

## DOUBLE COLONIZATION IN MOTH SMOKE: THE ELITE'S EXPLOITATION OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

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### ABSTRACT

*This research explores the idea of double colonization in Mohsin Hamid's novel Moth Smoke. It expands and redefines the term to show how people in a postcolonial country are first ruled by colonizers, and later by their own powerful elites. These local elites take control and continue the same systems of oppression after independence. This study adopts a qualitative literary approach grounded in postcolonial theory and ecocriticism. It also introduces the term "brown masters" to describe native elites who act like the former colonizers. The analysis looks at how Hamid shows class differences, social rejection, and damage to the environment. These problems are presented as linked results of elite control. The study focuses on themes, character actions, and symbols in the novel. It argues that Moth Smoke gives a strong critique of power in postcolonial societies. These power systems continue to cause both inequality and environmental harm. This study brings together ideas from both postcolonial theory and environmental studies. It adds a new view of double colonization in the South Asian context.*

**Keywords:** Double Colonization, Postcolonial Theory, Ecocriticism, Brown Masters, Mohsin Hamid

### INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the world, the end of colonial rule didn't bring the complete freedom that people had hoped for. The legacy of colonialism still shapes postcolonial societies today especially in the way power is held, resources are distributed, and social hierarchies are maintained. Rather than breaking away from these systems, the native elites who took over after independence often kept them alive. In doing so, they continued the cycle of inequality and control, showing that colonial exploitation didn't truly end it just changed hands. The concept of double colonization was originally introduced by Peterson and Rutherford (1986) in Postcolonial feminist studies to describe how women were doubly oppressed first by colonial

rulers and then by patriarchal systems within their own societies. While initially focused on gender, this concept can be expanded to examine how postcolonial elites assume the role of former colonizers, perpetuating both social and environmental exploitation. Rather than dismantling colonial hierarchies, these elites reinforce systemic inequalities, marginalizing lower socioeconomic groups while also contributing to environmental degradation (Bhattacharya 56). Pakistan, a former British colony, provides a compelling case for examining this phenomenon. After gaining independence in 1947, the country struggled to forge a distinct identity and governance system. However, colonial legacies of resource extraction, economic disparity,

and class-based hierarchies persisted. The elite class, often referred to as "brown masters" a term coined by Bhattacharya to describe postcolonial elites who replicate colonial oppression maintained these systems of exploitation. Wealthy landowners, politicians, and corporate figures upheld colonial structures rather than fostering equity, thereby deepening socioeconomic marginalization and environmental degradation (Bhattacharya 78).

This research focuses on postcolonial theory specifically from the ideas of Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford to analyze how different layers of oppression continues to shape postcolonial societies. It helps in revealing how colonial ways of thinking and unequal economic systems are still influencing the newly independent nations. At the same time ecocriticism is used to examine how today's elite carry on exploitative patterns similar to those used by colonial powers when extracting resources and degrading the environment. These two frameworks together offer a foundation for analyzing *Moth Smoke* where Mohsin Hamid shows how local elites continue to hold power by deepening social inequality and ignoring environmental damage.

Mohsin Hamid places the story in 1990 Pakistan and introduces protagonists Darashikoh also known as Daru a man from the lower middle class who finds himself gradually drawn into the lives of the wealthy and powerful. His descent into crime and isolation becomes a lens through which the novel explores the moral emptiness rising inequality and environmental neglect enabled by the upper class. These elites what this study terms as brown masters monopolize resources and reinforce a class system that pushes the less privileged people further down, all while contributing to the slow decay of the natural environment (Hamid 112). Their control does not just rest on wealth but also on their ability to separate themselves from the consequences of environmental and structural inequality.

Many researchers have studied *Moth Smoke* for its themes of class conflict, capitalism and corruption in postcolonial Pakistan (Sadaf 2014, Tariq 2018). Some like Ishtiaq et.al have examined the novel through a Marxist lens focusing on its critique of

economic systems. However, very few have looked closely at how the novel connects elite dominance to environmental harm. This research takes a different approach by combining postcolonial theory with ecocriticism. Through the idea of "brown masters", it explores how Hamid shows the elite as both social oppressors and environmental exploiters an idea that supports Bhattacharya's argument about how local elites repeat colonial patterns

This study is important because it highlights the link between class-based oppression and environmental harm within postcolonial contexts. Through meticulous analysis of *Moth Smoke* it becomes clear that the impact of colonial rule extends beyond political and economic systems to include attitudes towards the environment. The novel explains how issues such as pollution, deforestation, and unequal access to natural resources continue to disproportionately affect marginalized communities through already existing social divisions.

This study develops upon the concept of double colonization to present a fresh perspective on *Moth Smoke*. Hamid's representation of elites serves as a reflection of broader postcolonial problems throwing light on the interconnected issues of environmental injustices, rigid social hierarchies and the long lasting influence of colonial rule. In this way, the study adds to current academic discussion in both postcolonial and ecocritical literary frameworks.

### Research Objectives

1. To examine how Mohsin Hamid portrays the elite class as "brown masters" in *Moth Smoke*.
2. To analyze how these "brown masters" contribute to double colonization, impacting both the environment and marginalized communities.

### Research Questions

1. How does Mohsin Hamid portray the elite class as "brown masters" in *Moth Smoke*?
2. In what ways do these "brown masters" contribute to double colonization, impacting both the environment and marginalized communities?

### Literature Review

Scholars have explored *Moth Smoke* from various critical perspectives, including class conflict, neoliberalism, urban decay, and moral decline. However, fewer studies have examined how the novel simultaneously critiques elite social dominance and environmental degradation a concept that aligns with the idea of double colonization. . Using postcolonial theory and ecocriticism, this study introduces “brown masters” to show how Hamid depicts the elite as both social and environmental oppressors.

Postcolonial theory provides an important framework for understanding the persistence of colonial power structures in supposedly independent nations. The idea of double colonization, originally introduced by Peterson and Rutherford in the context of gender, can be extended to analyze the simultaneous exploitation of marginalized communities and environmental resources by the elites of their own society. In *Moth Smoke*, Mohsin Hamid portrays the elite class as inheritors of colonial power, sustaining systems of inequality while masking their dominance through Westernized lifestyles and consumerism. Zakirullah et al. argue that *Moth Smoke* reveals how postcolonial elites in Pakistan internalize colonial attitudes, practicing internal colonization through class hierarchy and economic power. Their reading supports this study’s emphasis on elite continuity with colonial modes of control. However, their focus remains limited to social dynamics, where this research extends the critique to include environmental exploitation.

This research adopts the term “brown masters” to characterize native elites who emulate the practices of colonial rulers, reinforcing Bhattacharya’s broader argument that postcolonial authority often replicates colonial systems of dominance over both people and the environment. In *Moth Smoke*, figures like Ozi exemplify this dynamic, using their privileged status to sustain class-based oppression and disregard environmental consequences through excessive consumption. Although Ghani, Shahid, and Elahi examine how elite characters manipulate Lahore’s urban landscape to assert their influence, they do not fully address the environmental implications of

such power. Expanding on Bhattacharya’s insights, this study reveals how elite behavior in the novel leads to both the marginalization of disadvantaged groups and ecological degradation. Ecocriticism also sheds light on how *Moth Smoke* exposes the environmental impact of the ruling class’s dominance. Rob Nixon’s concept of “slow violence” the gradual and often invisible destruction of environments disproportionately affecting the poor applies well to the polluted, decaying landscape of Lahore as depicted in the novel. Munazza Yaqoob offers one of the few ecocritical readings of *Moth Smoke*, interpreting the city’s smog and oppressive heat as reflections of inner moral decay. Although her analysis links environment with corruption, it treats pollution largely as symbolic rather than as evidence of material inequality. Tanvir et al. add an ecological dimension by discussing how Hamid’s fiction critiques the unsustainable relationship between nature and culture. They argue that *Moth Smoke* reveals the breakdown of this relationship due to urban overdevelopment and elite disregard for the environment. These studies support the environmental aspect of this research while also highlighting the gap: the connection between environmental harm and class-based exploitation remains underexplored.

By bringing these perspectives together, this study identifies a research gap in current criticism of *Moth Smoke*. While previous scholars have discussed elite control, corruption, or environmental decline in isolation, few have examined how these forms of domination work together. This research fills that gap by using the frameworks of postcolonialism and ecocriticism to argue that Hamid critiques a double colonization in which elites who acts as brown masters exploit both marginalized communities and ecological systems. The existing studies reveal that *Moth Smoke* highlights both societal inequality and environmental degradation, showing how these problems also exist in postcolonial societies.

### Methodology:

This study follows a qualitative approach. It focuses on both thematic and textual analysis to explore elite dominance and environmental decay

in *Moth Smoke*. Thematic analysis identifies repeated themes like class oppression, symbolic violence, and environmental decay. Textual analysis, on the other hand, looks at Hamid's use of language, narrative voice, and symbolism to support these themes.

The research builds on the concept of double colonization first developed by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. This framework helps show how marginalized communities in postcolonial Pakistan face layered exploitation first by colonial powers and later by the local elite. For the environmental dimension, the study uses Cheryll Glotfelty's ecocritical theory. This approach links ecological harm with social injustice and elite neglect. Additionally, Baidik Bhattacharya's critique of elite complicity supports the argument that today's "brown masters" continue colonial-style hierarchies to maintain their control.

#### Analysis:

Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* critically examines of elite control in postcolonial Pakistan. It shows how privilege, power, and environmental neglect are closely linked in an unfair society. The story follows Darashikoh Shehzad, a middle-class man who loses his job and slowly falls into poverty and crime. Through his downfall, Hamid shows how systems of oppression are continued by Pakistan's own elites the so-called brown masters. They follow patterns set by former colonizers. In addition to its social critique, the novel also highlights the environmental damage caused by elite rule. This study applies postcolonial and ecocritical approaches to show how *Moth Smoke* presents a double colonization. In this system, both marginalized people and the natural world are exploited by those in power.

Hamid's portrayal of postcolonial Lahore reveals how the native elite preserve their dominance by systematically marginalizing and excluding the working class. This is evident in their treatment of laborers, house staff, guards, drivers, and technicians who remain nameless and invisible throughout the narrative. These individuals enable elite comfort but are never acknowledged as social equals. Their presence is tolerated only so

long as they serve. The postcolonial elite reproduce colonial power structures while severing ties with the communities they control (Bhattacharya 85). In *Moth Smoke*, the poor are not just economically deprived; they are erased from the moral and social consciousness of the elite.

Daru's own fall from grace is portrayed not as an individual failure, but as a consequence of a tightly guarded system of privilege. His job at the bank had never been earned independently "my father got him his precious bank job" (Hamid 146) making clear that mobility is possible only through elite endorsement. When he later observes that "the guards weren't going to let me in... I didn't belong anymore" (Hamid 172), Hamid underscores how access is monitored and revoked by those in control. Space, like status, is conditional. The *brown masters* grant access selectively, maintaining a system in which those who fall from favor are not merely excluded but symbolically erased (Bhattacharya 85).

The policing of appearance further reveals this hierarchy. Murad Badshah's comment "you blend in with those boutique-going types... Someone like my mechanics or drivers would get watched by the guard" (Hamid 167) illustrates how class visibility is enforced. As soon as Daru loses his polished image, he becomes suspect. This is symbolic violence, enacted not through physical harm but through social coding and exclusion. The elite, acting as *brown masters*, do not need colonial bureaucracy to regulate difference they rely on cues of clothing, body language, and surveillance to define who belongs.

Even within the criminal economy, class power determines impunity. Daru notes that his wealthy clients pay high prices for drugs, yet treat him with disdain "he's buying it for eight times what it cost me... But some of these people are such snobs" (Hamid 127). When he later fears Shuja, saying "he's from a big feudal family... they're going to kill me" (Hamid 143), it becomes clear that status protects the elite even in lawless spaces. The powerful face no consequences, while the marginalized live in danger (Bhattacharya 90).

Daru's trajectory from insider to outcast is not merely a personal tragedy but a narrative strategy to expose systemic injustice. His descent is the

natural outcome of a system where social worth is measured by elite proximity. Once removed, he becomes indistinguishable from the nameless laborers he once overlooked. The *brown masters* enforce not only who gets included, but who becomes invisible, regulating the social order through exclusion, suspicion, and disposability.

Interwoven with this social domination is the systematic destruction of the environment. The novel opens a window into an urban reality stratified by environmental access. When it is said that “they wake up in air-conditioned houses, drive air-conditioned cars...” (Hamid 82), it marks more than comfort it represents climate privilege. In Hamid’s Lahore, temperature itself becomes an axis of inequality. The rich create sealed, cooled environments while the poor remain exposed to stifling heat and pollution. Daru’s own observation that “we’re sitting here sweating like pigs... They’ve got their generators, their ACs... they don’t even know what a power cut feels like” (Hamid 120) reveals how electricity, like status, is unevenly distributed. Ecocriticism, as Glotfelty explains, “studies the interconnections between human culture and the material world” (Glotfelty xix). Here, heat becomes a symbol of exclusion. It is not a neutral force it punishes those already denied access to elite comfort. The city’s ecological crisis reflects the postcolonial hierarchy, where nature itself becomes a classed experience.

This inequality is embodied in the city’s air, space, and surface. When Hamid writes that “the trees are gone, cut down or withered, and dust is everywhere, clinging to the walls, to clothes, to lungs” (Hamid 64), the novel highlights how environmental degradation is distributed to the poor. The absence of greenery, the omnipresence of dust, and the slow erosion of breathable air all suggest that the environment is collapsing but only for those who cannot afford to avoid it. Ecocriticism must examine the unequal burdens of environmental harm (Glotfelty xix). The elite are not victims of this crisis they are the architects and beneficiaries of a system that allows them to consume in comfort while the poor choke on what remains.

Daru’s body becomes a site of this degradation. When he says, “my shirt is soaked through with sweat... the fan stirs only hot air” (Hamid 88), it is

not merely discomfort it is symbolic of exclusion. The working class lives in the residue of elite consumption. Power cuts, polluted air, and unbearable heat mark their everyday experience. The physical toll of environmental collapse falls disproportionately on those outside elite protection, reinforcing what this study identifies as the ecological side of double colonization. The *brown masters* do not simply own wealth; they monopolize weather, clean air, and spatial safety. Hamid also turns to nature to symbolize domination. Daru’s comment that his fingers are “slick with their silver powder” after killing moths (Hamid 114) is not casual it is metaphorical. The moths, drawn to light, mirror the poor seeking opportunity in a system designed to destroy them. In another moment, “the lizard takes the moth into its mouth... the wing trembles frantically” (Hamid 177), offering an image of helpless life consumed by indifferent power. These symbols echo the argument that environmental harm reflects human power structures (Glotfelty xx). The poor, like moths, flutter toward what will kill them.

Finally, elite consumerism completes the cycle of exploitation. Boutiques, described as “the soft underbelly of the upper crust, the ultimate hypocrisy in a country with flour shortages” (Hamid 167), symbolize the elite’s detachment from collective suffering. The banker’s absurd question “Would you like your money starched, sir? Box or hanger?” (Hamid 147) reveals wealth as aesthetic, not ethical. The brown masters use image to mask injustice. They inherit colonial power not to reform it, but to decorate it.

*Moth Smoke* presents a society where social and environmental oppression are co-dependent. The postcolonial elite dominate both people and land, drawing comfort from systems that extract life and erase equity. This analysis reframes double colonization as the overlapping domination of bodies and ecologies by internal forces. In Hamid’s vision, freedom has not arrived it has been deferred, renamed, and rebranded. The colonizers are gone, but their tools remain in the hands of the brown masters.

## Conclusion

In *Moth Smoke*, Mohsin Hamid shows how power works in postcolonial society. In Pakistan, power dynamics still reflects the legacy of colonialism. This influence persists not through foreign rulers but through a local elite class. These elites uphold systems of inequality and cause environmental harm. This study uses the concept of “double colonization” to describe this ongoing dual oppression first by colonial powers, and now by native elites, the so-called “brown masters.” These elites maintain control economic and social system. At the same time, they distance themselves from the environmental damage which affects marginalized communities.

Daru faces decline in both his personal life and finances. This shows how elite controlled systems quickly abandon people who no longer serve their purpose. The novel also presents images of pollution, heat, and scarcity. These shows how environmental degradation becomes a tool of class oppression. the poor are not just socially marginalized but they are also forced to live in environments damaged by the negligence and excesses of the powerful elites.

*Moth Smoke* shows a clear link between class-based exploitation and ecological destruction. It suggests that independence did not end colonial ideologies. These ideas were simply passed on to local rulers. True decolonization, the novel argues, is not just about political freedom. It also means breaking the systems that keep social and environmental injustice alive.

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