

Exile and the Search for Belonging in Exit West: A Postcolonial Study

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Abstract

“Exit West” is a novel written by Mohsin Hamid in 2017. The novel states that compelled migration, in the sense of a genuine human need, should be accepted. The approach of postcolonialism has been taken in this novel and how Hamid uses and applies a door of magic as a theme in order to show the supernatural narrative way which is used as a metaphor in the migration of the postcolonial era. . Based on the concept of theory perspectives of H. K. Bhabha, who developed the concept of postcolonial theory, along with the Third Space. According to E. Said's concept of exile as loss and liberation, and Stuart Hall's understanding of cultural identity as a process of becoming rather than being, this research investigates the ways the protagonists of the novel (Saeed and Nadia) negotiate their identities in different geographical regions. This research paper claims that Hamid develops a postcolonial cartography of belonging through which home is no longer a stable area of geographic space, but also a fluid, contested and always deferred status. Analysis proceeds by exploring the ways in which the novel interrogates the power dynamics of displacement as they unfold and reproduce themselves on a global scale, as well as the psychic burden, which is being shared by those who have to reconstitute the self, in hostile peripheries. By locating *Exit West* in a wider *postcolonial* fiction or contemporary migration narratives, the research paper adds to scholars writing on exile, hybridity, and issues of belonging in the first of twenty century. **Keywords:** exile, belonging, postcolonialism, migration, hybridity, Exit West, Homi Bhabha, third space, identity, Mohsin Hamid.

1. **Introduction** International literature more and more has focused on the "migrant" figure — the one out of place migrating to another country seeking safety and opportunity and new identity. Among them is Mohsin Hamid's “Exit West” (2017), arguably the greatest literature of this tradition which is also one of the most critically awarded literary works of all time, following Saeed and Nadia through their exile from an unnamed city on the verge of civil war. When it descends into a civil war, they flee under a series of supernatural doors to the Greek Island of Mykonos, to London and Marin County in California. The doors themselves, like portals between the familiar and the foreign, serving as portals here become doors to connect Hamid away from the ever-present threat; these doors let Hamid escape the normal story of a voyage as dangerous and dangerous journey and concentrate instead on what is to come and experience of displacement's existential and psychological side. The work (novel) has become a major academic focus in the literature since “Exit West”, with its allegorical characterizations, its reflection of time and belonging, as well as its complex portrayal of a relationship within the context of displacement. From a postcolonial vantage point, the novel “Exit West “forces us to critically engage with the ongoing legacies of colonialism and its consequences on global inequality in a postcolonial context, which have left many millions cast into exile for this new book as the legacy of colonialism, that still structures global inequalities that force millions living and living in the world. This research paper shows the understanding of the novel “Exit West “ as a postcolonial novel which

refers to understand the hybridity, third space and theme of belonging in Bhabha's theory of postcolonial literature, then it focuses on theory of exile by Edward Said or Saeed and finally this paper explains the belief of Stuart Hall in the identity of diaspora. So this research paper is written in order to state the following ideas: the paper provides the study of postcolonial and migration, then it analyzes the concept of exile in the novel and how to apply the theory of hybridity along with politics and gender as they were the main reasons behind the migration.

2. **Literature Review** After the deep study of the novel and its shortlist entry into the Booker Prize last year academic conversation about "Exit West" has expanded markedly. Literature critics have discussed the text from various approaches to a range of areas, such as comparative literature, migration studies, postcolonial theory, affect theory and more. This overview of critics suggest several interesting questions which this study aims both to build on and expand upon.

3. **Postcolonial readings of the novel** The postcolonial aspects of "Exit West" have been treated by some readers who situate it within the wider corpus of literature's reaction to and departure on the history of empire. Hamid's decision to de-name the cities of his origin is an instance of postcolonial strategy, Chambers says, where the Western reader is denied the comfort of spectatorial distance while universalising the experience of expulsion (43). This interpretation resonates with Said's primary claim in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that the postcolonial world is constructed by existing tensions between imperial centre and colonised periphery — tensions that are spatialised in the novel via the contrast between the crumbling nameless city and the affluent Western destinations reached by Saeed and Nadia. Walia's work on border imperialism is a good way of putting the novel's concern with global migration into context. She contends that the borders restricting postcolonial subjects' movement are an artefact of colonial cartographies that were constructed to address the needs of imperial powers (Walia 67). Hamid's magical doors can thus be a form of direct reversal of this logic: through the dissolution of the materialized reality of borders, they reveal violence and arbitrariness of border enforcement without sliding into the gory, desperate crossing story. Researchers like Walkowitz have argued that Hamid's formal choices — the shorthand story, the unnamed location, the magical realist instrument — serve to compose what she terms 'born-translated' literature: works that address global circulation and resist any one national or cultural claim (Walkowitz 12).

4. **Theoretical studies (Hybridity Theory, the Third Space, and the Reshaping of Identity)** Bhabha's understanding of the third space is particularly helpful for understanding the multiple migrant enclaves that weave within Saeed and Nadia's trajectory. Both are not purely the culture of origin or that of the host society, but in themselves hybrid formations that both borrow from them while wholly belonging to neither. The squat in the London mansion rings out most: a mansion owned by a British establishment with its neighbors drawn from all corners the postcolonial world: architectural features and the residents form a palimpsest of colonial and postcolonial heritage. Hamid writes that 'the house had been built by a man who had grown wealthy in trade with the east' — a sentence that embeds modern-day migrant experience within the long history of colonial extraction and British wealth generation (Hamid 133) Hybridisation is not a light or a smooth process of things. Saeed's increasing attachment to a Muslim community in London reflects an effort to forge a new mode of belonging through religious identity in lieu of national or family identity. According to the viewpoint of Hall that belongs to the identity of diaspora which declares that " the process of production is not completed and it is always going on " . But Said tries to build a culture that depends on religiosity as a material. Nadia, for her part, is beginning to delineate herself more and more against any kind of communal structure, her individual independence becoming both a mode of survival and a form of isolat The eventual split of Saeed and Nadia can thus be read as an enactment of the limitations of the third space in a long-term space of habitation and residence. The third space is a provisional condition of transit, of negotiation, and doesn't settle into a settled place. Their relationship, forged under the strains of a common ordeal, cannot withstand the different paths each of them is pulled in exile. Hamid does not depict this as a failure, refusing to paint the experience as a failure but rather as an honest account of the ways displacement disaggregates the self and the attachments nurtured under duress (Hall 222).

5. **Exile and Identity in Postcolonial Fiction** According to Said, exile is an 'incredibly modern condition': its enduring quality is its permanent loss in exchange for the possibility of creative renewal and critical awareness. Said explains that exiles are 'cut off from their roots, their land, their past' which also provides them a 'plurality of vision', one which those who are rooted are unable to achieve (Said, 'Reflections' 148). According to the same account, an exile will not only lose his home (or his land or family), but will suffer some alienation as well. Hamid's protagonists represent this dual aspect of exile: Saeed, in particular, is

obsessed with nostalgia and, in the most important, the memory of home, while Nadia proves to be more capable of adaptive reinvention. One of the novel's key dramatic strains revolves around the different ways they react to exile, and so becomes the lens through which Hamid interrogates how exile refracts identity. Bhabha's theory is arguably the one that is used the most in the existing scholarship of *Exit West*. His understanding of the third space — as an interstitial zone of cultural negotiation that challenges the binary logic of self and other, coloniser and colonised — has been utilized by various authors to explain the novel's portrayal of migrant subjectivity. According to Singh, each place where Saeed and Nadia live represents a new and therefore extra-informative space in the sense of Bhabha, a space where cultural meanings are translated, hybridized, and reimagined as opposed to transplanted. The immigrant enclaves in the novel — the shantytown of Mykonos, the squat in a London mansion, the commune in Marin — are heterotopias that are not fully of the host society or the culture of origin (Singh 88).

6. **Gender, Migration, and Agency** Many of feminist scholarship has highlighted the gendered aspects of displacement in *Exit West*. Nadia's character — her motorcycle, her black robe as a protection against male harassment, her independence — has been considered to serve as an example of female agency both facilitated and stifled by patriarchal social structures in her home country and then again tested in the various spheres of exile. Morey makes her case that Hamid represents migration as a differentiated identity to which inflecting by gender are both what are called the hostilities of the socializing society on the one hand and the internal tensions of the displaced community, for the social and other homo-patriarchal systems they may perpetuate in new societies. This scholarship offers a critical corrective to readings that present the migrant as an undifferentiated figure and situates the gendered politics of belonging as the central concern of the novel (Morey 134).

7. **Exile as Postcolonial Condition** " *Exit West*" is marked by a unapologetic understanding of the psychic and social violence that accompanies a life of exile. Hamid offers the offer not as a free choice but a forced one, outgrowth of political violence whose roots lie in the lasting impact of colonialism. The nameless decline of the city into civil war, the growth of armed groups, the disorganization of civic institutions: all these are symptomatic of the postcolonial state according to Fanon's theory in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) in which decolonisation brings forth new orders of violence rather than liberation. While Hamid does not provide historical analysis, the novel's storyline situates the characters' displacement within a larger political economy of postcolonial crisis. What Saeed identifies with exile is his attachment and grief. He carries with him both his parents, his city, faith and textures unique to a life which has been irrecoverably lost. This attachment to the homeland reflects Said's idea of the exiled consciousness as one forever haunted by what remains behind ('Reflections' 148). Nadia, in contrast, approaches every new environment with pragmatics. Not lack of interest, however one's adaptation is survival in a society where women always negotiate in what they must live under and with what other women. The difference of individuals in gender and class destroyed their power. Allegory of postcolonial in the context of the door of magic in the novel. Exile in the sense of violence (they do nothing about that or any kind of violence) but they use doors as a way to pass and leave everything behind such as family friends and life. The geography of global discovered through the doors of magic in order to make security and prosperity for the society. The transformation of global geography caused by political and regional changes.

8. **The Politics of Belonging and the Question of Home**

Exit West, is always approached as a political achievement as opposed to a natural condition. The hostility that meets the migrants in London — the protests, the threat of forcible removal, the government's imposition of "dark windows" as clearance zones — is emblematic of the political economy of belonging in the present-day West, in which entitlements to citizenship are distributed according to principles that are deeply shaped by colonial histories of race and nation. Hamid puts great moral clarity to these political conflicts: the migrants are not beggars of the generosity of the host nation but human beings asserting a right to life that the structures of global inequality have systematically stripped them of. It's possible to consider that Stuart Hall's distinction between identity of culture as "being" vs "becoming", it has direct relevance to how the novel approaches home. Saeed's attachment to his origin symbolizes the need for a stable, fixed identity — a being — which exile has rendered impossible. Nadia as a symbol of identity in the novel in term of pragmatism and a response to a new situation in the modern society. At the end of the final pages of the novel, Hamid confirms the disorder of postcolonial and inequality in the world. Hamid presents the two characters in the novel (Nadia and Saeed) in the term of belonging to each other rather than lovers in their community.

9. **Limitations of the Study** This research suffers from several limitations. Firstly, the analysis is reliant on three theoretical lenses, namely Said's reflections on exile, Bhabha's concept of the third space, and Hall's account of diasporic identity, and is limited in its engagement not only with other theoretically plausible lenses such as psychoanalytic models of trauma and displacement, ecocritical readings of the novel's treatment of space, or those of economic and sociological literatures on migration. More holistic interpretations would have to place the literary analysis within these broader disciplinary dimensions. Second, the paper's discussion of secondary scholarship is inherently selective. Exit West has produced a substantial body of critique, and this study attends to only a portion of it. In particular, scholarship emerging outside the English-language academic mainstream — in Arabic, Urdu, French, and German criticism — has gone unmentioned and thus the interpretive framework developed here represents a primarily anglophone critical perspective. Any future research that builds on multilingual scholarship would greatly enhance the analysis. Third, the study does not conduct comparative analysis. Hamid's novel is part of a long lineage of postcolonial migration fiction that contains works by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole, Jenny Zhang, and others. A comparative approach that read Exit West in the light of these fellow writers would help to bring out particular features of Hamid's aesthetic and political project more sharply than any single text study could. This issue represents an area to tackle in future research.

And finally, perhaps most importantly, postcolonial theory itself has been subject to great internal critique. This stems from the fact that it tends towards abstraction and fails to deal effectively with the material conditions of actually existing migrants. This paper accepts that there is a dialectical tension between the theoretical languages used here and their respective lived realities, and it does not suggest that this tension has been resolved.

10. **Scope of Research** It stands to reason then that this study is limited to the novel Exit West authored by Mohsin Hamid, which is rife with themes of migration and exile, yet tells a particular story that may not be adequate to account for all displaced peoples' lived experiences. The implications of this study may therefore be less generalizable elsewhere along the exile/migration continuum. That one text itself may serve as a narrow reading of postcolonial themes and miss other important literature with these ideas presented more culturally or prospectively.

Conclusion "Exit West" is a novel that refuses consolation without abandoning hope. Through the story of Saeed and Nadia, Mohsin Hamid maps the postcolonial geography of displacement with remarkable economy and moral intelligence. The magical doors, the unnamed city, the unnamed protagonists, and the novel's characteristically compressed temporal scale all serve a consistent aesthetic and political purpose: to render the condition of exile not as exceptional but as the defining experience of the contemporary postcolonial world. The concept of Exile can be found and read in the works that are written by Hall, Said and Bhabha and also through Mohsin Hamid's novel "Exit West" a novel which refers to the condition of loss of identity or on other hand the loss of original identities but at the same time the novel reshapes a new self_hood identities depends on the concept of (The Third Space) which doesn't refers to a home along with a possibility of of location in the term of hybridity that states the survival and belonging which can be created by human beings. One of the most common and arguable question in the world of politics is migration. So the term ' migration' is taken by "Exit West" novel in order to show or state its literary function and how does it relate to the humanity along the complexities of politics. The crisis of the present displacement like the exploitation, domestic or social violence and inequality are not natural things but all happened because of the consequences of colonialism in all over the world." Exit West" can be read as a postcolonial text , political and humantrian novel in a form of resistance for human existence.

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