

Borders and Freedom, Autonomy and Postcolonial Subjectivity in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I examine Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*, in which abrupt transnational portals of magical realism lay bare ongoing political, economic, and psychological hurdles to twenty-first-century migration through a broad postcolonial lens. The doors democratize mobility across geographies, circumventing real physical border infrastructure, but they don't accomplish much to alter global systems of power. Grounded on the seminal ideas of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Frantz Fanon, this book examines the ways in which displaced individuals negotiate a partial and complicated autonomy. The research looks at how the characters transcend Western orientalist tropes and colonial spatial segregation, following the shift from displacement to the establishment of hybrid communities in liminal contact zones. It also intersects with modern criticisms of state sovereignty, biopolitics and wall-building by scholars such as Wendy Brown, Giorgio Agamben and Saskia Sassen to show that postcolonial migration entails ongoing navigation of entrenched imperial mechanisms. Finally, the study argues that in spite of the re-emergence of national borders and institutional confinement, the displaced recover narrative agency and self-determination, showing postcolonial subjectivity as a dynamic and resilient negotiation between historical heritage and current survival.

KEYWORDS: Postcolonial subjectivity, migration, borders, autonomy, hybridity, subaltern agency

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Today's displacement is more than a mere movement from one place to another, it is an essential space where human freedom is continuously confronted with structural limitations. Migration is not a simple logistical move within territory but an existential threat to the potential of a person to steer their own life in the face of large-scale humanitarian catastrophes. In this sense, autonomy is to be understood not just as physical freedom of movement but as the very agency necessary to build one's body, cultural identity and life course in the face of dominant geopolitical frameworks. As human mobility accelerates under the strains of contemporary globalization, theorists have come to see that crossing physical thresholds involves a renegotiation of one's place in the world in opposition to institutional forces that seek to regulate, contain and classify human lives (Braidotti, 2011; Clifford, 1997).

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) is a contemporary novel that offers a stunning literary rendering of the complex negotiation of mobility and identity, reformulating the discourse of displacement via the lens of magical realism. Hamid presents mystical, omnipresent doorways that immediately teleport persons across continents, thereby rendering physical border infrastructure such as massively guarded barriers, naval patrols and bureaucratic checks null and void. Removing geographical boundaries does not, however, result in a utopian disappearance of conflict, but isolates and exposes the continuous political, economic and psychological obstacles which continue to define who belongs and who is excluded. The magical doors serve as a literary tool that removes physical geography to expose the naked mechanics of global power relations, pushing readers to face how modern regimes maintain exclusivity even when physical limits are no longer essential (Hamid, 2017).

Edward Said's fundamental postcolonial paradigm provides a crucial critical lens via which to engage critically with the way these modern narratives face current imperial processes. Said (1978, 1993) reveals how imaginative geographies are produced by Western cultural and political hegemonies, which split the globe into dominating centers and dominated peripheries. The migrant or the "Other" is invariably represented as a cultural threat or a passive recipient of Western benevolence. Said's findings on contemporary fictional migrations demonstrate how postcolonial subjectivity is always undergoing the process of being made, governed and limited by deeply embedded colonial legacies. The literature that deals with transnational movement fits into a broader critical tradition of breaking down imperial worldviews. It shows that the cultural legacy of empire continues to influence how host societies receive, categorize, and govern displaced populations (Ashcroft et al., 1989).

In addition, the current literature on migration needs a stylistic and cosmopolitan perspective to understand the instability of conventional national borders. Texts that are globalized, moving via worldwide marketplaces, provide a cosmopolitan esthetic that

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resists provincial interpretations and reflects the fractured, multi-sited realities of displaced populations (Walkowitz, 2006). In this article, I explore how Hamid's allegorical narrative of migration and Said's critique of Western power reconfigure postcolonial subjectivity. It looks at the borders that separate the illusion of western, supposedly absolute, freedom and the reality of the western-drawn colonial borders. This study explains the contrast between the continuing grip of institutional power, and the truth behind human liberties, and whether they can be realized in a world still resides in the shadow of the empire.

CHAPTER II: POSTCOLONIALISM IN THE 21st CENTURY

To understand the governance and interpretation of contemporary migration, one must understand the ongoing relevance of colonial paradigms to twenty-first century international relations. Modern state policy toward displaced populations is not made in a vacuum but in a historical setting of governance and cultural classification. Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) provides a framework for assessing the ways in which Western institutions consistently construct the non-Western world as an exotic, inferior, or dangerous "Other. This ideological model is entirely based on what Said calls imaginative geography; a conceptual boundary dividing the cultivated domestic sphere from the chaotic foreign exterior. The very otherness of foreign territories and their inhabitants is the very frame on which Western discourse is built. This frame gives rise to a constant hierarchy that makes the legitimacy of governance, oversight and ultimate exclusion possible before a physical border is crossed (Said, 1978).

This fictional geography has become the complex geopolitical strategies of active positioning and regulation of global movement in the twenty-first century. Derek Gregory (2004) in *The Colonial Present* shows how contemporary military operations, humanitarian interventions and state security apparatuses continue to operate thru established colonial logics. Gregory says that the world is broken up into zones that remain outliers by contemporary geopolitics, where human rights can be ignored and people can be jailed. This spatial regulation depends on the construction of a rigid dichotomy between a secure West and volatile postcolonial peripheries, such that the movement of refugees is perceived not as a humanitarian reality but as an existential threat to domestic stability and national identity (Gregory, 2004).

The modern media and humanitarian discourses, which play a fundamental role in influencing the public opinion on the migration problem, complement these physical and geographical divisions. In their analysis of the soft power of war and humanitarian spectacles, Lilie Chouliaraki and Roberta Perkowski (2020) consider how media portrayals produce certain limits of empathy. They contend that modern Western rhetoric often portrays migrants as helpless victims or nameless security threats, depriving them of agency while also justifying state confinement practices. Public awareness is controlled thru emotive framing and manufactured spectacles of pain to justify strong border enforcement. Consequently, the formation of the 'Other' is constantly reified thru both explicit geopolitical policing and more subtle cultural narratives that govern who is judged worthy of inclusion in the contemporary nation-state (Chouliaraki & Perkowski, 2020).

Beyond the immediate mechanics of exclusion, the lived experience of twenty-first-century migration brings with it complicated processes of cultural identity that resist strict national boundaries. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1994) argues that cultural identity is fluid and situational, arising out of a liminal "Third Space" of enunciation. For Bhabha, the idea of cultural purity is a fantasy constructed by nationalist ideologies; real cultural production occurs in the liminal zones in which different histories and traditions converge. For migrants and displaced groups, the passage into this liminal zone breaks down the binary oppositions of colonizer and colonized, giving rise to hybrid identities that defy the homogenizing demands of the host nation. This conceptual framework offers literary and cultural analysts an alternative reading of migration as an active process of cultural interpretation and negotiation rather than an identity deficit (Bhabha, 1994).

However, opportunities for hybrid self-identification are greatly limited by institutional power structures that often exclude marginalized groups from meaningful political participation. In her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak interrogates the epistemic violence of representation. The postcolonial female, and the subaltern more generally, she argues, is not heard, but represented, by Western intellectual and political authorities. Spivak argues that even the best-intentioned institutional structures continue to reproduce imperial power relations, by incorporating subaltern voices within the established Western discourses. This silence of modern migration takes place when migrants are reduced to mere administrative statistics or voiceless victims, rather than recognized as political actors who can voice their own wants and stories (Spivak, 1988).

To reconcile these contradictory dynamics, we need to examine how immigrant narratives negotiate the tension between cultural dislocation and the expectations of the host society. In Wail S. Hassan's *Immigrant Narratives* (2011) the author looks at how diasporic and immigrant literatures engage with the politics of cultural translation, identity construction, and representation. As Hassan observes, contemporary literature from the Global South not only contests orientalist assumptions but also enters into a complex dialog with western literary heritage. These stories show the systemic barriers that immigrant individuals face in trying to repurchase their experiences in unwelcoming spaces. Immigrant literature is a rich site for exploring the intersections of migration, language and authority and for understanding the limits of national identity and the complex nature of cultural translation (Hassan, 2011).

One way to approach the complex psychological implications of this displacement is thru Frantz Fanon's incisive examinations of alienation, psychic suffering and colonial domination. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) Fanon describes the profound

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psychological schism in the colonized and dispossessed person caught between cultural fields. He says the deep-rooted racism and colonial mentality result in a deep feeling of inadequacy alienation and emotional distress which continues even after political independence has been achieved. The psychological strain of the twenty-first century migrant is magnified by unwelcoming host societies, who see them thru racialized and stereotypical lenses, requiring them to constantly negotiate their humanity within pervasive systems of exclusion and devaluation (Fanon, 1967).

These psychological observations are further extended to the political domain in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004) and discuss systemic violence in colonial and postcolonial contexts. As Fanon famously said, the colonial domain is a bifurcated space between the settler town and the native town, separated by police barriers and military outposts. This geographical apartheid is not only historical, but also anticipates present geopolitical arrangements in which affluent countries wall themselves off from poor and war-torn portions of the world which they have historically exploited. Fanon maintains that true decolonization demands a complete reversal of these geographical and economic inequalities by means of revolutionary struggle and the construction of a new humanism, and offers a critical framework for the understanding of contemporary resistance to global inequality (Fanon, 2004).

This persisting pain of structural inequality and its erasure or depoliticization by current global capitalism and its inclination to ignore the reality of postcolonial oppression is subject to a critical reading by Neil Lazarus (2011) in *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Modern theoretical approaches tend to ignore the material aspects of imperialism, Lazarus claims. Therefore, postcolonial studies are confined to the study of culture or literature, and global capital continues to subjugate the peripheries. Lazarus presents a vital correction, discussing how literature and theory engage with or avoid these practical realities, and asking critics to pay close attention to the socioeconomic mechanisms producing displacement, poverty, and migration in the twenty-first century (Lazarus, 2004).

In the end, the literary representation of this worldwide dislocation is inextricably bound up with the notion of the diasporic fantasy. The Literature of the Indian Diaspora In *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, Vijay Mishra (2007) theorizes the complex psychological and cultural elements of diaspora, and differentiates between diasporas of displacement and diasporas of trade. Mishra analyzes the ways in which exiled people develop imagined homelands as a psychological protection against the alienation of exile and conforming to new cultural settings. In turn, this diasporic lens links past pain and contemporary survival, explaining how literature reflects the varied experience of living between worlds. The frames arising from the postcolonial and the theoretical establish the foundation upon which *Exit West* and other contemporary writings are examined, as well as how these works respond to the legacies of the empire and the complicated nature of human agency (Mishra, 2007).

CHAPTER III: AUTONOMY AND BORDERS IN HAMID'S EXIT WEST

In Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, the geography of the world is radically disturbed by the sudden appearance and multiplication of mysterious black doors. These gateways permit instant global movement, bypassing the military architecture of modern nation-states. In a world of concrete barriers, the door is a democratic equalizer, allowing displaced persons to cross heavily barricaded seas, borders and checkpoints without the danger of an illegal border crossing. Hamid (2017) illustrates this rapid transformation as his protagonists cross a portal from a conflict-ridden city, only to become unexpectedly affected. "We destroy our past identities when we move" (Hamid, 2017, p. 94). This revolutionary study dissects the material geography of exclusion and debunks the myth that geographical mobility is equivalent to real political freedom.

The magic portals permit movement everywhere, not disturbing the present world power structures that govern international transactions. In *Violent Borders* Reece Jones (2016) argues that the main role of the state in the twenty-first century has been to increasingly coercively control movement in an effort to maintain global economic inequality. Jones underlines that physical boundaries are not simply lines on a map but deadly devices constructed to perpetuate the privilege of the global North while imprisoning the destitute. In *Exit West*, the doors render conventional border walls obsolete, but the host nations quickly move to new forms of containment, surveillance, and spatial segregation. This shows that the structural violence of the border industry is not eliminated in bypassing physical obstacles, but adjusted (Jones, 2016).

The constant adjustment of border control systems functions following what Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013) theorize in *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. As Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) argue, boundaries are no longer just at the state's territorial edges, but rather expand across society, and are important devices for managing global labor, controlling citizenship, and separating people. In the setting of Hamid's novel, the entry of millions of migrants thru the doors causes a systematic reconfiguration of the host nations. Migrants no longer have freedom of movement, but instead are confronted with a plethora of internal frontiers, legal, economic and social, within cities like London and Marin. The doors may offer a way across space, but Mezzadra and Neilson's approach reveals how global capitalism quickly establishes new forms of control to dominate the newly arriving migrant labor force, maintaining systemic hierarchies (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013).

So, in *Exit West*, the experience of migration demonstrates that ultimate freedom is a dream, for the protagonists soon learn that walking thru a door does not erase the geopolitical baggage of their beginnings. This startling reality, in which his characters traverse inhospitable host areas where local communities regard them as an imminent demographic danger, is shown by Hamid (2017). The protagonists recognize that "they were foreigners now, and would be foreigners forever, wherever they went" (Hamid, 2017, p. 138). The constant feeling of alienation is juxtaposed with the contradictory aspiration of infinite freedom, and conflicts with the concrete

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bases of institutional resistance to outsiders. The migrant is thus immediately caught in the net of modernity's global powers, ones that are constantly testing him/her for legality and, and crucially—the powers of the state—his or her social worth.

The force of push from outside, geopolitical, factors is evident in every part of the novel but the thrust toward autonomy is central. This desire is channeled through different personal channels, particularly psychological and gender specific ones. Their constraining freedoms are driving our protagonists apart, Nadia and Saeed. Migration is a special motivator for Nadia that brings her freedom. It's a prerequisite on the road to breaking free from the suffocating embrace of traditional patriarchy, religious conservatism and social surveillance in her hometown. Hamid openly mentions the way that Nadia came to understand herself in the face of uncertainties around her. She was “fiercely protective of her independence” (p. 38). She makes her decision to migrate due to her inner voice, both physically and psychologically. This enables her to develop an independent self, one she could not access from her past.

But Saeed's desire isn't to break free from what he's trapped in today, but is rather an emotional aversion stemming from his history. The rupture, however, is not a release, it's Saeed's but a sad break. Nadia is looking forward, learning how to live in a new world. Saeed clings to memories, rituals and physical artifacts of his lost homeland. Hamid (2017) illustrates that Saeed's inner motivation was ‘Saeed prayed not because he was religious, but because he missed his mother and father’ (p. 97). His psychic architecture is based on nostalgia, on regret, his autonomy is very dependent on what he has lost. This difference highlights that autonomy is not the same everywhere, but rather is shaped by personal experiences of memory, emotion, and psychological sense of trauma and loss. Therefore it is crucial to have an understanding of the specific gender features of the journey of Nadia's quest for autonomy as explained in the theoretical perspective of Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders*. Mohanty (2003) has responded to feminist Western analysis of women from the Third World, which is often universalizing, and is calling for more locally based and complex analysis of agency, power and resistance in the context of global capitalism. Theories by Mohanty enable us to read *Exit West* thru the conscious choice that Nadia makes when she wears the flowing black robe. For the Western gaze, the robe may represent a form of oppression, but to Nadia, it is armor – a flexible border that shields her body from the public gaze, and provides her with a paradoxical sense of autonomy and security in public sphere. In other words, Nadia's agency is negotiated in a complicated cultural process, rather than in the binary of freedom and servitude.

Judith Butler's theory, *Frames of War*, also offers a prism through which to understand the psychological effects of this change and the differing worth of human life. Butler (2009) takes into account the geopolitical and media environment that defines what lives are deemed grievable and bodies can be violently contested without being mourned publicly. In *Exit West*, Saeed and Nadia are on the constant move through these institutions that shape the culture and displace people—who are not treated by host societies as whole human beings but as threats that will be suspected if they are not in control and secure. However, in such contexts, emotional survival requires the restoration of sensitivity and grievability, Butler says. The psychological reactions of Saeed and Nadia's pragmatic persistence are both reactions to having been enveloped in the frameworks of the west which do not offer them political and human dignity. However, in *Exit West*, as in much magical realism, socio-political reality is intertwined with the idea of autonomy, and, ultimately, this is a very broken and hard-won success. The novel is therefore not just a tale of triumph, but a sign of agency being negotiated and threatened by the structural tyranny of borders, along with the inward pressure of memory and trauma. As Nadia and Saeed separate in Marin, each in his own way in a world changing, Hamid reminds us that it is freedom that can be found as one crosses the geo-political frontiers without and the psychological gulfs within. The magical doors are contrasted with the bleak realities of postcolonial displacement, to show that real human agency is not in the endless freedom to move across borders but in the tenacity, resilience and ability to survive, adapt and build anew in a fractured global world.

CHAPTER IV: RECLAIMING NARRATIVES

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit* challenges the stereotypical and simplistic portrayal of refugees in the West's political and media narratives. Unlike many other passive figures featured in his work, Hamid's characters are psychologically complex, emotionally nuanced, and have agency, rather than waiting to be rescued by the West. This is a form of resistance that is directly related to the question raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) in “Can the Subaltern Speak? It is on this point that Spivak's discussion of dominant geopolitical formation and intellectual elites comes in: how poor subjects are turned into passive objects of study, and how that renders them silent. In response to this epistemic violence, Hamid invents characters that defy typecasting, and that ask for recognition and self-determination in the era of global displacement.

The most apparent instance of this change of passivity in the text is the intentional deployment of Nadia's black cloak in the story. For the western gaze, so accustomed to discerning orientalist stereotype, the veil or the black robe seems to be one symbol of the rule of the fathers and female subservient religious fanatics. But Hamid makes Nadia's dress a subtle weapon of agency. Instead, Nadia uses the robe as a “form of armor” (Hamid, 2017, p. 27), as a garment to shield her body from the intrusive look of a conservative culture, a place to escape from the public chaos. Nadia's appropriation of an object usually hyper-sexualized or considered shameful by the Western viewer, challenges the assumptions held by the outside viewer, asserting that subaltern women negotiate their own independence subjectively.

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This conscious reappropriation is similar to the description of Aijaz Ahmad in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992), who cautioned against the idealization or generalization of the Third World texts and themes in the Western academic institutions. Ahmad contends that the literature of the Global South should be understood from the perspective of its own class, social and gender dynamics and not from a generic Eurocentric perspective. Hamid honors this simple requirement, refusing to make Nadia into a symbol of all womankind, instead a flawed, intensely individual, and very real choice maker. Her refusal of traditional domesticity and of western feminist fantasies of saving her from such commercialization highlight the complex independence that Ahmad wishes to warn against the neo-imperial commercialization of. The complex independence of which Ahmad warns in relation to the neo-imperial commercialization of is foregrounded by her rejection of traditional domesticity and of western feminist rescue fantasies. Moreover, Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) notion of the "contact zone" in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* sheds light on how characters negotiate these regions of cross-cultural interaction. According to Pratt, contact zones are social locations where various cultures encounter, fight and wrestle with each other, frequently under unequal power relations. In *Exit West*, cities such as Mykonos, London and Marin are vast interaction zones in which displaced migrants and hostile native populations come into touch. Hamid's protagonists are not passive witnesses of their own relocation; they are actively involved in these zones. Instead, they turn these liminal spaces into centers of active cultural negotiation, forging their own narratives against the grain of imperial expectations.

As the protagonists traverse via global interaction zones, they are eventually placed in liminal places and generate hybrid cultural identities. The perfect lens via which to see how Nadia, Saeed and other displaced persons produce new forms of belonging is Homi Bhabha's (1994) seminal notion of the "Third Space" in *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha says that cultural identity is never pure or static; it is rather produced in the liminal regions of translation and displacement. The migrant camps in London and the cooperative settlements in Marin are the physical realizations of this Third Space in *Exit West*, where people of different nationalities, languages and cultures come together to form hybrid communities that transcend the national boundaries.

This hybrid community creation is a direct challenge to the assimilation pressures and defensive nationalisms of the host cultures. Stuart Hall (1990) in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* argues that cultural identity is not an essential given from origin but a 'becoming' which has as much to do with the future as the past. Hall insists that diasporic identities are characterized by a recognition of an essential heterogeneity and continual alteration. In Hamid's story, Nadia and Saeed are part of this process of becoming. By living among different refugee groups in London – where buildings are collectively lived in and shared by people from all parts of the world – they create a diasporic solidarity that undermines nationalist binaries of 'us' versus 'them' and demonstrates that community can be built on common precarity rather than common ethnicity.

Salman Rushdie's writings in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) further explain this intricate link to origins, memories and hybrid futures. The displaced writer and the migrant, Rushdie notes, have to work with shattered mirrors, building fictitious or psychological homelands when the actual nation is lost or transformed beyond recognition. Both Nadia and Saeed in *Exit West* battle with this phantom terrain. Saeed clings to the memories of his former city by praying and retaining it in his mind, and Nadia looks to the future, adjusting her lifestyle to the changing demands of the hybrid spaces they live. Rushdie's observations assist to understand how their different journeys in Marin mirror the reality of the diasporic condition: memory is not a fixed anchor but a fluid landscape to be renegotiated all the time.

Ultimately, thru the integration of Spivak's criticism of voice, Ahmad's warning for exoticization, Pratt's touch zones, Bhabha's Third Space, Hall's dynamic diaspora, and Rushdie's fictional homelands, Hamid's work becomes a masterclass of narrative reclamation. *Exit West* is a challenge to the flat, clichéd images of refugees that are produced by global media and nationalist politicians. Instead, it fills its pages with complicated, hybrid themes that communicate, resist, adapt and create new solidarities. Both liminal community-building and rich character agency are shown by Hamid to be the main engine under which even displaced people still have the potential to write and command their lives under the most limiting global power structures, and reinvent what it means to belong in a world fragmented by colonial powers.

CHAPTER V: GLOBAL POWER AND AUTONOMEY

Hamid's *Exit West* presents a remarkably accurate representation of the classical postcolonial critique by Frantz Fanon's and the concept of spatial segregation in social settings. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (2004) describes the colonial world as a bifurcated place, starkly split between the compound of the wealthy colonizer and the filth of the destitute colonized, with no border other than barracks, checkpoints, and policing forces. This historical spatial apartheid is vividly mapped onto twenty-first century London in Hamid's novel, as the rapid flood of millions of migrants results in a deep polarization of metropolitan geography. The city is divided into various regions, rich districts that are maintained by the native elite and large, gloomy encampments where displaced populations are warehoused and ostracized (Hamid, 2017).

Derek Gregory's conceptual framework in *The Colonial Present* (2004) makes this current reworking of colonial spatial politics very clearer. Gregory shows how current geopolitical policies continue to depend on creative geographies that split the world into zones of security and zones of exception, where human rights are suspended for racialized and displaced people. *Exit West*'s division of London into bright spaces of native privilege and darkened spaces of migrant confinement maps onto the persistent legacy of

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colonial authority. Hamid shows how Western nations do not block global migration altogether, but rather build internal physical limits that isolate the migrant body so that the structural inequities of the colonial past are preserved in the heart of the metropolis (Gregory, 2004).

Deeply related to the historical governance of race, intimacy, and social order are the intimate processes of power that maintain these geographical boundaries. Ann Laura Stoler (2002), in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, examines how colonial regimes rigorously regulated personal life, racial categories and physical borders to preserve imperial authority. Stoler said that the policing of boundaries, physical and bodily, was necessary for the maintenance of the notion of European supremacy. In *Exit West*, this legacy is shown in the increased concern host communities feel over the presence of migrant bodies within native places. London's imposed social segregation echoes an ongoing imperial instinct to police contact zones, to separate the native people from the alien 'Other' to preserve existing systems of power and privilege (Stoler, 2002).

More than urban spatial segregation, the contemporary state's general geopolitical machinery is a nervous, aggressive rejoinder to the deterritorializing forces of globalization. In *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, Wendy Brown (2010) contends that the increase of border walls and physical barriers in the 21st century is paradoxical; states build walls precisely when their traditional sovereign power and national autonomy are weakening under the pressure of global capital, transnational flows, and cross-border crises. Brown says the physical borders have a performative and psychological function, seeking to create the impression of total state control in a world where traditional borders have become porous and meaningless. A striking example of this type of theoretical finding is the fact that the host governments in Hamid's novel are striving to recover control over a demographic situation that has been radically changed (Brown, 2010).

The urgent re-establishment of sovereign authority takes place through biopolitical apparatuses which influence the legal status and the basic life of the migrant. This connection may be critically examined by Giorgio Agamben's (1998) foundational paradigm in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Agamben states, "the core of contemporary sovereignty is the power to determine who may be reduced to 'bare life,' a life that has no political rights or legal protection and in which violence can be committed without it constituting a crime. The inhabitants evacuated through the miraculous portals in *Exit West* frequently reside in this very same biopolitical zone. They are transformed into administrative curiosities, confined to camps and under state control, existing in a precarious legal limbo where their essential humanity is constantly held in abeyance by sovereign fiat (Agamben, 1998).

To understand the maintenance of the monopoly of current governments over movement and exclusion, it is also crucial to evaluate the institutionalization of travel limitation throughout history. John Torpey (2000) in *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*, chronicles the progressive control of "the legitimate means of movement" by the contemporary nation-state. Passports, visas and national registrations are tools to sort people and govern who is part of the national body. Torpey traces the history of the passport as the ultimate weapon of national sovereignty and global stratification. In *Exit West* the magic doors make passports and legal checks temporarily irrelevant, presenting a major threat to current governments whose administrative infrastructures rely on control of human mobility. The aggressive responses of the host countries reflect a desperate effort to restore this bureaucratic monopoly of mobility.

The convergence of these theoretical methods allows Hamid's tale to become a striking criticism of current imperialism, state sovereignty and border police. The story demonstrates that postcolonial migration is never merely a matter of physical travel but a negotiation of a deeply established, very resilient matrix of imperial forces. Be it the biopolitical reduction of migrants to bare life, the physical partition of urban spaces, or the bureaucratic policing of identity through surveillance and legal limits, the contemporary state is always seeking to reassert the borders of control. Hamid's magical realism strips away the practical rationales of border control and reveals the stark, unyielding architecture of global injustice that faces the postcolonial subject at every turn (Hamid, 2017).

Ultimately, *Exit West* shows that a person who just passes through a legendary portal would not achieve genuine sovereignty, but rather enters a region immediately controlled by old and new imperial powers. The central premise of postcolonial migration is that freedom is always contested by the afterlife of empire and the defensive architecture of the sovereign state, as demonstrated in the characters' constant negotiations with partitioned cities, antagonistic authorities and systematic surveillance. In mapping these intricate intersections of space division, state sovereignty and border technology, the novel offers an urgent and pointedly critical meditation on the structural obstacles that constitute the human condition of the twenty-first century and affirms its status as a masterwork of contemporary postcolonial literature.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* exploits magical realism not to offer a utopian escape from geopolitical reality but as a superb literary trick to highlight the constraints of modern mobility. The magical portals are a way to instantly circumvent the physical checkpoints, the oceans, the border walls. This reduces the main problem of transnational mobility to a minimum: removing physical obstacles does not always mean real emancipation. Displacement causes a state of persistent rupture where "exile is like so many ruins," a situation that is not readily fixed by simply moving geographical coordinates (Edward Said, 2000, *Reflections on Exile and Other*

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Essays). Hamid shows that the postcolonial person who passes via a door is simultaneously faced with a complex matrix of enduring social, political and economic restrictions.

This complex reality verifies Michael Perfect's (2020) critical interpretation of the novel in his article, " 'Black holes in the fabric of the nation,' " where he argues that Hamid's refugees are vivid reminders of the structural exclusions ingrained in the modern global order. Perfect shows how host governments regard displaced populations as dangers and not as humans to welcome, making them unstable even when conventional boundaries become porous. In *Expulsions*, Saskia Sassen (2014) explains how global capitalism and systemic state policies are constantly expelling vulnerable communities and generating huge spaces of un-belonging and dispossession. These frameworks expose the fact that the postcolonial subjectivity remains

Together, these frameworks reveal that postcolonial subjectivity is still a continuous, difficult balance between the weight of historical legacy and the harsh reality of contemporary relocation. The way ahead throughout this broken country is thus to understand that autonomy is never total, but rather a very partial and hard-won victory. As Nadia and Saeed's diverging paths indicate, the migrant experience is filtered thru the lens of internal memory, trauma, and gendered survival tactics under hostile host settings. Characters must continually adjust to changing terrains, but they never completely free themselves from the structural ghosts of empire. As sensitively informs the readers throughout the narrative: "we are all migrants thru time" (Hamid, 2017, p. 209). It suggests that the human life itself is a continual process of transformation. Thus, postcolonial subjectivity is created in the very tension between loss and adjustment, in which people are required to reconstitute their sense of self when the traditional marks of home have been wiped out by global catastrophes.

This complex understanding of displacement informs the conclusion of this study, which underscores the crucial need of regaining narrative agency and self-determination in an age of rising national borders. In *Who Sings the Nation-State?* (2007), Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak examine the precarious position of populations without a state, suggesting that genuine political activity requires challenging the exclusionary logic of sovereign nation-states that monopolize belonging. They argue that the dispossessed nevertheless possess an important potential to make claims for rights and to propose alternative conceptions of community, challenging the treatment of them as only victims of global economic and political transformations. For subaltern individuals navigating the treacherous seas of twenty-first-century migration and state monitoring, reclaiming their agency is of the utmost importance.

Walter D. Mignolo (2000) in *Local Histories/Global Designs* calls for "border thinking," an epistemological attitude that critiques and transgresses imperial designs by using the experiences of the oppressed to escape Eurocentric frames of power and belonging. Border thinking invites displaced persons to generate knowledge from the geopolitical periphery, making the status of exile a locus of critical resistance rather than passive captivity. Madina V. Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo (2012), in *Learning to Unlearn*, further elaborate this decolonial imperative, where they call on scholars and marginalized people to unravel the colonial epistemologies and adopt other ways of knowing, living, and relating across cultural divides.

This study ultimately illuminates how, thru the integration of Hamid's allegorical story with these compelling postcolonial and decolonial conceptualizations, *Exit West* provides an essential blueprint to comprehending contemporary displacement. The novel successfully portrays how postcolonial subjectivity still pulls the threads of global systems of power, transcending the binaries of achievement and victimhood. Although walls are raised higher and surveillance is thriving, the people displaced by the very systems multiplying surveillance are reclaiming the narratives surrounding their existence and asserting self-determination, showing how the resilience of the human spirit is undeniable. And, in a world that is expandingly more fragmented, the capacity to adapt and write one's own future is the ultimate expression of autonomy and decolonialism.

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