

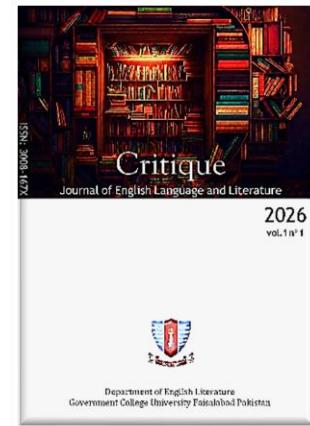
Critique

Journal of English Language and Literature

2026 vol. 1 n° 1

ISSN: 3008-167X

<https://critique.gcuf.edu.pk>



Cultural Transduction in Zafar's Identity: A Study of Zia H. Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*

Atta-ul-Mustafa

To cite this article: Atta-ul-Mustafa. "Cultural Transduction in Zafar's Identity: A Study of Zia H. Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*." *Critique: Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2026, pp. 4–18.
<https://critique.gcuf.edu.pk/index.php/critique/article/view/21>



Published online: 11 October 2025



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Department of English Literature
Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan

Cultural Transduction in Zafar's Identity: A Study of Zia H. Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*

Atta-ul-Mustafa¹ 

¹ Department of English & Linguistics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This study explores how Zia Haider Rahman's protagonist Zafar in *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) becomes culturally transduced distancing him from the native culture in the aura of cultural imperialism. The study further investigates how the contemporary national and global realities created by capitalism and their cultural and political manifestations shape the conceptual model of this study. The theory of proximity and cultural transduction is applied to analyze the selected work. Furthermore, I employed Bourdieusian notion of reflexive research practice to inform my methodological choices and analysis. Besides analyzing the hegemonic schema of global capitalists in some other cultures, the study also shows how globalization creates an impression of smallness and diminishes cultural differences, forcing the South Asian diasporas to immerse in host culture. There seems to have been a general cultural turn that entails a greater emphasis on the personal self. My findings show that the global capitalist projects of transculturation and transnationalism have shaped the *mélange* identities of the South Asian subjects making them culturally transduced.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 March 2025
Revised 25 April 2025
Accepted 2 June 2025

KEYWORDS

Cultural transduction;
globalization; *mélange*;
proximity; South Asian
diaspora

Introduction

Bengali diaspora writer Zia H. Rahman interweaves the issues of love, literature, music, mathematics, physics, psychology, carpentry, law, religion, language, American and Britain social trends, the 1971 'Liberation' war of Bangladesh, the incident of 9/11, and the 2008 financial crisis in *In the Light of What We Know* (Rahman). Most of these issues are faced by the residents of a multicultural society. The novel depicts the rich English class through the eyes of a poor East-Pakistani born guy, Zafar. Rahman's unnamed narrator, born to Princeton-graduate Pakistani-parents in New Jersey, immersed in American society, becomes "American citizen" (Rahman 3) and is estranged from religion and Pakistaniness. His maternal grandfather was a Pakistani ambassador to the US whereas his paternal family is associated with industry (4) in Pakistan. His father is a professor of Physics at Princeton and Oxford Universities. The narrator, while equipped with economic, cultural and social capitals to play in the global field, starts his career as an investment banker in the ruthless financial sector of fine points. His wife, Meena is about to leave him when Zafar meets

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR Atta-ul-Mustafa  atta_mustafa71@yahoo.com

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by the Department of English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author (s) or with their consent. The views expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher. The publisher accepts no responsibility for any errors or for the views expressed herein.

him last time. He is sacked from job for trading the mortgaged-backed securities that has upset millionaires' fortune through "a small movement in exchange rates" (2) in the global market.

Zafar was the narrator's class fellow in mathematics at Oxford in 1987. Instead of "biological parents" (Rahman 43), his maternal uncle raises Zafar (137). A Pakistani soldier had raped his virgin mother (137) during the 1971 Bengali liberation war. At five, his maternal uncle migrates to England where his father (maternal uncle) works as a driver and waiter and Zafar calls his parents as "staff" or "peasants in the sense that connotes nothing pejorative" (481). At eight, Zafar introduces himself as George among his white would-be friends since he has become conscious of class and status particularly after he is bullied in white London school. Zafar, the brown-skinned poverty-ridden Bengali is racially discriminated in London (279). At twelve, his parents decide that he should visit Bangladesh. There he visits several places including that of his birthplace. He happens to see his real mother as well but feels no proximity to her. On his way to village in Bangladesh, Zafar feels worried to see a "large white car" (84) of the UN resembling Land Cruiser that aid organizations often use in developing countries. The issues of electricity, running water, and decent roads make the land "generations away from modernity" (84) and a place rejected as Kissinger's "international basket-case" (162). In one instance, when the narrator urges Zafar to write a book, he reacts to narrator's suggestion so adroitly that it obstructs both narrator and the act of writing as a general investigation of novel's boundaries.

Zafar quips what the world requires right now is an answer to the questions about the history of Bangladesh. He says to the narrator that since the world considers him "a bloody authority" and "a leading international luminary on the history of Bangladesh, it needs to hear those answers from me", whereas he knows that he is an outsider in his own country and a stranger among his hosts (Rahman 310). Zafar is a transduced character; he is unaware of the ground realities of his homeland, Bangladesh which he left in his childhood. Similarly, he is taken as an alien in the host land despite his acculturation. He compares him with axolotl, a *mélange* character occupying the third space. He rejects narrator's idea of writing a book (311-12) because writing one's own story or using first-person means the presentation of exaggeration. Zafar is a dual *émigré* since he is not only "an exile, a refugee, if not from war, then of war, but also an exile from blood" (51). He grows ashamed of his parents for poor getup. At Oxford, they happen to see him only once and react with the mildest of interest. Homelessness is the "unmooring of his body" (271) caused by his "unmooring soul" (271).

Given this context, this paper problematizes how post-9/11 phase of globalization marked by the capitalist forces' aggression has brought about their cultural monopoly denting the very identities of diasporic characters and forcing them to embrace transduction as order of the day. Neo-imperialists are still seeking to attain homogenization of culture. Zafar is a culturally transduced character in the multicultural milieu of global world where the prevailing trends have hegemonized the South Asians like him, alienating them from their native culture. The article uses theory of proximity and cultural transduction to analyze the selected work. Furthermore, I employ Bourdieusian notion of reflexive research practice to inform my methodological choices and analysis.

Review of Literature

Globalization has multifaceted connected communities of one part of the world to the advancements happening in another region. Giddens argues that hardly any human being

on the planet is free of its influence (Giddens). “Globalization can be examined as a way of resurrecting past colonial relations, though without the essentiality of physical captivation of other lands – save that even the metropolitan cities of London or New York are under the colonial entrepreneurs of those people whose own lands were once colonized by the West” (Held 16). Cultural globalization poses severe threats to the local identity; the developing countries face various cultural, psychological, and socioeconomic problems such as poverty, social inequalities, extinction of local cultural norms, heritage and values, and lack of development. The issues of cultural displacement scatter cultural traits, practices and occupations (Islam et al.). Tomlinson argues that a truly cosmopolitan culture cannot be materialized unless cultural divergences are respected. Globalization as a complex connectivity is not in disorder, and that local cultures are in Jean-Paul Sartre’s phrase condemned to freedom (Sartre). Being closely associated with a place, culture is normally immovable. But under the impacts of globalization, there emerges a renewal in relationship between the place and culture. Apart from implying the meanings of travel and change of culture, deterritorialization also connotes ever-broadening horizon of everyday experience (Tomlinson). Only the gush of a deterritorialized culture renovates other cultures or constructs a fresh culture by hybridity. Deterritorialization may engender cosmopolitanism/ cultural deposition which is not confined to locality, but assimilates others’ apprehensions in routine doings. Cultural globalization convenes cosmopolitanism to help project joint understanding, common support, and a sense of responsibility for remote others. Criticizing this inappropriate approach to the relationship between the nation-state and cosmopolitanism, Changxue Xue says that globalization has replaced imperialism since 1990s and is popular in academic research and representation of reality. The world has transitioned from cultural imperialism to globalization and culture. Cultural imperialism implies that a country, by using force, imposes its own culture and ruins the native culture. Moreover, deterritorialization and cosmopolitanism are two active agents which help develop cultural globalization (Xue). Tomlinson’s view confirms his passion for humanism.

The revolutionary changes affirm the dawn of a universal ‘Empire’ different from the past European imperialism which sought hegemony and capitalist expansion by subjugating other nations. The universal Empire borrows the traits of hybridity and multiculturalism from the US Constitution to expand its frontiers through globalism while lowering the national geographical borders of states (Hardt & Negri). Globalization has projected a border-free citizenry. Connell & Marsh observe that the spatial divisions among the first, second, and third world have diminished besides a merger of the first world into the third world and vice-versa while eliminating the second world. Deterritorialization of proletarian and the debate between productive forces and system of domination resulting from Empire’s totality and expansive energy have caused subversion in the subject negating the geopolitical place. Through the circulation of multitude, however, the subject re-appropriates space and constitutes itself as an active subject capable of reclaiming an already existing global citizenship. These subverting attitudes win the subjects as sympathizers and facilitators of globalization (Connell & Marsh). Cultural imperialism is attained by reducing cultural differences around the world for which culture as a commodity is either purchased or retailed in the market system. Global culture is Westernized or Americanized because it disseminates Western trends to strengthen its economic interests. Cultural imperialism does not present global cultural flows as a civilizing or development process, but engrosses cultural nuisance and dominance much less gently or proportionately (Held).

Jan Nederveen Pieterse says that cultural hybridization takes place across locations and identities, brings up a postmodern susceptibility of mobile culture quite roving in its nature and helps render global identity (Pieterse). The pervasive perception of increasing global unification escorts toward rising cultural homogeneity and consistency, as it is observed in the global storm of consumerism. This impetus is better visible nowhere else but in the account of Americanization or Western culture. The worldwide market culture is healthy and voluntary but to some, it is avariciously corrupt. The double standards of the world are responsible for most of its mess. The fundamentalist terrorism and setting up of a religious government are undesirable as it is oppressive colonialism but grasping market affairs and colonizing human life by money-making industrialism is considered commendable in the name of freedom (Buck-Morss).

Large scale settlements in other worlds for earning and other purposes have affected the original cultures. The immigrants carry along their home cultures developing transculturality and cultural plurality. Home communities living in a host country cannot reproduce homegrown cultural forms or transfer their knowledge to their progeny (like when at home). The environment constructs cultural classification as a wary selection for community members to select the best as a conscious object. However, the enormous mobilization of people and the global economy have made this reproduction difficult for locals (Spencer and Wollman). Besides the evolution of culinary styles, innovation has also occurred in fields like media. Time-space compression under late capitalism weakens the experience of 'othering' (Harvey). The mishmash street culture shows divergence and fragmentation of space in city life, emphasizing otherness. Literature apprehends the issues of transculturation. Said states that "[p]artly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (xxix). Critics such as Wolfgang Iser observe an increased blending between cultures as amazingly new when taking it as a puzzling form of culture. His

Objective [...] is to use ['transculturality'] to describe a strikingly new, contemporary feature of cultures originating from their increased blending. The main idea is that the differences between cultures are diminishing, that contemporary cultures are characterized by cross-cutting elements— and in this sense are to be comprehended as transcultural rather than monocultural ... [T]he inherited concept of cultures as homogenous and closed entities has become highly inappropriate in comprehending the constitution of today's cultures (Welsch 4).

This pluralism is shown in fiction which portrays characters wandering around the globe without having an awareness of their world, a perception of their identity, and a sense of direction. McHale says that this postmodern ontological landscape is a space of several worlds collapsing upon one another that can be compared with the accumulation of commodities in a supermarket. The byproduct of such an environment appears in split personalities that disturb private life in favor of (an)other reality. Postmodern fiction reflects the fragmented real world of today and insists upon ephemerality (McHale).

Repeating Homi K. Bhabha's ideas on hybridity and third space, Welsch argues that transculturality is not aimed at attaining uniformity of cultures but fairly to "the emergence of a diversity of a new type" (Welsch 11). Mélange of cultures leads to a third space by developing a new, diverse, and hybrid culture (Pieterse) dissimilar to the source

culture. The term Trans-culturation, first coined by Ortiz further explains Welsch's diversity of a novel kind which takes place in the third space.

Transculturation develops a changed reality by modifying the culture of the subject who occupies a third space. It implies an exchange between the two cultures to jointly produce a unique, complex, and self-determining new reality rather than involving one culture toward which the other must tend (Ortiz). Mary Louise Pratt notes that marginalized groups choose only from what a dominant metropolitan culture conveys. Since the subjugated groups cannot manage what comes from the dominant culture, they need to discover what they want to receive, and what to use it for (Pratt).

Global trends develop transcultural sensibilities (Dagnino) by increasing transculturality through writing. The in-between-space created by transcultural texts has linguistic, cultural, and literary dimensions. [T]ranscultural writers show determination to make a home of any place as self-inhabits. Culturally and physically itinerant writers can distinctively express cultural sensibilities because they write in exile or as part of some diaspora community. Epstein explains that a transcultural orientation is acquired by living diffused in a new dimension (a continuum), simultaneously inside and outside of all existing cultures (Epstein).

The present study extends the transcultural framework by using the concept of cultural transduction to examine Zafar's identity in Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*. Unlike transculturality, which highlights coexistence among cultures, transduction examines the process of conversion, mediation, and re-signification through which identity undergoes cultural and psychological reconfiguration within transnational and diasporic contexts. By focusing on Zafar as a culturally transduced subject, this research diverges from previous transcultural readings and contributes to the ongoing debate on post-9/11 subjectivity, globalization, and South Asian identity in diaspora.

Theoretical Framework

Drawing upon the theory of proximity, Straubhaar in *Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical [sic] Interdependence and Cultural Proximity* has introduced the concept of cultural proximity to describe the forces in close interaction with cultural imperialism (La Pastina & Straubhaar). Through polysystem approach, he concluded that notwithstanding the hegemony of cultural imperialism, audiences regularly select audiovisual programs from within their own culture or an adjacent culture. The concept is also applicable to literary works now (Straubhaar). To Bourdieu, it includes national, regional, and transnational aspects because the characters with variegated cultural experiences receive several impacts of cultural capital in respect to their religion, class, language, dress, gender, body language ethnicity, education, music, and storytelling preferences (Straubhaar). Cultural proximity and distance impact the transfer of media content between different cultures or genres (Cattrysse). The success or failure of this transfer depends on factors such as the stability of desired genre or context, and the level of conservatism or innovation in the adaptation. If cultural proximity becomes a core challenger for cultural imperialism, other norms may be exempted from this rule; the audiences/ characters may recline to media content produced outside (Cattrysse). The theory of proximity describes how humans perceive and interpret cultural stimuli. When cultural elements are placed near each other, they are seen as belonging together, and tend to be perceived as a single entity. Proximity can be geographical, temporal, social, or even conceptual. When cultural practices are in proximity, there is a higher likelihood of interaction, exchange, and influence between

Uribe-Jogbloed and Espinosa-Medina introduced cultural transduction, expanding its application within the realm of research. The theory implies transformation of cultural elements, ideas, or practices from one context to another. It investigates the movement of audiovisual goods and activities between cultural markets in global context (Uribe-Jogbloed and Espinosa-Medina). The transduction paradigm takes a multidisciplinary approach, creating a meeting point for different (sub)disciplines to help draw on cross-disciplinary concepts, techniques, and knowledge (Cattrysse). Cultural transduction occurs through cultural diffusion which is the spread of cultural traits from one society, group, or individual to another. It happens through various channels such as trade, migration, media technology, or interpersonal communication. When cultural elements are transduced between different contexts, they undergo adaptation, modification, or even hybridization leading to the emergence of new cultural forms. Physical or conceptual proximity between cultures facilitates the transformation of cultural traits, leading to new cultural phenomena or modification of existing ones.

To Bourdieu, transduction refers to the process of adaptation or transformation that a cultural product (or character) undergoes when crosses different habitus or fields. Transduction involves changes in form, content, meaning, or function of the product depending on how it is received and interpreted by different agents. It changes habitus or practices of the agents themselves, as they encounter new or unfamiliar cultural products which modify their existing dispositions (Bourdieu). Bourdieu has based his theory on three major conceptual tools: habitus, field, and capital. The theory includes the notions of struggle and strategy, which suggest internationalism in individuals, families, and social groups who use their position in several social fields (Grenfell).

Habitus, for Bourdieu, is a property of social agents: individuals, groups, and institutions. It is structured by the conditions of existence including present and past circumstances, family, and education, and generates practices, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings in line with its structure. However, it does not function alone since we have no pre-programmed autonomy to cause our upbringing; our practices are the outcomes of an unconscious relationship with habitus and the field in which we perform. Habitus comprises objective social structure and subjective personal experience which to Bourdieu is the internalization of externality and externalization of internality (Grenfell). He clarifies his concept through following equation: [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practices.

The joining property of 'three thinking tools' of Bourdieu's approach is that practice is the outcome of relations between one's disposition (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital) within the present scenario of that social space (field). Bourdieu's habitus focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being (Grenfell). It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we make choices to act in a specific way. Field refers to the social field where agents come, without much knowledge about the art of play, positions, beliefs, and skills of other agents, or the outcomes of their actions. They learn everything with time and experience. Field is a social world divided into social spaces such as education, religion, and law, each having its own set of rules, forms of capital, and knowledges. The agents invest capital in their respective fields to maximize their positions. The relational structures of habitus and field with evolving relations help us understand the practice (Grenfell). Bourdieu conceptualizes that the agents use different plans to maintain their position in their respective social spaces. Accumulation of capital is at stake in the field: the capital may be both the process within a field or a product of the field itself (Bourdieu). However,

Bourdieu enumerates three forms of capital: economic capital comprises money and assets, cultural capital refers to cultural preferences (language, voice, and narrative), forms of knowledge, aesthetics, and taste, and social capital points to affiliations and networks, family, religious and cultural heritage (Grenfell).

Bourdieu's methodological approach works at three levels: at first level, the position of the field is analyzed by comparing it with the field of power. Here, the individual field is compared to international business or to political power or government. At the second level, the objective structure of relations between agents' positions is analyzed with reference to their contest for specific authority. Capital in all three forms – economic, cultural, and social – earns positioning for the agent in field. At the third level, the habitus of agents is evaluated in context of their background, chosen course, and positioning; the past or present qualities of the individuals are examined with particular reference to their relevant field (Grenfell).

Analysis and Discussion

Zafar's Cultural Transduction

Zia H. Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* illustrates cultural transduction through the protagonist's negotiation of multiple identities and spaces. The individuals in globalization, in Bourdieusian view, are at losing end in their economic, cultural and social capital. Zafar, being the other has no economic and social capital to play in the global social arena; i.e. field in Bourdieu's concept (Grenfell). His craving for home i.e. poor habitus –structured by the past and present condition, family origin, and education– as cited in Bourdieu (Grenfell), drives him to books (Rahman 51) where he finds “a sense of belonging” (178) besides “glimpses of a kind of truth” (44): mathematics i.e. Bourdieusian cultural capital (Grenfell) purges his mind from everything “banging [his] head” (Rahman 29). Zafar's analytical mind takes him from a humble origin to Harvard, Wall Street and London's Inns of Court where he gets equipped with capital to play in international market. After jumping into the global field, he equips him, as Bourdieu argues, with cultural capital, particularly, language and knowledge (Grenfell). His quest for roots is quenched when he is called “Anglo-Banglo” (Rahman 163) by Bill and Dave, the Chippies carpenters in Kensington, London; this shows his proximity to multiculturalism, distancing from nativity (Cattrysse).

Pointing to Zafar's cultural transduction, the unnamed narrator says that Zafar is “every bit a [Sic.] part of an age, a West, that identifies pathology in the strong emotions, in jealousy, hatred, rage” (Rahman 419). During his search for means of living to afford his educational expenses, Zafar goes from house to house in the streets until he is engaged by Bill and Dave Carpenters in a renovation work of a five-story Georgian house on the condition that he may be paid after one week's assessment of his work; thus Zafar, who landed in international arena without any capital at hand, has now transduced into Western culture, receiving impacts on his religion, class, language, dress, gender, profession, and education, as Bourdieu conceptualizes (Bourdieu). Zafar learns about carpentry and its tools. In an episode, Zafar overhears both discussing him as a *Pakiman* for dedication to his work, which is very bitter leading him into a period when Pakistan's elite committed atrocities against East Pakistanis; Cattrysse's concept of periodization denotes adaptation in terms of transposing present-day stories into the past causing him distanced from a culture adjacent to his Bengali culture. Zafar feels him conceptually closer to Chippies when Dave shifts to ethnic politics of *Redskins* and *neo-Nazis* explaining to Bill that being far- right extremists, Skinheads cause intimidation, threat and insult to browns or blacks. Politically Redskins, Dave continues, are not different from neo-Nazis but by dressing and behaving like those of the right-winged thugs, they have distorted the skinhead movement.

A skinhead, he adds, may be less intimidated if people become aware of this; all this provokes in him the feelings against discriminatory measures that the people of his homeland faced while being part of United Pakistan (Cattrysse's periodization). Zafar adds that original skinheads had used the term to imply in one way but the band has changed its definition troubling the originals to achieve their motives. Skinheads cannot be understood to imply whatever they want. Dave and Bill look at each other, seeking confirmation of Zafar's argument. Dave says to Bill that perhaps Zafar has not liked their calling him *Pakiman* because it is "a derogatory and offensive" (160) for some people. On Bill's query, Dave says that 'Paki' is a charged word and nobody needs to be highly qualified to understand its derogatory implication. Zafar says that sometimes words cannot signify exactly what one wants them to. His claim that he is a Bangladeshi surprises Dave and Bill. They comment that since good Bengalis had not fought a bloody war with Pakistan, it will not be just to call them *Pakimen* (Zafar's conceptual distance from native culture).

Zafar's Religious Transduction

Besides proximity to English culture, Zafar occupies a third-space religiously; he transduces in global secularity distancing him from Islam. He is on the verge of postmodernist conversion; he finds faults with Islam but equally he depreciates his belief in Christianity. On narrator's question whether he is a Christian, Zafar criticizes Islam saying it could not guide him when he needed God (Rahman 181). He argues that Islam is ritually practiced; Koran is recited without understanding its commandments. Similarly, prayers are said thoughtlessly as if special steps were arranged in a dance with the patterns of "standing, kneeling, and falling prostrate" (182). All this, Zafar continues, offends him because of irrational following and interpretations of Islam. In Bourdieusian perspective, Zafar with his variegated cultural experiences has received several impacts of cultural capital, including religion, class, language, dress, ethnicity, gender, profession, and education preferences; but native religious trends are no more appealing to him. His adaptation based on Western cultural and global market mores distances him from Eastern cultural capital including that of religion and brings closer to Western cultural capital. Christianity is inappropriate, yet its simplicity and its message of love impress him (Rahman 186). Soon, he becomes fed up with Christianity too for its impracticality; it is English with an English God and an English heaven. He is led to conversion when his soul that is restless due to homelessness, 2008 financial crises and Emily's indifference transduce him into, what Spencer and Wollman conceptualize, a *mélange* character occupying a third space. Equally he shows affinity to his motherland and Sylheti language despite his immersion in a multicultural society. Zafar, later on, confesses that religious conversion ultimately leads him to destruction. Safety of one's life, he adds, is bound to one's recourse to God (198). He predisposes to God when he accompanies Emily to meet Pastor Anwar Daniel M.A. at St. Thomas Catholic Church in Islamabad to seek favor regarding their expected engagement. The Pakistani pastor, after knowing Emily is an Anglican (484-85) and Zafar a Bangladeshi by birth shows closeness (proximity) to Zafar distancing him from Emily. He talks to Zafar to know the reason of marrying Emily. Zafar replies that he is not going to marry Emily for passport. The pastor advises him to think seriously before marrying a moneyed woman especially when he himself is not from a rich family. Pastor Anwar questions the validity of love calling it, "a tricky business" (486).

Zafar feels himself closer to *Nicene Creed* instead of European version of Christianity –Anglican or Catholic– because Nicene-followers trust in God instead of believing in Him (496). His transposition from Islam to Christianity and then to postmodernist secularity shows his religious transduction; in fact, this is acculturation that

involves cultural proximity to the prevailing Western culture ([Cattrysse](#)) distancing him from his native culture. Zafar and narrator are in proximity to each other in religious and multicultural trends as the narrator also has no taste for religion because of secularity prevailing in his family; his father takes prayers as the private affair of a man and his mother has abhorrence for all religions with her venomous attitude towards Islam ([186](#)). In Bourdieusian concept, Zafar's habitus, structured by his poor existing conditions, humble family origin and meager education, generates in him impoverished social practices, outmoded religious beliefs, and outdated perceptions. Moreover, he enters the global world (field) without economic, social or cultural capital. In global arena, Zafar's position, if compared with that of international power structures, is miserable due to lack of knowledge and skills, as Bourdieu conceptualizes ([Grenfell](#)). It takes him time to adjust to the global field; nevertheless, despite his capital-based position in international business Zafar is compelled to recalibrate his habitus and reshape his embodied perceptions as he negotiates new cultural fields. Zafar's transduction, however, reveals that his identity is not fixed but transformed by the cultural codes he encounters, reinterprets, and sometimes resists as is obvious from his religious stance shifting time to time from Islam to Christianity, from Catholicism to Nicene Creed; from belief in God to disbelief and belief again.

Zafar's Political Proximity with Homeland

1971 Bangla liberation war affected South Asian politics; its memories are still alive to diaspora character, Zafar. The narrator is surprised when his father asks Zafar about his origins as his parents had never talked about South Asia before that. On Zafar's reply that he was born in Sylhet, the narrator's parents discuss 1971 tragedy. Their debate gives the narrator a notion that the past of both Pakistan and Zafar is very similar. The war fought between the Eastern and Western wings of Pakistan had stemmed from divergence of languages, foodstuffs, and religious attitudes of the people of both wings besides their geographical distance from each other ([Rahman 215-16](#)). Narrator's father says that they had opposed the military operation by the West Pakistani establishment to suppress insurgency in East Pakistan ([216](#)). He seems closer to Zafar when he criticizes his motherland's holocaust-like conducted in East Pakistan. His father continues that they had detached themselves from Pakistan in protest ([216](#)). He refers to the letter which they had written to New York Times from Princeton to condemn West Pakistan's 'Operation Searchlight' ([218](#)) conducted to target Bengali intelligentsia, journalists, lawyers, doctors, engineers and other professionals; some were killed, others were pursued. Both also show conceptual closeness in their critique of the American role during Bengali liberation-war. Zafar identifies the alleged hypocrisy of Americans highlighting Kissinger's diplomatic visits to Pakistan and China while relying on Pakistan as an intermediary even though the victimization had increased in East Pakistan ([218](#)). The narrator's father regrets over the fate of his motherland, soldiers and countrymen narrating how Kissinger was playing Cold War games instead of solving the issue.

Both agree that Indian Junta comprising a divergent bunch –Manekshaw, a Zoroastrian Iranian Parsee, and Jacob, an Indian Jew from Iraq, and Jagjit Singh Aurora – showed unity because they were qualified from the same British military college. They all also belonged to same socioeconomic class. The father continues that everyone had made a big deal about the diversity of Indian army even though they were concentrating too much on the issues of race and religion while failing to see that all these commanders had hailed from the same social class. Under the British patronage, army generals including those of Pakistani had attended the same military college. They were not diverse in the

most crucial way (Rahman 220-21). South Asian and international elites are in proximity to run the regional affairs without bothering about masses. The narrator's mother adds that the war had barely been over for 20 years, but the American role is yet to be exposed. Pointing to American intervention in her homeland, she says, since they had ruled over thirty years, they should have released their official records now. Finding nobody aware, she says that American misdeeds in Pakistan following inquiries had surfaced in 2001-2002. Nobody needs Pakistan as a middleman for anything (221-22). This shows how South Asian characters proximate to each other and highlight the elites' exploitation back in their home countries.

Zafar's Social Proximity and Transduction

Connected by religion and Pakistan's complicated relationship with Bangladesh, the narrator and Zafar diverge along social classes. This division propels the plot forward from the moment Zafar enters the narrator's Kensington townhouse and tells tales about Oxford, New York, Dubai, Kabul, and Bangladesh mostly using his diaries to supplement his story. Zafar's tales have a lot to say about the injustice and 'meritocracy' fallacies that characterize the global economic system today. His dejection is reflected through his reaction to the disloyalty of Emily, a rich English lady. Men fall like ripe fruit (Rahman 420) for her despite her flirtatious disposition in both love and war.

Despite his acculturation, Zafar feels alienated in high-class Western culture. He hides identity from participants of the parties which he attends with Emily because the English lady has never introduced him in her high-culture social circle. At Fiona's party (Emily's friend), Zafar meets Emily's compeers such as Gemma, Hugh and Toby (Rahman 228) none of whom knows him even though he is living with Emily under the same roof for the last few months.

However, even his immersion in English society makes him isolated. Zafar's wandering around the world and blending without any clear sense of direction leads him to transculturality, as Welsch also argues. Zafar learns how snobbish elites impress each other by ogling, flirting and misusing their social status. Unlike other characters, Zafar does not reveal his identity. He experiences the dilemma of a postmodern world as McHale argues that people having split personalities interact ephemerally with dispersed thoughts (McHale). Zafar avails himself of a space in this postmodern ontological landscape where several worlds collapse on one another just like commodities accumulated in a supermarket. Despite his transduction in westernization, he is taken as 'other' in respect of culture, race, and class. In one instance, when the narrator asks Zafar why he did not marry Emily in spite of his liking for her, he tells the narrator that Emily's laughing away of his proposal had revealed that she would not marry him (Rahman 381).

He is not sure whether he could ever adjust to the romantic image of Emily who hailed from a different nation, a country that does not even share a boundary with his own. Zafar adds that neither were they proximate in conceptual, racial, national or geographical borders, nor did he equate with Emily in status or class. He could not be intimate with Emily, Zafar discusses with narrator about his interaction with Tomaso, an Italian friend and Emily's business partner. Tomaso (under)estimates Zafar's caliber and social stature and lets Zafar down calling him a trader and not a banker. He questions how Zafar can be in the business of derivatives if he is only a law-graduate (Rahman 387-88). When Zafar mispronounces the French name of the bottle as Beaucham instead of Beecham, Emily corrects Zafar making him realize that the English will detect his error even if it is through French. Again, Zafar feels him an alien in a society he is immersed in: "I had been put in

my place” (389). Zafar realizes that Emily’s proximity to both Tomaso and French language distances her from him.

Zafar’s Geographical Proximity with Neighbouring India

Tomaso mocks at Indians asking Zafar why Indians believe that the earth sits on a big turtle, he becomes exasperated for calling him Indian. Tomaso asks him ironically that if India has an acceptable history, culture and tradition, why he is a British. Zafar, feeling himself closer to English culture says Tomaso that he is degrading England. Tomaso ridicules the Indian Muslims for their closeness to Christians and Jews, remarking that it is strange if they believe that the earth rests on a giant turtle (Rahman 392-93). Zafar appreciates the varied cultural heritage of India for being the neighbouring country of his homeland but equally he affirms his affinity with host land before the white Tomaso. Zafar shares all this to the narrator, explaining how and why Westerns are now taking the colonized people very seriously. Zafar’s identity is not fixed; rather, his conversation with Tomaso renders him an ambivalent character. He demonstrates not only his physical closeness to Indians but also his transduction within a multicultural society, whose neo-colonial binaries treat him as alien -- an ‘other’. We find Zafar maltreated by C18 a racial neo-Nazi group committing violence against South Asians. He faces discrimination from his white class-fellows in the school (Rahman). Hence, Zafar discovers himself in every bit of his life as an outsider and excluded in different land both at political and personal levels.

Emily’s indifference frustrates Zafar so much that he is admitted to some mental institution for treatment but Emily never comes to see him. The unfaithful Emily is allegedly pregnant with the unnamed narrator’s child. After recovery, Zafar becomes an international human-rights’ lawyer and leaves the Wall Street business. Meanwhile, Emily has gone to Afghanistan as part of a UN reconstruction project. Knowing this, Zafar who is still infatuated with her, also travels Afghanistan as the UN Rapporteur. Zafar, however, becomes annoyed to know about Western agencies’ avaricious and self-centered businesses in Afghanistan; he observes globalization has affected the geopolitical issues in Afghanistan. In Paul Jay’s concept, globalization functions as a postcolonial phenomenon and borrows practices from colonization (Jay). The 21st century’s phenomenal occurrences in third world countries have established the issue of globalization through a network of international organizations. Deviating from its purpose of lessening skirmishes and raising peace network, however, has taken over the governing system there. By imposing policies, these organizations are running a supranational government there, as Hardt & Negri view it, to make them dependent for a long time and as Zafar observes the network of UNAMA, AfDARI, ISAF managing Afghan affairs. Though his anger is mainly the outcome of his reactionary feelings for a changed Emily, yet the global nations dealing of the postcolonial subject in the center and periphery aggravates his anger.

The story ends highlighting two men's friendship and intellectual compatibility, a cause of their proximity. Following his departure from narrator's home, Zafar sends a thank-you postcard to narrator bearing a picture of Einstein and Gödel strolling side by side which suggests his appreciation for knowledge and Western intelligentsia; novelist's proximity and transduction into a global world. It also symbolizes Zafar’s relation with West, just as Gödel and Einstein, who despite their intellectual differences, remained closer to each other. Zafar, being the part of global world, is transnational though his postcoloniality and cultural hybridity cannot be overlooked. His life in the complex global system, willingly or unknowingly, is somehow affected since the politics ensnares him causing to recognize his ‘self’ or ‘individual’ within the territorial confusion emerged in

him due to his ambivalence. He expresses his reactionary feelings on seeing how West has disturbed the peace of South Asia capturing Afghan land in the name of humanitarian inventions. Talking to Philip, a white man who is on a humanitarian mission in Afghanistan, Zafar complains:

What worries me is that there might be questions out there that I haven't thought to ask. Isn't that the history of international development and Western beneficence: unknown unknowns invoked to legitimize excuses for what comes to pass when their preponderance should be a restraint on intervention in the future? [...]. One question I don't know the answer to is what the hell I'm doing here in Kabul. Isn't there a lot to be done? [...] it's not my war. It's dreadful, I said. The war itself is over. The Taliban are ousted. The war has only started. And the country should be left to rot? The white man's burden. How far will he go in the name of helping his inferiors? The country should be left alone (Rahman 431-31).

Zafar is not rooted in the financial and conflictual spheres of global modernity despite his cultural transduction. Being in such confusion, he perceives his 'self' belonging to a certain nation and culture while sharing a strong bond with another nation. He is a *mélange* character whose presence in several spaces is often marked by ambivalence and alienation, reflecting the postcolonial condition of being close yet excluded.

Thus, this study while originating from numerous literary concerns of South Asian Anglophone fiction has shown the post-9/11 global trends and the current phase of globalization with its effects on South Asia. Moreover, the critical evaluation of the text shows that the novel addresses transcultural and transnational issues of globalization by showing how global society affects the South Asian subject making him culturally transduced. The novel centers on the neo-imperialist hegemony in South Asia and its expression in tripartite globalization – economic, cultural, and political transnationalism. Since Z. H. Rahman is a hybrid, his work depicts economic, cultural, and political realities of the post-9/11 phase of globalization in South Asia. Neo-imperialist hegemony operates in South Asia due to the global, political and monetary institutions such as IMF, World Bank, TNCs, MNCs, and NGOs.

Conclusion

The study has shown that Proximity and Cultural Transduction shape the character and cultural interactions of Zafar. Zafar adapts and reinterprets cultural elements and blends them with existing beliefs or practices which cause the emergence of new cultural forms in him. Zafar encounters cultural traits through external sources such as travel, migration, trade, or exposure to technology which open up new ideas, customs, or perspectives to him. Global characters also transmit beliefs, values and practices in him through dialogues, storytelling episodes, or personal experiences of another world making him distanced from native culture and closer to global culture. As Zafar encounters new cultural elements his identity is shifted, evolved, and becomes transduced into a *mélange* character. The conflicts or harmonies arising from the cultural exchange contribute to Zafar's growth, inner struggles, or external conflicts. Zafar, as a UN rapporteur to Afghanistan, observes how global forces use neo-orientalist assumptions to gain economic goals. AfDARI and UNAMA, he observes, run transcultural and transnational entrepreneurs in Afghanistan in the name of welfare and thus operate as metonyms of neo-imperial governance. The

campaign of constitutional reforms in Bangladesh aims to purge it from institutional corruption through a bureau working under the UN rapporteur, Zafar. Zafar and Nicky are transcultural agents of global forces spying for the global nations besides rendering advisory services for the Afghan government. Zafar concludes that the West emphasizes individuals' rights but acts against them thrusting the cultural imperialism. The paper has also shown how national domains of others are endangered. Afghanistan's border sanctity is violated by the military and civilian personas having transnational identities.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to his PhD Supervisor Professor Dr. Ghulam Murtaza for his insightful supervision and guidance. His support was instrumental in shaping the author's understanding of literary and postcolonial theories.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Atta-ul-Mustafa has been teaching at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, as an Assistant Professor since 2003. He holds a PhD in English Literature, with research focused on globalization and its effects on South Asian subjects in both home and host countries. His areas of interest also include Orientalism, Postcolonialism, and cultural imperialism. Dr Mustafa has authored fourteen research articles, many of which explore his perspectives on globalization and the war on terror.

Works Cited

- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*. Free Press, 1998.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2013.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*. Verso, 2003.
- Cattrysse, Patrick. "Cultural Transduction and Adaptation Studies: The Concept of Cultural Proximity." *Palabra Clave*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2017, pp. 645–662. <https://doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2017.20.3.3>.
- Cattrysse, Patrick. *Descriptive Adaptation Studies: Epistemological and Methodological Issues*. Granat Publishers, 2014.
- Connell, Liam, and Nicky Marsh, editors. *Literature and Globalization: A Reader*. Routledge, 2011.
- Dagnino, Arianna. "Transculturalism and Transcultural Literature in the 21st Century." *Transcultural Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23751606-00801001>.
- Epstein, Mikhail. *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford UP, 1990.

Grenfell, Michael, editor. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*. Routledge, 2014.

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Harvard UP, 2000.

Harvey, David. "Neo-Liberalism as Creative Destruction." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, vol. 88, no. 2, 2006, pp. 145–158. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2006.00211.x>.

Held, David. "Defining Globalization: Understanding Global Change." *A Globalizing World? Culture, Economics, Politics*, 2nd ed., edited by David Held, Routledge, 2004, pp. 15–16.

Islam, Md. Rabiul, et al. "Cultural Globalization: A Critical Analysis of Identity Crises in the Developing Economies." *Globalization and Development*, edited by N. Faghieh, Springer, 2019, pp. 343–359. *Contributions to Economics*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14370-1_16.

Jay, Paul. *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. 2nd ed., Cornell UP, 2014.

Kissinger, Henry. *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*. Penguin Press, 2015.

La Pastina, Antonio C., and Joseph D. Straubhaar. "Multiple Proximities between Television Genres and Audiences." *Gazette*, vol. 67, no. 3, 2005, pp. 271–288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549205052231>.

McHale, Susan M., et al. "Community-Based Interventions for Young Adolescents: The Penn State PRIDE Project." *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1996, pp. 23–36.

Ortiz, Fernando. *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Translated by Harriet de Onís, Duke UP, 1995.

Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. "Globalisation as Hybridisation." *Postmodern Management Theory*, Routledge, 2019, pp. 507–530. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429431678-22>.

Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. "Globalization and Culture: Three Paradigms." *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, 4th ed., Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2007.

Rahman, Zia Haider. *In the Light of What We Know: A Novel*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage, 1994.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Existentialism Is a Humanism." *Marxists Internet Archive*, 1946, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm.

Spencer, Philip, and Howard Wollman. *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*. SAGE, 2002.

Straubhaar, Joseph D. "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1991, pp. 39–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039109366779>.

Straubhaar, Joseph D. "Choosing National TV: Cultural Capital, Language, and Cultural Proximity in Brazil." *The Impact of International Television*, Routledge, 2014, pp. 77–110. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410607041-6>.

Tomlinson, John. *Globalization and Culture*. 2nd ed., John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

Uribe-Jongbloed, Enrique, and Hernán David Espinosa-Medina. "A Clearer Picture: Towards a New Framework for the Study of Cultural Transduction in Audiovisual Market Trades." *Observatorio (OBS*)*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.15847/obsobs812014707>.

Welsch, Wolfgang. "Transculturality: The Changing Form of Cultures Today." *Filozofski Vestnik*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2001, pp. 59–86. <https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/filozofski-vestnik/article/view/3602>.

Xue, Chun. "A Review of Tomlinson's Views on Cultural Globalization." *Asian Social Science*, vol. 4, no. 6, 2008, pp. 112–114. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v4n6p112>.