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교육학석사 학위논문

Passing through Magical Doors, I Was
Never the Same: Identities of Refugees
in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

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2023 년 8 월

서울대학교 대학원

외국어교육과 영어전공

정 유 연

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이 논문을 교육학석사 학위논문으로 제출함

2023 년 8 월

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외국어교육과 영어전공

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Abstract

Exit West of Mohsin Hamid mirrors the devastating war, the surging number of refugees, the worldwide media broadcast, and the intricately globalized world of today. This thesis follows the protagonists, Nadia and Saeed, in their experience of war and migration to follow their different pathways of identity construction. The terrorizing war and their vulnerable states as refugees reflect the clash of ideologies and highlight the lack of liberalistic values and systems for refugee resettlement. Through the experience of vulnerability and changing surroundings, Nadia and Saeed drift apart as Nadia cherishes the multicultural atmosphere of the migrant community while Saeed clings more strongly to national heritage. In their last city of migration, the traits of liberalism in the political, economic, and cultural environment are delineated, which enables the protagonists to finally find a way to belong and construct their identities in a foreign land.

However, Hamid's optimistic ending and his universalization of the refugee experience seem to be cautious steps that blind the readers from seeing the refugee phenomenon with analytic eyes. His universalizing gesture through the device of magical doors and stars removes the need to comprehend the historical, political, and economic causes for the mass displacement of refugees which are intricately woven together. Without comprehending the actual causes, the refugee crisis cannot be addressed and understood correctly, and thus the universalizing gesture resorts to humanitarian empathy instead of bearing responsibility for the crisis as part of a global community.

Even so, the message that Hamid sends through the title *Exit West* calls for an exit from the nativist ideology and the excluding policies of the West. The travel through magical doors counters the divide in the mobility of the present world, and the protagonists' hardships in finding belonging and identity assert that liberalism is a prerequisite for identity and individuality to flower. Thus, their travel portrays how the liberal or suppressing ideological backgrounds of different locations interact with the

process of identity construction of the protagonists.

Keywords: Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West*, migration, refugees, liberalism, identity

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Table of Contents	iii
Introduction: The Identities of Refugees	1
1) Wars and Refugees.....	1
2) Ideologies in the Identity Construction of Migrants	5
3) The Journey of Changing Identities of Nadia and Saeed in <i>Exit West</i>	15
Chapter One: Home. Where the Migration Begins	19
1) Saeed and Nadia in their Homeland.....	19
2) War and the Instigation of Vulnerability.....	24
3) The Duality of Technology in Liberal Existence	26
Chapter Two: Mykonos and London: Diverging Paths of Identity	30
1) Saeed and Nadia's Discrepant Experiences of Vulnerability.....	30
2) Media and Technology as Threats to Liberal Existence	42
Chapter Three: Marin City: The Dream City of Belonging and Identity	46
1) Hope at Last: The City of Intermittent Optimism	46
2) Natives vs. Migrants.....	48
3) Finding a Way to Belong: Nadia and Saeed's New Lovers	50
Conclusion	55
1) The Passage through Magical Doors.....	55
2) Starlit Cities <i>Villes Eteintes</i>	59
3) <i>Exit West</i> ?	64
Works Cited.....	67
Abstract in Korean	70

Introduction: The Identities of War Refugees

1) Wars and Refugees

By mid-2022, an estimated 103 million people were forcibly displaced in the same year according to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). The half-year period has already exceeded the numbers of the previous year by 13.6 million (“UNHCR Mid-Year Trends 2022”). Then, what is a refugee? The UNHCR defines refugees as “People who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country” (“What is a refugee?”). Thus, the cause of the refugee phenomenon is violence and war, which in turn cannot be separated from ideological causes. As the following incidences of refugee crisis show, all economic and political interests and power conflicts are sustained and justified by ideologies that constitute the identity of their followers.

The news media of 2022 was splashed with videos and images of the injured people, explosions, and interviews of the Russo-Ukrainian war, generating nearly 7.9 million refugees fleeing from the crisis (“The Russo-Ukrainian War”). While this war is a fight over territory and gas, these practical interests are backed by nationalistic ideology and ethnic essentialism (“The Russo-Ukrainian War”). While Russia justified its attacks through its public rhetoric as reclaiming what was righteously Russia—describing the soldiers as patriotic volunteers, and portraying fallen soldier’s families in the news—Ukraine fought for its own identity as a separate ethnic group and nation. Even within Ukraine, pro-Russia groups or native Russian speakers were suppressed, replicating the suppression of Russia on Ukrainian territory. Thus, the war on economic profits is justified through patriotic propaganda based on nationalistic ideology.

Another major refugee crisis was caused by the civil war in Syria (“Syria’s Civil War”), which has been continuing for eleven years after the citizens rose against the military regime of the Bashar al-Assad president and its autocratic and kleptocratic rule. Inspired by the overthrowing of dictators in

other surrounding countries, the people of Syria stood up for “the release of political prisoners, an end to the half-century-old state of emergency, greater freedoms, and an end to corruption” (“Syria’s Civil War”). Zachary Laub records the violence that crushed the protesters under the dictators’ foot: the massacres toward unarmed protesters, chemical weapons on civilians, fifteen boys who were arrested and tortured for writing “The people want the fall of the regime” on the school wall, etc. More than half of the country’s pre-war population has been displaced by the staggering number of twelve million people (“Syria’s Civil War”). The ongoing civil war in Syria is a war between the liberal ideology of the oppressed and the ruthless dictatorship of the ruling family.

Likewise, the instigator of the top third refugee crisis in the world was the Civil War in Afghanistan which also involved sectarian conflicts as well as other interests. As the core of identity, religious differences led to violence over what one believes is true. Many more countries in the African continent, including South Sudan, Rohingya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been divided through civil wars that have generated refugees and internally displaced people on the verge of poverty. As these cases of the most refugee-producing wars depict, the worldwide suffering of refugees is, at the most basic and ideological level, about identity and the deprivation of values of liberty.

Ironically, the war backed by ideologies lead to refugees without a stable national ideology to sustain their identity. The defining characteristic of refugees is their statelessness. Giorgio Agamben points out that the statelessness of refugees strips them of their inalienable rights of men (116). In the political world structured by the state-centered system, a pure man without any affiliations to borders and states are unimaginable. Thus, the refugees lose the means of identifying with their national ideology through the loss of citizenship, loss of affiliations to home, and culture indexterity in a foreign land. However, the unimaginability of men without national affiliation conversely also offers a new form of existence by its very liminality and lack of belonging. By losing their former identities connected to their homeland, refugees pass through a stage of ambiguousness.

Furthermore, Victor Turner and Roger Abrahams note that liminal beings assume “a statusless

status, external to the secular social structure, which gives him the right to criticize all structure-bound personae in terms of a moral order binding on all, and also mediate between all segments or components of a system” (116-17). By their very status of non-belonging, the refugee experience brings light to the fictional quality of nationalism and objectively scrutinizes its ideological substance. Agamben states that refugees break up the boundary between “man and citizen, nativity and nationality” and “throw[s] into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty” (117). Sovereignty is based on nativity, the birth within nation-states, and the boundaries of states both consolidate and delimit the power of sovereignty. The refugee, Agamben predicts, forecasts and makes it possible to imagine a new form of space: an aterritorial or extraterritorial space characterized by holes and twists which cannot be divided by borders but have different ethnic groups living alongside and separated from each other simultaneously. It is interesting to note that Agamben describes sovereignty as fiction—as something created by man that can be nullified and recreated into something new.

Similarly, Edward Said notes the fictional quality of national identity and delineates the creation of ideologies as the true strength of the enduring power of the states (*Culture and Imperialism* 36). The power of the states and the preservation of the status quo for the ruling class is efficiently managed by building dual borders of physical boundaries and cultural essentialism. Essential identities of nations are spread through modern technology which broadcasts and disperses various narratives of nationalism through the media. Thus, the liminal form of existence of refugees is a threat to the national ideology of sovereignty.

Said distinguishes between exiles, who are banished from their homeland through an age-old practice, and refugees, which is a political term depicting “large herds of bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance” (*Culture and Imperialism* 144). As exiles and refugees Said describes share a common essence of being displaced, those descriptions of exiles can be applied to refugees. By losing the grounds of national identity, refugees are said to be in a “discontinuous state of being” (*Reflections on Exile* 140) which instigates a pulling need to reconstruct their fractured lives.

Furthermore, Said proclaims that the condition of refugees is “a condition legislated to deny dignity—to deny an identity to people” (*Reflections on Exile* 139). In this statement, identity is comparable to dignity. According to Sukriti Ghosal, identity is a complicated construct consisting of our view of ourselves intermingled with our relations with others (13). Refugees have been disconnected from their past and their past relations in their homeland, and with it has died their previous identity—their previous lives of dignity.

Then, how are refugees denied lives of dignity? Most refugees are denied the essentials of human beings by being on the brink of poverty. Mai-Link Hong reveals that even the refugee regime of today, which self-proclaims itself as consisting of humanitarian organizations induced to helping the refugees, is in actuality more concentrated on stabilizing state borders and reinforcing the very structures that actuate the vulnerabilities of refugees while providing asylum to a selected few (34-35). How then does the refugee regime disguise its actual workings and how are they operated? Hong explicates that the UNHCR proclaims two principles of refugee management: non-refoulment and burden sharing (36). The first principle prohibits nations from turning away refugees in their territory or sending them back to the nations that they have fled from, while the second principle indicates that nations must bear the economic and social burden of accepting large masses of refugees together. Likewise, Betsy Fisher reinstates that refugees not only have a right to asylum that Hong introduces but also a need for “durable solutions” that can help the refugee construct long-term resettlement on a long-term condition (1119). Durable solutions include voluntary repatriation, local integration through access to employment and residence, and resettlement through legal admission.

Fisher explicates the violations of the two principles of refugee management with case studies of the United States, Australia, and the European Union. These nations have taken advantage of the laws of the 1951 Refugee Convention which prohibit nations from penalizing refugees who are within the territory as long as they present themselves to the authorities. These countries have interdicted refugees from arriving at the state territory to avoid violating the convention: they have either turned

them back (US), resettled but in actuality impounded them on a Pacific Island in dire conditions (Australia), or built hot spots to screen refugees before they enter the national territory (EU). The rationale and the justification behind this were to help refugees achieve resettlement. However, resettlement is open to a tiny fraction while masses are turned away from the asylum.

Hong expands the hidden circumvention of humanitarian responsibilities further and depicts how the refugee regime uses “masking narratives” to camouflage its operations as humanitarian (38). She exemplifies how texts like “This Land is Your Land” is based on ideological myths of heroic and humanitarian America and its philanthropy toward the refugees. In contrast to such narratives, the violation of refugee rights stated by the 1951 Refugee Convention is a worldwide phenomenon, forcing the refugees into a state of vulnerability and debased existence.

The masking of the regime is possible because the voices of the refugees are silenced. Instead of hearing their stories, their plights, the difficulty in earning the right of asylum, and the heartbreaking return to their homeland, which only means death or similar consequences, people hear the stories of the salvaged, the gratitude of the minor settled portion towards the host nation, and mostly, the narratives of the regime and the heroic asylum providing nations. The dire conditions of the refugees and their nullified rights strip them of voice and identity. As discontinuous beings, without a newly formed identity and a new way of belonging, they are forlorn, distanced, silenced—masses, but not individuals.

2) Ideologies in the Identity Construction of Migrants

To overcome their discontinuous existence, it is necessary to build a bridge from the old identity towards a new territory of existence. Then, what is identity? Kwame Appiah explicates that identity has two dimensions: collective identity and personal identity. These two interact to form what we know as who we are (Appiah 320). Collective identities refer to “the kinds of people” existing in a society, such as women, butlers, homosexuals, and other labels that cultures have for indicating categories of people.

Complementing the collective dimension of a person is personal identity, such as “intelligence, charm, wit, [and] greed” (Appiah 320). These are features of a person which cannot be explained through general labels like gender, nationality, ethnicity, or religion, but are nevertheless important in defining a being (Appiah 320). However, only collective identities, which are framed by society and culture, pertain to the ideological stance of a person and are thus relevant in exploring the cultural and social identity of refugees. Appiah borrows from Ian Hacking who argues that collective identities are created by nominalizing categories of people and by building discourse around them into identifying characteristics (161). In other words, identities come into being when they are identified, named, and certain expectations and reactions form toward them in a certain society.

In this sense, collective identities are inseparable from grand narratives of ideologies of societies. Therefore, as the refugees migrate to another society, they receive labels that are different from those they had in their homeland and are exposed to other ideologies influencing the new identity construction of the migrants. Four grand ideologies are seen to be unavoidable in comprehending the collective identities of refugees: nationalism, imperialism, multiculturalism, and liberalism. Among these, liberalism combines with other ideologies of identity construction in that it argues that each person has the freedom to develop and flourish his or her sense of identity by choosing an ideology as part of one’s identity.

Nationalism is possibly one of the most widespread identifying ideologies for many who define part of themselves with their national culture. Said describes nationalism as follows: “Self-definition is one of the activities practiced by all cultures: it has a rhetoric, a set of occasions and authorities (national feasts, for example, times of crisis, founding fathers, basic texts, and so on), and a familiarity all its own” (*Culture and Imperialism* 37). Said’s description portrays the core of nationalism as an intricately woven discourse, a creation of a group of people who identify themselves with a certain nationality. Nationalism and exile are described as opposites informing and constituting each other (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 140). While exile is a form of non-belonging, nationalism builds a sense of identity

and affinity through narrated cultural bonds. Said establishes that being a nationalist means that one identifies with the culture and habitus, the collective ethos of a community termed by Pierre Bourdieu, of one's nation (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 140).

According to Said, the culture and political interests of a nation are intertwined and even the same, forming the identity of a nation (*Culture and Imperialism* 57). Culture in this sense forms the core of national identity through the construction of narratives created by its particular history, rhetoric, and aesthetic forms that are connected to the interests and power relations of the nation (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* xii). In other words, culture reflects, supports, and refutes the political interests and power struggles of groups.

Furthermore, culture is "each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* xiii) which could lead to a combative identity based on superiority and a movement calling for returns to tradition. These features of culture demonstrate that the identifying role of culture has a possibility of leading to a selfish drive for national interest as well as promoting exclusiveness and jingoistic fervor that ostracizes others who are labeled as those outside the boundaries of national grouping.

The fictionality of nationality surfaces when culture is revealed to be hybrid and artificially constructed. An example given by Said is the root of Western culture—Greek philosophy. It has the image of pure and privileged Western intelligence but in actuality received its roots from Egyptian, Semitic, and African philosophy that were actively erased by the descending writers (*Culture and Imperialism* 15-16). If the idea of a bounded and pure nationality is fictional, then what the chauvinistic supporters are fighting for is also something unreal, drawing strict lines in a porous and continuously interacting world.

Imperialism is the realization of the sense of chauvinistic superiority, righteousness, and bounded grouping that nationalism has the danger of becoming. It is based on nationalist ideology and

narratives that have circulated repeatedly justifying and strengthening the dominance of one's state over other cultures which are portrayed as less-than-human and in need of European rule. Said describes how racist and ethnocentric views were widely accepted in the era of imperialism through the rhetoric of words like "inferior," "subject races," "subordinate people," "dependency," "expansion," and "authority" (*Culture and Imperialism* 9). These rhetoric were used in the idea of *mission civilisatrice*—that other "uncivilized" cultures "required and beseeched domination" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 9). It was the idea that "manufactured consent" (Chomsky, qtd. in Said *Culture and Imperialism* 286) from the domestic masses who were convinced that they were somehow doing good by providing dominance to the "inferior race" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 286). Imperialism gave moral power to colonial mechanisms which kept the imperial empire continuing despite its costs and inefficiency. In other words, imperialism as culture disguised the economic and political interests of imperialist expansion as a moral obligation and laid the grounds for colonialization. This moral justification is grounded on categorizing people into superior "us" and inferior "them". Khaled Karam argues that "to colonize is to categorize; colonization is based on categorization, so colonists tend to be categorists in their ideology" (304). As with nationalism, the categorization of others outside nationalistic culture as inferior is broken by the reality of permeable boundaries and the inherent hybrid-ness of cultures.

Said ironically notes that it was nationalism that fought imperialist ideology and fueled the move for the independence of colonized nations (*Culture and Imperialism* xiii). In response to the degrading imperialist rhetoric, these nations constructed their history, literature, and ethnography—in other words, their identity—as the base for resisting imperialist rule. Thus, the political struggle between colonizing nations and pre-colonized nations was a struggle backed by ideology—between imperialism and nationalism of the colonizing and the nationalism of the colonized.

Imperialism is still living today as the immense economic rift between the rich and poor countries (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 283). Although the American ascendancy of today avoids the word imperialism, Said identifies the dominance of the U.S. as a repetition of the old European ideology

(*Culture and Imperialism* 322). Said uses Noam Chomsky's expression to describe that America "manufactures consent" through the ideologies of American exceptionalism, altruism, and America as the guard of world peace (*Culture and Imperialism* 286). Accepting imperialism as a reality of the past and present calls for mutual responsibility for refugees who have fled violence, poverty, and conflicts that the Global North is partially responsible for historically and politically.

Nationalism was shown to be the base of both support for and resistance to imperialism through the assertion of the identities of both the colonizing and the colonized nations. However, the conflicts that it has triggered disclose that it is enclosed in its limitations by setting closed boundaries and promoting exclusive and unitary identities that can motivate xenophobic reactions toward outsiders. The interconnected and transnational associations of the world directly disillusion a monolithic national identity with strict boundaries because reality is shown to be much more complicated and intertwined.

Therefore, in this globalized world, multiculturalism is accepted as an irrefutable value in encompassing all ethnicities and exercising tolerance for others. In defining multiculturalism, Steven Vertovec finds that multiculturalism is defined differently in different contexts (3). Vertovec criticizes the 'old' sense of multiculturalism in that it is based on essentialism and represents culture as a "kind of package of collective behavioral-moral-aesthetic traits and customs" (2, 4). In addition, he cites Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's criticism that multiculturalism is based on ethnic minorities, excludes Caucasian cultures, and erects barriers (4-5).

The new multiculturalism he proposes is the description of multiculturalism in "The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain," also known as the "Parekh Report." It acknowledges the reality that refutes essentialist identities and delineates communities and boundaries as porous, overlapping, interconnected, and interactive. The ethnic groups within Britain are both influenced by the main culture and affect it back reciprocally. Diverse communities have different degrees of openness and different strengths of affiliations, with its members having several affiliations to different groups with different degrees. Various affiliations within a person compete, compromise,

and uphold each other, disintegrating boundaries including boundaries between communities and nations. The new multiculturalism accepts this complex picture of interacting societies instead of essentialist and closed models of ethnic groups. Said also comments that all cultures are “hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” (*Culture and Imperialism* xxv), emphasizing their continuously interacting nature. This notion of hybrid culture and the fracturing of essentialism argue against purist and nativist cultures that view refugees as threats to one’s nation, culture, and way of life. Perhaps, acknowledging that our cultural identities are naturally hybrid can help us overcome degrading “the other.”

While multiculturalism focuses on the freedom to engage in diverse interacting cultures, liberalism aims for the autonomy of individual beings. Liberalism is an ideology with many different meanings for different people at different times. Michael Freeden contests that there are various versions of liberalism, such that it should be pluralized as “liberalisms” because it involves concepts that are compatible and incompatible with people stressing different concepts in different ways (4). Confusion rises because the difference may be subtle but also reach conflicting meanings. To categorize the branching and growing meaning of this ideology, it is necessary to distinguish between political liberalism which has developed with historical progress on the coalface (Freeden 38), and philosophical liberalism, where liberalism is accepted as a universal and ideal value of freedom for all (Freeden 94-95). Freeden explicates the political development of liberalism as temporal layers of liberalism that has developed with history (40). The layers have been added over the previous ones but are likened to having holes in them for different users, thereby showing different parts of the previous layers (Freeden 40).

He organizes the history of liberalism into five layers. The first layer proclaims restrained power which protects the people’s rights (Freeden 14). Before the term liberalism was made, proto-liberalism started with the right to say no to oppressive governments while the people’s silence was understood as approval (14). This was the era when the oppression of feudalism, monarchy, and the church became

hard to bear, and movements like the Protestant Reformation stirred the voicing of dissent from the people (Freedden 22). It was only later that the citizens' right to approve and support government action was developed.

Second, liberalism came to mean the freedom of economic activity. As new middle-class manufacturers and entrepreneurs entered the political arena, ideas of free trade and internationalism spread, asserting for laissez-faire stance from the government (Freedden 28). The second layer of liberalism cannot be separated from imperialism, for Freedden explicates that "In that particular version, liberals ingeniously intermingled the colonizing of foreign markets with the sense of a 'civilizing' mission and purpose concerning the wealth-producing, rational, and individualist values across the globe" (43). This idea of free trade and the weak government later bloomed as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism stems from liberalism but argues for "the beneficial consequences of competitive markets and personal advancement far more than general nourishing of human well-being" (Freedden 3). The term neo- springs from the fact that it appeared in the later 20th century, but historically, Freedden's temporal layers of liberalism show that it is the second layer among the five (Freedden 14).

The third layer turned towards a different direction by stressing individual development over time so that unique individuality can bloom and grow at liberty (Freedden 45). The idea of human progress was fueled by the flourishing of education through the growth of universities (Freedden 25) and the Enlightenment, which supported the idea of rational knowledge and the study of human beings (Freedden 26).

As liberalism progressed, the fourth layer proclaimed ideas of social dependence and utilitarianism, calling for the welfare state to guarantee people to be free from deprivation and other disadvantages that block one from achieving one's own identity. To achieve the third layer of liberalism and reach human potential, the barriers to advancement must be exterminated (Freedden 47). As such, the British reformer William Beveridge argued for the eradication of "five giants of 'want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness'" (Freedden 47).

Fifth, the last layer asserts tolerance towards diverse lifestyles and beliefs (Freeden 14). This layer seems to be related to the multicultural trend of the globalized era. Society began to be seen not just as a community of individuals but as interplays between social groups that competed for recognition (Freeden 51).

When viewed together, the third layer complements and mitigates the second layer of infinite competition by stressing social investment towards developing individual capacity, while the fourth stage conflicts with the second by claiming that individual space can be intervened by the government when the welfare of the less opulent are at stake. Thus, the third layer marked a turn in liberalism toward greater government intervention and social reforms. In addition, the idea of cultural freedom of the fifth layer can counter individual freedom of layer three in some cultures that oppress women or deny rights to certain people, or in cases where different groups within a society may clash with one another (Freeden 52-53).

On the philosophical level, Appiah traces and probes the meaning of liberalism by exploring previous liberal philosophers like John Stuart Mill and the philosophies on identity. He expounds that liberalism is a political ideology that enables the development of individuality and identity, evoking the third, fourth, and fifth layers of liberalism. To him, liberalism allows the flowering of individuality, which he expresses as developing oneself as a work of art (317), showing a thread of connection with the third layer of liberalism. Liberalism does not mean providing freedom to arbitrarily do whatever one pleases, but asserts for the shaping of individual life plans and projects through the combination of one's own choices and nature as well as the materials provided by the society (Appiah 320-22).

For an individual to create one's identity, two types of liberty are needed. Appiah cites Isaiah Berlin's concept of negative liberty, the freedom from the government to pursue one's own choices, and positive liberty, the help from the government through education, welfare, and other systems (329). Positive liberty, ringing the tunes of the fourth layer of liberalism, removes the obstacles to actualizing individuality (such as illnesses or poverty) and stimulates and hones one's nature for realizing

individuality through educational systems (Appiah 329). In addition, his insight on personal identity development brings forth the cultural aspect of it since one's choice of what to become is set by labels of specific societies (322). Thus, liberalism as a philosophy is a realization of human identity at the individual, social, and cultural levels, and is asserted to be a universal compass for political entities as "the articulation of the value of a life of dignity: a life as free and equal people, sharing a social world" (Appiah 322).

Liberalism can become an ideology that gives hope to refugees through its universal value of freedom and equality. It gives political justification for supporting refugees by asserting their need for the negative liberty of fleeing from oppressive and dangerous states and the benefits of positive liberty through welfare and essentials. It supports refugee rights and refutes the criminalization of refugees who have crossed borders for safety and affirms their need for durable resolutions that include social and political rights in the society they migrate to.

However, liberalism is promoted within states as a polity of liberal democracy. Seyla Benhabib observes that there is tension within liberal democracy because liberalism asserts universal human rights which is also inscribed in the constitution of the states while democratic intentions could be headed in other directions (443). In other words, the wishes of the democratic polity could conflict with universal humanitarianism. Benhabib states:

'We, the people' refers to a particular human community, circumscribed in space and time, sharing a particular culture, history, and legacy; yet this principle establishes itself as a democratic body by acting in the name of the 'universal.' The tension between universal human rights claims and particularistic cultural and national identities is constitutive of democratic legitimacy. (450)

Even within the state, liberalist parties and right-wing parties differ in their stance towards receiving refugees, with right-wing parties leaning towards democratic demands of protecting its boundaries and prioritizing its citizens. This phenomenon is found in the controversy over receiving refugees in the Global North. In Benhabib's analysis of the political membership of the EU, he writes that giving refugees social rights and even civic rights has ironically instigated backlash from the people and right-

wing politicians against refugee entrance.

Contrary to the constitution which strives for universal values, the sovereign aims to control its borders and screen those entering the borders, contradicting the rights of refugees to seek safety from oppressive situations (Benhabib 443). The monitoring process controls the quality and quantity of refugees crossing borders—the quality pertaining to the capitalist benefits and the social burden the refugee is presumed to import. The predictive hypothesis of refugee settlement by Egon Kunz states that the distance from the native land to the country of asylum and the number of countries the refugees have to cross in their flight act as selective factors: the distance overcome and the quality of refugees are positively related (51). In other words, refugees who enjoy higher social status and greater wealth will have more mobility across state borders. Border control means that the state will put its interests and welfare before universal humanitarianism. Behind the curtains of the political narrative on border control and refugee screening stands neoliberalism and the ultimate capitalist value of private property.

According to Josephine Carter, neoliberalism insists that the ideal being is autonomous and self-dependent and blames the suffering people for their inadequacies and failures (621). She states that the competitive atmosphere of neoliberalism promotes a climate of precarity by kindling the anxiety of others and fear of the threats to property from the outside (621). The neoliberal government offers a privilege of protection distributed according to the degrees of wealth and portrays the refugees as the ultimate threat to property from the outside (Carter 621). The capitalist reason is packaged as propaganda asserting the protection of our way of life, which dehumanizes the refugees who are already suffering from deprivation and physical danger.

In doing so, the neoliberal political climate labels the refugees as those outside the realm of empathy or as receivers of humanitarian aid (Carter 622-23) and adds to the ordeal of identity construction of the newcomers to the land. Countering the neoliberal narrative and the narratives of categorizing is the novel *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid, who gives voice to the refugees who are not different from non-refugees and delineates their changing identities through their story of migration.

3) The Journey of Changing Identities of Nadia and Saeed in *Exit West*

Exit West is the fourth novel by Mohsin Hamid. It begins in a nameless country with two ordinary protagonists: a woman named Nadia and a man named Saeed. As they gradually become closer and fall in love, their city falls under violence from the conflict between the government and military forces. These politically unspecified forces seep into the city through surveillance and violence. The violence pushes them into deciding to move to other countries for survival.

Like most refugee crises, a war pushes the protagonists into becoming refugees. While the specific ideological clashes of the war are left undescribed, the different characteristics of Nadia and Saeed stand for different value systems of identity. Their yet fuzzy ideological stance meets crisis through forced migration, and their search for identity throughout the journey is inseparable from the ideological choices they make to define themselves.

What makes this novel unique is that they do not move by hazardous routes on ships on the sea or hidden in trucks, but through magical doors that mysteriously begin to appear around the world. Stepping into the door, they find themselves somewhere else on the globe. The darkness of the door makes it unpredictable where they will end on the other side, and so their migration begins.

In their home country, Nadia is a woman in a culturally Islamic society but resists the labels given to women in her culture by striving for independence while Saeed is a pleasant man who sufficiently belongs to the way of life in his home. Nadia and Saeed move through the door three times and their identities go through changes and developments in their different locations. Said's description of exiles as discontinuous beings (*Reflections on Exile* 140) shows that their identity has lost coherence. In facing drastic changes in their environment—the end of relations with people they have left behind, the discarding of their previous social status, and the deprivation of familiarity with the surrounding culture—they face the death of their previous selves and the burden of new selves to create. Refugees have a greater burden than other migrants in that they face threats to their survival itself when basic

needs are not met while other natives treat them with hostility and resentment. Hamid describes their changing identities as illuminated screens that change shades by reflecting their surrounding:

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. So it was Saeed and Nadia, who found themselves changed in each other's eyes in this new place. (Hamid, *Exit West* 186)¹

In this thesis, the changing identities of Nadia and Saeed will be delved into by the city they travel through. In their home city, as the war spurs them into vulnerable states, their differing backgrounds and personalities indirectly reveal their possible ideological stance and cultural affinity. As the war heightens the vulnerability of the people, Nadia and Saeed display contrasting reactions toward their fluctuating safety and privacy. Noteworthy is the role of media and technology in rendering citizens vulnerable through surveillance and propaganda, while also strengthening the people by connecting them through mobile phones.

The next chapter reveals the discontinuous and yet continuous identities of the protagonists in their first and second destinations through the magical doors: Mykonos and London. Although the location has changed, their defenseless state and the violence surrounding them seem to stay the same, reflecting that the ideological stance of nationalism and nativism which triggers bigotry is the same for the nativists and the nationalistic migrants. Saeed and Nadia portray discrepant experiences of vulnerability, and this is mirrored in their relationship with the people around them, as well as their relationship with each other.

The last city, Marin City, is the place where Nadia and Saeed finally find a way to belong in a new society and thereby construct an identity for themselves. Marin City is where different cultures peacefully coexist and interact, and where diverse groups and affiliations are accepted, making it a city of possibility and hope. As Nadia and Saeed finally end their long migration away from each other and

¹ Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* will from onwards be cited by page number only.

no longer stand as couples, they meet new lovers who are mirrors of their newly formed identities.

The love between couples is one of the strongest bonds which are not given by blood or forced by circumstances, but springs from the deepest aspect of who we are. Hamid chooses to follow the migration of a refugee couple to depict how the shared homeland and experience of war can bring a couple together, and how their different paths of identity construction can finally drift them apart. The differences between the couple at their homeland stands for their possible different ideological stance in their identities, with Nadia showing traits that oppose her culture and Saeed portraying affiliation to national culture. The lack of liberal values in their homeland politics pushes the couple to escape their dire conditions. Once they move through the doors, their difference amplifies, revealing their different ideologies in identity construction. Their move through the doors does not change their illiberal existence due to bigotry from the natives and the migrants, which stem from ideological roots which categorize people into “us” and “them”.

In addition, Hamid depicts how technology plays a key role in oppressing the people through surveillance and the dissemination of political propaganda while also promoting liberal existence by connecting people to their community, and ultimately to the world. Thus, this dual-sided knife plays the role of suppressing liberalism while realizing the fourth layer of liberalism and multiculturalism within communities. The different cities the protagonists migrate to depict the different roles of technology in its relation to liberal values.

Although Nadia and Saeed share the experience of becoming refugees moving from place to place in search of a new home, which has the power of bringing people together, their different paths of identity construction and their receding relationship depict that traveling through time and space, people discover and create themselves in diverse ways. The freedom of culture and lifestyle that Nadia cherishes and the clinging to the traditional national values of Saeed, and their eventual obtainment of belonging send the message that there is no one answer for refugee identity and that they are no different from non-refugees in their creation of the self. As Appiah proclaims, the important thing is that one has

chosen the path for oneself (317). Marin City, the last city they settle in, allows such freedom of individuality and depicts the actualization of liberalism which has been lacking throughout their travels. Hamid demonstrates that the necessary move is the construction of a political, social, and economic environment where refugees can enjoy the liberty to choose and construct their own identities. Overall, *Exit West* exposes how the absence or realization of the different layers of liberalism, as well as its relationship with other ideologies, can effect the shaping the Nadia and Saeed's individuality and identity.

CHAPTER ONE. Home: Where the Migration Begins

1) Saeed and Nadia in Their Homeland

From the beginning, Nadia and Saeed show many contrasting traits. If relationships are constituted of differences as well as similarities, Nadia and Saeed are brought together by similarities based on their common place and experience of a devastating civil war. However, as Michael Perfect observes, Saeed's studious beard reveals his carefulness and seriousness while Nadia's flowing black robe shows that she is "guarded but elegant and laid back" (190). Another description of Saeed ironically shows his dependent character: "He was an independent-minded, grown man, unmarried, with a decent post and a good education, and as was the case in those days in his city with most independent-minded, grown men, unmarried, with decent posts and good educations, he lived with his parents" (9-10). Men are expected and labeled as independent-minded in society, but Saeed is not only intimately close with his parents but is also continually molded by their examples in his devotion to prayer, clinging to the past, and his love of his ethnicity.

In contrast, Nadia lives alone despite the social prejudice and dangers lurking for women who live alone. Her independence costs her the relationship with her family: she never sees them again after the fight induced by her statement that she will live alone. Her black robe is a means of protection so that she can live an independent life: when Saeed asks why she wears it if she doesn't pray, she answers, "So men don't fuck with me" (17). In times when even independent-minded and grown men live with their parents, she chooses a life by herself in an uncomfortable little flat that has "an alcove kitchenette and a bathroom so small that showering without drenching the commode was impossible" (27-28). Nadia doesn't mind the discomfort when it buys her freedom, and this makes her different and stand out from the people of her culture.

Unlike Saeed, who enjoys close ties with his family and coworkers, Nadia is aloof from both relations. The last days of work for Saeed and Nadia display contrasting camaraderie. For Saeed,

“Saeed’s boss had tears in his eyes as he told his employees that he had to shutter his business, apologizing for letting them down . . . All agreed he was a fine and delicate man, worryingly so, for these were not times for such men” (70). In contrast, Nadia’s departure is more practical than tearful: “At Nadia’s office the payroll department stopped giving out paychecks and within days everyone stopped coming. There were no real goodbyes or at least none that she was part of, and since the security guards were the first to melt away, a sort of calm looting, or payment-in-hardware, began” (70).

The differences between the protagonists can be analyzed by two of Kunz’s categories for classifying refugees: identification/marginality and attitude to flight and homeland (44). Among the groups in identification/marginality, Saeed can be classified as “the majority-identified refugee” who identifies with the nation, although not with the current government, while Nadia is partly “events-alienated” and partly “self-alienated” (42-43). Events-alienated refugees are those who have been set off from the majority either by events leading to refugeehood or past discrimination (Kunz 43). Similar but different, self-alienated refugees have voluntarily alienated themselves due to ideological choice (Kunz 43).

Nadia is discriminated against as a woman and further alienates herself through her free-wheeling personality, showing that her alienation is partly caused by self-will. The scene where Nadia walks out of the house shows her marginality in society: “She stood naked, as she had been born, and put on her jeans and T-shirt and sweater, ready to resist the claims and expectations of the world, and stepped outside to go for a walk in a nearby park that would by now be emptying of its early-morning junkies and of the gay lovers . . .” (48). Her will to fight the norms of the society links her in the same marginality as drug users and homosexuals, a.k.a. the alienated of society. Her acquaintances are those “among the city’s free spirits, and a connection to a discreet and nonjudgmental female gynecologist” (23), or those outside the mainstream culture. Even before she becomes a refugee, she is already a liminal being neither belonging to nor outside the place she was born in. From this perspective, her black robe resembles what liminal entities wear during the rites of passage, whom Turner and Abrahams describe

as the following: “They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system . . . ” (95). The weak and lowly status, or the blank state of liminal beings is expressed through appearance. Nadia also uses blank facades on the internet: “Nadia frequently explored the terrain of social media, though she left little trace of her passing, not posting much herself, and employing opaque usernames and avatars, the online equivalents of her black robes” (41).

While Nadia’s descriptions are centered around her individual character, Hamid delineates the character of Saeed indirectly through descriptions of his parents. Saeed can be classified as a majority-identified man because his personality is shaped by the people around him, who act as communicators of social norms and cultural values. While the only description of Nadia’s family is the disapproval of her father towards her and the obedience of her other siblings, the past of Saeed’s parents—their love story, their previous jobs, and their conversation with their son—are recorded. The respectful and modest career of his mother as a schoolteacher and his father as a university professor shape Saeed’s morality while their life-long love portrays the loving and caring character he is to Nadia in their home country.

The protagonists’ difference is illuminated in their psychological response to leaving their home. Saeed feels the loss of leaving “his extended family and his circle of friends and acquaintances” (94), reflecting his departure as pertaining to “the reactive fate-groups” in Kunz’s category of “attitude to flight and homeland,” who identify with the majority of their people but leave because of “sudden revolutionary changes and expulsions” (Kunz 44). Contrastingly, Nadia feels apprehension about the possibility of dependence, that “she and Saeed and Saeed’s father might be at the mercy of strangers, subsistent on handouts, caged in pens like vermin” (94). Their fears reflect what is important to them, and it is the personal relationships and social bounds for Saeed and independence for Nadia. Nadia’s relative state of feeling “more comfortable with all varieties of movement in her life” (94) depict that

although she cannot be strictly categorized as a “purpose group” who voluntarily leave their homes, her migration is not just simply a reaction to forced violence.

Nadia’s unrestricted character and Saeed’s strict recognition of borders are reflected in their usage of their mobile phones and their attitude toward sex. Nadia tends to satisfy her desires without boundaries while Saeed indulges himself within set borders. In using the internet, “Nadia saw no need to limit her phone. It kept her company on long evenings . . . ” (41). On the contrary, Saeed feels the lure of the magic of the phone too powerful that he only uses the basic utilities except for one hour of surfing every day: “But the hour was tightly regulated, and when it ended, a timer would set off an alarm, gentle, windy chime, as though from the breezy planet of some blue-shimmering science fiction priestess, and he would electronically lock away his browser . . . ” (40). Saeed controls and restrains himself inside the limits of what he deems acceptable. The addictiveness of the phone is a device of pleasure for Nadia while it is both pleasure and danger to Saeed, dangerous because it has the power to make him lose self-control.

When Nadia and Saeed’s relationship deepens into that of lovers, it is Saeed who stops their sexual relationship. Like his indulgence with his phone, Saeed enjoys the sexual affections he shares with Nadia, but only to the extent that he deems acceptable, which is that they shouldn’t have sex before marriage. This mirrors the past of Saeed’s parents, who “did not have sex until their wedding night” (13). Saeed’s will to keep his chastity is something prescribed because he suggests “they do nothing that was disrespectful to his parents . . . always stopping short of sex, upon which she no longer insisted, and which they had by now found ample means to circumvent” (85). His determination to stay within the borders is out of his respect for his parents and his social, and religious culture at large, which is communicated via his dialog with his parents.

Saeed’s insistence on marriage before a physical relationship illuminates his need for stability and system in relation. His initial response to Nadia’s question “Are you saying you want to get married?” was an unromantic “To anyone, really” (65), reflecting that marriage itself has importance to him

separately from the marriage with a certain person he loves. Nadia's blended emotional reaction of tenderness and "something that struck her as akin to resentment" (65) shows her feelings of affection for Saeed as well as one of the first initial sensations of the difference lying between them.

Their pleasure and sense of awe taken from narcotic shrooms is an area of common enjoyment for Nadia and Saeed because his parents and his educational and social bearing had not mentioned drugs, rendering him to feel no need to restrain himself. The shrooms, and the illegality of them in the militarized area, show Nadia's boldness in reaching the ends to find means of pleasure and happiness in her own way. It shows who Nadia is in a compacted fashion, for Nadia always retains her optimism and joy, even in dire circumstances after becoming a refugee. Being outside the value system set by society, following pleasure and enjoyment is a value system she has chosen, representing her identity at large.

Since a young schoolgirl, Nadia liked art, a subject that allows free expression and allows one to aesthetically cross borders, and in the religious house that she grew up in, her character was hard to bear. Her father, who strived to be a quiet man, grew angry with her because "her constant questioning and growing irreverence in matters of faith upset and frightened him" (22).

Nadia's independent living and ensuing vulnerability has made her keen on survival and attentive to the practical needs necessary for it, while Saeed's dependency on his parents has made him less practical and unready for the vulnerable experience of becoming a refugee. On the night before their departure, Nadia employs herself in practical matters like checking the baggage while Saeed nostalgically touches the objects he is leaving behind, packs memoranda, and prays (101-02). This difference drastically surfaces once the journey begins. In the face of becoming vulnerable, Nadia is much braver due to her plentiful experience of vulnerability as a liminal being. On their way to meet the agent of the magical door, the flying robots make Saeed walk with "a slight hunch" while Nadia "walk[s] tall" (88). The daunting mood of the burnt-out shopping center where they promised to meet makes Saeed regret taking Nadia along while Nadia wishes she had brought a knife (89).

The differences between Nadia and Saeed are the harbinger of what is to come and their eventual separation. Out of the twelve chapters in the novel, the protagonists are in their homeland during the first five, falling in love and being trapped in escalating danger. The magical doors open their underlying traits to the discovery and development of their disparate identities.

2) War and the Instigation of Vulnerability

Before people like Nadia and Said become refugees, there is war, and war brings about vulnerability. Carter notes how Hamid portrays the mutual vulnerability of refugees and non-refugees through the first vignette of a dark man passing through the door (628-29). *Exit West* intermits the main story throughout the novel with short vignettes of seemingly unconnected people whose only common feature is that they travel through magical doors or are influenced by the migrants of magical doors. The first of these vignettes depicts a white woman sleeping alone in her room. Carter writes that Hamid uses the subtlest expressions to create a sense of unease, and with the emergence of a dark man through the dark door, Hamid arouses a sense of sexual assault involving “the trope of black men raping a white woman” (628-29). However, Hamid cunningly turns this trope around and presents the man as the vulnerable figure who “wished only not to be heard” through the excruciating passage through the magical door which leaves him like a “newborn foal” (9). Hamid narrates that “[h]e was aware that alone a person is almost nothing. The woman who slept, slept alone. He who stood above her, stood alone” (9). Thus, the mutual vulnerability of the man and the woman is formed, and this vulnerability connects all humanity through the consciousness of one another’s precariousness.

Other vignettes also portray the vulnerable situation of refugees. In the second vignette, Filipinas emerge from a door in the Tokyo district of Shinjuku, dressed in tropical clothes and talking in Tagalog. A man, who is likened to and is possibly a gangster, is described as follows: “The man wore a suit and a crisp white shirt and therefore any tattoos he had or did not have on his arms would not be

visible”; “an Irish gangster film he had gone to see repeatedly in his still-impressionable youth”; and “Gazes leapt away from his gaze, as they might among packs of dogs in the wild, in which hierarchy is set by some sensed quality of violent potential” (29). This man follows the girls fingering a metal in his hand. By entering another territory, the Filipinas face bigotry and potential violence from this native man. The phrases—“They were in his territory” and “He disliked Filipinos” (31)—imply his territory as a gangster but could also dually mean his national territory, reflecting his xenophobic reactions based on notions of nationalism, whose core is essentialist identity (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 311).

For Nadia and Saeed, the vulnerability of refugees begins even before they become refugees in the events leading up to their choices, or more truthfully, their coercion into escaping their country. It begins at the start of the novel—“In a city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war” (3)—and escalates with mounting tension and violence between the military and the government forces. The infrequent shootings, which felt like “subsonic vibration” (4), become “evisceratingly real” (31) once their acquaintances are killed by the conflict. Quotidian lives are put to a stop as Saeed and Nadia go to work for the last time. War becomes “an intimate experience” (68), and finally, even the privacy of homes is in danger from unexpected bullets flying through the windows. Pérez Zapata cites the statement in *Beyond Victimhood* that refugees suffer from threefold violence: “the violence of the country fled . . . the violence of the perilous journey, and the violence of unstable and uncertain lives” (768). Zapata describes the refugees’ effort to retain the quotidian as a means “to preserve their humanity” (767). The destruction of the quotidian is highlighted when Saeed’s mother dies—a bullet pierces her while she is finding an earring in her car—and when the neighbor upstairs is killed and his blood seeps through the ceiling into Saeed’s house. These descriptions debunk the myth of refugees as “opportunistic parasites” (Carter 632). They are acting out of necessity and dire conditions for survival (Carter 632).

The war pushes Saeed to his limits and his crossing of the border of chastity is the harbinger of his crossing through the magical doors. The incident that pushes him over the line is the dead neighbor’s

blood seeping through his ceiling and “A combination of horror and desire subsequently impelled him back each evening, despite his earlier resolution . . .” (85) and the execution of unmarried lovers induce urgency based on terror, bringing each coupling “a strange sort of ecstasy” (86). Had it not been for the war, and the tendency in which terror and entrapment in the house bring people closer together, their relationship might not have escalated with the speed and urgency it does.

The first layer, and the most fundamental and prerequisite layer of liberalism is violated as governmental and military forces clash with the core concept of limited and accountable power to the point of risking the lives of citizens. Denying them the choice to flee would additionally transgress their rights to make choices for one’s life. It is also committed by the militants who proclaim that “any attempt to use one [magic door] or keep one a secret had been proclaimed by the militants to be punishable, as usual and somewhat unimaginatively, by death, . . .” (88). Likewise, the attempts of the states to strengthen its borders, although futile in the novel, is commensurable to the militant’s efforts to block passage.

3) The Duality of Technology in Liberal Existence

Another key factor that compels the refugees to become vulnerable is surveillance, especially surveillance through modern technology like drones and surveillance cameras. Surveillance is ubiquitous around the globe, starting from Nadia and Saeed’s home country. Both the militants and the government forces use surveillance as a means of oppression and control over citizens. Hamid conjuncts the oppression of flying robots above Nadia and Saeed with the vignette of a Tamil family being monitored on camera to show that surveillance of the helpless is a worldwide phenomenon. The vignette is solely narrated from the viewpoint of surveillance camera feeds, and the family is carried away: “A small quadcopter drone was hovering fifty meters above them now, too quiet to be heard, and relaying its feed to a central monitoring station and also to two different security vehicles, . . . along a trajectory

that would intersect with that of the Tamil-speaking family in a minute or so” (92). Juxtaposed to this family is the surveillance on Saeed and Nadia: “[they] enjoyed a degree of insulation from remote surveillance when they were indoors, owing to their lack of electricity, but even so their home could still be searched by men without warning, and of course as soon as they stepped outside they could be seen by the lenses peering down on their city from the sky and space, and by the eyes of militants, and of informers, who might be anyone, everyone” (93). The trespassing of privacy extends even to the most basal acts of “emptying their bowels,” which is done outside due to no piped water, and people face the ground so that even if they are seen by drones, their identity is kept hidden (93).

Maria-Irina Popescu and Asma Jahamah assert that the state’s surveillance resembles Michel Foucault’s panopticon, which creates power order by rendering the individual an object of information, which is seen but never sees, and is blocked from being a subject of communication (138). The inequality is exercised in two ways with the Tamil family: between the colored migrant family and the mostly Caucasian tourists, whom the border control is careful not to alarm; and between the watchers and the monitored family. The monitoring allows the security to effectively intersect them and capture the family, and, for the militants, repress any rebellious force. Popescu and Jahamah state that the only way to overcome the panopticon is to break the walls through empathy and acknowledgment of sameness among individuals (138).

However, technology also strengthens people by connecting them and bringing the world into their hands. In the dire circumstances of war where wandering could lead to physical danger, technology kindles and fuels the protagonists’ love before Nadia decides to move into Saeed’s apartment.

Saeed and Nadia’s changing identity is in sync with their migration toward and away from each other. Their relationship is mirrored in their use of technology and the conversations they share. In describing the relation between phones and distance, Claire Chambers claims that “[t]heir phones help them keep their distance while at the same time connecting them” (220). Technology has a dual function of both connecting people from distances and distancing people who are physically within the sensory

boundaries. In other words, it gives people an ample amount of choice of where to be, for they may be physically in one place appreciating the reality around them but also mentally roam the endless hyperlinked pathways of the internet. Hamid describes the bountiful pieces of information on the internet for Saeed as “too mesmerizing as though he were eating a banquet of limitless food, stuffing himself, stuffing himself, until he felt dazed and sick, and so he had removed or hidden or restricted all but a few applications” (40).

Chambers explicates that Nadia and Saeed’s first date illustrates their interest in each other through their act of putting down their phones “like weapons of parley” (219). However, when they are apart, their phones act as the key means of their communication and deepen their relationship. Saeed’s phone is described as follows:

Yet even this pared-back phone, this phone stripped of so much of its potential, allowed him to access Nadia’s separate existence, at first hesitantly, and then more frequently, at any time of day or night, allowed him to start to enter into her thoughts . . . he became present without presence, and she did much the same to him. Soon a rhythm was established, and it was thereafter rare that more than a few waking hours would pass without contact between them . . . They had begun, each of them, to be penetrated, but they had not yet kissed. (40-41)

The reliance of their relationship on the phones is highlighted when the government eliminates all the signals and disconnects its citizens, making Saeed and Nadia lose contact without knowledge of each other’s company location: “Deprived of the portals to each other and to the world provided by their mobile phones, and confined to their apartments by the nighttime curfew, Nadia and Saeed, and countless others, felt marooned and alone and much more afraid” (57). It is only through Saeed’s constant search for Nadia’s number through the call service and his travel to her house that they are again connected. By dividing and slicing the finely and intricately interconnected society, the government violates the fourth layer of liberalism—the basic sustaining needs of humans to connect with each other—rendering them vulnerable. After the disconnection, people start to vanish, without people knowing why or where, showing that disconnecting makes people more easily targeted to violence (69).

Thus, technology acts as a tool that both hinders and promotes liberal existence through surveillance and connection, depending on the purpose it is used for. The heightening surveillance and the total disconnection of signals depict the downfall of liberal lives in Nadia and Saeed's hometown through the kleptocratic ruling of both the military and the government forces. To the citizens of the home country, it is not the conflicting political stance of these forces which matters, but their ideological divide and oppression of liberal values which calls in "localities thought not merely to be occupied but disloyal" (70) and forbids people to talk about the vanished ones (69). The passage through magical doors is an escape from the illiberal existence portrayed through the technological usage of the power holders.

CHAPTER TWO. Mykonos and London: Diverging Paths of Identity

1) Saeed and Nadia's Discrepant Experiences of Vulnerability

Passing through magical doors, Nadia and Saeed become refugees in Mykonos, and then in London. Amanda Lagji explains that one of the ways in which refugees are made vulnerable is through waiting. She adopts a new mobilities paradigm that views waiting and motion as overlapping and dependent states. Refugees are subjected to modes of waiting in refugee camps and are stalled in liminal states by power relations which cause friction in movement, defined as the slowing and stalling of movement by authorities (Lagji 221). By waiting, refugees are forced to become passive instead of active and be attributed feminine states instead of masculinity, thereby showing that they are not threats to national security. Nadia and Saeed experience the forced waiting without clear deadlines twice: the first time in the refugee camp in Mykonos, and the second time in a work camp in London.

Mykonos housed many refugees from magical doors from diverse “poor countries,” while those to wealthy nations were heavily guarded (106). Without access to social rights such as employment, settlement, or social welfare, they are forced to use the resources and the money they brought, nudging them towards resorting to debased forms of existence: “Their funds were growing thinner, more than half the money with which they had left their city now gone. They better understood the desperation they saw in the camps, the fear in people’s eyes that they would be trapped here forever, or until hunger forced them back through one of the doors that led to undesirable places . . . ” (115). The refugee regime is far from complete without Fisher’s durable solutions (1119) or Appiah’s assertion of the need for positive liberty (329). Saeed and Nadia resort to shortening their wandering to save energy requiring food and drink. Their experience of being followed by rough-looking men at dusk after trying to acquire food through fishing (116) depicts their lack of protection from the social infrastructure and law. Nadia and Saeed’s case shows that they lack not only social rights such as health insurance, educational and housing subsidies, and retirement benefits but also political and civic rights that give one the power to participate in the community’s fate (Benhabib 455).

Nadia and Saeed escape the dire state of dwindling resources and the absence of physical protection by passing a second door with the help of a native girl of Mykonos. They first arrive at an empty but luscious mansion in London and become squatters with other migrants who come through the door in the house. The stark contrast between the previous deprivation and the current house of dream seems almost unreal, highlighting the gap between the deprived Global South and the affluent Global North.

However, they are encircled by nativist mobs and violence breaks out, which reminds Nadia of the militants back home. They experience being physically hurt by the nativist mobs and being cut off from electricity, water, and transportation. The latter feels different from the similar experience back home. While it was a common experience for all in their nation, it is selectively and ruthlessly aimed at migrants: “But in London there were parts as bright as ever, brighter than anyplace Saeed or Nadia had seen before, glowing up into the sky and reflecting down again from the clouds, and in contrast the city’s dark swaths seemed darker, more significant, the way that blackness in the ocean suggests not less light from above, but a sudden drop-off in the depths below” (146). Liliana Naydan states that this portrays the duality of the digital divide: people of color vs. people who are white; no electricity vs. electricity; the disenfranchised and unwelcome inhabitants vs. the sanctioned and empowered Londoners (441).

Given that western politics are realizations of underpinning liberal values, Saeed and Nadia are excluded from social infrastructure because they are not considered one of the members of the society, for they are not citizens. According to Max Weber’s definition of citizenship, citizenship consists of “unity of residency, administrative subjection, and democratic participation and cultural membership” (Benhabib 454). The citizen has the right to reside in the sovereign territory, is subject to its laws and procedures, is culturally homogenous, and issues laws by its name (Benhabib 454). However, transnational migrations, legal and illegal, crumble the concept of the unity of residency, and the globalized world of today disintegrates cultural homogeneity. The disaggregation of modern citizenship

can be found in the case of Nadia and Saeed in the form of the division and disproportionate distribution of these properties (459).

Another factor that contributes to their vulnerability as refugees or third-world immigrants, as Naydan explicates, is race (441). According to Benhabib, whereas the migrants from other EU nations exercise civic and political rights throughout the continent (456), migrants from the third world and their second-generation progeny are permanently alienated from political membership (458). The dark-skinned family surveilled through cameras after passing through a magical door in the vignette also shows the one-sided violence of racism (43). To Hong, the dark figures are depicted as “insubstantial, lost in the aura of whiteness” in the desert sun, which designates them as being less than liberal and agential subjects in the environment controlled by Caucasian authorities (43).

In sum, the loss of citizenship and the migrants’ different race leaves them unprotected and powerless in the face of nativist violence. Fortunately, in *Exit West*, the nativist mobs suddenly recline back from encircling the migrants. Instead of facing death, Nadia and Saeed end up in working camps, which assign them on a waiting list for “forty meters and a pipe: a home on forty square meters of land and a connection to all the utilities of modernity” (170). Popescu and Jahamah (2020) describe this as “un-/underpaid labor” that degrades Nadia and Saeed into “biological bodies” that natives and surveillance have control over (137). However, for migrants in the camp, forty meters and a pipe are a hopeful promise of giving them the right to settlement and connection to the community. The workers’ camp partially gives them natural rights in liberalism: it provides the right of employment, though not a choice for the type, and social rights of settling in the country, preventing them from being criminalized as illegal residents. It compromises between absolute othering and the bestowment of citizenship.

Although both Nadia and Saeed are thus forced to become vulnerable through waiting and racial prejudice, their differences outlined in Chapter One lead to different psychological reactions towards their vulnerable states and display contrasting patterns. Nadia doesn’t lose optimism or her old lively

self during the dire experience and builds friendships and communities with people of other cultures. Moreover, between the couple, Nadia is the one who adopts and leads the survival, while becoming dependent on her and vulnerable as a foreigner with no stable occupation makes Saeed an acid and brittle man. On their destination past the first door, the island of Mykonos, Nadia puts her sleeves up to continue her survival. It is continued because she was already endeavoring for survival in the nation of her birth. She deals with the practical issues of gathering items: “The first things Saeed and Nadia bought, Nadia doing the negotiating, were some water, food, blanket, a larger backpack, a little tent that folded away into a light, easily portable pouch, and electric power and local numbers for their phones” (107). Nadia interacts with other refugees arriving from around the world to attain what they need. She even suggests exploring the island as tourists would (113) and enjoys her situation in difficult times.

Contrarily, Saeed resents Nadia’s optimism, feeling like a “bad son” (107). He refuses Nadia’s kiss angrily. Nadia is surprised:

because what she thought she had glimpsed in him in that moment was bitterness, and she had never seen bitterness in him before, not in all these months, not for one second, even when his mother had died, then he had been mournful, yes, depressed, but not bitter, not as though something was corroding his insides. He had in fact always struck her as the opposite of bitter, so quick to smile . . . for it struck her that a bitter Saeed would not be Saeed at all. (107-08)

From the first migration, Nadia observes the changes in Saeed and his bitterness caused by losing the stable grounds—his family, friends, culture, work, and society—on which his identity was based. Nadia’s stability of mood and disposition reflects the fact that her identity was not grounded on the location of her birth. This difference is also reflected in their appearance. While Saeed trims off his beard which was kept in custom according to the custom of beards, Nadia still wears her black robe, which was her camouflage and protection as a vulnerable being. Considering that appearance sends a message to others in the society, Saeed keeps his beard for conformation to the national culture while Nadia keeps wearing the black robe as a means of survival and anonymity.

As a person who was originally liminal and vulnerable, Nadia accepts the people in the refugee camp well. Meeting people without the labels of society opens a genuine relation for her in Mykonos.

In contrast, Saeed trusts only old acquaintances from their homeland, but one of them deceives Saeed and Nadia by promising a door out of the island's endless depletion of resources, takes their money, and disappears. It is Nadia's new friend, a volunteer girl at the old town where locals live, that saves the couple from deprivation by leading them to another door. Saeed, to whom acquaintances based on kinship are more familiar, "is surprised to see what appeared to be tears in the girl's eyes" (118) and a truly unselfish act of friendship. In short, Saeed's experience of vulnerability in the refugee camp unnerves him. His anxiety is expressed through anger (107) and bitterness (108).

Their next stay in London amplifies the difference even more, where they become illegal squatters in a luxurious but empty house. Nadia feels the experience of living in the house with other migrants from around the world to be like "a university dormitory at the start of classes" (131) and thinks that a possible community could emerge. The house they are living in is called "the Nigerian house" because most of its migrant residents are Nigerians. Nadia becomes part of the council by helping an old woman of the council go up the stairs, and she realizes that Nigeria only exists *pro forma*.

she understood that Nigerians were in fact not all Nigerians, some were half Nigerians, or from places that bordered Nigeria, from families that spanned both sides of a border, and further that there was perhaps no such thing as a Nigerian, or certainly no one common thing, for different Nigerians spoke different tongues among themselves, and belonged to different religions. . . . they spoke different variations of English, different Englishes, and so when Nadia gave voice to an idea or opinion among them, she did not need to fear that her views would not be comprehended, for her English was like theirs, one among many. (148)

With the boundaries of Nigeria porous and frayed, a global and multicultural community emerges.

Nadia's community is a small world, and it is here that she finds both common humanity and differences of the other: "she found these people were both like and unlike those she had known in her city, familiar and unfamiliar, she found them interesting, and she found their seeming acceptance of her, or at least tolerance of her, rewarding, an achievement in some way" (148-49). Karam describes Nadia's way of building relationships as "reciprocal self-consciousness," a concept by Franz Fanon (313). Reciprocal self-consciousness is based on fuzzy and non-categorical borders, where distinct cultural identities are acknowledged but understood to be fluid and porous, enabling the common humanity to

stand out (Karam 308). Karam cites Fanon's explication that "It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend" (308). Nadia's predisposition to cross borders helps her to reach out to others who are of different cultural and social backgrounds, and a genuine friendship and community develop. The mutual acknowledgment and respect allow the reciprocal self-consciousness of the Nigerian council to flower, and this paves the way for multiculturalism and liberal values to flourish within the house.

To Nadia, her home culture and country have never been her home in her heart and soul. She refuses to move into the house where migrants from her home are residing, saying "They're not like me" (153). Despite the constant hunger and native hostility of refugee life, she prefers the multicultural Nigerian house:

she saw all these people of all these different colors in all these different attires and she was relieved, better here than there she thought, and it occurred to her that she had been stifled in the place of her birth for virtually her entire life, that its time for her had passed, and a new time was here, fraught or not, she relished this like the wind in her face on a hot day when she rode her motorcycle and lifted the visor of her helmet and embraced the dust and the pollution and the little bugs that sometimes went into your mouth and made you recoil and even spit, but after spitting grin, and grin with wildness. (159)

The fact that most are foreigners and that most are marginalized in the community results in tolerance and coexistence without being superimposed by the dominant norm. Therefore, although the basic needs of social welfare and safety are unfulfilled, the third layer and the fifth layer of liberalism is achieved for Nadia as she relishes the freedom to be who she is and enjoy the diverse cultures around her.

On the other hand, the experience in the Nigerian house is "jarring" for Saeed. He feels guilty for taking the food, using the utilities of the house, and witnessing its withering from being used by too many residents (132). Even more strongly felt than his guilt for the illegal usage of the house is his unease around foreigners:

he was the only man from his country, and those sizing him up were from another country, and there were far more of them, and he was alone. This touched upon something basic, something tribal, and evoked tension and a sort of suppressed fear. (149-50)

Being from a different country, and thereby race and culture, adds the tension and fear of others around

him; he does not know their customs, language, and ultimately ways to connect with these people. Without the means of communicating, a person becomes trapped inside himself, because identity is constituted of reflections of ourselves on others. Aneta Pavlenko and James Lantolf cite the experience of various writers with migration experiences, and the Russian-English bilingual Helen Yakobson's experience mirrors Saeed's loss of self: "My 'Americanization' took place at all levels of my existence; in one sweep I had lost not only my family and my familiar surroundings but also my ethnic, cultural and class identity" (164). This disconnection between Saeed's inner self and outer expression is depicted in the scene where a woman with harsh words blocks his way in the hallway. He considers going back but a "tough-looking Nigerian man" (150) who is presumed to carry a gun is behind him, and Saeed inwardly panics. When the woman removes her foot, Saeed goes through brushing her body and feeling emasculated. He finally reaches his room where "he s[its] on the bed and his heart [i]s racing and he want[s] to shout and to huddle in a corner but of course he d[oes] neither" (151). His turbulent emotions and the contrasting physical stillness portray a disconnection between the inner and outer self. Likewise, Lagji comments that Saeed's comfort behind closed doors, given that magical doors illustrate globalism, indicates his "nationalist, isolationist response to movement *en masse*" (226).

Similarly, after hearing the news of his father's death, he does "not know how to mourn, how to express his remorse" (172) and works even harder till exhaustion in the worker camp set for migrants. His loss of expression reflects his loss of identity, which has been tied to this home. Without the cultural and relational materials and customs necessary to express his grief, his inner self and outer self are separated, marooning himself from the self.

His method of reconstructing his falling identity is ironically tethering more strongly to the past, to his religion, and to hard work. The first thing he does when Nadia and Saeed take up a room to themselves in the London house is to place the photograph of his family on the bookshelf, making it a temporary home (124). In addition, Saeed spends more time in a house that the people of his country occupy. He is drawn "drawn by the familiar languages and accents and the familiar smell of cooking"

(151). Being there makes him feel that he belongs, and praying with the men from his country is “not just something spiritual, but something human, part of this group, and for a wrenchingly painful second he thought of his father” (152).

Saeed ties ropes to his home through prayer with a fervor that did not exist in his home city: “he prayed more regularly, every morning and every evening, and perhaps on his lunch breaks, too” (186). The meaning Saeed attaches to prayer epitomizes his ideal self:

When Saeed was a child he had first prayed out of curiosity. He had seen his mother and father praying, and the act held a certain mystery for him. . . . Until the end of his days, prayer sometimes reminded Saeed of his mother, and his parents’ bedroom with its slight smell of perfume, and the ceiling fan churning in the heat. . . . and prayer for him became about being a man, being one of the men, a ritual that connected him to adulthood and to the notion of being a particular sort of man, a gentleman, a gentle man, a man who stood for community and faith and kindness and decency, a man, in other words, like his father. . . . some young men pray to honor the goodness of the men who raised them and Saeed was very much a young man of this mold. . . . he valued the discipline of it, the fact that it was a code, a promise he had made, and that he stood by. (200-02)

The increase of prayer after the death of his father show that Saeed’s endeavor to regain his identity aims at becoming someone like his father, and prayer is the main way he achieves this. In the worker camp, Saeed finds a father-figure in the native foreman, the only native that he personally contacts in London and feels admiration for.

However, his expression of gratitude is met with silence, nullifying his attempt to interact and possibly to start a cautious construction of a new identity: “The foreman did not say anything. In that instant Saeed was reminded of those soldiers he had seen in the city of his birth, returning on leave from battle, who, when you pestered them for stories about where they had been and what they had done, looked at you as if you had no idea how much you were asking” (179). The apathy from the natives and the surrounding environment for Saeed’s pain is symbolically shown in the scene where he, waking up tired, takes a walk with Nadia through the worker camps:

[they] looked at these birds who had lost or would soon lose their trees to construction, and Saeed sometimes called out to them with a faint, sibilant, unpuckered whistle, like a balloon slowly deflating. Nadia watched to see if any bird noticed his call, and did not on their walk see even one. (181)

Hamid's universalization of the migrant experience pertains to the birds, who have secure homes but do not know that their homes will be devastated and that they will have to migrate in the near future. The birds can be likened to natives who do not respond to Saeed's sounds of loss and sadness because of their lack of awareness of their own instability. The reciprocal exclusiveness of the natives and Saeed prevents him from forming a way to belong, which is the deep need of being and identity expressed in the fourth layer of liberalism, forcing him to resort to his past to find a sense of belonging.

Taken collectively, Saeed's course of identity development follows the path of nationalism. In identifying with his father, he identifies with his traditions and religions. As was explained in the Introduction, nationalism is utilized by both imperialistic powers for asserting their aggressive power over other nations and the colonized people fighting for independence. The scene of ideology conflicts coming from the same root is also reflected in the collision between nativist mobs, who strive to retain their national identity, and migrants like Saeed, who assert their own identity to counter the attack. The similarity lies in the bigotry, violence, and xenophobia that emanate from both sides of the conflict. Shazia Sadaf delineates this as "an inverse view, a mirror image: the native is the migrant; the migrant, native. All identities seep into one another: militant, native, military, migrant" (643). Similarly, Carter views that Saeed and Nadia's reactions reflect the responses of host-nations to the displaced (633). She analyzes that the role reversal reveals that the context decides whether the person would be the nativist or the refugee, but that their core reactions to the unfamiliar are the same (633). Both Nadia and Saeed feel this reciprocal similarity. Saeed leans toward the migrants who assert for fighting back against the nativist mobs, but he is "torn":

because he was moved by these words, strengthened by them, and they were not the barbarous words of the militants back home . . . but at the same time the gathering of men drawn to the words of the man with the white-marked beard sporadically did remind him of the militants, and when he thought this he felt something rancid in himself, like he was rotting from within. (155-56)

Something "rancid" in Saeed mirrors the gap between nationalist claims for national glory and the reality of army-led violence and inhuman atrocities done in its name. Saeed finally refuses the leader of

the migrants from his home country, who is also a father figure and a symbol of nationalistic fervor, realizing that violence is not his way. Nadia similarly realizes that “The fury of those nativists advocating wholesale slaughter . . . seemed so familiar, so much like the fury of the militants in her own city” (159), highlighting the common feature of different groups as closed boundaries which lead to exclusion and hatred. The separating and categorizing tendencies of nationalism and imperialism is the source of threat to the liberal existence by labeling those outside the boundaries as “others”.

In their fervor for eliminating the other—the barbarous, the uncivilized, and the degraded—the nativists end up deploying actions that render themselves barbarous and degraded: “That night a rumor spread that over two hundred migrants had been incinerated when the cinema burned down, children and women and men, but especially children, so many children . . . ” (163). Hamid uses the subjunctive and repeated “perhaps” to imagine that the natives might have noticed their own atrocities as eventually defining who themselves are and that “too many native parents would not after have been able to look their children in the eye, to speak with head held high of what their generation had done” (166). Children are the most vulnerable beings among the refugees and the natives themselves. Their love for their children triggers the mutual recognition of each other as beings with common humanity and pushes them to become aware of Karam’s adoption of “reciprocal self-consciousness” (313).

In sum, Nadia chooses the path of multiculturalism while Saeed walks the path of nationalism in the process of building their identity. Their different paths are mirrored in their distancing relationship in Mykonos and London, which is portrayed through their use of technology and their conversations. Technologically, the distancing of Nadia and Saeed is portrayed in the act of traveling through online spaces separately while physically together. Chambers describes that their use of phones in Mykonos to gain knowledge of the news of the world and connect with others is the harbinger of their separation (219). As the distance between them grows in London, their conversations continued through the phone are silenced or morphed into arguments, and their phones take them to separate places while they are in the same room: “before they fell asleep they often sat outside on the ground with their backs to the

dormitory, on their phones, wandering far and wide but not together, even though they appeared to be together” (185). Connecting to the phone entails disconnecting with surrounding reality, and their wandering on their phone is accompanied by their lack of physical contact and genuine conversation.

Technology is a key measure not only for globalism but for multiculturalism, acting as a central transnational connector of different people. Vertovec explicates that people can live dual lives, both in their home country and their migrated country, through modern communication and transportation (11). People can easily connect with people of their home country, and watch the dramas and books of their birth nation, while physically living and economically participating in the migrated country. Anyone with the connection can watch popular K-dramas, order American fast food, and direct message a seller through SNS halfway across the globe. Vertovec explicates that “this has significant bearing on the second generation, or children born to migrants” (11). The transnational connections that weaken the borders of nations are existent politically and economically in unignorable ways (Vertovec 11-12). He expounds that politically, transnational connections are realized in dual citizenships and homeland politics, where people run political campaigns outside their country (11). The economic impacts are also huge, for the remittances themselves have reached \$60 billion each year (11). This is the setting that empowers the flowering of diverse identities. Saeed connects with people of his nation both online and offline (187) while both Nadia and Saeed use their phones to connect with the world, catch up on the news and gain information necessary to survive in foreign land (108).

The relationship between Saeed and Nadia is also reflected in the conversations they share, which metamorphose into fights, and finally sink to silence. Saeed’s aforementioned fervor for prayer excludes those who do not share his religion, including Nadia. When Saeed’s father dies, Nadia offers to join the prayer meeting to share in mourning, to which Saeed answers that there is no need. She feels “for the first time unwelcome. Or perhaps unengaged. Or perhaps both” (173). Saeed psychologically connects with his father, stability, protection, and national culture through prayer, and the fact that he cannot share the most important values to him with Nadia is also frustrating for Saeed:

it was inexplicable that she continued to wear her black robes, and it grated on him a bit, for she did not pray, and she avoided speaking their language, and she avoided their people, and sometimes he wanted to shout, well take it off then, and then he would since inwardly, since he believed he loved her, and his resentment, when it bubbled up like this, made him angry with himself. (187)

The feeling of resentment is also felt on Nadia's part. She senses that prayer—all that it represents that she cannot empathize with—is what is drifting them apart.

Saeed was more melancholic than he had been before, understandably, and also more quiet and devout. She sometimes felt that his praying was not neutral towards her, in fact she suspected it carried a hint of reproach, though why she felt this she could not say, for he had never told her to pray nor berated her for not praying. But in his devotions was ever more devotion, and towards her it seemed there was ever less. (195)

In turn, Nadia feels guilt when she thinks of Saeed, thinking she had led him astray and feels relief when she is away from him (164, 172). Although she is consciously unsure of her reason for guilt, it can be hypothesized that the fact that Nadia is enjoying the migration experience, be it dangerous and uncomfortable, and is adapting to the multicultural world better than Saeed, who is becoming bitter, quiet, and reserved, is the main reason for the guilt. Perhaps Saeed's father already knew the difference and the stronger survival powers of Nadia in making her promise to "see Saeed through safety. . . . remain by Saeed's side until Saeed [i]s out of danger" (97). Her promise and Saeed's dispirited state combine into a heavy responsibility that she is not excelling in.

Their distancing relation is disheartening for both. The phrase that describes their leaving of Saeed's father—"when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (98)—also indicates that a part of our identity, which was created when together with the person, also dies. In drifting away from each other, Nadia and Saeed also migrate from each other, "murdering" each other slowly in their lives. This loss is so upsetting that they give up on the waiting list for a house in the worker camp, and travel once more through the magical door. To Saeed, the loss is delineated as follows:

She was the entirety of his close family now, and he valued family above all, and when the warmth between them seemed lacking his sorrow was immense, so immense that he was uncertain whether all his losses had not combined into a core of loss, and in this core, this center, the death of his mother and the death of his father and the possible death of his ideal self who had loved his woman so well were like a single death that only hard work and prayer might allow him to withstand. (188)

2) Media and Technology as Threats to Liberal Existence

In London, the media acts as the tool for disseminating nationalist ideology and counteracts the formation of empathy and Karam's "reciprocal self-consciousness" (313). As discussed in the Introduction, the fictionality of nationalism also pertains to the nationalist message of the media. This is portrayed by the media coverage of refugees as threats to the nation in London, even though in the actual plot, the nativists threaten the vulnerable refugees with unmatched high-technology gear. In the media, refugees are described as threatening by outnumbering the natives:

It seemed the more empty a space in the city the more it attracted squatters, with unoccupied mansions in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea particularly hard-hit, their absentee owners often discovering the bad news too late to intervene, and similarly the great expanses of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, filling up with tents and rough shelters, such that it was now said that between Westminster and Hammersmith legal residents were in a minority, and native-born ones vanishingly few, with local newspapers referring to the area as the worst black holes in the fabric of the nation. (129)

Perfect construes the "fabric" to be woven out of nativism and the tears (holes) are therefore considered "unthinkable to some as anomalies in the fabric of spacetime" (195). Given the countering facts that cultures are inherently hybrid and "assume more 'foreign' elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 15) while the nation is an identity constructed through cultural narratives that aspire towards dominance and purity, the power relations in creating such images of "the fabric of the nation" rise to the surface.

The current state of globalized media is mostly dominated by Western cultures and American influence. This "system of pressures and constraints" keeps the whole media corpus concentrated on its "essentially imperial identity" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 323). This makes the cultural discourse follow a repetitive and predictable routine: it creates pastiches of older versions, and silences or minoritizes alternative narratives (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 323-24). Hamid disillusiones the national narrative by exposing the actual cause behind the xenophobic messages of the media: the neoliberal values of property and capitalism. When Saeed wonders why the reaction to refugees is different from that of his home country, Nadia replies that "That was different. Our country was poor.

We didn't feel we had much to lose" (164).

Unlike the threatening description of the media, the helpless refugees face the arms of the nation through peaceful protests: "they banged cooking pots with spoons and chanted in various language and soon the police decided to withdraw" (128). Like their previously colonized ancestors, the refugees employ helplessly unbalanced fights. However, unlike the era of colonization, it is not the colonizers but the residents of the previously colonized nations who reversely occupy the territory of their former colonizers. Yogita Goyal cites Toni Morrison's claim that the history of colonialism is yoked with "the connected refugee crisis by aligning 'the journey of the colonized to the seat of the colonizers'" (244). By this reciprocal migration, Hamid portrays the truth that one cannot exploit the other without facing its consequences, because the world is intricately connected.

The next description of the media concerns the major operation "to reclaim Britain for Britain, and it was reported that the army was being deployed, and the police as well, and those who had once served in the army and the police, and volunteers who had received a weeklong course of training. Saeed and Nadia heard it said that nativist extremists were forming their own legions, with a wink and a nod from the authorities, and the social media chatter was of a coming night of shattered glass . . . " (135). The nativist fervor and the expression, "the night of the shattered glass," harks back to the holocaust *Kristallnacht*, which was named after the broken glass of shops owned by Jews, and which was also committed with "a wink and a nod from the authorities," for the Nazi leaders ordered police forces and fire brigades not to protect the Jews or their property ("Holocaust"). History is repeating itself through nationalist fervor harking back to a glorious past, a history created and retold many times to gain national prominence. Many Western citizens view the holocaust as inexcusable violence toward one ethnic group, and Hamid, by showing the likeness, is exposing the violence of natives' hostility toward the hopelessly weaker minorities. The media's call for national values ironically accuses itself of inciting brutality.

The power of the media to objectify its subjects is depicted in Nadia's experience of *mise-en-*

abyeme, the placement of a copy of an image within itself.

once as Nadia sat on the steps of a building reading the news on her phone across the street from a detachment of troops and a tank she thought she saw online a photograph of herself sitting on the steps of a building reading the news on her phone across the street from a detachment of troops and a tank, and she was startled, and wondered how this could be, how she could both read this news and be this news, and how the newspaper could have published this image of her instantaneously, and she looked about for a photographer, and she had the bizarre feeling of time bending all around her, as though she was from the past reading about the future, or from the future reading about the past, and she almost felt that if she got up and walked home at this moment there would be two Nadias, that she would split into two Nadias, and one would stay on the steps reading and one would walk home, and two different lives would unfold for these two different selves, and she thought she was losing her balance, or possibly her mind, and then she zoomed in on the image and saw that the woman in the black robe reading the news on her phone was actually not her at all. (157-58)

Seeing herself on the news, she feels that the woman in the news is another being and herself at the same time. The two Nadias are the agentive and living Nadia; and the fixed and passive Nadia in the media. She feels alienated from the latter Nadia. The media replaces the voice of the subject, represents it the way it wills without the consent of the subject, and objectifies and silences the individual as an agentive self. The mismatch of the living Nadia and the Nadia in the media warns the readers against regarding the refugee and the refugee in the media as identical entities.

The last description of the media during the stay in London somewhat counters the nationalist portrayal so far:

The news in those days was full of war and migrants and nativists, and it was full of fracturing too, of regions pulling away from nations, and cities pulling away from hinterlands, and it seemed that as everyone was coming together everyone was also moving apart. Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory, and people were questioning what role they had to play. Many were arguing that smaller units made more sense, but others argued that smaller units could not defend themselves. (158)

Identity requires borders, for one cannot know oneself without distinguishing oneself from the other. Ghosal states that “as identity essentializes being, it presupposes the existence and necessity of a border. Thus, a nation, a religious community, or a political party requires a border for the purity of its defined identity but must cross it if it wants to re-define its identity” (13). The border crossing of the globalized

world, which has been escalated to the extreme through magical doors, has frayed identities in a national sense, and the confusion caused by the breakdown of stable state-centered culture and identity is pushing people to search for new ways of defining themselves. Crossing the border thus enables one to obtain a plural view and recreate oneself in the new environment (Ghosal 14). Whereas the eroding of borders brings confusion and anxiety to some, it provides others with an exciting relay of diverse choices for self-creation.

Hamid describes the differing reactions to border crossing as follows: “Reading the news at that time one was tempted to conclude that the nation was like a person with multiple personalities, some insisting on union and some on disintegration, and that this person with multiple personalities was furthermore a person whose skin appeared to be dissolving as they swam in a soup full of other people whose skins were likewise dissolving” (158). Dissolving skins remind one of the boiling pot metaphor for multiculturalism, where the culture melts into a homogeneity. In reality, the diverse cultures co-exist both retaining and influencing each other. The media, which had condemned and denigrated the refugees to protect national identity, ironically realizes that the refugees have already brought changes into the nation, eroding the concept of the nation itself. The nation-state in the globalized world is still viable and standing as the central system of politics. However, Vertovec’s claim that “ideals of national sovereignty are increasingly seen as no longer entirely viable in an interdependent world” rings truths to the reality of multiple affiliations and transnational migrations (16). The reality of “interacting and overlapping communities” and “individuals’ multiple identities” (Vertovec 7) means that people belong to competing attachments. This environment pushes identities to become “more situational” (Vertovec 7). Therefore, the borders should be realized as porous and fluctuating, with diverse borders interacting and changing with time and space.

CHAPTER THREE. Marin City: The Dream City of Belonging and Identity

1) Hope at Last: the City of Intermittent Optimism

Marin County, California, the United States of America. This is the last destination through the magical door in the novel and the place where the protagonists finally construct their identity through finding a way to belong, and also end their long love relationship. What makes Marin different from the two previous cities? Although the destitute state of the protagonists remains the same, Marin is described as the following:

There was nonetheless a spirit of at least intermittent optimism that refused entirely to die in Marin, perhaps because Marin was less violent than most of the places its residents had fled, or because of the view, its position on the edge of a continent, overlooking the world's widest ocean, or because of the mix of its people, or its proximity to the realm of giddy technology . . . (194-95)

The subjunctive “perhaps” becomes clear reasons for the optimism of Marin through the experiences of Nadia and Saeed. The most significant aspect of Marin is that it offers Fisher’s “durable solutions” (1119)—access to employment and resettlement—to the migrants. Unlike Mykonos, where the protagonists had to use their own resources from their home, or London, where they were half-forced to work in worker camps, Marin allows the migrants choice over a job they can apply for. Nadia works for a food cooperative (194), providing a stable income for the couple despite their poor living conditions in a shanty, while Saeed works “to feed and shelter his congregants and teach them English” (199). Other than providing them with individual liberty of employment, Marin allows the migrants to settle in without the violence that was delineated in London. Although their shanty uses a rainwater collector for water and lacks the comfortableness of a modern home, it nevertheless has “wireless data signals” which connect them to the world outside the small space, fulfilling the fourth layer of liberalism to connect with the community around them. This contrasts with the completely cut signals of their home country and the discriminating cut-off from electricity in London. Moreover, although there is no

mention of the political and civic status of the migrants, the plebiscite movement of the people which includes the migrants give hope of future political voice to the protagonists. Its governmental status is yet unclear, but its “authority could be substantial, for unlike those other entities for which some humans were not human enough to exercise suffrage, this new assembly would speak from the will of all the people . . . greater justice might be less easily denied” (221).

The second reason for the optimism of Marin is the multicultural atmosphere which depicts porous boundaries and mixing cultures. The celebration of multiculturalism in Marin is illustrated in the flowering of culture, especially music. The description of the blending of culture as “a new jazz age,” according to Eva Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek, is an appropriate term for the cooperative efforts of the community created through improvised adaptation; they even contend that jazz could be a metaphor for migration (448). Jazz is unique through being different every time it is played through improvisation, affected by the mood of the moment, the musician’s internal swings, and the music being played. As such, Nadia and Saeed have adapted to the new city through a combination of their inner selves and the outer influence of multiculturalism. The same community holds religious and relatively close communities like the one Saeed finds belonging in and the realm of belonging in a cooperative without any specific similarities of faith or values, such as the one Nadia is living in. The differentiated porousness, the diversity from migration, and the interactions between different communities call for the “new” multiculturalism of the “Parekh report” (Vertovec 6).

Lastly, Marin is relatively free from surveillance through technology which has followed the protagonists like the Big Brother from their home city and throughout their migration. Opposed to the threatening military drones over the citizens in their hometown and the migrants in London, the drone in Marin is described as follows:

One night one of the tiny drones that kept a watch on their district, part of a swarm, and not larger than a hummingbird, crashed into the transparent plastic flap that served as both door and window of their shanty, and Saeed gathered its motionless iridescent body and showed it to Nadia, and she smiled and said they ought to give it a burial, . . . (205)

Its tiny size reflects its relative harmlessness and the description of its mechanical breakdown as a

“death” reflects that the stifling intrusion into the privacy has reached its end. Naydan comprehends this scene to denote that “an escape from a vast if now ubiquitous network of violence exists as a possibility in the twenty-first century” (439). The burial of the drone sparks a joke and a laugh from the separating couple as they commonly find hope in finally escaping one of the most prominent technological devices which have violated their liberty.

2) Natives vs. Migrants

The most marked aspect of Marin, however, is the breakdown of the boundaries between natives and migrants. The message Hamid has been sending through mirroring identities of natives and migrants becomes clear in Marin by the depiction of the layers of migration in the U.S., a country of migrants. Hamid introduces three layers of nativeness: the Native Americans, the descendants of European colonizers, and the African Americans. The Native Americans, as the original natives, have been reduced to a few and are full of sorrow. However, the American history of Western conquest is not depicted as the mass killing of Native Americans, but as the exploration of “a new race of people, independent of the sin-darkened heritage of man, seeking a totally new and original relationship to pure nature as hunters, explorers, pioneers, and seekers” (Lawrence qtd. in Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 288). Most citizens encounter the assenting narrative through the media and other public platforms. Contrastingly, in *Exit West*, the marginalized migrants listen to the stories told by the Native Americans, “for the tales of these natives felt appropriate to this time of migration, and gave listeners much-needed sustenance” (197), showing that the marginalized are consoled when they listen to other marginalized people’s narratives. Hamid uses the literary form of the novel to voice the excluded narratives of refugees and mirrors this form in this scene of storytelling.

The second layer of nativism is the colonizers from Britain who are native in the sense that “they or their parents or their grandparents or the grandparents of their grandparents had been born on the

strip of land that stretched from the mid-northern-Pacific to the mid-northern Atlantic” (197) and renders nativeness a “relative matter” (197). However, through historical and ideological narratives of nationality, America has succeeded in creating an American nationality as concerning the narratives of former European colonizers. Said calls “this the orthodox, authoritatively national and institutional versions of history” whose voice overruns the voice of contestable versions of histories and narratives (312). Orthodox history accepts the second layer of nativism as the legitimate one and spurns all other versions of history by labeling them as illegitimate or extreme. One example given by Said is the outright anger and criticism toward the exhibition, “America as West,” which portrayed the noble and reflective Native Americans subject to brutal violence by white men (314). Voicing dissent faces obstacles, hatred, and marginalization. Through this prominent version of history, many migrants and refugees from other nations are categorized as illegal, rendering the proclamations of equality to become empty words. The country built on the migration of people seeking religious liberty, which eventually oppressed the natives living on the land, has built walls to shut out others seeking liberty from similarly oppressive governments or other dire circumstances. Hamid claims that “America has become incoherent. An American that denies the human right of migration can no longer be the America it imagines itself to be, because it can no longer champion equality” (“Why Migration”). He shows the irony of the claim of the legitimacy of the American descendants of Britain by exposing their past migration along with their emotional hostility towards the new migrants: “[they] seemed stunned by what was happening to their homeland . . . and some seemed angry as well” (198).

The last layer of natives, the African Americans, is described as having “vast importance, for society had been shaped in reaction to it, and unspeakable violence had occurred in relation to it, and yet it endured, fertile, a stratum of soil that perhaps made possible all future transplanted soils” (198). The forced migration and slavery of African Americans send a message about dehumanizing the migrants through physical power and racial bigotry. The refugees and the ancestors of African Americans show differing traits, but their stripping away of homes, the forced departure, and the racism that they face share a common aspect of tragedy. As a land that has endured the traumatic history of

slavery, the historical lessons it has learned may well seep into the income of new migrants.

The three layers depict that although the second layer is powerfully dispersed as the orthodox layer, all the people living in America are migrants, even the Native Americans who have traveled to the American continent in the distant past. The layers of natives highlight the porousness of the categories of migrants and natives and assert the acknowledgment of everyone as ultimately migrants. In his essay on migration, Hamid extends the relative nativeness to the whole humanity by affirming that:

We are all migrants historically: our ancestors came from somewhere else, and originated, long ago, in the same spot in Africa. And we are migrants personally: life is the experience of moving through time, of abandoning each present moment for the next, of temporal migration. (“Why Migration”)

By breaking the categorical borders between migrants and natives, Hamid criticizes the hostility and xenophobia of natives and nationalistic migrants alike, and brings forth common humanity that bounds everyone together. The blurry boundary aligns all people on a continuing spectrum of migration, with everyone moving through time and space on a grander scale.

3) Finding a Way to Belong: Nadia and Saeed’s New Lovers

Thus, in this city of Marin where boundaries break and liberalism is in the air, Nadia and Saeed find belonging in different communities and lovers. Nadia paves her way for belonging in a food cooperative. Her black robe initially prompts distance from other female workers, who show their xenophobia toward Islamic culture (Sadaf 641). However, she encounters a man threatening her for her Islamic outfit, and her characteristic steady and courageous response of staying still and looking calmly at the man moves other women to befriend her “whether it was because they were impressed by her mettle in the face of danger or because they recalibrated their sense of who was threat and who was threatened or because they now simply had something to talk about” (216). In other words, the state of being vulnerable reminds them of their own vulnerability, and bonds form based on this mutual recognition. After her separation from Saeed, she moves into an empty storage room in the cooperative.

This reminds her of her small old apartment back home and her independent living, and she relishes this uncomfortable room that nevertheless gives her freedom to be who she is.

On the other hand, Saeed enters a religious community. However, they are not people of his country, but African Americans. In doing so, he passes the boundaries of his country and his religion for the first time. Therefore, Knudsen and Rahbek's classification of Saeed's belonging as "filiation" only pertains to him before reaching Marin. They explicate that filiative bonds are based on "birth, nationality, profession" while affiliative bonds are created through "social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and will" (451). Through Saeed's bond with his nation, represented by his father and prayer, he was claimed to belong to filiative bonds. Here, his identity transcends nationality, which already started with his refusal to join the fight against the nativists in London, and reaches a combination of his national culture (religion) and novel culture (African American tradition) into a fusion of a new form of identity. In a new sense of multiculturalism described in the "Parekh Report" and delineated by Vertovec, Saeed's allegiance to the religious group also pertains to multiculturalism, as well as Nadia's form of belonging to diverse people around her (6-7).

Saeed has chosen allegiance to his religion, his countrymen, and a religious African American community, while Nadia has contrarily chosen to belong not to certain standards but everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. Both of their ways of existence can be expounded through Said's notion of "contrapuntal existence" (*Reflections on Exile* 148). He contends that migrants—exiles to use Said's words—are aware of two or more ways of seeing the world through cultural aspects including their home culture and their migrated one, allowing them "unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension" (*Reflections on Exile* 148). He delineates the loneliness and the weariness of living as migrants but explains that the prize that one attains is that of self and other- awareness because one cannot know oneself without the other. Similarly, Ghosal says that "What I am can be grasped only from knowledge of what I am not" (13). He also describes the existence of diverse perspectives as "a plurality of perspectives—accessible by overleaping the border, that is, by negotiating with the Other" and asserts

border-crossing as “a precondition for the assertion of identity” (14). While Saeed views the world through the eyes of his religious wisdom and the African American cultural worldview, Nadia freely enjoys diverse cultural thoughts and perspectives without preferences to certain associations. For Nadia, listening to diverse voices from multicultural backgrounds was a source of joy since her experience at the Nigerian house. In this sense, the contrapuntal existence of Saeed and Nadia differ in the scope of possible perspectives and the borders crossable in pursuing one’s values.

Before border-crossing, one is blind to the self and exists without a conscious choice of the values to pursue and retains only the passive self shaped by the cultural sphere around oneself. It is only when one crosses borders that awareness of oneself through the difference of the other springs, and the diverse possibilities provide one with a choice of whom to become. Likewise, before passing through the magical door, Saeed existed in a placid state of belonging given to him from birth. It is after migration that his passion for his nationality, prayer, and religion becomes warm—for the very reason that he has chosen it. Nadia had actively chosen her own lifestyle despite the currents of opposition before she left her home, but the freedom given to her through border crossing have both been exhilarating and developed her identity from the marginalized to the multicultural and contrapuntal existence. They both achieve liberalism by reconstructing their identities, albeit in different ways.

Their new identities and belonging are mirrored in their new love relationships. Nadia falls in love with a woman who enjoys music as she does and thus crosses the boundaries of sexuality laid out by society. However, her emerging identity as a bisexual began not in Marin, but in the first city of their destination, Mykonos. The girl with a shaved head that she befriended there appears in her dream in the worker camp in London. She dreams of stepping through the magical door back to Mykonos to meet the girl: “when Nadia woke she was panting, and felt her body alive, or alarmed, regardless changed, for the dream had seemed so real, and after that she found herself thinking of Mykonos from time to time” (171). Juxtaposed with Nadia’s dream are Saeed’s dreams of his father. These dreams portray their emerging identities, as something that is still in the unconscious realm but seeping out of the inner

self.

Nadia's new lover is a woman cook who introduces her to old cuisines and new cuisines that are being born as the world's food combines into fusion food. Their common ground can be seen in their daring to cross the borders of love, their appreciation for multiple cultures, and their love of enjoying physical joy. Nadia's fondness for narcotics matches the cook's introduction to cuisines as hedonistic delight, as well as their enjoyment of music.

Saeed finds his new lover in the religious community he attends. She is a preacher's daughter, whose dead mother was from the country that Saeed is from. Knudsen and Rahbek describe her as a "combination of the old and new" (450). As a progeny of parents from Saeed's home and an African American descent, her national heritage is a mixture of Saeed's culture and the African American one. She is interested in what is important to Saeed—prayer and his home country—and this brings them together. However, the religious community is not the same religious community of Saeed's people, and the volunteer work Saeed leads, which includes the preacher's daughter, consists of migrants from diverse backgrounds. His conversations of nothings once again open up because he has someone to share them with: "she prompted him to want to listen and speak, and, he had from the outset found her so attractive that she was almost difficult to look at. . . . there were aspects of her that were much like Nadia" (220). Nostalgia seems like an intricate part of Saeed, for the past and loss are always recalled with precious caring for him. His love for Nadia ends but is in part sustained through the priest's daughter. The similarities between her and Nadia are not clearly shown, but her zeal in the plebiscite movement and the voicing of the marginalized resembles Nadia's will to be herself even in the face of oppression and Nadia's kindness in binding with people through reciprocal empathy. To the priest's daughter, Saeed's attitude to faith as well as his conversation is intriguing, and his appearance reminds her of her mother and childhood. The priest's daughter also shares the loss of a dear family member, and so her nostalgia is shared with Saeed.

In short, the new lovers are reflections of the protagonists' emerging identities. Hamid has

delineated the migration of identities that follow different paths. Their recovery from the sense of loss to the endeavored creation and finding of a new home, and a new way of belonging, show that there are no set answers to creating oneself. What matters is that they have willfully chosen their own life plan and have overcome the difficulties of the migration by being together. The ideal notion of the fifth layer of liberalism—“alternative categories based on gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation [has] slowly worked their way into the mainstream liberal consciousness, rather than being denied, excluded, or ignored” (Freedden 51)—has been achieved by both protagonists. Their calm breakup, which didn’t leave resentment or rancidness on either side, suggests a community where differences are tolerated and accepted without hostility. Both Nadia and Saeed had to face resistance from the boundaries of the groups before they could be permitted. Nadia was initially distanced because of her black robe, and Saeed’s new love relationship faced “some resistance by others” due to his different heritage from the majority of African Americans (219). In time camaraderie has grown, and they have found belonging in a foreign land, making it theirs.

Conclusion

1) The Passage through Magical Doors

she was struck by its darkness, its opacity, the way that it did not reveal what was on the other side, and also did not reflect what was on this side, and so felt equally like a beginning and an end . . . (103)

It was said in those days that the passage was both like dying and like being born, and indeed Nadia experienced a kind of extinguishing as she entered the blackness and a gasping struggle as she fought to exit it, and she felt cold and bruised and damp as she lay on the floor of the room at the other side, trembling and too spent at first to stand, and she thought, while she strained to fill her lungs, that this dampness must be her own sweat. (104)

In the world of the narrative, the magical door is a poetic device of the discontinuousness of migrant identity. The description of the doors and the liminal states of being in rites of passage are congruous. Turner and Abrahams explicate that liminality is “likened to death, being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon” (95), showing similarity to the experience of magical doors. Going through the door is likened to being born again because our identities are intertwined with the social interactions and relationships around us so that moving not only cuts off our old self but necessitates construction of a new self.

In other words, the doors change our identities by changing the environment and “facts outside oneself” (Appiah 324). Nadia and Saeed’s inner strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics that have been delineated before their passage through the doors will undergo changes because the culture, language, status, expectations, prejudices, and other influences of people around them change when they step through the door. Therefore, the narrative of *Exit West* is both coherent and incoherent, coherent in the core characteristics of who Nadia and Saeed are, and incoherent in the setting they experience, which in turn changes who they are.

The device of magical doors not only represents the discontinuous identities of migrants but also has the effect of universalizing the refugee experience. Hamid uses the doors as metaphors for changes through time and space that everyone experiences. Goyal comments that using magical doors instead of journeys are moves that refuse to spectacularize the refugee (248). The doors themselves are arduous,

but it does not delineate the details of the sufferings involved in crossing borders. Naydan comprehends that the magic doors, in addition, has the element of depicting “migrants not as illegitimate or illegal but as individuals associated with magic and beauty” (446). However, Zapata cites interviews of refugees who wanted their sufferings to be represented, countering the effect of magical doors (761). Hamid’s literary device of magical doors, while representing the interconnected world and the refugee movement as a right instead of illegal trespassing, removes one of the most difficult aspects of the refugee experience: the dangerous travel that the disenfranchised must undertake for survival. As a novel speaking for refugees, this aspect is a dual-sided knife in the message it can and cannot tell. Between spectacularizing the refugee experience and universalizing it as a common human struggle, Hamid chooses the latter.

The magical doors also serve to connect the different vignettes sprinkled throughout the novel. These anecdotal stories are only connected to the main story of the protagonists through simultaneous time, using time phrases such as “while,” “later that day,” “that night,” “as”, or start with jumps to other locations on the globe. The vignettes start with other migrants passing through doors, indicating that “the whole planet was on the move” (169), normalizing movement as a universal phenomenon. As the main narrative progresses, the vignettes gradually widen their scope. The vignette in chapter nine involves an elderly man in Amsterdam, meeting another “wrinkled man” (175). The elderly man first regards the wrinkled man with xenophobic disdain toward the unknown, but the politeness of the wrinkled man surprises him. After journeying to each other’s places, they fall in homosexual love. The border crossing involves the crossing of sexual borders, and the woman photographer who coincidentally witnesses their first kiss shoots and erases the picture of the scene out of “uncharacteristic sentimentality and respect” (176). This reflects Hamid’s stance towards border crossing in all areas including love. The refugee phenomenon and homosexual love are tied together as the reconstruction of oneself through new experiences.

The vignette of chapter 10 narrates a woman who has no connection with the doors for the first time in the novel. She is at the extreme end of the spectrum of the human movement, for she has

lived her whole life in one house. Her daughters and sons are motivated by greed in persuading her to sell her house, while she feels alienated by the world which has changed so much that she doesn't know her neighbors or the town outside her house. Her closest family is her granddaughter who looks like the woman she might have been if she were Chinese. In describing the woman's thoughts, Hamid writes:

all these doors from who knows where were opening, and all sorts of people were around, people who looked more at home than she was, even the homeless ones who spoke no English, more at home maybe because they were younger, and when she went out it seemed to her that she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can't help it. We are all migrants in time. (209)

Age makes it difficult for her to adapt to new circumstances; the strange and unknown are causes of unease. However, even her life is tinged with globalization in its most private relations: for her granddaughter is presumably partly Chinese or Asian in her blood, and the migrants surround her house. Hamid suggests that whereas refugees face a radical and abrupt change through physical movement, everything changes and makes the experience of change inevitable for everyone.

The universalizing of the refugee experience has met both praise and opprobrium from critics. Goyal states that the omission of history, culture, and specific background politics renders the refugee experience banal, foreclosing conversations of ongoing forms of imperialism (252). She calls for a need to scrutinize the cause of the refugee crisis, which will lead the Global North to bear responsibility for the migrants because their wealth and safety are the results of historical and present economic and military exploitation of the migrants' home countries (252). Perfect goes further and deems it irresponsible of Hamid to claim that the refugee experience is universal, adding that "to insist that all refugees are human beings is vital; to insist that all human beings are refugees, however, is wrongheaded" (199). Likewise, Lagji criticizes that Hamid's statement "threatens a reductive view of refugees, emptying out refugees' distinctive experiences of violence, dispossession, and devastating loss" (218).

However, Lagji also acknowledges the possibility of "the connections forged between different degrees and scales of migrancy in *Exit West*" (219). He sees the significance of this gesture, and calls

it “revolutionary” in building future solidarity and feelings of belonging (228). Collectively viewed, it is irrefutable that the comprehension of the dire conditions or the trauma of others are not *completely* comprehensible based on our intellectual activity. However, normalizing the refugee experience helps the non-refugees take a step toward comprehending and empathizing with them, for we as human beings have all gone through the ebb and flow of time. It is loss that Hamid uses to bring people together, which is shown in the meaning Saeed dedicates to prayer:

When he prayed he touched his parents, who could not otherwise be touched, and he touched a feeling that we are all children who lose our parents, all of us, every man and woman and boy and girl, and we too will all be lost by those who come after us and love us, and this loss unties humanity, unites every human being, the temporary nature of our being-ness, and our shared sorrow, the heartache we each carry and yet too often refuse to acknowledge in one another, and out of this Saeed felt it might be possible, in the face of death, to believe in humanity’s potential for a building a better world. (202-03)

It is important to note that even though *Exit West* leaves out the refugee journey, the dark doors can be understood to be something traumatic and too dark to open. Perfect interprets the darkness to be reflecting the utter despair the refugees face (194). *Exit West* delineates the other aspects of difficulties besides the journey including the violence of the war, the desperation of migration camps, the racial bigotry in new places, and the differences in culture. In short, it addresses the complex issues intertwined with migrant identity construction. Therefore, it would be improper to say *Exit West* eludes all the experiences of being a refugee.

The ordinary protagonists and the magical doors act as steppingstones toward understanding and empathizing with the refugees for a worldwide audience who are oblivious to the exigent state of the refugees. Using our experience as steppingstones for empathy is not without precautions: Carter warns against empathy based on one’s identification, because doing so reduces the other into “our version of the other,” removing the threat of unpredictability and uncategorized mystery (623). Thus, what is needed in understanding refugees is both empathy based on our experiences and imagination that takes us beyond our realms into the world of the other. The novel, as a world of imagination, brings hope by creating empathy through the construction of the possible lives of refugees in people’s minds.

2) Starlit Cities: *Villes Eteintes*

The stars, as another important literary device, also universalizes and enlarges the scope of Nadia and Saeed's experience. The beginning and ending chapters of *Exit West* include the description of stars. In the first chapter, Saeed uses a telescope that he inherited from his father, who in turn inherited it from his father, to watch the stars on a cloudless night (15). His family takes turns "to look up at objects whose light, often, had been emitted before any of these three viewers had been born—light from other centuries, only now reaching the Earth" (15). The time of the cosmos counted through lightyears is a grander scale that mitigates the individual beings living on Earth. Saeed's father names this "time travel" (15). Magdalena Mączyńska explains that the stars enact a "scale-shifting essential to considering the long-term environmental and political consequences of modernity" (1096). Instead of looking shortsightedly at the inessential differences among human beings, it pushes us to see the vastness of the universe.

Ghosal states that identity presupposes the existence of borders (13). It is through the other that one can know what one is not and define oneself relatively. In this sense, Saeed's viewing of the planet Mars, the closest planet to Earth, extends the borders of nationalism to belonging and identity on planetary terms. In other words, providing another form of the ultimate "other" (Mars) bonds all humanity, animals, and everything on the planet, through the identity of "Earthlings." Indeed, Mączyńska reads *Exit West* as broadly inclusive of entities on Earth by portraying animal humanity and a shared technoecosystem (1097). Furthermore, the vignettes of simultaneous but disconnected stories illuminate the shared time and the planetary connection shared by humanity (Mączyńska 1092). Mączyńska expounds that the animals, especially the "urban wildlife" (1098) depicted in the novel are "only partially legible"—their motives and whereabouts can only be guessed—but still coexist in the same environment.

Even Nadia's plant in the home city, the lemon tree, shares the turmoil and violence of the civil war. It brings wonder and joy to the characters but desiccates after being incinerated by bombs. Saeed,

effected by the intaking of shrooms on Nadia's balcony views the lemon tree with awe:

the wonder with which he then regarded his own skin, and the lemon tree in its clay pot on Nadia's terrace, as tall as he was, and rooted in its soil, which was in turn rooted in the clay of the pot, which rested upon the brick of the terrace, which was like the mountaintop of this building, which was growing from the earth itself, and from this earthy mountain the lemon tree was reaching up, up, in a gesture so beautiful that Saeed was filled with love, and reminded of his parents . . . (46)

Nadia moves in with Saeed after his mother's death but comes back to her flat to retrieve the lemon tree that is "parched but possibly revivable" (84). This brings joy to Saeed's father who hadn't smiled for days. The lemon tree experiences the war together and its revivability signals the remaining hope of the homeland. When it finally dies, the hope of their home also extinguishes, and the couple decides to move.

The portrayal of the fox in front of their London mansion also arouses different meanings for different people, being opaque in its ultimate meaning, but still sharing the same space with the protagonists:

When they asked around if anyone else had seen a fox, all said not, and some people told them it might have come through the doors, and others said it might have wandered in from the countryside, and still others claimed foxes were known to live in this part of London, and an old woman told them they had not seen a fox but rather themselves, their love. They wondered if she meant the fox was a living symbol or the fox was unreal and just a feeling and when others looked they would see no fox at all (139).

The non-human entities do not directly communicate with people but nevertheless occupy the same time-space. To Mączyńska, Hamid's phrase that "people are monkeys who have forgotten that they are monkeys" (139) eradicates the differences between different races, people, and animals by highlighting that they all spring from the same evolutionary roots. It thereby "upends discriminatory hierarchies of being that underpin colonial and white supremacist discourses" (Mączyńska 1099).

Stars reappear in the work of art, the photographs by the artist Thierry Cohen named *Villes Eteintes*, or *Darkened Cities* in English. The photographs depict major cities on Earth but they are edited with computer graphics to erase the city lights and countless stars are added to the night sky. Saeed explains that the photographs of the sky were taken at a deserted place of the same latitude as the city,

which would occupy the same place after the Earth orbits, by pointing the camera in the same direction (56). To Nadia “They were achingly beautiful, these ghostly cities—New York, Rio, Shanghai, Paris—under their stains of stars, images as though from an epoch before electricity, but with the building of today. Whether they looked like the past, or the present, or the future, she couldn’t decide” (57). Mączyński reads the photographs as a means of broadening the perspective of the protagonists’ journey through the depiction of the universe (1096). From a different perspective, Naydan views the photographs as providing a new perspective through the ambiguity of time and space, and shows the “possibility of beauty to develop amid confounding or confusing circumstances” (445). However, it could also be likened to magical doors and phones, because the photographs compress time and space, acting as a portal, or an entity that exists betwixt and between, and therefore possibly nowhere. The liminal existence reflects the refugee existence, who temporarily belong neither here nor there, living in the past and present at the same time. As technology made the photographs possible, the liminality of existence—being in different places and affiliating to different communities simultaneously—has also been made possible through a globalized world connected with portals of technology that compress time and space. By their very ambiguity, refugees can become figures of new perspectives and possibilities for political involvement and global citizenship.

Saeed first talks about stars with Nadia initially when their relationship is just coming to a spark and they meet at a Chinese restaurant. In conversing about where they would like to travel to, Nadia romantically wishes for Cuba, which reminds her of “music and beautiful old buildings and the sea” (24) while Saeed wants to go to the Atacama Desert in Chile, where “you can lie on your back and look up and see the Milky Way. All the stars like a splash of milk in the sky. And you see them slowly move. Because the Earth is moving. And you feel like you’re lying on a giant spinning ball in space” (24-25). The awe inspired by the immensity of the universe once again moves the perspective from the couple, the devastated homeland, to the expansiveness of the cosmos.

The stars finally decorate the ending of the novel. In the last scene, Nadia and Saeed meet in their

home city after half a century has passed, and they have a cup of coffee together. Conversations of their unshared lives and the shared moments spark—“Their conversation navigated two lives, with vital details highlighted and excluded, and it was also a dance, for they were former lovers . . .” (230). The scene once again switches to planetary belonging through the portrayal of animals and technology, or “the techno-ecosystem” using Mączyńska’s term (1097): “Above them bright satellites transited in the darkening sky and the last hawks were returning to the rest of their nests and around them passersby did not pause to look at this old woman in her black robe or this old man with his stubble” (230). Their last words, which are also the last words of the novel, are about stars:

Nadia asked if Saeed had been to the deserts of Chile and seen the stars and was it all he had imagined it would be. He nodded and said if she had an evening free he would take her, it was a sight worth seeing in this life, and she shut her eyes and said she would like that very much, and they rose and embraced and parted and did not know, then, if that evening would ever come (231).

The frame-like structure of the novel that opens and closes with stars places the journey of the protagonists in the time and space of a massive scale. As delineated, this has the effect of eliminating differences between race, religion, and culture, and enlarges the scope to stress our common humanity and the pettiness of conflicts which fleetingly occupy our tiny planet Earth.

However, the enlargement of scope also emanates a sense of nihilism, that everything passes away, and that in the face of the limitless universe, all our conflicts are fleeting and all problems swiftly flow away. The novel itself, according to Goyal, is written like a fable, with no names for the cities, no names for the characters except Nadia and Saeed, and most importantly—and most controversially—without any historical and social background for why the refugee problem occurs and why the civil war is ongoing (247, 249). Goyal states that this novel shows no concern for the “cause, origin, or politics to the conflict between the militants and the government” (249). The universalizing of the migrant experience without any historical or political background is preventive of understanding the layers of complicated powers and historical causes of refugees. By disregarding the imperialist colonial history that caused the economic undergrowth of the pre-colonized nations and the global free trade network

that is injurious to the Global South, the humanitarian narrative of empathy repeats without any global responsibility that the Global North ought to feel for their continued exploitation. Goyal strongly denounces Hamid's call for humanitarian empathy:

[Hamid] forecloses urgent conversations about colonial history and ongoing forms of imperial and neoliberal control of the Global South, as well as the fact that a large number of refugees are displaced precisely by the decisions about war, environmental regulations, and regime controlled by the very nations that subsequently close their borders. (252)

Hamid's claim that mobility is a human right rings truth more so in these times where movement is regulated by wealth and status. In his essay, "Why Migration is a Fundamental Human Right," he expresses:

I imagine that centuries hence, when people are finally free to move as they please around the planet Earth, they will look back at this moment and wonder, just as we wonder about those who kept slaves, how people who seemed so modern could do such things to their fellow human beings, caging them like animals—merely for wanted to wander, as our species always has and always will.

However, the migration of refugees is not romantic wanderings, but stripping of the homes of desperate masses by concrete political, historical, economic, and ideological reasons. Presenting the stars as a hopeful gesture contributes to a wider sense of our world and the meaninglessness of the conflicts humans have. It, however, does not help in comprehending the complex reasons behind the refugee crisis. Without such understanding, the resolution is even more difficult to take. Carefully scrutinizing the complex web of interconnected causes behind actual refugee crises such as the Syrian Civil War, the Afghanistan civil war or the Russo-Ukraine War reveals that imperialism still plays a role in massive displacement, disguised as globalism, exceptionalism, and cultural imperialism.

In *Exit West*, Hamid brings the world together through magical doors and points to stars as a guide for our common humanity. However, the world order that has historically fluctuated and flowed stands as a reality that must be faced in order for the refugee crisis to be properly understood and addressed. The idealistic sentiment of humanity is a starting ground for change, but not enough to bring positive advancements to the current refugee crisis. The changing masks of imperial dominance enounce that it is our responsibility, on the whole planetary scale, not just to take part in refugee

resettlement but also to aid in fighting the political and economic injustice that has forced the people to become displaced in the first place.

3) Exit West?

Even so, the message on refugees that Hamid wants to send through *Exit West* is represented in its title. The title *Exit West* has been interpreted by critics in similar but slightly different ways, which can be largely divided into two ways. The first type interprets that it indicates an exit to the West, for the protagonists move west throughout their migration. Shazia Sadaf additionally construes it as an indication of a “unidirectional movement through the doors from poor countries to the affluent west,” while pointing to the exit of Britain from the European Union (640). Another interpretation is that it is the exiting of the West, the hegemonic rule of the West or the excluding refugee policies of the West. Sadaf understands the title to be the exit of the hegemonic position of the West in the world where space-time is compressed through accelerating globalization (640). Likewise, Naydan interprets the meaning to be an exit from the “destructive nativist ideology” of the West (448). Chambers, similar to Sadaf, elucidates the title in two ways. She claims that the title is an onomastic play, where “the initials of “N” and “S” in his characters’ names supplement the missing compass points implied in the novel’s title, *Exit [East] West* (216). To some extent Nadia aligns with the generalizations of the Global North and Saeed the Global South, “since the male protagonist is more community- and family-oriented than his independent girlfriend” (Chamber 216). They read the title as both exits to the West and from the West, the latter indicating the exit from the Western immigration policies for their closed borders (Chambers 216). In fact, the route from Greece to Britain to America traces the track of the essence of Western civilization and its hegemonic rule.

Following the route of the bloom of Western culture, the protagonists’ final destination is America, the current superpower of the world. The protagonists are the lucky ones. Many are not even able to

cross borders, becoming internally displaced; some are not able to legally find work like Nadia does, but work in secret or sink into destitution and many are killed along the way. There is room for criticism in finding hope in the West while claiming for the exit from the Western hegemony.

However, the West described through Marin City is not just a city in America. It is a global city of many races, cultures, and opportunities. The global mobilization depicts the rich-poor gap of the world because mobility is guaranteed to the enfranchised and the borders are becoming ever harder to pass without authorization due to high technology and satellites. Perhaps, Hamid is suggesting a world where mobility is open to all through magical doors, erasing the “digital divide” (Naydan 434) and the divide in mobility. Then, national borders will become more fluid as with the identities people construct; a truly atterritorial and globalized space like Marin will be open for public spaces.

The refugee crisis returns to the West the seeds of greed that they have sown in others. Those considered “far away in exotic places” have become close neighbors occupying places that we cannot overlook. They force people to see that liberalism and the actualization of individuality is an ideal for those whose eyes are on surviving another day. Opening the magical doors is the initial step necessary for liberalism to ultimately flower in the world. The famous quote from Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man*, “When I discover who I am, I’ll be free,” is upended in liberalism as “When I am free, I will discover who I am” (212). In other words, it is only when the layers of liberalism are harmoniously met—meaning that the people are free from oppression, have the right to private property and economic activity, have the freedom to grow and express themselves, be protected from the dangers of poverty and illness, and have the right to choose and enjoy cultures of affiliation—that one can discover and create one’s identity and individuality. The refugees return to the West to recover the lost values of liberalism.

Through *Exit West*, Hamid envisions a world where migration becomes the norm, leading to the flowering of multiculturalism and the actualization of liberalism where diverse identities are accepted and acknowledged. The peaceful resolution of conflicts in Marin, which have been continuing from

home to London, and the futile attempt of the national power arrangements to stop the magical doors from appearing paint the triumph of liberalism over clashing national and neoliberal ideologies. Hamid's imaginary world of magical doors and the vast setting of cosmos depict a world that has exited West, which stands for all the power structures and ideologies that exclude and categorize people, and asserts for a worldview based on common humanity migrating through the immense scale of time and space.

Opening the magical doors is a necessary step for liberal existence, and the plot of *Exit West* sends the truth-telling message of the importance of liberalism as a precondition for identity construction which needs to be heard across the globe. However, this needs to be complemented by the understanding of why the home countries of the refugees were no longer livable in the first place, and why the liberalism enjoyed in some cities are absolutely lacking in others. The comprehending of the reasons and the undertaking of cooperative steps toward remedying the world order might perhaps lead to a global community as Hamid imagined through Marin County.

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국문 초록

모신 하미드(Mohsin Hamid)의 『서쪽으로』(Exit West)는 참혹한 전쟁, 급증하는 난민 수, 국제적인 미디어 방송과 복잡하게 얽힌 오늘날의 세계를 반영한다. 이 논문은 전쟁과 이주를 경험한 주인공 나디아(Nadia)와 사이드(Saeed)가 서로 다른 정체성을 구축하는 과정을 따라간다. 끔찍한 전쟁과 이주한 땅에서 난민이 겪는 취약성은 이념의 충돌을 반영하고 난민 재정착을 가능하게 하는 자유주의적 가치와 시스템의 부재를 강조한다. 난민의 취약성과 변화하는 환경의 경험을 통해 나디아와 사이드는 각자 다른 정체성을 형성해감에 따라 멀어진다. 나디아는 이민자 커뮤니티의 다문화적 분위기를 소중히 여기는 반면 사이드는 민족주의적 문화유산을 강하게 붙잡는다. 마지막으로 이주한 도시는 정치적, 경제적, 문화적으로 자유주의의 특성이 실현되어, 주인공들이 마침내 외국 땅에서 소속감을 찾고 정체성을 구축할 수 있게 된다.

그러나 하미드의 낙관적 결말과 난민 경험의 보편화는 독자들이 난민 현상을 분석적인 눈으로 보지 못하도록 하는 위험성이 있는 조치로 보인다. 별의 장치를 통한 그의 보편화 제스처는 복잡하게 얽힌 난민의 대량 이주에 대한 역사적, 정치적, 경제적 원인을 이해할 필요를 제거한다. 실제 원인을 파악하지 않고는 난민 위기를 제대로 이해하고 해결할 수 없으며, 지구촌의 일원으로서 위기에 대한 책임을 자기보다 인도주의적 공감에 의존하고 있다.

그럼에도 불구하고 하미드가 『서쪽으로』, 즉, 서쪽에서의 탈출로 직역될 수 있는 제목을 통해 보내는 메시지는 서구의 배타주의적 이데올로기와 배타주의로부터의 퇴출을 촉구한다. 마법의 문을 통한 여행은 현재 세계의 이동성 격차에 대응하고, 소속감과 정체성을 찾는 주인공의 어려움은 자유주의가 정체성과 개성이 꽃피기 위한 전제 조건임을 주장한다. 따라서 그들의 여행은 다른 장소들의 자유주의적이거나 억압적인 이념적 배경이 주인공의 정

체성 구축 과정과 어떻게 상호 작용하는지를 묘사합니다.

주요어: 모신 하미드, 서쪽으로, 이민, 난민, 자유주의, 정체성

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