



WAR, DISPLACEMENT, AND LABOUR MIGRATION: IN EXIT WEST BY MOHSIN HAMID

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Abstract:

Wars, economic disparities, climate change, and globalization have rendered millions homeless in their pursuit of safety and opportunity. In this context, literature serves as an excellent medium for portraying the lived experiences of migration, providing humanistic insights into the emotional, psychological, and ideological dimensions of displacement. By maintaining the role of Saeed and Nadia as a buffer between the locals and the migrants, Hamid emphasizes the need for a Third Space for articulation, not just for the natives but also for the diaspora. This is because the writer not only captures the dislocation of the migrants, but also of the indigenous. Hamid has a tendency to deterritorialize the world in favor of migration as an inescapable truth in the postcolonial world. He does this by providing Saeed and Nadia with an easy route via porous doors to different areas of the globe.

Key Words: Migration, Hybridity, Diaspora Space, Labour, War

Introduction:

Migration and displacement have emerged as defining global dynamics of the twenty-first century, transforming social, political, and cultural landscapes worldwide. Wars, economic disparities, climate change, and globalization have rendered millions homeless in their pursuit of safety and opportunity. The magnitude of this humanitarian disaster is evidenced by the displacement of nearly 110 million persons, as reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023). In this context, literature serves as an excellent medium for portraying the lived experiences of migration, providing humanistic insights into the emotional, psychological, and ideological dimensions of displacement.

Exit West (2017) by Mohsin Hamid is a unique literary work that addresses the issue of worldwide migration through a blend of reality and metaphor. The narrative of the novel is around the adventures of Saeed and Nadia, who flee from their unnamed repressive city through magical doors that transport them to other locations throughout the globe. Hamid transcends regional and political boundaries, rendering migration as a worldwide human tragedy rather than only a local one. The linguistic and narrative strategies that he utilizes offer a robust framework for examining how discourses of migration, identity, and power are constructed in contemporary literature.

Despite the growing body of literature on migration, much of it focuses on themes or social interpretations rather than linguistic or ideological analyses. The humanistic essence of Exit West has garnered much acclaim; nonetheless, the linguistic choices employed by Hamid have seldom been examined about their role in shaping and interrogating prevailing narratives of migration. The ideological implications underlying Hamid's linguistic and narrative choices can be elucidated through critical discourse analysis (CDA), which may assist the reader in recognizing how the novel critiques global inequalities and transforms media discourse on belonging.

Displacement and Globalization in Contemporary Literature:

The effects of war, colonialism, and globalization on individuals have been examined in literature even before they became evident. Said's (1993) concept of exile is considered an essential aspect of modern identity, characterized by a condition of loss and the potential for critical reflection. Appadurai (1996) associates globalization with the formation of ethnoscape and ideoscape, asserting that modern migration is altering the notions of territory, nation, and belonging. Furthermore, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, and Jhumpa Lahiri are notable authors within the South Asian literary genre who utilize migration narratives to confront postcolonial disparities and transnational mobility (Chambers, 2019). Hamid's Exit West illustrates the worldwide refugee experience through symbolic doors that diminish distances, reflecting how globalization fosters new forms of intimacy and estrangement (Kaur, 2020). Scholars such as Cox (2021) and Sultana (2021) have noted that Hamid eschews linear migration clichés,

rendering the migration process are both inevitable and universal. According to his narrative, displacement transitions from a peripheral phenomena to a fundamental part of human existence in the modern world. The amalgamation of realism and magic enables Hamid to universalize the plight of refugees and position migration as a symbol of human connectivity within the rapidly evolving global landscape.

Power, Ideology and Border Politics in Discourse:

Migration discourse is a profoundly political dialogue intertwined with concerns of power, ideology, and representation. The diffuse notion of power articulated by Foucault (1980) throughout social structures is reflected in Hamid's depiction of borders, checkpoints, and refugee camps. Such areas are linked to control, exclusion, and surveillance - what Agamben (1998) termed the state of exception, wherein refugees exist beyond legal and political acknowledgment.

Fairclough (2013) posits that language functions as an instrument of ideology, influencing societal perceptions of migrants and refugees. Hamid's use of a neutral tone and passive constructs in *Exit West* gently exposes the underlying disparities governing migration. The invisibility of power is shown by the absence of identifiable agents, as to locked doors or bombs, which signifies that rhetoric may obscure accountability and reinforce domination, as posited by van Dijk (2008). Several academics (Chambers, 2019; Kaur, 2020) have noted Hamid's linguistic care in critiquing Western humanitarian and media discourses that sensationalize the suffering of refugees. Instead, he centers his discourse on empathy, portraying migration as a humanized experience. This ideological re-framing compels the reader to reconsider the moral assumptions surrounding migration, citizenship, and belonging in the context of globalization.

Objectives of the Study:

- To study Displacement and Globalization in Contemporary Literature
- To examine Power, Ideology and Border Politics in Discourse

Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory, and interpretive research approach to examine the themes of conflict, displacement, and labor migration in *Exit West*. The study primarily employs textual and thematic analysis, utilizing the novel as the principal data source, augmented by secondary materials including scholarly papers, books, and reports on migration and diaspora studies. A meticulous analysis is utilized to investigate story components, including character evolution, symbolism (such as the magical doors symbolizing coerced migration), and the socio-economic circumstances of displaced persons. The research is also bolstered by theoretical frameworks from diaspora theory, postcolonial theory, and migration studies, which facilitate the comprehension of identity formation, cultural hybridity, and global disparities impacting migrants. The research employs a critical and comparative methodology to link literary depictions with actual migration experiences, specifically within the South Asian setting, while recognizing its limitation as a text-based analysis devoid of practical investigation.

Result and Discussion:

Migration:

As far back as recorded history goes, people have been migrating. The human species extended from its original homeland to every corner of the earth because of migration. Humans used to be nomads who lived in the wild, surviving in the woods, mountains, and plains before they developed civilization. The phenomena of migration has undergone a radical transformation in the contemporary world, characterized by very rigid geopolitical borders brought about by the establishment of states and other geopolitical institutions. The "twentieth-century age of migration" that Soren Frank describes has only intensified in the last two decades.

Not only has this influx of people changed many cultures, but it has also altered mankind as a whole (Frank, 1). Migration, like many other significant issues, has been the subject of substantial research across many academic disciplines, including history, anthropology, sociology, etc. Because literature is a result of human creativity, it has explored migration from many angles. Migration has been portrayed as a varied theme in several literary works, spanning from ancient to modern times. Hybridity and diaspora are theoretical frameworks that emerge from this portrayal of movement and the thorough unraveling of migrants' experiences in literature, both by migrants themselves and by others. The purpose of this paper is to examine Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* in order to draw conclusions on migration, the impact of displacement on both locals and migrants, and the reactions of the characters on these issues.

The concept of migration holds the focal point throughout the work. The protagonists, Nadia and Saeed, initially meet in an unidentified "city swollen by refugees" (Hamid 1) Hamid has used magical realism as a tool of representation in his work through the usage of the term "magical doors" as the novel's central metaphor. He uses the magical portals as a means to avoid discussing the actual physical struggles endured by refugees. His usage of "magical doors" is an attempt to show migration as something that happens everywhere for many different reasons. Aside from Saeed and Nadia, other characters in the book also leave their hometown and go to other countries, such as Greece, England, and the US; for example, two Filipinas go to Tokyo, an unnamed dark skinned man who arrives in Australia, and so on.

The fact that individuals of all socioeconomic backgrounds are migrating from one location to

another is a metaphor for the inherent diversity of human migration. Additionally, these enchanted portals stand for changes in the migrants' lives and identities. These shadowy entrances and the refugees who pass through them stand for regions where social, political, and economic issues are tumultuous. The new status or marginalization of migrants in these new locales is symbolized by the position of these doors leading into dark alleyways or into uninhabited houses, etc. Keeping one's own cultural or religious identity is a significant psychological attribute for many migrants; in contrast, only a small percentage of migrants make an effort to blend in with the local culture. In *Exit West*, Saeed embodies the first quality and Nadia the second. Once Saeed leaves their hometown, they become more introverted. Even after breaking up with Nadia, he seeks out another lady from his group, continuing his habit of associating with members of his community. In accordance with the norms of his community, he starts to dress more traditionally.

When compared to other texts, *Exit West* stands out for the way it addresses migration. A more complete picture of migration in the modern era may be painted by delving into the experiences of migrants, the cultures and civilizations they encountered, and the reactions of the locals to these contacts. Going beyond borders and boundaries, it seeks to better comprehend fellow humans and further supports the notion of coexistence. The philosophical literature presents human existence as a kind of migration due to the fact that, as individuals, we go through subtle but constant changes in our dynamic personalities throughout our lives. At first glance, the title of the work seems to allude to Saeed and Nadia's (and others') migration to Western countries, which piques the reader's interest. On a deeper level, nevertheless, it represents the need for a shift in western policy toward migrants. A shift away from a policy of confrontation is signified by this. The book argues that peaceful cooperation is humanity's best hope for the future.

Hybridity and Diaspora Space:

"Diaspora" means "dispersion from center or home," which conjures up images of displacement and numerous migrations. The "phenomenon of the extraordinary and accelerating movement of people throughout the world" that Ashcroft and Griffiths (2002) refer to as "settling down" or setting roots "elsewhere" is what she sees as diasporas. All diasporas are "differentiated, heterogeneous contested spaces even as they are implicated in the construction of a common 'we'" (Brah, 1996, p. 181). This is how she alludes to the fact that there are many others inside a certain diasporic setting. Also, Brah's definition of "home" a "lived experience of locality" raises serious concerns. Since it examines the origin and displacement stories at the same time, it addresses behaviors that exclude as well as those that include. As a theoretical framework, hybridity seeks to characterize situations of cultural mixing and displacement via the lens of the displaced's interactions with hosts. All cultural assertions and systems are formed in an ambiguous place dubbed the "Third Space of enunciation," and Bhabha (1994) questions the concept of purity in this respect by arguing that they are inherently hybrid. This Third Space, according to Bhabha, is fruitful because it retains vestiges of colonial and postcolonial phenomena.

He claims that, rather than embracing the esotericism of "multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures," it conceives of a "global culture" that speaks to the "hybridity" of different cultures. "Carries the burden and meaning of culture" (Ashcroft and Griffiths, 2006) is the Third Space's declared mission. Hybridity, according to Bhabha, and Third Space are particularly relevant in diasporic contexts because they encourage "creative invention," which rules against totality and instead advocates for many perspectives. "To feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself" (Tyson, 2006) and "homing desire" (Brah, 1996; Brah, 1996; Tyson, 1996; Tyson, 2006) constitute diasporic experience, respectively, and he discusses this idea of "unhomeliness" in his work. He also delves into diaspora studies' focus on many cultural articulations.

Interacting with Fanon's concept of colonial identity, Bhabha (1985) challenges the idea of fixed identity and how it conflates with diaspora. Fanon, like Bhabha, tends to create an interstitial space, like Bhabha's "in-between" or "Third space for enunciation," to go beyond the binary of "Colonialist Self" and "Colonized Other," and address "colonial otherness" through this ambivalent space. It is not feasible, in Bhabha's view, to get a picture of wholeness; rather, the only way to achieve a picture of identity which, as he sees it, can only be understood metonymically as a "sign of absence and loss" is to negate identity altogether. Therefore, "hybridity is better conceived of as a process rather than a description" (Kalra and Kaur, 2005, p. 71), and "evacuation and emptying of the 'I'" constitute an ongoing process of identification.

Migrants have a tumultuous sense of identity as they navigate the complexities of two competing cultural traditions, according to Bhabha's concept of mimicry in a diasporic environment. As the act of imitation involves creating something that is "almost the same but not quite," it implies "double articulation" and disrupts the representational political discourse (Bhabha, 1994). By tracing the origins of essentialist ideas of a single identity by Bhabha's concept of hybridity and mimicry, we can see how diasporic studies confronts the authoritarianism that comes with the idea of an immutable and predetermined identity. Diasporic identities are both "local" and "global" by Brah (1996). In order to highlight its relevance to diasporic studies, Brah (1996) challenges the concept of boundaries. She uses the concept of boundaries, which stand for politics and power, in her work. She asserts that every boundary conceals a story of psychological and geographical facts. Because "Overdeveloped" nations

utilize borders to exert their dominance over "Underdeveloped" nations by limiting human migration throughout the world, she argues that borders are also a metaphor for power.

Borders, as Brah explains: "are territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others; forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where fear of the Other is the fear of the self; places where claims to ownership claims to 'mine,' 'yours,' and 'theirs' are staked out, contested, defended, and fought over" (Brah, 1996, pp. 194-195). When discussing global deterritorialization, Balibar (2006) uses the concept of border permeability. He claims that due to the fast-paced interplay between the information and capital courses, the globe has become more homogeneous in our globalized society. Because "every individual is virtually in contact with every other individual through a whole variety of channels" (Balibar, 2006, p. 105), he adds fuel to the fire of the virtual vs. real world debate. The "quasi- hallucinatory consistency" of VR makes it more convincing than the actual thing, as "Each local individuality is thus associated with the image of the place it occupies in the 'whole,'" (Balibar, 2006). In addition, he stresses the need of democratizing borders, as these physical boundaries in today's interconnected globe give rise to ideological conflicts between different countries and governments. Brah (1996) delves further into the concept of politics of space, which she defines as a multi-axial locationality characterized by numerous subject positions. Dislocation in the sense of traversing "geographical and psychic borders" and situatedness within a certain set of racial, ethnic, and gendered identities are all components of this perspective. What she means by "multi-axial politics of location" is that "...how the same geographical space comes to articulate different histories and meanings such that 'home' can simultaneously be a place of safety and terror" (Brah, 1996, p. 204). Additionally, diaspora space is discussed by Brah (1996) and is located at the crossroads of diaspora, border, and location politics. She argues that diaspora space is a place where "multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition" (Brah, 1996, p.205), which in turn creates economic, political, cultural, and psychological tensions. The idea of diaspora space is further complicated by the idea of culture as a flux, which challenges both the "subject position of the native" and the idea of pure culture. Because diaspora space challenges the dichotomies of inclusion/exclusion, belonging/otherness, and us/them, the subject positions of indigenous and native peoples are dynamic and not static. For this reason, "The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native" (Brah, 1996, p. 205).

The War:

"Two world wars, regional wars, the process of decolonization, emergence of totalitarian regimes" are among the many variables listed by Frank. Almost quickly into the story, the narrator names a notable victim of the migratory conflict. There has been no "open war" in the city, therefore it is "still mostly at peace" (Hamid 1). "From a slight premium place in during gentler times turns into the 'most undesirable in times of conflict,'" as Hamid puts it in his depiction of Saeed's home (Hamid8), echoing the dread of war. Throughout the narrative, we see this expansion of the link between migration and conflict. The founding family of the Chinese restaurant where they meet "migrated to this city due to WWII" and then "emigrated further to Canada" due to an intensification in the civil war in their county (Hamid 19). Knowing that "War Soon erode the façade of their building as though it had accelerated time itself, a day's toll outpacing that of a decade" (Hamid 19) is a way that they communicate the impending risk of war. In discussing the refugee situation in today's global politics, Hamid brings up the impact of this battle. "War, was doing badly" for international organizations due to a "unprecedented flow of migrants," and their reaction, which consisted of "building walls and fences strengthening their borders," was a fruitless endeavor, as the narrator of the book notes (Hamid 71).

The description of gunfire, bombings, curfews, massacres, etc., in the text heightens the horror and devastation of war. Once infected by the brutality of battle, the narrator discovers how everyday life changes. Saeed and Nadia are just two of many who are forced to flee their homes at this time of unrest, violence, and uncertainty. As Saeed and Nadia's position changes to that of migrants, they experience the same sentiments of being on the outside looking in as they leave their war-torn homeland for more stable, industrialized nations. After Saeed and Nadia pass through a mystical door on the Greek island of Mykonos, they find themselves in a deserted house in London with several other international refugees. After fanaticism and war, Hamid shows how people in a globalized society have to keep up with the hyper-real of their daily lives while dealing with the postcolonial predicament. Thus, despite the constant danger of conflict, the inhabitants of the nameless city in the story go about their daily lives as usual. Regarding this, Hamid retains an ambivalent attitude that permeates the whole book. The city is characterized by "war" and "peace" at the same time, representing the present condition of our globalized world with its plurality and multiplicity of human existence, including both natives and refugees, which eliminates the prospect of a pure nation or culture.

Conclusion:

An attempt is made by Hamid in "Exit West" to criticize the purist ideals that are linked with culture and identity by presenting a story that is incomplete nevertheless mixed. In order to do this,

Hamid helps to preserve a diaspora space by including several voyages of the two main protagonists. The voyages are filled with painful events that lead to an identity problem in a society that is global, and they also take place in a world where the yearning for a united home is hard to achieve in the modern world. The doors are a metaphorical image of borders, which are the origins of vast migrations and have come to symbolize the diasporic experience of the contemporary man. By maintaining the role of Saeed and Nadia as a buffer between the locals and the migrants, Hamid emphasizes the need of having a Third Space for articulation, not just for the natives but also for the diaspora. This is because the writer not only captures the dislocation of the migrants, but also of the indigenous. Hamid has a tendency to deterritorialize the world in favor of migration as an inescapable truth in the postcolonial world. He does this by providing Saeed and Nadia with an easy route via porous doors to different areas of the globe.

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