

CHAPTER II

DIALOGIC HETEROGLOSSIA: POLYPHONIC DISCOURSE OF MIGRATION IN THE NOVEL *EXIT WEST* (2017) BY MOHSIN HAMID

QURRATULAEN LIAQAT AND ASIA MUKHTAR

Migration is one of the most prominent global concerns of our age, not least due to its sheer scale: millions of people migrate from one part of the world to another every year in search of safety and economic stability¹. It is one of the most constant phenomena in human history, as groups of people have been migrating for thousands of years due to environmental, political, social and financial reasons. A few prominent examples are the migration of Jews from Nazi Germany and mass migration during the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, in more recent times, people have been migrating from Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Burma due to invasions, extremism, civil wars and religious persecution.

Recently, in the 21st century, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of migrants.² There is an all-time increased desire to migrate from down-trodden, poverty-ridden, extremist, and war-plagued countries to developed and prosperous countries³ because of globalization and advanced means of transportation available in contemporary times⁴. As a result, mass migration at this crucial juncture in the history of humanity has inspired

¹ Guterres, "Foreword," 2011, 217.

² Castles, "Migration and Social Transformation," 2012, 155.

³ de Hass, "Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective," 2014, 169.

⁴ Munck, "Globalization, Governance and Migration: An Introduction," 2000, 2; Van Naerssen, Spaan, and Zoomers, *Global Migration and Development*, 2008, 1; Paik, "Introduction," *Aftermaths: Exile, Migration, and Diaspora Reconsidered* (2009), 1; Frank, *Migration and Literature: Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, and Jan Kjærstad*, 2008, 1.

artists to produce visual, pictorial and written accounts of migrations taking place across the world (paintings, movies, graphic novels, novels)⁵. Among the many writers who approached migration crisis in their works, one should definitely mention Mohsin Hamid, with his latest novel, *Exit West* (2017). The novel was an immediate success because of its timing and nuanced treatment of current socio-political issues.

Hamid belongs to the successful younger generation of contemporary Pakistani Anglophone novelists. All his novels explore not only the most gruesome situation of contemporary Pakistani society, but also burning international issues. Migration was the harshest reality faced by Pakistanis at the time of partition. Another aspect of migration is the religious discourse of migration for Pakistani people – the Prophet’s migration to Medina. Therefore, migration is one of the most prevailing discourses in Pakistani literature and is an established historical reality of the Pakistani psyche, philosophy, religion and literature. Migration is a constant theme in all the novels written by Hamid. In *Moth Smoke*, Ozi migrates from Pakistan to America and then back to Pakistan⁶. Similarly, Changez, the central character of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, also goes to America and then comes back to Pakistan⁷. Likewise, the protagonist of *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* migrates from a rural to an urban area⁸. However, in his latest novel, *Exit West*, Hamid transcends the boundaries of nationality, religion and geography by narrating multiple strands of national, religious, historical and contemporary realities related to migration.

The theme of dislocation is not only prevalent in Hamid’s novels, but is also the focus of other authors. In fact, the contemporary world is haunted by the “spectre of migration”⁹ and this “Age of Migration”¹⁰ has given rise to creative productions on migration¹¹. Consequently, migration literature has emerged as a genre which deals with discursive stylistics,

⁵ Frank, *Migration and Literature*, 1-30; Paul White, “Introduction.” *Writing across Worlds- Literature and Migration*, 1995).

⁶ Hamid, *Moth Smoke*, 2000.

⁷ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 2009.

⁸ Hamid, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, 2013.

⁹ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 2000, 133-134.

¹⁰ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 1993.

¹¹ Frank, *Literature and Migration*, 2; Fraser, *Literature, Music and Cosmopolitanism*, 8; Khalid Koser, *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction*, 2007, 9; Naeressan et al., *Global Migration and Development*, 1.

discourses, languages, enunciations, cultural hybridity and themes¹². The main features of these novels are “linguistic deviance, impoverished vocabulary, and improper use of grammar” with “an unadorned minimalistic style which turns into a sign machine... that avoids closure that keeps pushing language to its limits, breaking down significance and multiplying meaning potentials”¹³.

Most often, the problem of migration is studied from a social sciences perspective as a “security threat”, “governance problem”¹⁴, “key aspect of social change”¹⁵, challenge for development,¹⁶ and for its value for national and economic development¹⁷. However, the ongoing contours of migration and its features are “multifaceted and complex”¹⁸ and there are not many comprehensive and integrated theoretical frameworks to study migration¹⁹. Hence, in order to capture complex realities related to migration, a “semi-scientific manner of research” is required²⁰. Therefore, in the area of migration studies, cross-disciplinary collaboration might prove to be “a fertile way of extending the methodological range of research, of highlighting previously neglected aspects, and of identifying new questions for consideration”. This collaborative research will also expand analysis methods and enhance understanding of the phenomenon of migration²¹. Consequently, this paper is an attempt to study migration from a semi-scientific perspective.

¹² Frank, *Literature and Migration*, 1-30; Fraser, *Literature, Music and Cosmopolitanism*, 1-18; Sten Moslund, *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*, 1-28; White, *Writing across Worlds*, 1-19.

¹³ Moslund, *Literature, Music and Cosmopolitanism*, 7-8.

¹⁴ Munck, *Globalization, Governance and Migration*, 1227.

¹⁵ Castles, *Migration and Social Transformation*, 155.

¹⁶ Munck, *Globalization, Governance and Migration*, 1244; Hass, *Migration and Development*, 258.

¹⁷ Taylor et al., “International Migration and Community Development.” *Population Index* 62, no. 3 (1996), 397.

¹⁸ Jayet and Rapoport, “Migration and Development: New Insights,” *Annals of Economics and Statistics* (2010): 5; Taylor et al., *International Migration and Community Development*, 410.

¹⁹ Arango, “Explaining Migration: A Critical View,” *International Social Science Journal* 52, no. 165 (2000): 283; Mangalam and Schwarzweller, “General Theory in the Study of Migration: Current Needs and Difficulties.” *The International Migration Review* 3, no. 1 (1968): 3-18.

²⁰ Munck, *Globalization, Governance and Migration*, 1230.

²¹ King, Connell and White, eds. *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, 1995, x.

Exit West is a good example of Bakhtin's definition of the novel as a microcosm of migration heteroglossia²² which deals with migration-related psychological, emotional, spiritual, behavioural, and security issues. Social scientists believe that local-global and national international connections are very important in the study of migration²³. Similarly, literary analysis may prove itself suitable to unravel the quintessence of migration because "literature provides the space in which to imagine new social configurations, to reflect on the local and the global, the individual and the collective".²⁴ Along these lines, the novel may be seen as a microcosmic representation of the multiple global realities of migration in the current era.

Mainly, this text deals with "survival migration"²⁵ and its various forms. The novel incorporates the multiple discourses of celebration and problematization which are usually associated with migration. Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of *polyphony* and *dialogic heteroglossia* provide an appropriate *modus operandi* to reflect upon the rich detail of contemporary refugee crisis²⁶. For Bakhtin, "the novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized"²⁷. Also according to Bakhtin, the novel is "multiform in style and variform in speech and voice,"²⁸ as multiple characters talk in multiple/polyphonic voices, which creates a dialogue (dialogism) of heterogeneous jargons, dialects, tones and styles (termed as Heteroglossia), and is neither purely formal nor formalist – rather, it is "heterosocial"²⁹. Moreover, centripetal forces of language unify and stabilize the meaning in a discourse, while the centrifugal ones introduce multiplicity, and both work against a larger backdrop of heteroglossia, "social diversity of speech types"³⁰. Multiple studies have

²² Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 411.

²³ Asis, Maruja and Piper. "Researching International Labour Migration in Asia." *The Sociological Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2008): 440.

²⁴ Thomas, "The Global Mediterranean: Literature and Migration," *Yale French Studies* 120 (2011): 150.

²⁵ Betts, *Survival migration*, 2013, 4-5.

²⁶ Moslund, *Literature, Music and Cosmopolitanism*, 6.

²⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. 1981, 262.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 262.

²⁹ Shevtsova, "Dialogism in the Novel and Bakhtin's Theory of Culture," *New Literary History* 23, no. 3 (1992): 754.

³⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 263; Suzanne Rosenthal Shumway, "The Chronotope of the Asylum: Jane Eyre, Feminism, and Bakhtinian Theory," *A Dialogue of Voices Book Subtitle: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin Book*, ed. by Karen Hohne, Helen Wussow, 1994, 153-154.

analysed the polyphonic nature of not only novels but of poetry and drama as well³¹. Accordingly, this study intends to conduct a qualitative hermeneutic textual analysis of Hamid's novel *Exit West* according to the framework of dialogic heteroglossia proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin. The authors assume that it is the most appropriate context to analyse the multiple realities of migrant crisis narrated.

The plot of *Exit West* is a clear indication of the universal approach of this text. The migrant was the main protagonist of the 20th century³² and the migrant is still the central prototype to explore the human condition in the 21st century³³. The main characters of the novel are Saeed and Nadia (central migrant figures) who live in an anonymous location which can be any conflict-ridden city, ranging from Karachi to Mosul, Basra, Aleppo, Cairo and Lahore³⁴. They migrate from that unnamed city to places like the Greek island of Mykonos, London and Marin, USA. Their ongoing journey is a quest for peace, which is the most prevalent archetypal human journey narrated in almost all literatures across all eras, generations, and geographical locations.

Multiple brief narrative stories that form alternate migrant situations have been integrated into the main story of Saeed and Nadia to enrich dialogism among the polyphonic voices in the narrative. Furthermore, along with spatial migration, the temporal nature of migration has been mentioned: "everyone migrates even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can't help it. We are all migrants through

³¹ Arnds, "Heteroglossia from Grimmelshausen to the Grimm Brothers," *Representation, Subversion, and Eugenics in Günter Grass's 'The Tin Drum'*, 2004, 28-48; Bowman, "Fontane's 'Unwiederbringlich': A Bakhtinian Reading," *The German Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2004):170-187; Tasker, "Time, Tense, and Genre: A Bakhtinian Analysis of Clough's 'Bothie'," *Victorian Poetry* 34, no. 2 (1996):193-211; Pauls, "Author and Other in Dialogue: Bakhtinian Polyphony in the Poetry of Peter Reading," *Bakhtin and his Others: (Inter)subjectivity, Chronotope, Dialogism*, 2013, 73-86; Crews, "Tradition, Heteroglossia and T.S. ELIOT's 'The Waste Land'," *Atlantis*, 20, no. 2 (1998):17-25; Carlson, "The Heteroglossia of Side Texts," *Speaking in Tongues- Languages at Play in the Theatre*, 180-213, University of Michigan Press, 2006.

³² Frank, *Literature and Migration*, 1.

³³ Twidle, *Exit West by Mohsin Hamid-journey's end*, *Financial Times*, Feb. 24, 2017.

³⁴ El Akkad, "Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, reviewed: A masterpiece of humility and restraint," *The Globe and Mail*, March 17, 2017. Gilbert, "Exit West and the Edge of Dystopia," *The Atlantic*, March 8, 2017. El Rashidi, "Caught Between Worlds," *The New York Review of Books*, April 20, 2017.

time”³⁵. Thus, the novel sounds like an allegorical epic tale for all ages because Saeed and Nadia’s journey depicts the voyage of humanity from innocence to knowledge. Migration has been used both as a contemporary reality as well as a metaphor for human evolution. In the end, Saeed and Nadia return to their native city but plan to travel again as tourists. Hence, there is an ongoing desire for movement from one place to another. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this novel is that every migrant travels by mysterious magical doors. These magical doors further confirm the universal vision of this narrative. Hence, the presence of portals³⁶ provides a magical quality to this text and allows it to transcend the narrative of an ordinary couple’s migration and become an allegorical representation of the condition of contemporary migrants.

***Exit West* as a Canonical Bakhtinian Variform Text**

The amalgamation of various genres, narrative devices and literary techniques used confirms the polyphonic discourse of this novel. The narrator tells the story of Saeed and Nadia, as well as those of multiple other migrants, in a very detached manner, never judging any characters on account of their actions. It is an account of people moving from one place to another via magical doors. Therefore, the narrative is a blend of both realistic and surreal techniques. The novel playfully juggles with the genres of dystopian fiction³⁷, science fiction³⁸, speculative fiction³⁹, fairy tale⁴⁰,

³⁵ Hamid, *Exit West*, 2017, 209.

³⁶ Goldsworthy, “Exit West review: Mohsin Hamid’s brilliant novel of the plight of refugees.” May 26, 2017. *The Sydney Morning Herald*; Kapoor, “Door that takes you elsewhere”. *The Hindu*, March 18, 2017; Sandhu, “Exit West by Mohsin Hamid – magical vision of the refugee crisis.” *The Guardian*, March 12, 2017.

³⁷ Battersby, “Exit West review: A migrant couple’s search for an open door”. *Irish Times*, March 4, 2017. Madani, “Dear Author- Exit West.” *Totally Dublin*, Jan. 19, 2018.

³⁸ Power, “Lover in the Doorway- Exit West.” Literary Review, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 26, 2017; Madani, “Dear Author- Exit West.” *Totally Dublin*, Jan. 19, 2018.

³⁹ Upchurch, “Review: ‘Exit West’ by Mohsin Hamid.” *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 28, 2017. Goldsworthy, “Exit West review: Mohsin Hamid’s brilliant novel of the plight of refugees.” May 26, 2017. *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

⁴⁰ Tolentino, “A Novel about Refugees that Feels Instantly Canonical.” *The New Yorker*, March 10, 2017. William Giraldo, “‘Exit West,’ by Mohsin Hamid, is a tale of love in the time of migration.” *The Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 2017. Kakutani, “Review: In ‘Exit West,’ Mohsin Hamid Mixes Global Trouble with a Bit of Magic.” *The New York Times*, Feb. 27, 2017.

epic⁴¹, allegory⁴² and fable⁴³. Thus, it truly is multi-form, the way Bakhtin describes it⁴⁴. In fact, *Exit West* incorporates multiple genres in order to capture multiple realities related to migration.

First of all, the narrative sounds like an excerpt from dystopian fiction during its description of a conflict-ridden unnamed city where Nadia and Saeed are unhappy because of tyrannous military rule. Second, the omnipresence of surveillance devices, helicopters, and social media configure the science fiction discourse of the novel⁴⁵. The apex of science fiction discourse occurs when Saeed and Nadia bury a drone and say a prayer over it⁴⁶. Third, the doors seem like a product right out of a fantasy tale like Narnia or a futuristic teleportation device from a science fiction narrative. Fourth, Saeed and Nadia stand for all men and women who migrate, and their story explores the most probable dilemmas which any migrant can face. This stereotypical quality gives shades of allegory to the story of *Exit West*. Fifth, the enumeration of various food, housing and security issues that migrants have to face seems more like a journalistic report on the migrant problems around the world. Last, but not least, the novel encapsulates an epic scale chronicle of ordeals and adversities which a migrant has to face. It might be pointed out, therefore, that polyphonic literary devices, narrative techniques and genres provide multi-layered perspectives about the contemporary migrant situation.

Dialogic Heteroglossia of Polyphonic Voices

This novel consists of a “medley of discourses”⁴⁷ and incorporates polyphonic voices in its structure in such a way that every “utterance is always in a

⁴¹ Goldsworthy, “Exit West review: Mohsin Hamid’s brilliant novel of the plight of refugees.” May 26, 2017. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sukhdev. “Exit West by Mohsin Hamid – magical vision of the refugee crisis.” *The Guardian*, March 12, 2017.

⁴² Colleen Lutz. “Exit West by Mohsin Hamid.” *World Literature Today*, May 2017; Giraldi, “‘Exit West,’ by Mohsin Hamid, is a tale of love in the time of migration.” *The Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 2017. Twidle, Exit West by Mohsin Hamid-journey’s end.” *Financial Times*, Feb. 24, 2017.

⁴³ Schaub, “Escaping A World on Fire in ‘Exit West’.” *National Public Radio*, March 1, 2017. Battersby. “Exit West review: A migrant couple’s search for an open door”. *Irish Times*, March 4, 2017. Sukhdev. “Exit West by Mohsin Hamid – magical vision of the refugee crisis.” *The Guardian*, March 12, 2017.

⁴⁴ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 262.

⁴⁵ Hamid, *Exit West*, 103.

⁴⁶ Hamid, *Exit West*, 205.

⁴⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 171.

dialogic relation with other utterances that precede it"⁴⁸ and "every utterance, every voice, stands in multiple dialogic relations with other utterances, with other voices in a text"⁴⁹. The text also takes multiple forms of migration under consideration and illustrates how much they are alike or different. Internal migration is mentioned in the first few pages of the novel on the pretext of civil war. Saeed and Nadia live in "a city swollen by refugees"⁵⁰. Secondly, Nadia's movement from her parents' home and then later on to Saeed's home is another form of internal migration—highlighted, for instance, in the Australian vignette where the previous owners of the pale-skinned woman's home are mentioned⁵¹ and in the description of San Diego which mentions people who have moved there "more recently"⁵². The narrator explains that internally displaced people have been living in multiple spaces like "open places in the city, hitching tents in the green belts between roads, erecting lean-tos next to the boundary walls of houses, sleeping rough on pavements and in the margins of streets"⁵³. Here, Hamid seems to be presenting a semi-literary journalistic report on the various kinds of dwellings that migrants usually resort to. Furthermore, there is also a polyphonic attitude towards migration with extra literary accounts of diverse responses to migration, as well as references to some refugees trying to "recreate the rhythm of a normal life". However, some stare "out at the city with what looked like anger, or surprise, or supplication or envy" and "didn't move at all: stunned, maybe, or resting. Possibly dying".⁵⁴ Hamid very skilfully incorporates multi-layered discourses associated with the dwelling places, in addition to the responses of migrants towards migration, thus creating a meaningful dialogic heteroglossia of migrant voices.

Various forms of external/international migrations have been illustrated through the motif of magical doors opening in Australia, Tokyo, San Diego, Dubai, Mykonos, Palo Alto, Vienna, Namibia, Marrakesh, Amsterdam and Marin. The narrative keeps on oscillating between spatial and temporal terrains. All these migrants coming out of magical doors are coming from alternate realities, and migrate due to multiple reasons:

All over the world people were slipping away from where they had been, from once fertile plains cracking with dryness, from seaside village

⁴⁸ Johnson, "Bakhtin's Dialogized Heteroglossia". 2004, 121.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 125.

⁵⁰ Hamid, *Exit West*, 1.

⁵¹ Ibid, 5-6.

⁵² Ibid, 47.

⁵³ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

gasping beneath tidal surges, from overcrowded cities and murderous battlefields, and slipping away from other people too.⁵⁵

The excerpt above creates a heteroglossia of manifold spatial, environmental and behavioural reasons behind migration ranging from plagues, floods, conflicts and overcrowded cities.

Interestingly, every short narrative vignette creates a discursive discourse of voices which are in dialogue with one another. The first brief story describes a black man entering Australia through a mysterious door in a room closet. This African man enters the home of “a pale-skinned woman”⁵⁶ who has recently moved to this house. This passage describes a three-layered discourse: the migration of the residents who lived here before that pale skinned woman, the migration of the pale skinned woman from somewhere else, and the black man’s dislocation from Africa. The novelist seems to be hinting at the fact that movement is inevitable and the concept of home is at once metaphysical and transient.

The second vignette has its own layer of dialogic heteroglossia, where a violent man sees two Filipino girls coming out of a bar’s back door in Tokyo. This man has “violence potential”⁵⁷ and used to beat his Filipino schoolmate in his childhood because of an irrational hatred towards Filipino people. Even at the end of this vignette, he is portrayed as following the two Filipino girls in order to harm them. On the contrary, he has a certain fondness for “Irish whisky”⁵⁸—showing biased or contradictory dialogic behaviour. He likes whisky from a foreign country but does not like people from another country. Both his fondness for the European whisky and his abhorrence of the Filipino girls show the contradiction in his nature and hint at the inevitability of the global exchange of objects and human beings.

Likewise, in the third short vignette, it is evening in Nadia’s timeline and morning in San Diego, California, in the town of La Jolla, “where an old man lived by the sea”⁵⁹. The old man by the sea hints at the canonical text by Earnest Hemingway and evokes the metaphor of humanity struggling with problems⁶⁰. In the context of this novel, the metaphor of the “old man” stands for every migrant in trouble. In this narrative passage, Muslims and Mexicans are labour-seeking immigrants fleeing from extremists on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. This vignette also has

⁵⁵ Ibid, 211.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 5-6.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 26.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 26-28.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 45.

⁶⁰ Bickford, “The Cuban Context of the Old man and the Sea” 1996, 263.

multiple levels of migrant discourses. First of all, it mentions the people who have recently moved from this area⁶¹. Secondly, it mentions the people who have bought their properties in this area “more recently”⁶². Thirdly, the old man remembers his younger brother who has migrated from life to death. Fourthly, the mentioning of Muslims evokes the discourse of xenophobia. Similarly, the reference to Mexicans and “neighbourhoods” ironically touches on the free movement from one neighbourhood to another inside national frontiers, and the impossibility of doing so from one neighbouring country to another (from Mexico to the US in this particular case).. Fifthly, on the temporal level, young officers remind the old man of his days in the Great War. Lastly, those young men have established a “perimeter around his property” and do not let him enter his property in the same way they are not letting Mexicans/ Muslims in their country⁶³. The young security officer instructs the old man to go to a relative’s place because he is not allowed to enter his home for security reasons, but the old man cannot think of any other place to go and stay. This vignette incorporates multi-layered discourses of migration and the old man stands for all migrants who are denied entry to various countries located on their home-planet Earth.

Another short passage illustrates the Tamil family migrating to a Jumairah Beach residence, Dubai, most probably for economic reasons, who is intercepted due to three different security cameras and “drone surveillance”⁶⁴. The hostile behaviour of the security men towards this family has a direct dialogic relationship with the consideration security forces show pale-skinned tourists: “uniformed men emerged and walked purposefully, but without undue or tourist-alarming haste”⁶⁵. The family is shown in stark comparison with “mostly pale tourists”⁶⁶.

Likewise, an analogy is also drawn between migrants and tourists while describing the Greek Island of Mykonos, which Saeed and Nadia explore as tourists⁶⁷: what is “a great draw for tourists in summer” becomes “a great draw for migrants this winter.”⁶⁸ The narrator thus raises the valid question that tourists are also people on move; therefore, why is it that they are courted, while migrants are placed under strict surveillance and subjected

⁶¹ Hamid, *Exit West*, 5-6.

⁶² Ibid, 47.

⁶³ Ibid, 46.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 87.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 108.

⁶⁸ Hamid, *Exit West*, 100-101.

to persecution? Hence, the movement of tourists and migrants is portrayed in a dialogic relationship to illustrate the similarities between both sets of people.

Dialogism between the Celebration and the Problematization of Migration

Dialogism refers to an ongoing debate among various opinions put forward in an artistic production. "Dialogism" applies equally to the viewpoints expressed in the novel, and the characters re-accentuate these discourses, so every character's thoughts, situation and speech contribute to the infinite ideological reworking of language that allows a dynamic participation in social dialogue⁶⁹. Interestingly, there is an interplay of forces against migration and in favour of migration. For instance, in Vienna, militants are shooting unarmed people, hoping "to provoke a reaction against the migrants" and succeed in that⁷⁰. As an outcome of the militants' shooting, a native Viennese mob is planning to attack migrant camps⁷¹. However, a human rights activist from the same city has "planned to join a human cordon to separate the two sides, or rather to shield the migrants from the anti-migrants; she is wearing a peace badge on her overcoat, and a rainbow pride badge, and a migrant compassion badge, the black door within a red heart"⁷². The anti-migrants are "furious, and they were staring at her and at her badges with undisguised hostility, and the rancour of perceived betrayal..."⁷³. This excerpt illustrates a tussle between pro- and anti-migrant discourses where anti-migrant forces have to give in at the end.

Similarly, in London, the police have to withdraw in the face of bedraggled people of all colours and races who "chanted in various languages"⁷⁴. Moreover, nativist mobs are being formed "with a wink and a nod from the authorities"⁷⁵. On the contrary, volunteers and aid agencies are delivering food and medicine and in this there is "hope"⁷⁶. There is a constant dialogue and conflict going on between the two sides, which recede in the end, and London takes required constructive measures to accommodate migrants.

⁶⁹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 276.

⁷⁰ Hamid, *Exit West*, 104.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, 105.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 125.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 132.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 136.

The Inevitability of Polyphony

Bakhtin's concept of polyphony is especially applicable to the passages where groups of heterogeneous people have been depicted at refugee camps in Mykonos, London, and Marin.

In the Mykonos camp, "people of many colours and hues-many colours and hues but mostly falling within a band of brown that ranged from dark chocolate to milky tea" are "speaking in a cacophony that was the languages of the world"⁷⁷. The passage directly alludes to the diversity of the migrants' origins and the polyphonic nature of migration discourse, and concludes very succinctly that "everyone was foreign, and so, in a sense, no one was"⁷⁸. The narrator is dominating all these voices and the polyphony emphasizes the message that, in this world, everyone is a native and a foreigner at the same time.

Similarly, in the house in London where Saeed and Nadia arrive next, there are fifty squatters from Nigeria, Somalia, Myanmar, Thailand, Guatemala and Indonesia⁷⁹. Moreover, the Nigerians are further divided into half Nigerians and borderland Nigerians who speak in various Englishes⁸⁰. This London house is a heteroglossia where diversity is being celebrated with the numerous voices ranging from "snatches of beautiful singing that could be heard, in Igbo"⁸¹ and "a call to prayer, at dawn, perhaps over a commandeered karaoke machine"⁸².

Likewise, by the end of the novel, Marin (USA) emerges as "a cultural cosmopolis"⁸³ with multiple forms of cuisine and music amalgamation⁸⁴. Marin stands out as a metaphor for planet Earth and the contradictory nature of the discourse of the word "native". In Marin, there were "almost no natives"⁸⁵ because the ancient tribe of Native Americans – the Coast Miwok Indians is no more⁸⁶. However, it "was not quite true" as "nativeness" is "a relative matter" in the case of Marin, where many people call themselves natives because "their parents or their grandparents or the

⁷⁷ Ibid, 100.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 123-124.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 144.

⁸¹ Ibid, 125.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Fraser, *Literature, Music and Cosmopolitanism*, 185.

⁸⁴ Hamid, *Exit West*, 206-207.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 195.

⁸⁶ Charles C. Colley, "The Missionization of the Coast Miwok Indians of California," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (1970); 143.

grandparents of their grandparents had been born” on that strip of land⁸⁷. A third layer of nativeness consists of those who are descendants of “the human beings who had been brought from Africa to this continent”, centuries ago as slaves⁸⁸. Hamid concludes:

...the nation was like a person with multiple personalities, some insisting on union and some on disintegration, and this person with multiple personalities was furthermore a person whose skin appeared to be dissolving as they swam in a soup full of other people whose skins were likewise dissolving⁸⁹.

The excerpt above emphasises that nativeness is relative, and that natives are dissolving into each other and adopting some attributes of each other. Thus, in this novel, nativeness is discussed on multiple levels in heterogeneous voices which create a dialogic heteroglossia. However, centripetal forces are at play here because all discursive narratives converge into one discourse which foregrounds the notion that everyone is an inhabitant of planet Earth, which obliterates the division between native and non-native.

Dialogism Inherent in the Metaphor of “Magical Doors”

The magical door motif incorporated by Hamid in this narrative binds all polyphonic discourses present in the novel. The door is used as a metaphor for illegal migration which cannot be controlled. A normal door becomes a “special door”⁹⁰ – even “the most reputable international broadcasters had acknowledged the door existed, and indeed were being discussed by world leaders as a major global crisis”⁹¹. The metaphor of the door incorporates polyphonic dialogic heteroglossia because the motif of migration has been synonymous with death and regeneration in many migrant novels⁹². Similarly, in *Exit West*, the passage through the mysterious door is “both like dying and being born” and feels “like a beginning and an end...”⁹³

⁸⁷ Hamid, *Exit West*, 196.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 196-197.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 156.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 70.

⁹¹ Ibid, 83.

⁹² White, *Writing Across Worlds*, 6-7.

⁹³ Hamid, *Exit West*, 98.

because migration is about “hope” for a better future⁹⁴ and the murder of the self from a dwelling place.⁹⁵ The metaphor of the door illustrates the working of centripetal forces of language because the door unites and stabilizes other centrifugal forces in the form of diverse characters and their narratives. Hamid sums up the entire novel with the metaphor of doors, “for what did those divisions matter now in a world full of doors, the only divisions that mattered now were between those who sought the right of passage and those who would deny them passage”⁹⁶ and strongly hints at the new upcoming world order division formed on the basis of celebration and problematization of migration.

In conclusion, *Exit West* emerges as a dialogic heteroglossia of polyphonic migrant voices with its multiform narrative and heterogeneous characters. The amalgamation of various genres is employed to exhibit a multi-perspective literary representation of the situation of migrants. Indeed, it is a literary collage which includes elements of science fiction, dystopian fiction, graphic novel, fairytale literature, epic literature, allegorical innuendos and magic realism. It implies that the diverse contemporary reality can only be portrayed through an eclectic approach based on multiple genres, techniques, and forms. Moreover, the two emergent discourses of problematization and celebration of the phenomena of migration are in dialogue with each other throughout the text. Therefore, this novel might be read as a dialogic heteroglossia of contemporary migrant discourse. All the centrifugal forces related to genres and polyphonic voices steer the narrative towards a united centrifugal discourse that migration is inevitable and that everyone is on move in the contemporary milieu. Thus, it is time that the global community accepted the inevitability of migration and prepared to manage the situation pragmatically for the sake of global welfare.

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⁹⁴ Goldin, Cameron and Balarajan, *Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped Our World and Will Define Our Future*, 2011, 284; Leese, *Migration, Narration, Identity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, 2013, 8-9.

⁹⁵ Hamid, *Exit West*, 209.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 152.

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