
**Borders and Mobility: The Role of War and Conflict in Forced Migration in
Exit West**

Akanksha

Research Scholar

Department of English

University of Rajasthan, Jaipur

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Abstract:

War forces people to leave their homes. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* shows this through the story of Saeed and Nadia. Their city becomes unsafe due to violence. They escape using magical doors that take them to new places. This paper explores how war leads to migration in the novel. It also examines how magical realism explains forced migration. The novel shows the fear, loss, and struggles of displaced people. The doors symbolize the sudden and unpredictable nature of migration. War not only affects physical movement but also identity and relationships. This study connects *Exit West* to real refugee crises. It discusses how war shapes migration today. The paper also shows how Hamid makes readers think about migration differently. This research uses literary analysis and migration studies. It argues that *Exit West* gives a human perspective on forced migration.

Keywords: Magical Realism, *Exit West*, Displacement, Identity

Introduction

War leads to forced migration. Many people leave their homes to escape violence and find safety. *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid tells the story of Saeed and Nadia. They live in an unnamed city affected by war. The city becomes dangerous due to bombings and military control. They have no choice but to leave. The novel uses magical doors to show migration. These doors take people to different countries instantly. The doors represent how migration happens suddenly and without warning (Faiz et al).

Forced migration is a serious global issue. Many wars have caused people to leave their homes. Conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Sudan have led to large refugee crises. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that over 110 million people are displaced worldwide due to war and conflict (UNHCR). *Exit West* reflects these real-world events. It shows how war affects identity, relationships, and survival.

Magical realism plays an important role in the novel. The doors allow people to escape

instantly, but they do not remove the struggles of migration. Refugees still face challenges in new lands. They deal with discrimination, fear, and cultural differences (Noreen & Abbas). Hamid's use of magical realism helps readers understand migration in a new way. It makes the experience feel both real and surreal at the same time.

War and Conflict as Catalysts for Migration

War forces people to leave their homes. It destroys cities, economies, and families. Many people migrate because they have no choice. They move to escape violence and find safety. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* shows how war leads to displacement. The novel follows Saeed and Nadia as their city becomes unsafe. Bombings, military control, and curfews take away their freedom. They realize that staying is not possible. War pushes them to leave their home (Faiz et al).

Many real-world conflicts have caused mass migration. The Syrian Civil War forced millions of people to flee. More than 6.8 million Syrians became refugees (UNHCR). The Afghanistan war also led to a refugee crisis. People left to escape violence and find stability. Sudan's ongoing conflict has displaced millions. War creates fear and instability. People cannot live normal lives in war zones. They leave to survive. *Exit West* reflects these real situations. The novel's unnamed city represents any war-torn country. Saeed and Nadia's experiences are similar to real refugee stories (Hameed et al).

Hamid describes war as sudden and unpredictable. At first, Saeed and Nadia live normal lives. They work, study, and spend time with family. But war changes everything. Roads become unsafe. People disappear or die. Their city becomes unrecognizable. This mirrors real conflicts. In many war zones, people live under constant fear. They do not know when their homes will be destroyed. This uncertainty forces migration. When survival becomes difficult, people choose to leave (Noreen & Abbas).

The novel also explores how war affects personal relationships. Saeed and Nadia's bond changes as they face danger. They rely on each other more. However, stress and fear also create distance. War forces people to make hard decisions. They must leave loved ones behind. Many real refugees experience this. Families separate during migration. Some members move first, while others stay behind. This causes emotional pain and long-term trauma (León).

War also takes away a person's sense of home. Even after people leave, they struggle with identity. They feel disconnected from both their old and new lives. Many refugees live in foreign countries but still long for home. *Exit West* highlights this struggle. Saeed and Nadia's journey shows how war shapes a person's identity. They become migrants, not by choice, but by necessity (Faiz et al).

War is a major cause of forced migration. It makes cities unlivable and takes away security. People leave to survive. Hamid's *Exit West* captures this reality. The novel reflects real refugee experiences. It shows how war destroys homes, relationships, and identities. The

story of Saeed and Nadia helps readers understand the struggles of displaced people. War forces migration, but it also reshapes lives in unexpected ways.

Magical Realism and the Metaphor of Doors

Magical realism is a literary style that blends reality with fantasy. It presents magical elements in ordinary settings. Unlike fantasy, magical realism does not explain the supernatural. It treats magical events as normal parts of life. This technique allows authors to explore complex themes in a unique way. Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, and Salman Rushdie use magical realism in their works. It helps them depict history, culture, and politics in a symbolic way (Bowers, 2022).

Mohsin Hamid uses magical realism in *Exit West*. He introduces mysterious doors that allow instant travel. These doors open in war zones and take people to new places. They do not require passports, visas, or long journeys. This removes the physical struggles of migration. However, it does not remove emotional and social challenges. People still face displacement, fear, and discrimination. The doors symbolize both freedom and uncertainty. They reflect how migration is unpredictable and life-changing (Faiz et al).

The doors allow sudden movement, but they do not bring immediate stability. When Saeed and Nadia leave their city, they arrive in unfamiliar places. They do not feel at home in Greece or London. They struggle with new cultures and social barriers. Many real refugees face similar issues. Even after reaching a safe country, they experience isolation and identity loss. Migration does not end when someone crosses a border. It is a continuous process of adaptation (Noreen & Abbas).

Hamid blends fantasy with real-world migration struggles. He removes the physical journey but keeps the emotional pain. The novel shows how refugees feel disconnected from both their old and new homes. Saeed and Nadia grow apart as they adjust to different places. They face fear, discrimination, and survival challenges. The magical doors highlight the suddenness of displacement. They show how people become migrants overnight. This reflects real refugee experiences. War, violence, or persecution can force people to leave at any time (Hameed et al).

Scholars argue that magical realism helps readers understand migration better. It allows them to focus on emotions rather than physical struggles. It creates a universal story that applies to all refugees. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" explains this. He says migrants live between two cultures. They do not fully belong to their old or new home (Bhabha). Hamid's novel captures this experience. The doors create instant movement but also highlight dislocation. They show how migration is more than just travel. It is a transformation of identity (León).

Magical realism plays a key role in *Exit West*. The doors symbolize migration in a new way. They remove physical barriers but keep emotional struggles. The novel blends fantasy with real refugee experiences. It helps readers see migration from a human

perspective. By using magical realism, Hamid creates a powerful story about displacement and identity. His work challenges traditional narratives about migration. It encourages readers to rethink borders and belonging.

Transformation and Identity in New Lands

Migration changes people. It forces them to adapt to new cultures and environments. Saeed and Nadia experience this in *Exit West*. They leave their homeland and travel through Greece, London, and other places. Each location challenges their identity and relationship. They struggle with belonging, cultural differences, and survival. Their journey reflects the experiences of real migrants. It shows how migration is not just physical movement. It is also a transformation of self (Faiz et al).

Saeed and Nadia arrive first in Mykonos, Greece. They find shelter in a refugee camp. The place is unfamiliar and crowded. They interact with other migrants but feel isolated. In real life, many refugees experience this. Camps provide safety but not a sense of home. People feel stuck between their past and future. They do not belong to their old home or the new land (Bhabha).

Their next destination is London. They enter a city divided by migration tensions. Refugees and locals live separately. Many migrants face discrimination. Saeed and Nadia experience this division. They try to adjust but feel unwelcome. Saeed connects with people from his culture. He finds comfort in shared traditions. Nadia embraces change. She explores new ideas and independence. This difference creates distance between them. Many migrants go through this. Some hold on to their roots, while others change. This affects relationships and identity (Noreen & Abbas).

Migration affects personal identity. People struggle with cultural differences and loss of community. Saeed and Nadia's journey shows this transformation. Saeed becomes more religious and traditional. Nadia becomes independent and open to change. Their identities shift based on their surroundings. Refugee studies explain this as "cultural hybridity." Migrants exist between two worlds. They are not fully part of their homeland or the new land (Bhabha).

War causes permanent psychological displacement. Even in new lands, migrants carry the trauma of war. They remember the violence and loss. Saeed and Nadia feel this burden. They left their home, but the past stays with them. Many real refugees experience this. Studies show that war survivors struggle with mental health. They face anxiety, PTSD, and identity crises. Migration does not erase these wounds. It creates a life of constant adjustment (Hameed et al).

Migration changes identity. It separates people from their past and reshapes their future. *Exit West* captures this transformation. Saeed and Nadia's journey shows the emotional and cultural struggles of migrants. War does not just displace people physically. It also changes their sense of self. The novel highlights the challenges of adapting to new lands. It presents

migration as both a journey and a transformation.

Relevance and Global Migration

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* mirrors today's refugee crises. The novel follows Saeed and Nadia as they flee their war-torn city through magical doors, symbolizing the abrupt displacement many refugees face. This narrative reflects the experiences of millions worldwide forced to leave their homes due to conflict and persecution.

As of mid-2024, over 120 million individuals have been forcibly displaced globally, with 43.7 million classified as refugees. This marks a 1% increase from the end of 2023, driven by ongoing conflicts in countries like Sudan and Ukraine.

War and migration significantly influence global politics. The influx of refugees into Europe has reshaped political landscapes, fueling debates on immigration policies and national security. Some European nations are reconsidering asylum applications and contemplating repatriation efforts.

Hamid humanizes migration by focusing on personal stories. Saeed and Nadia's journey emphasizes the emotional and psychological challenges refugees endure, moving beyond statistics to highlight individual resilience and adaptation. This approach fosters empathy and challenges readers to view migrants as individuals with unique narratives. Current refugee policies vary globally. Some countries have reduced aid and tightened asylum regulations, citing economic and security concerns. These measures often leave refugees in precarious situations, facing limited support and uncertain futures. Public attitudes toward migration are mixed, influenced by economic conditions, media portrayals, and political rhetoric. While some communities welcome refugees, others express apprehension, leading to social tensions and policy shifts.

Exit West offers a poignant reflection on contemporary refugee experiences. By intertwining personal narratives with global migration issues, Hamid challenges readers to empathize with those displaced and consider the broader implications of conflict-induced migration on society and politics.

Conclusion

War, migration, and identity are central to *Exit West*. Mohsin Hamid shows how war forces people to leave their homes and face uncertainty. Saeed and Nadia's journey highlights the struggles of refugees worldwide. They move through different countries, adapting to new cultures while dealing with loss and separation. Migration is not just physical movement but also a transformation of identity. The novel captures the emotional and psychological impact of displacement, showing how it reshapes personal relationships and cultural belonging. Magical realism enhances these themes. The mysterious doors symbolize sudden displacement. They remove the physical journey but emphasize the emotional struggle. This technique helps readers focus on the human side of migration rather than logistics. The doors also represent instability, showing that reaching a new place does not mean immediate security. Hamid blends fantasy with reality to make the refugee experience more universal and relatable. *Exit West* connects to real-world migration issues. It highlights

the struggles of millions of displaced people today. The novel challenges stereotypes and encourages empathy. It also raises important questions about borders, belonging, and the future of migration. In a world where refugees often face discrimination, Hamid presents a story that humanizes them.

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