

ANALYZING MOHSIN HAMID'S EXIT WEST AND THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST: COSMOPOLITAN AND ANTI-COSMOPOLITAN CONCERNS

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ABSTRACT

Migration is common to nearly all the known species in the cosmos inasmuch as it stems from the urge characterizing the principle of survival. The present study discusses Mohsin Hamid's Exit West and The Reluctant Fundamentalist in terms of two contrast themes, cosmopolitanism and anti-cosmopolitanism by analyzing major characters in the selected texts. This qualitative study uses Kenneth Burke's Pentad Dramatism as theoretical framework and applies content analysis technique for analyzing the selected texts. The study brings to conclusion the crucial and reluctant change of the protagonist in The Reluctant Fundamentalist who ironically transforms from a cosmopolitan figure into an anti-cosmopolitan person whereas in contrast to this, the characters in Exit West transform from regional characters into a more universal and cosmopolitan figures.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, anti-cosmopolitanism, migration, identity.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is common to nearly all the known species in the cosmos inasmuch as it stems from the urge characterizing the principle of survival. In the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, migration remains one of the chief features of the phenomenon of evolution. Species are compelled to leave their places, mostly on a natural impulse, to subsist, survive and make a way ahead. Human beings are no exception to this tendency to move. Prompted by multiple factors, they move from place to place. McNeill and Adams (1978) stressed the historical significance of human migration and experiences from past to present.

Migrants face a number of issues in the host countries. Depending upon the nature of migration, goals of varying experiences of migrants, they face issues such as the problem of economy, homesickness, alienation, discrimination and the crisis of identity. The course of migration does not run smoothly. In both cases, voluntary and forced, it puts the migrants at traumatizing risks. It involves exile, uprooting, cultural displacement, placement in new socio-cultural conditions and crisis of identity. The mentioned traumatizing risks vary for each category of migrants. Where it is difficult for migrants, particularly, refugees, to forget their origin back in their homeland, which, they are forced to leave; it becomes next to impossible for them to survive in host lands where they are discriminated against and given stereotypical image (Wagner, 2016). In this case, not only migrants are affected but their offspring are also segregated as European Union (EU), indicates that children of migrants may be at high risk for drug abuse because they use drugs to demonstrate their rejection of, and exclusion from, so-called mainstream society.

The phenomenon of migration has been a great attraction in various disciplines such as sociology, economic, politics etc. It has also become a rich debate in the discipline of literature. Different writers from the field of literature particularly from South Asian literature in English have written on migration and related issues. Diaspora fiction writers in South Asian literature in English have written remarkable literary texts. The subject of migration has developed in the discipline of literature considerably during last few decades. Diaspora writers have developed migrant narrative and

literature which serve as an effective means of exploring migrants' experience and related issues particularly the question of identity.

The present study discusses migration and migrants' experiences regarding their identities. The phenomenon of migration leaves a number of impacts on the lives of migrants such as economic, socio-political and others. It is not just a simple moving from one place to another but is a complex process of carrying values of origin, quitting them and adopting new values in the host country. This study specifically discusses Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The selected texts have been analyzed in contrast regarding the notion of cosmopolitanism and anti-cosmopolitanism.

Statement of Problem

Diaspora writer, Mohsin Hamid demonstrates the predicaments as well as the great experience of migrants in his writing. On a close examination of Hamid's *Exit West* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* it seems that the former novel exhibits the characters developed from regional to global atmosphere and become cosmopolitans whereas the latter novel shows that the protagonist ironically transforms from a cosmopolitan into an anti-cosmopolitan character in the wake of 9/11.

Objectives of the Study

- a) To discuss Hamid's *Exit West* regarding the theme of cosmopolitanism
- b) To analyze the notion of anti-cosmopolitanism in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Research Questions

- a) How does Hamid's *Exit West* exhibit the notion of cosmopolitanism?
- b) Why does the protagonist in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* transform from a cosmopolitan figure into an anti-cosmopolitan person?

Significance of the Study

The present study is significant and worth reading in following ways: firstly, it touches upon the most common phenomenon of migration in the present times and discusses both the predicaments as well as the great experiences of migrants between home country and host land. Secondly, it helps both to common readers as well as migrants regarding both: chances and challenges in the way of migration.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The phenomenon of migration is not a smooth journey, rather, it brings along a number of predicaments among which the identity related challenges are the most hindering ones. Challenges to identity constitute a crucial factor for immigrants. At the same time, migration brings great chances and opportunities for migrants in terms of economic improvements, standard of life and innovative experiences. All these factors leave great impact on migrants' identities and hence deep study of identity can provide important insights on immigration. Important aspects of these issues have already been addressed by different scholars in their research studies. This section reviews several lines of study about immigration and identity that form the crucial theoretical underpinning. It deals with research works previously done regarding the subject of the present study. The purpose of the theoretical framework with the review of relevant literature in this section is to place the research problem within a context of related studies and it helps the researcher to achieve the objectives of this study.

Notion of Migrants' Identities and Related Reviews

Exploration of human identity has always been a central subject in various disciplines. In the wake of the 21st century, particularly in the context of migration, it has become more relevant and essential regarding the development of individuals' personality. In Erik Erikson's theory demonstrates the roots of identity which means continuity and an inner coherence. The phenomenon of identity is so complex that there is no universally accepted definition; however, in the following, a few definitions are cited in order to extend the debate.

Abrams and Hogg (1988) terms identity as "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (p, 2). In the view of Jenkins (1996) the term identity "refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities" (p, 4). Wendt (1992) marked those identities are relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self. Whereas Hall (2003) commented "Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between numbers of intersecting discourses. ... [Until recently, we have incorrectly thought that identity is] a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action ... the logic of something like a 'true self.'... But it is continuously under change.

Gleason (1983) argues that Erickson's notion of 'identity crisis' is fundamentally the position of being uncertain of oneself specifically, in term of character, origin and goals while growing up fast changing circumstances. Whereas, in the postmodern context concept or construction of identity deviates from that of Erikson's notion of identity. In the postmodern age, identity is perceived as discontinued, fragmented and transitional phenomenon that keeps on changing.

The postmodern society has demolished these values such as unity, coherence, continuity and has replaced them with terms such as discontinuity, fragmentation, and dispersal. Petzold (2012) says "the postmodern identity constitutes itself in the negotiation of the limits and positions through correspondents, consensus- dissension process of the subjects within the social community". Identity works at two levels; personal and collective. Identity at personal level refers to individual to his belongings and in this respect Kaumann (2005) says "identity is the story that everyone tells about himself". (p, 63) on the other hand, collective identity based on the concept of socialization which integrates an individual within a collectivity as per Berg (2001). Jenkins (1997) differentiates between personal identity and collective identity and points out that the first accentuates the differences while the second accentuates similarities. In enlightenment thought, the subject identity is based on the doctrine that the human is a unified individual gifted with the power of reason and action and having a center consisting of a self who remains identical throughout individuals' existence and this very center of self is defined as identity.

Apart from above, another concept of identity is formed in post-modern subject. Identity is a prehistoric phenomenon, but it was not until the 20th century that the term got used properly. It is used as an umbrella term used in social sciences in order to define an individual's understanding of him or herself as per desired characteristics. The term includes personal, social and conscious image defining- 'real me'.

Postmodern Identity in Relation to Cosmopolitan Migrants

Postmodernism is a reactionary movement against modernism. It is contradictory, complex and ambiguous interconnectedness which has unclear stance. In other words, it is the reincarnation of dissatisfaction towards modernity. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines postmodernism as an indefinable phenomenon; however, it can be termed as a set of strategic notions such as repetition, difference and hyper-reality. Relativism, pluralism and subjectivism are the key features of postmodernism.

So, for the notion of identity in post modernism is concerned, it varies from traditional construction of identity as unified, integrated and fixed. Rather postmodern identity debates on identity in postmodern context.

Most of the postmodern critics define identity as an open question, fluid and a changing notion with the changing circumstances of moving people. Post moderns have fragmented, dynamic and shifting identities which are often hybrid and having crisis in term of culture, language, and other social values. Consumerism is a driving force regarding the formation of identity in postmodern age. In this context, Featherstone and Kellner define postmodern identity with relation to consumption of products provided to individuals by industries. Similarly, postmodern critics such as Beck and Gernsheim (2002) focus on the concept of individualization, a stem for changes in society associated with the practice of industrialization which resulted in consumer society. These critics argue that being in a consumer society people relate their identity more to their own lives than to their relation to other people in society. In other words, people are likely to be individualized, considering themselves as unique individuals rather as a group or collective body and further, they also motivate others to define themselves as individuals. Identity is conceptualized as non-essential and non-fixed and rather presented as moveable, designed and transformed ceaselessly in relation to the socio-cultural system of society (Hall, 1987 p.30) Hall (1990) asserted that if someone feels or claims fixed, unified and coherent identity, it may be a fantasy but not reality at all. He believes that we have contradictory identities within us which pull us to different directions, and they keep on shifting continuously.

The postmodern society imposes a process of permanent reconstruction of identity. Personal autonomy and self-consistency are seen as ideals of existence, which imply reflexive proficiencies and individual negotiations. The obstacles, changes and crises belong to the human life. However, there are situations that lead to an overcrowding of heavy burdens, so the individuals are overcharged with the integration and processing of what they have lived, in their personal identity.

Crisis of Migrants' Identities leading to Anti-cosmopolitanism

Identity is not a fixed phenomenon rather it keeps on changing with the course of time due to varying circumstances and the experiences one faces, particularly in the case of migration. When the migrants leave their home country and join the host country, they face a number of variations in term of culture, social norms, linguistically and ideologically. In such cases the migrants react and sustain them differently according to their respective capability of acceptance and adaptability. Sometimes, they accept the host culture whereas sometimes they resist against it and try to sustain their respective cultural and other associated values in the host country. It depends on their personality traits such as extroversion and introversion. The more they are the extroverted the easier they find to adjust, whereas the more they are introverted the harder it becomes to adjust in the host culture. However, whenever the migrants find it difficult to adjust in the host country in respect of any of the above-mentioned factors, they feel the crisis of identity. In other words, they do not feel at home in the host country and this situation makes them look back to their origin. A critic namely Asghar in his work argues that people have divided and subdivided themselves into so many class and categories ranging from religious, economic, geographic and linguistic lines that it will require a complete overhaul to bring us remotely close to the ideals of Quaid.

Their personality becomes lingered and shattered and they feel hybrid due to multicultural associations. Such situation compels them reconstruct their identity in order to feel secured. Now in this regard, they attempt differently and consequently some of them get adjusted in the host culture and welcome the newly framed identity believing that nothing is fixed and they move ahead being what they were and who they are now. On the other hand, some of the migrant find it hard to say their past farewell and hence they time and again struggle to look back being too nostalgic. In this context such migrants cannot move forward as they lament for past and origin. Though they try to restore their identity but often fail doing so because they are living in a new set up where they are required to adapt themselves according to the constructed norms of the host country. Studies show that one of the categories termed as refugees, often finds it next to impossible regarding the phenomenon of identity. They leave their home-country on account of push factors such as war, political restlessness or some disaster and thus they in other words don't leave rather they are enforced to leave. Such people are not accepted in the host country as first citizens and they are discriminated in different ways. On account of segregated treatment, the refugees cannot adjust themselves in the host country.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study is qualitative in nature because it deals with the social, cultural and anthropological issues within the discipline of fictional literature. Qualitative research is mainly projected at describing, understanding and clarifying human experience the way it occurs in people's lives. This data is collected in the form of spoken or written language rather than numbers (Polkinghorne, 2005). In this research, social, cultural and anthropological issues related to the cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan concerns are extracted from the selected fictional works of Mohsin Hamid.

The present research implies Kenneth Burke's Dramatic Pentad critical theory. Burke was a literary critic who sought to synthesize the broad swath of theories relevant to the social interpretation of literature, ranging from Aristotle, to Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. Burke's Dramatism consists of five elements: act, agent, scene, agency and purpose. Act refers to action, happening or occurrence in text. Agents are doers of action and they are characters in work of art and literature. Scene denotes to place, period and time of action. Agency indicates to the mode or method of action. Lastly, purpose demonstrates the reason or aim of doing some action. Content analysis procedure has been adopted in order to interpret the selected texts in which thematic analysis has been done.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The current study discusses Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In light of Kenneth Burke's critical theory: Pentad Dramatism, it analyzes cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan concerns in Hamid's *Exit West* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Cosmopolitan concerns in *Exit West*

Exit West is a story of two major agents namely Saeed and Nadia who begin to become a couple. The initial scene, an unnamed city, already signals the universality of transience. The writer starts with the

lines, "The city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war..." (p.1). Presenting the city without a particular identity—unnamed—makes the city universal. This not only invites a wide circle of readers to imagine themselves from anywhere, but also symbolically indicates the universality of transience in human life. This scene is a consonant introduction to the primary actions of the characters throughout the book: Saeed and Nadia leave their homeland in the wake of war and roam different places. Their transient visit to different parts of the world is symbolic, as the writer indicates in the book, "these choices meant something" (p. 1). The author indicates that the choice of place becomes destiny when he writes, "Geography is destiny, respond the historians" (p. 9). The most interesting thing regarding the mode of migration is the use of black magic doors in the book which symbolically represent free and checkless movement from place to place. The author is imagining a new and unpracticed version of migration. The magic doors in the book collapse distances. In this regard, Hamid in one of his interviews argues, "it is important to imagine future on migration instead of past as we often do." Thus, the agency as per Kenneth Burke's Pentadic Dramatism is the use of black magic doors in *Exit West* which symbolically demonstrate an imagined future mode of migration visualized by the author. The magic doors are described in the following lines, "the effect doors had on people altered as well. Rumors had begun to circulate of doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away, well removed from this death trap of a country" (p. 69). The characters make their movements around the globe through the agency of magic doors. Using this magical agency has the effect of emphasizing the transitions that occur in different places, rather than emphasizing the hardships of the transportation process, as many other books on migration do. The doors also emphasize the serendipity involved in the place to which migrants move, thus further universalizing the symbolic representation of the author's idea that life is a journey over which we do not have full control, but rather adapt to as contingencies compel us. Initially the magic doors take Nadia and Saeed to Mykonos, Greece where they are among many refugees and settle in a tent city. Mykonos is one of the most famous Greek islands for its cosmopolitan atmosphere and welcoming of thousands of tourists every year. This selection of Mykonos is symbolic of both the positive desires behind immigration and the harsh material limits faced by migrants to new places. Mykonos stands for the archetypal Cosmopolitan Island of dreams and symbolically represents agents' desires and dreams. But Nadia and Saeed, like all the hundreds or thousands of other migrants there, live on the outskirts of Mykonos's dream community. After some time of increasing hardship, Nadia's acts of friendship lead to obtaining the compassion of a local Greek girl who helps them go through a recently discovered door.

The basic stance of the author of *Exit West* is that we are all migrants through time. In this line portraying the thoughts of the old woman in Palo Alto the author further universalizes his theme that life is inherently a migration, even for those who never move. The woman has spent her entire life living in the same house in the same city but she still feels that she is a migrant.

Another way in which the authors represents the push and pull factors is in terms of individual characters' identity. Saeed, Nadia, and Saeed's father illustrate different responses to these factors. Saeed's father is the most conservative of the three, and he has the longest personal and historical ties to the place. He is facing the same "push" factors that Saeed and Nadia are facing, and yet he chooses not to migrate. Saeed is a young man with stubble of a beard, signifying his tradition-oriented temperament and the nascent conservatism that will ultimately shape his response to migration. But, the push and pull factors are great enough to lead him to migrate in spite of these resemblances to his father. Unlike his father, who is seeking to stay near his wife's grave, Saeed is pulled toward migration by his relationship with Nadia. Although Nadia wears a flowing black robe, this robe is a cover that conceals rather than reveals her personality. She has abandoned her family and lives alone as a working independent girl. They move toward being a couple in an increasingly conflicted place, but they do not marry and they have not physically consummated their relationship. As they experience the repeated moves together, they grow apart in line with their personalities.

Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) projects a world experiencing massive migration that can no longer be controlled by physical borders, military surveillance and international agreements. A massive migration has begun at this time of globalization more than ever, the text demonstrates: That summer it seemed to Saeed and Nadia that the whole planet was on the move, much of the global south headed to the global north, but also southerners moving to other southern places and northerners moving to other northern places (p. 168). The book allows its readers to understand the urgency of today's turbulent global conditions of social unrest, war, and human displacement. The writer has used a magical realism

as a technique in which black magical doors enable thousands of people to “slip away” from the economic destitution and “murderous battlefields” of their homelands to the safety of the West. Normal doors that “become special door [s] . . . without warning” let migrants from different countries, ethnicities, and religions appear all of a sudden at people’s doorsteps and transform the globe into denationalized cultural spaces, causing the enormous split between the First and the Third World to be reproduced within the experiences of everyday life. Mohsin Hamid imagines a new version of migration in future and lets readers visualize it too. This prospective face of migration pictures a cosmopolitan world in which people move from one place to another simultaneously. The technique of black magic doors works as an agency in the text and allows the writer to articulate the previously unarticulated version of a cosmopolitan world. The doors represent the hope of a new life in the wake of civil war in the text. Further, by choosing these magic doors, the writer stresses a borderless and nationless community that is more globalized and cosmopolitan. Because of the ease of travel they offer, these doors represent the dissolution of the borders that keep people in and out of nation states and therefore bring into question what makes a nation at all. This element of magical realism changes the nature of global mobility, removing traditional barriers like long overland migration routes or dangerous sea journeys as well as making migration nearly impossible to control.

Anti- cosmopolitan concerns in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Hamid’s second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), is story of Changez who moved to America at an early age, graduated from Princeton University and consequently started working at Underwood Samson as an analyst. The book focuses on the life of the protagonist, living in America an ideal life as he says, “This is a dream come true, Princeton inspired me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible” (p. 3). But the incident of 9/11 brings a crucial change in his life. Thus, *TRF* is a story of a person who was living the idealized cosmopolitan life, suddenly faced with a nightmare in the wake of 9/11 which shattered his expectations and dreams. On a close examination, Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* seems to bear some of the anti-cosmopolitan threads. The protagonist, Changez migrates from Pakistan to the U.S as an economic migrant with the dream of education and standard life. He lived in America before 9/11 as a cosmopolitan at Underwood Samson and represents elite culture, optimism and power. In his view Samson, seems like a perfect meritocracy, feeding its employees a version of the American Dream: if they work hard, they’ll be rewarded. Samson employees travel around the world, performing seemingly useful services and enjoying huge fame. But this glorious span ends for him as soon as 9/11 happens in America. The protagonist comes to realize the crucial face of cosmopolitanism, globalization and pluralism in the wake of 9/11. The notion of anti-cosmopolitanism can be understood in contrast to cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism refers to the concept which promotes pluralism, universalism, globalization and sociocultural and ethnic diversities. On contrary, anti-cosmopolitan propagates indigenized values, nationalism, boundaries and anti-global thoughts. In *TRF*, the protagonist, after 9/11, grows his beard and becomes a staunch nationalist Pakistani and Muslim. Similarly, he is treated as an outsider by Americans which goes against the notion of American Dream. As a protest, Changez becomes a reluctant fundamentalist which means that the crucial and unavoidable circumstances of 9/11 compel him to be a fundamentalist which he becomes reluctantly and it is cleared from 101 the title of the book too. The protagonist says, “I said I hoped ... to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability” and it clearly demonstrates his priority for staunch nationalism and religious supremacy. Similarly, his initial reaction against the collapse of the World Trade Centre signifies his fundamental attitude. At the end of story, Changez describes himself as working as a university lecturer in Pakistan with followers to whom he persuaded for political activism. His choice to return to his homeland and to start as a political activist is significant and it demonstrates an attempt to make his own country a substitute version of America where he been living like a star in a film before 9/11. At this point, he seems to be more a Pakistani-Muslim who bears hatred, though reluctant, in his heart against America where he had been living like a star before 9/11. It looks that Changez mostly wanted an identity as superior and when America refused that to him after 9/11 by treating him as an “outsider” that he pursued that in Pakistan. In other words, he seems to be in competition with America being a Pakistani. His religious and national associations at this point make him more a believer of nation state and less a cosmopolitan. Thus, the present study contributes this stance as a new addition to the theory of push-pull factors of migration.

CONCLUSION

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*'s main stance is, "We are all migrants through time". It demonstrates that movement is life and stasis death. Nadia and Saeed move and they live on. *Exit West* reflects that people adapt either through cosmopolitan approach, rootless but adaptable, as Nadia adapts or through recreating their past in the new setting as Saeed does. The most significant portrayal is the notion of cosmopolitanism; specifically Nadia is characterized as a cosmopolitan character who moves smoothly and adapts to every new context. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* portrays a world of continuous movement. Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist* after a very close analysis in the light of Burke's dramatic framework seems in contrast to cosmopolitan theory. The protagonist moves to the U.S carrying an American dream that he achieves to a great extent too, by getting a job at the prestigious Samson Company, but he is badly pushed back to his home country after the scene that is "America" undergoes a stark change. In contrast to existing theory of cosmopolitanism, the protagonist transforms from a cosmopolitan figure into an anti-cosmopolitan one in the wake of incident of 9/11.

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