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FROM KNOWING TO CREATING YOURSELF: IDENTITY CRISIS IN *EXIT WEST* BY MOHSIN HAMID

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Abstract

Scholars most often tend to associate both terms, migration, and identity. People who migrate from one country to another carry their knowledge and the feeling of distress with them. Their identity tends to shift into a new one because they try to assimilate into a new country. Mohsin Hamid is a transactional author and has been preoccupied with the critical issues of global relevance like the mass migration of people, identity crises, and racism. This article is mainly focusing Hamid's novel *Exit West*. This study aims to analyze the theme of identity crises portrayed through the central character Saeed and Nadia. This theme has the foundation of post-colonial era, so the relevant literature is also given in this article. The analysis has elucidated that protagonist of the novel face a condition that places them at their identity in being at crossroads. They try to intimate and assimilate to the new culture portrayed through their ways to blend with contemporary society in attaining their identity. The qualitative research method is adopted to examine the identity crises in "*Exit West*" through descriptive analysis—this research was analyzed using online research journals, research papers, and books. For the investigation of the study, as a sample, those lines are selected from the novel that best describes the idea.

Keywords : South Asian fiction, identity crisis, assimilation

Introduction

Identity is defined as “the certainty of being who or what a man or thing is” (Dictionaries) derived from Latin word *dentitas*, which means sameness. While discussing the identity crises in this contemporary world, it is significant to consider multiculturalism and its connection to the post-colonial identity. Formers is about the cultural differences linked together in the demographic space,

and its ideas and strategies move in different directions. The discussion will now be done on the grounds of literature (Altın, 2021).

In European colonies, the term 'post-colonial' refers to when colonies slip themselves, resulting in binaries, reflecting colonized and the colonizers. That is why the postcolonialism term, as stated by Sawant (2014), concerns the impacts of colonialism on cultures & communities. By the experience of colonialism, around three-quarters of the general population have had their lives molded Ashcroft (1989).

Several difficulties and crises arose despite the political change and independence achieved by several nations culturally and economically are. Therefore, the new countries refereeing their culture and identity remained in perplexity (HAMIDS, 2021). Colonialism was power control of several cultures by the colonizers, and individuals still colonized are attached to it (Agrawal, 2019). A part of cultural transformation is formed by battle of colonized subjects for their cultural identity that, in turn, prompted a conflict with colonizer's culture (Randa & Marlina, 2020). Many of those countries were in cultural, economic, & political crises, as Young (2003) stated. Colonial and imperial powers influenced the communities and nations ruled under European domination with which postcolonialism concerns. Both these powers refer to the authority and domination of Western power over other countries and nations by economic, military, and political means (Kumar). In post-colonial times, colonialism is mainly refused, and to affirm independence, individuality is searched.

Additionally, other conflicts are also concerned about the migration from former colonies to the colonizer's countries and the cultural differences that make new hybrid societies (Zubair & Javed, 2021). Considering this discussion, Ashcroft (1989) claimed that “all post-colonial societies are still subject somehow to plain or inconspicuous types of colonial domination, and independence has not tackled this problem” (Bill Ashcroft). In African and Asian countries, ethnic conflict is another element of the post-colonial period that is deserted in the view of the colonial policies directed in the colonies. This battle of the ethnic sector is to be perceived as equal or for independence. The creolization by colonial powers is continued even after the decolonization (Blanton, Mason & Athow, 2001). The recently liberated states to accomplish their cultural, political, and psychologically recognizable proof overpower the postcolonialism reflecting their security and buttressed by their determination not to be perceived as forced by a colonizer (Bilal, 2020).

In the post-colonial term and literature, questions of identity are the most pressing issues. Because of its crises in all the post-colonial communities, it is considered the most imperative (Dizayi, 2015). This issue is not reasoned and a settled idea but had turned to be a phenomenon in the post-colonial scheme; as Mercer (1990) states, “character just turns into an issue when it is in crisis, when something thought to be altered, intelligible and stable is dislodged by the experience of uncertainty and instability” (Mercer). Under the colonial tenet, the decolonization's of nations incited a significant move toward the reproduction of individual and social identities. It spread at all levels of life and henceforth called the battles of Lumberton for demanding a recapture of actual identity (Daukšaitė-Kolpakovienė, 2021). In postcolonialism, the writers drew attention to the crises and inquiries, including multiculturalism, diaspora, and identity crises. In this article, the focus is identity crises (Sharma, 2019). The issue of identity is one of the vital exchanges that the post-colonial writers and critics consider. Novelists, including Selvon and Naipaul, portray the identity and significance of the immigrants and set forth

their struggles, such as in *The Mimic Men* and *The Lonely Londoners*. In post-colonial novels, identity has been the focal point in which crises and the conflicts of the colonizers' struggle to find a way for identification are imagined. Said (1993) states that this struggle, in turn, is advanced against western domination everywhere in the non-European world. As stated “the major themes in the works written in the post-colonial period have been the fragmentation and identity crisis experienced by the once colonized peoples and the critical impacts of colonialism on the indigenous” (Sheoran). These novels rarely escaped or avoided the existence of exile, diasporas, and matters relevant to the identity (Zahid, 2015). This article mainly focuses on an Asian novel, so the identity crises as a central theme will be discussed in Asian novels.

In Asian literature, the novel is written by a Pakistani writer, so the representation of identity crises in Pakistani novels will be examined. It is explored that post-colonial, post-partition, and modern South Asian literature helped the nations that are newly emerging from the dark of imperialism and oppression to pose the questions of a new identity (Paul, 2021). This is done by reacting to the immediate discourse of colonialism and by confronting issues that are political, decolonization, and cultural independence of formerly subjugated nations and their people. In the writings of Chinua Achebe, Isabel Allende, V. S. Naipaul, Anita Desai, Derek Walcott, and Salman Rushdie, there is a continuous critique of the texts with racist and neo-colonial undertones. Mainly, the literature is post-colonial and obsessed with colonialism's effects (Kowal, 2021). But in South Asia, it helped conflicting cultures negotiate the minefield left in our mind; inferiority complex, identity crises, and cultural vulnerability (Hussain, Ahsan, & Akram, 2020).

In *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid contributes to the literary discussion of the contemporary worldwide refugee crises. Migration is depicted as affecting the individuals refreezing their national and global identity (Sadaf, 2020). Joseph Slaughter, a migrant literature scholar, asserts that human rights are confined to people having national citizenship, and most of the world's population is excluded from this. This genre of literature serves to humanize the migrant, and in this, the human rights are also challenged concerning their bias towards white, middle to upper-class people and heteronormative. As a usual way of life, migration is portrayed in *Exit West* where identity is fluid. This is asserted through the characters of the novel Saeed and Nadia, who are migrated from their home-place to Mykonos, London, and S Francisco. These locations affect Saeed and Nadia's respective home-place and one another. Migrancy is also universalized in this novel as the writer imagines the world in which migration is accelerated through magical doors that allow people to freely cross the national borders (Akhtar, Qureshi, Hassan, & Tanveer, 2021). In this novel, the experiences of Saeed and Nadia are quite different. Still, every person will experience changes in both identity and the environment due to migrating through time. He depicts that to validate the identity a migrant has not to rely on the home-place with time because the migrant is in motion and time re-shapes home (Mir, 2018).

This building had taken the same name as the cinema that preceded it: both once had the same owner, and the cinema had been so famous as to have become a byword for that locality. When walking by the arcade and seeing that old name on its new neon sign, Saeed's father, sometimes Saeed's mother, would remember and smile. Or remember and pause (Hamid 16)

The depths of this novel become fascinated by the main characters. The compelling reflection on the changing nature of the attachment is shown where humans are repeatedly torn from their moorings

even if they do not constitute the roots (Humayun 2017). As Hamid writes “Every time a couple moves, they begin, if their attention is still drawn to one another, to see each other differently, for personalities are not a single immutable color, like white or blue, but rather illuminated screens, and the shades we reflect depend much on what is around us” (60).

In the novel, the identity of the migrant is in crisis that is portrayed through the trauma of migration (Neure, 2019). To highlight the sense of the rootlessness and uneasiness that people suffer as they try to get settled in a country, Hamid has explored the theme of refugees and natives in the novel. Some get settled, and others return to their countries (Sattar, Naz, Yasin & Arslan 2020).

The novel also seeks to move the focus away from the notion of single, identifiable geopolitical crises to acknowledging the individual human crises experienced by the people displaced in the contemporary moment (Javaid, Rabbani, & Shahbaz, 2021). There is also a growing sense of crisis because of the arrival of more refugees in wealthy nations (Bosch, 2020). Such as, through the door in the novel, the refugees do not know where they will appear as soon as they step through the door, so is the case with authorities (Carter, 2021). This novel aligns with the notion of Agamben (1995) and suggests that movements of refugees represent crises for the very concept of nationhood itself. In this article, the theme of identity crises will be analyzed. Further, we have some questions that will be answered in this study.

Research Methodology

In this research, the qualitative research model is applied to examine the identity crises in "Exit West" through descriptive analysis specifically used to describe some basic features of the data collected through the research. Instead of going for common approaches and procedures for data collection and analysis, the methodology's most significant aspect is the theoretical link of methods. Additionally, in many research studies, the following three techniques are commonly used-quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods that stand out while a subject is being examined. In this research work, qualitative research comprises of analyzing the collected non-numerical data such as audio, video, and text to fathom out the thoughts, ideas, concepts, and experiences, which can be further utilized to manage the comprehensive understandings of a problem to create new ideas for the research. On the contrary, quantitative research involves strategies focusing on a systematic investigation of quantifiable data for statistical and mathematical analysis. However, qualitative research is mainly utilized to recognize how people experience the world in arts and humanities, in English literature, anthropology, history, education, sociology, and health sciences. Therefore, many flexible approaches adopted in this research emphasize retaining rich meaning while interpreting the collected data. Standard practices considered necessary in this category are ethnography, narrative analysis, ground research, action research, and phenomenological research. All mentioned techniques emphasize different aims and perspectives, though share some similarities also.

In this research work, a Descriptive Approach is considered for analyzing data gathered through the novel "Exit West". This novel can be interpreted in the context of the South Asian diaspora's legacy of multicultural perspectives that challenge ideas such as self-consciousness and integration in the native culture. The term diaspora refers to fragmented people of more than one region with an enduring and significant relationship to a shared identity, culture, or heritage. This descriptive approach aims to acquire detailed data and apply it in a novel through the reader's visualization that s/he perceives

through the writer's experiences. It can respond to questions about what, why, how, and where but not concerns about why. A Descriptive Approach of such analyses to each variable, the study may use a comprehensive range of methodologies. This study approach continues in the modern conceptualization of intercultural, multicultural, and transcultural identities. This tradition continues in contemporary conceptualizations of multicultural, intercultural, and transcultural identities.

To sum up, this research methodology aims to diagnose the significant issues at the crossroads of identities. This research used fictitious devices to highlight the novel's identity crises, including certain characters, contexts, and settings. The descriptive analysis of this research is mainly concerned with Homi K. Bhabha's ideas of hybridity, most of which are endorsed by the text's interpretations and contextual meaning. The method adopted for the selected study was a descriptive qualitative method. It is a fundamental phenomenon that includes studying and reading a text rather than having many hypotheses. Hence, the character strives to consolidate and reflect contemporary society, which has been seen in incorporating cultural values to maintain their identity.

Aims and Objectives:

This research is based on the Novel "Exit West". The story of Exit west is about the dislocated people and their experiences. So, the basic and objective of this research is to mention the crises of migrant people.

Research Questions:

The study will answer the following questions.

- What are the migrant crises elucidated in the novel 'Exit West'?
- How is the illustration of identity crises done through Saeed and Nadia's main characters, the migrants in the novel Exit West?

Literature Review

Identity is the multidimensional word, and according to Erikson, the identity crisis is the time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself (Erikson, 1994). Here some past studies are included in this section to get more insight into this term and relevant studies. In the thematic framework of the Indian Anglican novels, the crises of identity have always enjoyed a defining significance Tiwar (2012).

One of the main issues in this review is post-border assumptions. Ideas of hybridity and amid societies are supported by Homi Bhabha (1996), who shows the hybridity or the mixture of two societies concerning the character of foreigners. Foreigners talk to cultures in-between (Bhabha 1996) because they are caught between two distinct societies which figure their character. Their situation in the public is extraordinary and identical at the same time. This hybridity entails the third space that the colonists make or find "others of ourselves" (Bhabha 2004). Therefore, a short presentation on reconciliation, assimilation, absorption, and underestimation is introduced by giving various meanings of these ideas supported by Rubin and Al. (2011) and Sam and Berry (2010). The above ideas are essential considering that they describe the connection between people and the social environment and influence the disposition of the personality of foreigners. The situation of Iraqi Kurds in Sweden is exceptionally limited to Swedish society, and some Kurds share a global personality and the feeling of having a place with the Swedish society in the light of reconciliation. In addition, Swedish multiculturalism plays an

incredible role participate in the arrangement of personalities from abroad, as reported by my sources. Different examinations clarify the personality structure as indicated by the suggestion of the identity process Assumption in which this structure is to be conceptualized concerning substance and value (Breakwell 1986, Jaspal and Cinnirella 2011). Likewise, two all-inclusive cycles change the structure of the character, which are the measure of ease of digestion and evaluation measure. Absorption refers to the admission of a new room or new data into the personality structure. At the same time, convenience alludes to changes that occur existing system and must adapt to the new components. In addition, the evaluation cycle rewards which signifies and incites the substance of the character (Breakwell 1986, Jaspal and Cinnirella 2011). The importance of absorption is the way in which individuals force new components that help to development or arrangement of the character structure. In this examination, virtually all witnesses are satisfied with their Kurdish ethnic character and offer an incentive to their new social personality, since they ingested new data that led them to develop their personality. Also, four personality standards are recognized by Breakwell (1986) and referenced by Jaspal and Cinnirella (2011) to manage the general cycles referenced previously. They are named separately as congruity through time and circumstances; uniqueness or peculiarity of others; because of convenience of osmosis and evaluation measures; feel safe and responsible for their life; and feelings of individual or social value (Breakwell 1986, Jaspal and Cinnirell 2011).

Here considering the concept of the border used in the novel, the term border, is elaborated by French philosopher Étienne Balibar (2004), "is undergoing a profound change in meaning" (37). Even though this is an old concept, it is an undeniable fact that the European borders have unique implications that are diverse from their conservative connotations. They are associated with the national distinctiveness along with vehemence. This way, a succession of sociocultural glitches and complications arise that restructure the inclusion canons and the dogmatic schemas, and in the novel, Hamid questions these sociopolitical borders. In the post-colonial term, the blend of several cultures brought about new cultural identities. The contemporized cultural identities or the significance of the identity is an unpredictable one Tiffin (1989). Immigrants from post-colonial countries have mostly suffered the diaspora and the dilemma of constructing a coherent identity. Fanon also worked on the impact of colonialism and the effects of immigration. Immigrant, in his view, is forced to subvert their individuality so the colonial nation cannot view them under the prism of his 'backward' cultural background (Ryan, 2012). The dislocation also is related to the psychology having some ambivalent feelings. Genetech (2003) explores the elocution is conceptualized as the social frameworks loss which has enriched an individual's existence with significance and psycho-social stability". That states that dislocality is not acknowledged as binaries from restriction or as a probability of restriction. The above-given works have discussed immigrants' identity and then the identity crises. The novel being analyzed in this study is based on these themes.

This novel is relevant to the ongoing discussion of the highest percentage of expatriates in the member nations of the EU. And this is the reason that ethnic distinctiveness and authority tend to be discussed more. Borders hence are the protectors of the national identity that comes out as the national sovereignty because of the nationalist. In the novel, it is portrayed through the journey and practices in London where Hamid exemplifies the cracking of London. It emerges through the intense endeavors by eradicating immigrants and emigrants from the societal cosmos as the struggle to strengthen the

British national identity as a globalized and homogeneous identity .Ucar (2019).

Theoretical Framework:

In this research, the scientific information of the man is both inseparable and shared affairs discussed. The act of man has certain reasons and guidelines. In this research, critique the performance of man, thinking and feelings. So, the theoretical framework based on the “life experiments” in the perspective of naturalism. The research adopted is in qualitative form and data based on the “individual preferences and constraints”.

Discussions and Analysis

In this study, being at the center of identity crisis refers to the attempts made to be recognized in the new society by two characters, Saeed, and Nadia. Both characters have multiple ways of selecting their identity.

Saeed's character can be seen in many ways in the novel. He chooses to leave the western culture. He could not find himself suitable for western civilization. He strives to adjust himself to western culture but could not. He goes back to own culture he is used to. He gets married to a woman of belief from his homeland.

Both characters in the novel face their identity crisis differently. If we look at Saeed's character in many ways, we can see how he picks out from western culture and chooses to live independently. It all starts when he escapes the West, showing his identity belongs to his homeland and not the West. We can see it from a text from the novel which narrates that how he started living independently in the Vicar Gate because he felt as if he is reliving in his hometown, even when he prayed there once he felt as if he has never ever prayed more spiritually that this . the love and benevolence which the imam showed reminded him of his father

The whole scene depicted very explicated clearly shows Saeed's regretted condition that follows with internal and external contradictions. The setting in the text indicates differences between the West and his homeland. Saeed is trapped in both situations. On one side of the conflict, he finds himself new in a new land. But after a short time, as an internal conflict, he misses his home and the familiar atmosphere of his hometown. He tries to escape the West and prays to get himself out of this crisis. He meets with his people in the West to get closer to his own identity. The phrase, ‘Saeed began to spend more time there’ (Hamid 60). reflects onset to escape Western culture.

Besides this, Saeed's character also faces mental disturbance as he continuously says his prayers, and through spirituality, he tries to fight it off. The following few phrases, “One afternoon he was there at prayer time, and he joined his fellow countrymen in prayer in the back garden” (60). It indicates that he finds spiritual energy by praying. It lets him feel more human. The following text, and subsequently discusses he quickly adjusts himself among his people. It also reveals that this is hard to adopt the new land society because of the oppression of indigenous people of using their culture in their zone. In this context, he used the adjustment step in the change process because he changes what culture suits him to establish new reasons to gain his identity. Since he had lost his country's culture, He tried to return to his home culture. He has imitation since he has lost his place back in his native society.

Saeed prefers to flee from the West as he's unable to adapt himself to the society of the West. When he remains in the West, it is essential to escape disorientation or to feel surprised and unnerved.

Outwardly, he smiles at Nadia to make her feel comfortable and satisfied. He thinks that it shows her

his care and warmth when he smiles but Nadia always felt quite the opposite. She knows Saeed can't stay in the West, and he is always shocked and surprised by this unfamiliar atmosphere. She knew that he needs to find a way out of this place. The external conflict stems from the war between refugees and nativists. Another quotation illustrates the same situation:

"Without borders, nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory, and people were questioning what role they had to play. Many argued that smaller units made more sense, but others argued that smaller units could not defend themselves" (Hamid, 2017, P. 62).

The above quotation illustrates the misunderstanding of the first character in imitating the culture of the West. World contributes to a stressful situation since the first character is unable to adapt to the culture of the West. The external conflict is the product of a war between refugees and nativists. This condition leaves him uncertain, as an internal struggle, to remain in the West.

Besides, Saeed cannot adapt himself to the culture of the West, nor can he be his homeland citizens. He has lost the culture of his homeland. He becomes an imitation which is reflected as "Nadia looked him in the eye. 'You don't say your evening prayers?' She asked Saeed conjured up his most endearing grin. 'Not always. Sadly'" (3).

The character of Saeed is stuck between two cultures, and he loses his identity. The character has become many identities. First, he is in the West as a new man; on the other hand, he couldn't get out of his homeland mentally. Saeed belonged to a conservative family, which was the main reason he couldn't adapt to his new identity in the West.

Apart from Saeed, it is possible to see the character of Nadia's ways to reveal her identity by incorporating herself into West culture. When she was at university, she changed her lifestyle. She absorbed into the society of the West. Coexistence is how immigrants mingle with society. In this analysis of identity crisis, migrants do not have the skills to survive in a foreign state. The second way of expressing her identity is to integrate with society. . She feels more relaxed with her new life through the discussion above. The second character approves that when she was in her homeland, she abandoned her own culture. She feels welcomed by her very own culture. That's why she wants to integrate into the new society to boost her social standing.

Living in a country of civil conflict makes Nadia flee her homeland to take refuge. She would like to escape her country. Through her assimilation into Western society, she feels she will get refuge. She never believes she gets shelter in living in a foreign world, although she thinks she can adapt to the culture of the West. She finds a job in a strange land, but the native people exploit her.

She feels puzzled about living in the West because she thinks she can adapt herself to the culture of the West. She assimilates to the society of the West as the sentence "the mob looked like a strange tribe to Nadia" (75). It means that she cannot become the same as the society of the West even though she was secular. By imitating Western culture, Nadia gets oppressed by the natives.

The hard option is the crisis of identity of both characters. The prevailing world refers to the traumatic journey obtained by Nadia because of the struggle of migrants and natives and between migrants. The conflict relates to the external conflict.

It is hard to have only one identity when you belong to a conservative family and get to live in a foreign land whose culture and the living atmosphere are opposite to yours, as in the case of Saeed. Saeed's continuously changing identity and personality traits show a conflict of identity as an identity crisis

drawn by the writer.

Nadia's character, though, is quite the opposite of Saeed's, but still, she also finds it very difficult to adjust to Western culture, even being open-minded and secular. She tries to imitate the Western culture, but she loses her identity. This conflict of identities confuses her in many places in the novel.

Conclusion:

This article has analyzed the theme of the identity crisis of the migrants in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. The text of the novel is focused on the analysis. Immigrant problems have assumed a recognized proportion in the present century that finds the parallels during World War II. To be a migrant, the immigrant needs a strong commitment to their identity to survive in the new land. It is witnessed that the millions of people in the world are undertaking arduous journeys to escape their war-torn countries of origin. In search of better lives, innumerable people are leaving their homes. The theme of the inevitable migration of people across the countries is presented as the modern take by the Hamid in *Exit West*. People are migrating across countries, even sometimes across continents, in a circumstance when societies descend into chaos and conflict. The analysis of the study has found this is the story about the dislocated people and their experiences. With the help of the magically created doors that take the refugees to different places, this novel is made typical.

Along with the theme of post-colonialism, it also has used magical realism this way. The author speculates an age when all of humanity will be excluded. We are furnished with looks on a movement of the times of the end where each is according to all current accounts. Wars and extraordinary atmosphere changes cannot be ruled out in the future. This gives *Exit West* a faint hint of sci-fi, too. While managing the subject of the inescapable mass movement of individuals, the physical and mental distress seen by the excluded was also dazzling. Hamid tried to change our view of ideas of nation and borders. It places a very extraordinary approach to the question of mass movements of individuals by introducing an astonishing perspective on world geology and false frontiers. The writer informs us that it is fundamental to reexamine our convictions about the world and our future.

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