

# Mohsin Hamid's Exit West: A Postnational Vision For A Global Age

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## ABSTRACT

*Beyond the conventional constraints imposed by borders, nationalism, and fixed state identities, Mohsin Hamid's Exit West offers a visionary narrative that redefines migration. The novel uses the potent metaphor of magical doors that allow instantaneous travel over great distances, enabling people to travel freely without the usual limitations of political boundaries, passports, or visas. Hamid provides a profound critique of the current global response to displacement through this creative device, emphasising the frequently harsh and discriminatory policies that refugees and migrants around the world must contend with. Exit West examines the human and emotional aspects of migration and how people adjust, make new connections, and re-establish their sense of belonging in strange settings rather than focussing only on migration as a political or economic issue. The book interrogates the primary influence of the nation-state in shaping identity and disputes the belief that citizenship and location should determine an individual's sense of belonging. Rather, Hamid envisions a future rooted in compassion, flexibility, and international unity, where communities emerge from collective experiences and altruistic support. Hamid explores how Exit West addresses existing global fears related to migration while presenting an optimistic, postnational perspective that envisions a more embracing and connected universe where human movement is recognised as an inherent and enhancing aspect of life.*

**Key words:** migration, magical doors, displacement, postnational.

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## INTRODUCTION:

In today's world, migration has become a vital and debated topic, influenced by numerous crises such as warfare, political unrest, economic inequality, and environmental changes. These factors are displacing countless individuals, compelling them to cross national boundaries in pursuit of security, prospects, and respect. Instead of promoting unity and acceptance, numerous countries have reacted to this movement with escalating nationalism, stricter immigration regulations, and exclusionary language. The rise of nationalism across multiple regions has established rigid divisions, both tangible and ideological, that highlight the distinction between "citizen" and "non-citizen," intensifying an atmosphere of fear and division. Within this framework, literature is essential in redefining global connections and providing new perspectives on identity and belonging. Mohsin Hamid's Exit West (2017) emerges as a powerful literary answer to these worldwide conflicts. Through its creative storytelling and symbolic magical doors, the book challenges traditional notions of borders and national identity, advocating a postnational perspective rooted in compassion, flexibility, and common humanity.

Located in a city that remains unnamed and on the brink of civil strife, Exit West traces the journey of Nadia and Saeed, two youths whose emerging love is disrupted by chaos and turmoil. As their environment becomes less viable for living, they, along with many others, decide to leave their country. Their method of escape is extraordinary: enchanted black doors that enable them to travel instantaneously to various global locations—such as Mykonos, London, and San Francisco—without the need for visas, passports, or the usual perils faced by those seeking refuge. These magical doors are not just narrative elements; they represent significant symbols that challenge conventional views of migration, illustrating movement as both a physical journey and a deep emotional and psychological change. Hamid employs this metaphor to examine the random and often brutal obstacles that shape contemporary migration systems and to propose that the ability to move freely is an essential human right.

As Nadia and Saeed traverse unfamiliar regions and social realms, *Exit West* transcends the conventional tale of refugees. Instead of merely highlighting the tangible hardships of being displaced, Hamid delves into the psychological experiences of his characters—their transforming identities, evolving connections, and fluctuating senses of belonging. The story posits that identity is no longer tied to a specific locality or national loyalty; rather, it is molded by movement, tenacity, and our links with others. Hamid envisions a community characterized not by collective territories but by shared principles and care for one another.

With its inventive structure and emotional resonance, *Exit West* critiques the constraints of nationalism and advocates for a more empathetic and inclusive view of global belonging. Hamid's perspective, transcending national boundaries, acknowledges the challenges of migration while envisioning a future where individuals are liberated from the limitations of geography or citizenship. They find solidarity in compassion, flexibility, and the universal human yearning for connection. In this way, the narrative reflects our present global crisis and outlines a vision for a kinder and borderless existence.

Scholars have significantly highlighted how *Exit West* engages with discussions surrounding global migration. Kumar asserts that Hamid “breaks down the distinction between citizen and refugee” by envisioning a reality in which enchanted doors circumvent the restrictive mechanisms of national borders. This perspective resonates with Hamid's larger concept of postnationalism, which advocates for reconceptualising belonging through empathy and common experiences instead of legal identities or national loyalty.

Hamid's use of magical realism, especially illustrated through the symbolism of the black doors, has been regarded as an impactful storytelling technique. Ilott suggests that these doors serve “not as a means to flee reality but to capture its emotional and existential essence.” By eliminating the physical threats typically linked to migration, Hamid shifts the reader's attention to the psychological and relational changes that migrants experience.

In examining the novel's approach to borders and identity, Spencer situates *Exit West* within a global perspective. He asserts that Hamid presents a “vision of global togetherness” that challenges the divisive nature of nationalism and fosters a sense of ethical unity (Spencer 38). This global ethos frames *Exit West* as a work fundamentally engaged with envisioning international possibilities beyond geographic confines.

Huma Ibrahim interprets the evolving dynamics between Nadia and Saeed as representative of the impact migration has on individual identity and societal values. She observes that the characters' contrasting reactions to unfamiliar settings—Nadia embracing her freedom in contrast to Saeed's yearning for the past—highlight the intricate emotional layers of dislocation (Ibrahim 79). Furthermore, the narrative upends traditional gender expectations, portraying Nadia as a symbol of independence against Saeed's more conventional ideals.

Additionally, critics have noted Hamid's unique writing style. In his review for *The New Yorker*, James Wood commends Hamid's “gentle, indirect narration,” which facilitates a reflective examination of migration and grief. The novel features long, flowing sentences along with an all-knowing third-person perspective, giving it a quality reminiscent of fables, thereby intensifying its allegorical impact (Wood 42).

Beecroft presents a distinctive perspective by examining how the novel handles concepts of time and space. He suggests that the quick transitions through doors illustrate the shortening of time in our digital era, and represent how globalization reduces physical distance while still creating emotional detachment (Beecroft 66). In this way, *Exit West* challenges not just nationalism but also the boundaries of contemporary global society.

In Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, the enchanting doors act as a significant symbol for movement beyond nations, representing a reality where migration goes beyond the strict confines set by borders and countries. These doors enable characters to transition effortlessly from one location to another—be it from a city ravaged by conflict to a tranquil island or to an unfamiliar urban center—without requiring any travel documents, such as passports or visas, or any formal authorization. As symbols, the doors embody a vision of unrestricted movement across borders, questioning the established frameworks that manage and limit individual mobility in reality. They break down the tangible and political obstacles that characterize current migration patterns, underscoring the

arbitrary essence of national borders that frequently compel individuals to undertake perilous and lengthy journeys.

By enabling immediate transportation, Hamid critiques the sluggish, bureaucratic, and often hostile hurdles that migrants confront, highlighting the distinction between the book's creative liberties and the grim truths of displacement. In truth, migration tends to be intertwined with politics, laden with legal challenges, xenophobic sentiments, and aggression, rendering displaced people as marginalized "others." Consequently, the magical doors not only provide a means to evade these threats but also present a hypothetical challenge to the global frameworks that govern migration. They imply a future where movement is regarded as a basic human right instead of an advantage limited by geographic boundaries or national identity. Additionally, these doors inspire readers to reconsider concepts of identity and belonging in ways that transcend geographic limitations, suggesting that relationships and compassion should underpin communities rather than inflexible national ties. The immediate travel facilitated by the doors mirrors the rapid pace of globalization and the increasingly entwined world, where ideas, commodities, and individuals navigate swiftly across great distances.

Nevertheless, Hamid's analogy simultaneously highlights the conflict between this ideal and the harsh truth of exclusionary politics that prevail in today's discussions surrounding migration. Utilizing this creative approach, *Exit West* imagines a world beyond national identities, one that overcomes fear and division, promoting a future in which borders vanish and humanity comes together through shared experiences and mutual support. The doors, therefore, emerge as a symbol of hope for freedom and a critique of the structural obstacles that persist in dividing the global community.

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* effectively confronts and dismantles the conventional narrative of the nation-state, showcasing a postnational perspective that challenges the essential elements of identity and belonging linked to rigid geographical and political boundaries. Within the story, the nation-state—often seen as the main origin of individual and collective identity—is portrayed as a weak, exclusionary concept that struggles to reflect the dynamic realities of human life in a globalized context. Hamid subverts this prevailing narrative by spotlighting the journeys of Nadia and Saeed, two young lovers whose lives are disrupted by conflict and enforced migration. Their passage through magical doors, which swiftly take them to various locations around the globe, represents both a literal and symbolic movement beyond the limits of national borders.

At first, Nadia and Saeed's sense of self is closely tied to their native land, which, while unspecified, holds significant cultural, social, and political implications. Yet, as they journey through different nations and continents, they start to loosen their ties to these stable identities, and they begin to explore new, more adaptable ways of belonging. This developing self-awareness mirrors the intricate reality encountered by countless migrants and refugees today, whose identities cannot be wholly defined by the stringent labels associated with nationality or citizenship.

Hamid's story illustrates how nationalism often serves as a catalyst for separation, exclusion, and strife. The novel addresses how national identities can be weaponized, promoting xenophobia and hindering compassion through the establishment of rigid distinctions between "insiders" and "outsiders." These barriers, both tangible and ideological, restrict people's movement and overlook the interconnected nature of global societies. By envisioning a world where national divisions become increasingly irrelevant or permeable, *Exit West* imagines a future in which identity is shaped not by legal frameworks or geographic claims but by shared human experiences and emotional bonds. The bond between Nadia and Saeed exemplifies this transformation: their love and ability to thrive rise above their backgrounds, influenced more by adaptability, support, and strength than by loyalty to any specific nation. The novel posits that genuine belonging is derived not from fixed locations or passports but from the ability to cultivate new communities across cultural and geographical boundaries.

In addition, Hamid's portrayal of his characters' journeys pushes readers to rethink the ways in which identity can be reshaped during times of widespread dislocation. The narrative transcends mere stories of grief and suffering, focusing instead on the potential for personal reinvention and intercultural camaraderie. This perspective that goes beyond national boundaries provides an optimistic contrast to current discussions that are

primarily fueled by anxiety, isolation, and growing nationalistic sentiments. By dismantling the conventional nation-state storyline, *Exit West* encourages us to envision a reality where the connections among individuals are founded on compassion, shared humanity, and receptiveness to transformation. It prompts us to reconsider what belonging really means—not as a static or inherited position, but as a fluid, developing process influenced by interpersonal relationships in a global context. In this way, Hamid's work not only critiques the drawbacks of nationalism but also offers a revolutionary understanding of identity that aligns with the intricacies of the twenty-first century.

The book serves as a compelling analysis of citizenship beyond national boundaries and the ethics that come with globalization, shedding light on the ethical duties we have due to our increasingly intertwined existence. It envisions a world in which outdated concepts of citizenship—previously linked to rigid national borders and legal definitions—are confronted by a more adaptable and inclusive notion of belonging that goes beyond geographic limitations. Through the experiences of Nadia and Saeed, who use extraordinary doors to escape from their conflict-stricken nation to sophisticated cities such as Mykonos, London, and San Francisco, Hamid underscores the importance of global bonds in forming new identities and communities. These urban centers are not just settings but dynamic environments of cultural interchange, where diversity and hybridization thrive, allowing migrants and residents to live together, adapt, and redefine their sense of home. The theme of urban cosmopolitanism in *Exit West* encapsulates both the opportunities and obstacles of navigating a global society—spaces where varied histories, languages, and customs intersect, sometimes uncomfortably, while also providing a foundation for empathy and unity to grow.

Hamid's depiction of these city environments highlights the moral necessity of acknowledging our collective humanity that transcends national boundaries. The journey of individuals moving across frontiers, enabled by the enchanting doors, represents the dismantling of the obstacles that usually divide communities and restrict ethical considerations to one's own country. Consequently, *Exit West* champions a universal ethical framework based on compassion and shared accountability, prompting readers to broaden their moral perspectives to encompass those forced from their homes due to warfare, environmental changes, and financial struggles. The narrative critiques the divisive politics rooted in nationalism and fear of outsiders, revealing how these mind sets hinder the potential for authentic global unity. Instead, Hamid's perspective resonates with rising conversations around worldwide citizenship, where individuals recognize their shared destinies and accept responsibilities that surpass geographic borders.

The places that Nadia and Saeed call home showcase the intricacies of life beyond national boundaries, defined by both possibilities and conflicts. Mykonos serves as a transitional haven, while London and San Francisco are vibrant multicultural environments where immigrants face the complexities of adapting to fresh social landscapes. Within these cities, the characters grapple with issues of assimilation, belonging, and self-identity, mirroring larger worldwide discussions on migration and inclusion. However, amid the challenges and feelings of isolation, these urban settings also facilitate the creation of new communities that go beyond ethnic and national distinctions. Hamid indicates that these cosmopolitan urban areas are essential for reimagining and embodying a form of citizenship that is not based on legal definitions but rather on engaging in a collective human endeavor.

In the end, *Exit West* advocates for a rethinking of what it means to belong and our ethical duties in a globalized era. By placing its story within varied urban environments and emphasizing the connections among human experiences, the book introduces a vision of citizenship that transcends national boundaries and promotes empathy, inclusiveness, and a dedication to justice that goes beyond borders. Through this narrative, Hamid envisions a future where international crises inspire compassion and joint efforts instead of fear and isolation.

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* intricately connects the themes of affection, grief, and the redefinition of home to showcase the complexities of postnational realities in a world that is becoming more interconnected. At the heart of the novel lies the bond between Nadia and Saeed, whose love story unfolds against a backdrop of conflict, displacement, and migration. Their relationship serves as a miniature representation of the larger social and political shifts that confront rigid ideas of identity and belonging linked to nation-states. As Nadia and

Saeed journey through magical portals to cities like Mykonos, London, and San Francisco, their connection evolves in tandem with the changes in their surroundings, illustrating how close relationships can adapt and endure despite chaos. Their love, although challenged by external conflicts and personal differences, embodies a humanizing element that crosses borders, drawing attention to the emotional aspects of migration that often get eclipsed by political discussions. The narrative demonstrates that personal connections in a postnational setting are dynamic and complex, shaped by evolving conditions yet grounded in shared vulnerability and strength.

In *Exit West*, the idea of home is powerfully redefined as fluid and changing instead of something fixed or linked to one specific location. Conventional notions of home as a consistent physical place or an integral part of one's identity are challenged by the harsh realities of forced migration and worldwide displacement. The experiences of Nadia and Saeed highlight the grief that comes with departing from one's native land—such as the loss of cherished environments, social circles, and a sense of safety—but simultaneously reveals the potential for home to be understood as a concept that is continually molded by experiences and relationships. Home shifts away from being a matter of land to being about the emotional and social ties that migrants forge in different, often temporary settings. This adaptable perspective mirrors the realities faced by countless individuals in a contemporary world marked by displacement and movement, indicating that a true sense of belonging is not solely rooted in geographical locations but resides in the ability to cultivate new connections and derive significance from unfamiliar surroundings.

Hamid's story also delves into the sorrow and confusion brought about by loss—of family, cultural heritage, and former lifestyles—while concurrently presenting an optimistic outlook on transformation and resilience. Through the developing connection between Nadia and Saeed, the book investigates how migrants balance the desire to cling to their histories with the necessity of facing the unknowns of new starts. Their tale captures the emotional nuances of migration, illustrating how home encompasses both what has been left behind and what remains to be explored. By concentrating on the personal encounters of love and grief, *Exit West* personalizes the broad notion of migration and encourages readers to rethink belonging as a fluid, evolving journey influenced by compassion, adaptability, and shared human experience.

*Exit West* employs personal narratives to shed light on political themes, revealing how the evolution of Nadia and Saeed's relationship parallels wider changes in our perceptions of identity and community in a world beyond traditional nations. The novel's redefinition of home confronts conventional beliefs about rigid borders and national allegiance, promoting instead an idea of belonging that centers on connection, kindness, and adaptability. Through this narrative, Hamid presents an impactful reflection on the potential for human resilience and collective support in a time characterized by displacement and global change.

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* stands out as a compelling literary investigation and a call to rethink the notion of human belonging in a connected, postnational era. By crafting a story that crosses borders—both in a literal sense and figuratively—Hamid questions entrenched concepts of identity, home, and nationality. The narrative is set against the backdrop of worldwide challenges such as warfare, forced migration, and xenophobic sentiments, urging readers to envision a reality where belonging is determined not by the place where one is born or their legal status, but through shared experiences, emotional bonds, and the ability to empathize. The mystical doors act as a strong symbol for the prospects of a world without borders, in which mobility is recognized as a human right instead of a privilege regulated by politics. Nadia and Saeed's passage through these thresholds indicates the evolving essence of home and identity, symbolizing a broader shift from national awareness to a postnational outlook.

At the core of *Exit West* is Hamid's optimistic perspective on coexistence—one that values diversity, fluidity, and mutual support over fear, division, and exclusion. Rather than merely concentrating on the trauma associated with displacement, Hamid's story also highlights human adaptability and the strength of love and community amidst turmoil. The novel does not idealize migration; however, it implies that from loss and dislocation, new types of solidarity and significance can grow. At a time when nationalism and isolationist sentiments are rising

globally, Hamid offers a different outlook: a vision of a more inclusive society where humanity prevails over borders, and the relationships we create with others transcend geographical limitations.

The lasting significance of *Exit West* is found in its capacity to make urgent global Issues relatable. With its poetic language and emotionally impactful characters, the novel brings attention to the migrant experience in a manner that promotes understanding instead of alienation. It urges readers to look past political generalizations and recognize the individuals represented in headlines—people with aspirations, fears, and the need to belong. By doing this, *Exit West* not only critiques the shortcomings of our existing systems but also points towards a more empathetic and interconnected future. It serves as both a mirror to our current world and a guide for a better one—one built on empathy, openness, and shared humanity.

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