side the First world countries like America, and Australia provide funds and offer money to the Afghan and on the other side, they are buying the consent of the Afghans to dominate over them ideologically. For instance, Suiaf who works as a guard, and was an engineering professor, left his job because he is "paid more by the UN and NGOs" (Rahman 32). These NGOs, and other international organizations, whom the novel classifies as "neo-imperialists" (361), are being used as tools to subjugate third-world countries like Afghanistan. Moreover, to Nkrumah "control over government policy in the neo-colonial State may be secured by payments towards the cost of running the State, by the provision of civil servants in positions where they can dictate policy, and by monetary control over foreign exchange through the imposition of a banking system controlled by the imperial power" (3).

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

While residing in Kabul, Mujtaba Ali was at the center of one of King Amanullah's pet initiatives, which attempted to give his subjects contemporary 'modern' education. Ali's story is marked by the liveliness in which he portrays the nature of the Afghan people through vibrant dialogues with average citizens that illustrate their values, attitudes, and prejudices influencing the turbulent events. Both Syed Mujtaba Ali and Zia Haider Rahman trace the uncanny atmosphere while unmasking the propaganda of various international agencies through their writings. To Ali, Afghanistan resembles his homeland while simultaneously remaining unfamiliar and unhomely. Ali after meeting so many people in Afghanistan, and seeing so many unknown flowers, and trees, either ugly, dry or rocky hills, felt "homesick" and his body and mind craved for his own land, the known corners of his home (117). Due to internal upheavals in Afghanistan, Ali's sense of the uncanny and unhomely, which was within control, to begin with, intensifies and becomes fearful. In contrast, Zafar, a fictitious character created by Rahman, discovers himself through experiencing different cultures and identities that he could never claim as his own. Thus, Zafar's vision of home remains uncertain and blurred, regardless of where he is in the world, making him feel out-of-place, and never having a sense of belonging.

Processes of globalization are based on geopolitical interests. As the more powerful western countries wield greater power, the old colonial forms of control of power make themselves felt albeit in a different form. As Paul Jay has stated, globalization is a postcolonial issue, yet it is undeniably a result of colonialism, as the history of globalization began with colonial actions. The rising influence of international agencies has established a systemic means of invading third-world countries as Ali mentions "democracy is indeed a fragile concept" (178). As reported in *In the Light of What We Know*, United Nations officials portray Afghanistan as a doomed nation

because of its poverty and lack of education, thus justifying intervention in its internal affairs.

Furthermore, In *In the Light of What We Know*, as well as *In a Land Far from Home* examine the hypocrisies of Western operations in Afghanistan are revealed.

So, the land of Afghanistan, in the eyes of Bengali writers, forms a space which is both familiar and foreign, both akin to ourselves and strangely different. In this familiar/unfamiliar terrain, our authors – Ali at the beginning of the twentieth century, and Rahman from the first decade of the twenty-first – find an apt location from which to examine contemporary political power games, the efforts of a poor nation to rise from the domination of global powers, to form its own shape. Ali rooted in high Bengali culture, a product of Santiniketan, nonetheless finds reflections of his own culture, and Rahman, a writer who flaunts his in-between status, creates the character of Zafar, who finds himself at one and separated from the people he encounters in his sojourn in Afghanistan. Bengal and Afghanistan lie on two different ends of the Indian subcontinent. Both writers draw a contrast between the lush green of Bengal and the rocky arid beauty of Afghanistan. It is a worthwhile question to ask what their points of comparison are. Therefore, this thesis has tried to trace those while concentrating on the larger political and cultural issues at stake.

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