

Magical Version of Migration in Hamid's *Exit West*: A Postmodern Perspective



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Abstract: *In the present times world mobility of people has become a normal phenomenon as compared to old days where migration used to be an extra ordinary practice. Hamid in Exit West seems to depict a magical version of migration which visualizes a futuristic perspective. The portrayal of migration in the selected novel demonstrates postmodern aspect of human movement across the world which becomes a cosmopolitan community. This paper aims at exploring this fantastical treatment of migration in the novel and highlighting its implication in the context of postmodernism. The paper has used theory of magical realism as a theoretical framework for the analysis of text and content analysis technique has been employed to interpret the selected passages of the novel. The study concludes that migration has become an unavoidable practice in the wake of postmodern world which has resulted due to pluralism, diversity of cultures and cosmopolitanism.*

Keywords: Magical Migration, Postmodernism, Cosmopolitanism

Background to the Present Research

Migration is the moving of people or groups from one place to another, which often includes a change in where they live or their habitat. It includes both internal migration (movement within a country) and foreign migration (movement between countries). Migration can be voluntary or forced, and it can be caused by economic, social, political, or environmental reasons, among others (Massey et al., 1999). Through the view of magical realism, Hamid's book *Exit West* is a thought-provoking look at migration. The story is about two young people, Saeed and Nadia, who are stuck in the middle of a civil war in a country that isn't named. As the fighting gets worse, the characters have to leave their home country and go on a dangerous trip to find safety and a new place to live. Hamid uses magical doors that act as gates and let people

move instantly from one place to another. This gives the story a fantasy feel. Hamid draws attention to the universal aspects of migration by using magical elements. He does this by focusing on the shared experiences and humanistic aspects that go beyond cultural and geographical borders.

Magical realism is a literary genre that incorporates magical components into a realistic portrayal of the modern world (Bowers, 2004, pp. 2-3). Magical realism is a literary genre that incorporates fantastical elements into otherwise realistic narratives, often serving to illuminate the mysteries of human existence. The term gained prominence during the 1980s in Latin America due to several writers' widespread popularity of literary works. Nevertheless, the application of this expression predates that period. Critics initially coined the term during

the 20th century, subsequently facilitating the progression of black consciousness and examining their subjugation under colonialism. The term "magical realism" was first introduced Alejo Carpentier, published in 1949. This work is considered a significant contribution to developing Latin American literature's magical realist narrative style. The author's application of various literary components in his novel, coupled with an examination of diverse societies, underscored the capacity of magical realism to communicate post-colonial encounters (Cunningham, 2013). This was subsequently exemplified in literary works like Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

In the context of Hamid's *Exit West* which is about future migrants, the magical version of migration is a speculative and transformative look at how migration could happen in a world where technology and society are changing. Even though Hamid's book doesn't directly talk about the future, we can figure out what it means for future migrants based on the magical realism aspects. In this imagined future, magical migration could be made easier by improved technology or supernatural events that go beyond what normal transportation systems can do. Like the enchanted doors in the book, refugees of the future might have access to amazing ways to travel that let them move instantly over long distances, regardless of physical borders.

In present times world migrants would not have to deal with the hard trips, long asylum processes, or dangerous border crossings that many have to deal with today. Instead, they would have access to a magical and effective way to travel, making the process of moving easier and more civilized. Even though it is easy to move around, future refugees may have the same problems as the characters in *Exit West*. They may have to deal with the loss of their home country and the difficulties of adjusting to new places. Even if it was magical, the experience of migration would still involve leaving behind known cultural contexts, navigating unfamiliar social landscapes. Hamid's look at the magical version of movement for future migrants makes us think

about the larger social and political effects. It raises questions about how magical migration resources are shared, who has access to these technologies, and whether there could be injustice and power imbalances in a world where people can move around with the help of magic.

Research Objectives

To discuss magical migration in Hamid's *Exit West*

To analyze postmodern perspective on migration in the selected novel

Research Methodology

The study is based on qualitative research techniques to attain a comprehensive comprehension of the function of Magical Realism in portraying migration in *West* through a textual and content analysis technique. The present study has employed theory of magical realism for the analysis of the selected novel. The selected passages has interpreted by the researcher in the context of the research objectives. By employing this methodology, the researchers have attained a more profound comprehension of the application of Magical Migration from postmodern perspective within the literary work and its importance in portraying the encounters of individuals who migrate.

Analysis and Discussion

Roh in his book *Magic Realism: Post Expressionism* talks about magical realism. In his view it is the blend of reality and supernatural elements. In the same domain, magical migration refers to a migration that includes leaving of one place in reality along with magical elements. This is the case in Hamid's *Exit West*, where Saeed and Nadia migrate from unknown city to Mykonos, Greece. Hamid portrays this migration in the following manner:

And so their decision to leave their city, when it finally came, was an involuntary one. The city swelled, the buildings grew taller, the queues longer, the prices higher. No one could afford to live there anymore. The city was collapsing under its own weight. Its infrastructure and

institutions were crumbling. Its streets and neighborhoods were overrun with violence and lawlessness. Its citizens were leaving in droves. (Hamid, 2017)

The concept of magical migration is exemplified in this quote from *Exit West* by means of a city in the process of collapse and the manifestation of enchanted portals. The act of leaving the city by the characters without their conscious wish, along with the transformative effects of migration, serves to underscore the strength of the magical realist literary style in its capacity to delve into intricate themes such as displacement and identity in a distinctive and fanciful manner.

Magical Version of Migration in *Exit West*

The present study exhibits the motif of enchanting migration in action. The urban setting inhabited by the characters is experiencing substantial transformations, resulting in the deterioration of both physical and organizational structures, alongside an increase in aggression and an absence of legal order. The alterations are compelling the populace to depart from the urban center, albeit the mode of their departure is enchanting.

The origins of the doors remain undisclosed and unaccounted for yet they function as a strong metaphor for the metamorphic impact of migration. The given quote highlights that the characters' migration from the city was not a voluntary decision, implying that they were compelled to leave. The application of the term "swelled" connotes a significant increase in the populace of the urban center, resulting in issues of overpopulation and limited resources. The aforementioned scenario constitutes a frequently occurring impetus for migration, and the characters' encounter is analogous to the encounters of numerous actual migrants.

The city's collapse serves as a symbolic representation of societal disintegration and the imperative for reform. The collapse being depicted is not solely limited to the physical realm, but also encompasses emotional and psychological dimensions. The characters are grappling with the challenges of managing the disorder and unpredictability that have arisen as a result of their circumstances. The enchanted

portals present a means of escape from the current circumstances, instilling optimism and potentiality in an otherwise bleak scenario.

In Roh's views there is the representation of different concepts and ideas in a way that they are presented in relation with magical elements. This happens in the selected novel where, because of various reasons, Saeed and Nadia migrate from one place to the target one. Hamid portrays the scenario of magical migration in the following manner:

The streets were thick with people, streams of black and brown and white and everything in between flowing together. The war had scrambled and dispersed them from their homes and families and identities, shuffled them into communities not of their choosing, and then pressed them again and again until they became involuntary nomads on the frontiers of the world, pilfering and begging and trading and surviving. (Hamid, 2017).

The present text intertwines the theme of migration with the consequences of warfare, displacement, and involuntary nomadism. The application of the term "frontiers" connotes a notion of residing at the boundary or beyond the confines of the societal norm, while the concept of being "pressed" accentuates the absence of wish and autonomy encountered by the migrant population. The application of the term "involuntary nomads" underscores the notion of lacking a fixed abode or a sense of rootedness, a prevalent phenomenon among numerous migrants.

Alternatively, the terminology magical migration may be deemed applicable to the aforementioned excerpt. The notion of being "scrambled and dispersed" connotes a perception of disorientation and mobility that surpasses the agency of the migrant population. Moreover, the aforementioned expression "streams of black and brown and white and everything in between flowing together" accentuates the amalgamation of cultures and identities that may transpire as a result of migration. The process of blending can be interpreted as a form of mystical metamorphosis that transpires via motion and relocation. When

the story moves Saeed and Nadia hear various rumors about the magical or mysterious doors that have an ability to send people to different other locations that are far from the borders of their country. These black doors represent magical migration where one passes and suddenly transported to a new location without any physical mean of transportation. Here migration is a real world phenomena but migration through these magical doors without using any physical transportation means magical version of migration. Hamid in his novel talks about this version of migration in the subsequent way:

Rumors had begun to circulate of doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away, well beyond the borders of the country. Some people claimed to know people who knew people who had been through such doors. A normal door, they said, could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all. (Hamid, 2017).

The aforementioned excerpt presents the notion of enchanted portals capable of conveying individuals to alternate locations, surpassing the geographical confines of their nation. The notion of an ordinary door undergoing a transformation into an extraordinary door without prior notice implies that this enchanting capability is capricious and conceivably accessible to all, irrespective of their societal standing or situation. The aforementioned notion is consistent with the concept of magical migration, as it implies that migration can possess a mystical attribute, with doors symbolizing the diverse methods through which individuals may endeavor to depart from their present circumstances and locate a fresh abode in another place. Moreover, the circulation of rumors pertaining to these doors indicates a degree of apprehension and ambiguity regarding the concept of migration, as individuals may be uncertain about their final destination upon traversing through one of these portals.

She had lived in a house with a concrete yard and an outdoor kitchen, where her father had smoked opium on a rope bed under a corrugated roof while she and her siblings played in the alley with other children, their laughter mingling with

the clatter of cooking pots and the cawing of crows. She had lived in a house where her mother had instructed her and her sister to play with the girls next door, because their mother was a prostitute and the girls had no one else to play with, and in the evenings the girls' mother had come over to drink tea with her mother and sometimes they had laughed and sometimes they had cried. (Hamid, 2017).

The passage conveys the notion of migration through the protagonist's suggestive depictions of their childhood abode and the recollections linked to it. The application of the past tense implies that the main character has already undergone migration from the above-mentioned location and is currently reflecting on her recollections from a remote standpoint. The presence of a concrete yard, an outdoor kitchen, and a corrugated roof serve as distinctive features that connote a particular temporal and spatial context, thereby evoking a feeling of sentimental longing for the protagonist's formative years.

The present passage demonstrates the application of Magical Realism in *Exit West* to investigate the intricate encounters of migration, encompassing the physical relocation of individuals from one location to another, alongside the emotional and psychological difficulties of adjusting to novel surroundings and circumstances. The intricate depictions of the protagonist's domicile and locality during their formative years engender a physical atmosphere of locale and chronicle, whereas the underlying motifs of marginalization and displacement serve as a reflection of more extensive predicaments that are pertinent to numerous migrants globally. When story further moves forward the readers come to know about the mindset of Nadia as she thinks about her ancestral village while leaving.

But Nadia did not see her city only as a warzone. She knew it as an intimate place, its every street corner and shop window, its every sidewalk crack and chewing gum stain, its every resident, she knew all of these things more deeply than she had ever known anything before, and this attachment was not something she was willing to surrender easily. (Hamid, 2017).

This passage emphasizes Nadia's emotional connection to her urban environment. The said attachment is not solely attributable to a sense of familiarity, but rather to a profound connection that has been cultivated with the location over an extended period. The reluctance exhibited by the subject to abandon this attachment suggests that she may be compelled to depart from her urban center, plausibly attributable to the persistent hostilities. This emphasizes the motif of forced migration and dislocation.

Furthermore, the passage portrays the mystical element of the narrative, as Nadia's emotional connection to her city is portrayed in a manner that transcends the tangible and logical explication. The author's familiarity with the urban landscape, including its streets, inhabitants, commercial establishments, and other facets, implies a profound and intimate bond that transcends superficiality. The profound interrelation between characters can be perceived as enchanting, underscoring the implementation of magical realism within the literary work to scrutinize the subject matter of migration. In the same vein, like Nadia, the feelings of Saeed regarding migration have been portrayed by Hamid in subsequent lines:

The sensation of falling asleep on the floor of the church, under the warm blanket, surrounded by strangers, was like that of being in transit again, and it was then that Saeed knew that he would not return to his old life, that this new one stretching out before him, and those to come, were his reality now, vast and uncharted, like the infinite sea. (Hamid, 2017).

As the story moves forward Hamid talks about the process and time span of magical version of migration. He discusses the attitude and the way in which this migration takes place. He deliberates the process in the following manner and says that it only took a moment to migrate from their ancestral country to the target one.

The doors were closing, the warm atmosphere of the great hall was starting to dissipate, and the air outside felt desolate, barren, and sharp. Nadia took Saeed's hand and squeezed it, as if for courage, and then they stepped through, together, their fingers interlaced, and on the

other side, immediately, they were in another country, where the buildings were smaller and closer together, where the streets were crowded with motorbikes and rickshaws and street vendors, and the air was thick with smog and cooking smoke, and the sunlight was weaker, and the people looked different, and the signs were in a different alphabet, and there were no trees, and a man was being beaten by another man with a length of wood (Hamid, 2017).

Within this excerpt, the protagonists Nadia and Saeed are utilizing the means of doors as a method of immigrating to a foreign nation. Upon traversing the threshold, individuals are instantaneously transported to a distinct locale that markedly diverges from their current surroundings. The linguistic choices employed in this excerpt engender a feeling of disorientation, as the recently encountered surroundings are portrayed as bleak, infertile, and jagged. The reference to diminutive edifices, congested thoroughfares, and diverse individuals and scripts underscores the cultural disparities and obstacles that accompany the process of migration. The incorporation of doors as a mystical component in the literary work facilitates the prompt relocation of the protagonists to an alternative setting, underscoring the abrupt and frequently disorienting quality of migration.

Implications of Magical Migration in *Exit West*

Hamid in his book brings on surface the concept of Magical Migration by incorporating various supernatural element. These magical elements are the part of the narrative throughout the book. The element of black doors are the part of the novel. Hamid implicates these magical elements in the subsequent lines:

The streets were empty, and the sky was empty, and their sense of each other, of their aloneness, grew. They walked for a while in silence, and then Nadia said, "I've never felt as lonely as I have in this city." And Saeed said, "It's the same for me. I think it's the same for everyone here. I don't know if it's possible to be lonelier than that." They walked in silence some more, and then he said, "But maybe that's a good thing. To

be if not alone then at least lonely. Because a lonely person has to try harder.” (Hamid, 2017).

The concept of magical migration is implicated in the given extract, as the characters experience a feeling of isolation and disorientation in their unfamiliar environment. The application of vacant thoroughfares and unoccupied heavens stimulates a perception of seclusion and novelty. The discourse among the characters pertaining to solitude accentuates the affective ramifications of migration and the challenges associated with acclimating to a novel milieu.

Moreover, Saeed's observation regarding the potential correlation between loneliness and increased effort could be construed as a reflection on the perseverance exhibited by immigrants who are required to surmount numerous difficulties and barriers in their adopted country. The application of Magical Realism is noticeable through the depiction of the desolate thoroughfares and firmament, potentially signifying the characters' perception of existing in a transitional realm or an intermediate state.

The city had surrendered its place to a shape-shifting mass that throbbed with a life of its own. There were over two million people in this metropolis, yet the only way to know you existed was to risk losing yourself in a crowd. Privacy was a luxury that the crowd could not afford.

The author employs the literary technique of magical migration to reveal the implications the urban landscape as a mutable entity, thereby potentially serving as an allegory for the metamorphic effects of migration. The urban landscape is depicted as having undergone a loss of its initial structure and distinctiveness, and the perpetual mobility and relocation of its populace has resulted in the emergence of a novel, adaptable identity. The characters' perception of anonymity and absence of privacy can be interpreted as a result of migration, whereby individuals are compelled to adjust to unfamiliar environments and may experience a sense of detachment from their previous identity and social network.

Describing different Magical elements in

relation with reality, Hamid surfaces all these elements present in the land where Nadia and Saeed migrate. He discusses the setting and location of new city which seems to have some supernatural elements. Hamid blends these elements with reality and tries to make this scenario the real one. Same is the case with Roh who, under the umbrella term of Magical Realism discusses magical migration. This representation can be seen in *Exit West*. The writer describes the setting new city in the following lines:

They were in Mykonos when the sea turned, when the tide retreated so far from the shore that it exposed a causeway of stone to the island of Delos in the distance, and people walked across the seabed to visit the ruins of the ancient temple. Saeed and Nadia saw the news on a television in a café, and the customers around them cried out in amazement and disbelief, and then started to phone their friends and family. (Hamid, 2017).

The present text implicates the occurrence of a sudden change in the sea, which led to the exposure of a stone causeway. This event is symbolic of a moment of disruption and displacement, mirroring the experiences of migrants who are required to adjust to unfamiliar surroundings and unanticipated obstacles. The customers' responses within the café underscore the notion of communal experience and affiliation that may arise among migrants as they confront the difficulties of displacement and reestablishment. The implementation of Magical Realism within this excerpt contributes a surrealistic attribute to the occurrences, intensifying the feeling of confusion and ethereality that frequently accompanies the process of migration.

Hamid, apart from physical description of places and characters, talks about abstract elements like time. By talking about time he blends some of the real elements with magical one. This representation is quoted in the following lines.

Time is how you spend your love, the labourer's task, and time is how you lose it, the degradation of the soul. Time is wealth, and time is poverty. Time is the past, and time is the future. Time is

fast, and time is slow. Time is a bolt of lightning from the blue-sky, and time is a feather floating down from the same sky. Time is a boomerang, flung out into the future, and returning to us, sooner or later, with consequences good or bad. Time is a bird, making its way over the oceans. Time is a kindness, and time is a thief." (Hamid, 2017).

The present text implicates time as a multifarious and intricate notion that can serve as a means of prosperity or destitution, a mechanism for affection and toil, and a power that can either elevate or debase the human spirit. The intricate nature of the novel is reflected in its examination of migration, which is depicted as a complex phenomenon that can yield both favorable and unfavorable outcomes for both the individual and the collective. Similar to migration, time is often depicted as a potent cause of transformation capable of effecting significant changes in both individuals and societies. The application of the metaphorical representation of time as a bird traversing over oceans conveys the extensive geographical and existential uncertainties inherent in the migrant experience. Additionally, the likening of time to a boomerang serves to underscore the potential repercussions of present actions. In general, the aforementioned excerpt highlights the thematic interrelations among time, migration, and the influential potential of both.

Along with Saeed and Nadia, Hamid portrays the magical migration of rest of the people living in the city. He brings out various experiences of people who, for betterment of their life, leave the ancestral village and migrate to the new land. Hamid in *Exit West* portrays this version of migration in the subsequent passage:

The streets of the city were full of people fleeing their homes, some with suitcases, some with nothing but the clothes on their backs. It was a scene that had played out countless times in countless cities throughout history, but it was new to Saeed and Nadia, and they walked slowly, taking it all in. The air was thick with the sound of shouting and crying, and the smell of smoke filled their nostrils.

By doing all these, the author visualizes migration as an unavoidable and an essential phenomenon in the wake of postmodernism. He deviates from the traditional pattern of migration, which demonstrates strict rules and complexities, through the doors of magic and hence substitutes it with a magical version of migration where everyone moves simultaneously and feels at home in the entire world.

Conclusion

On a close examination of Hamid's *Exit West* under the light of magical realism, it seems that the selected text reflects an imagined version of migration which is fantastical and magical. The author by employing the technique of magic doors, has treated the phenomenon of migration in an extraordinary way. Moreover, this sort of treatment demonstrates a postmodern version of migration which has cosmopolitan implications for future world. The author has deviated from the traditional pattern of migration, which demonstrates strict rules and complexities, through the doors of magic and hence substitutes it with a magical version of migration where everyone moves simultaneously and feels at home in the entire world.

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