

From National to Global identity: Effects of Migration on the Individual in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* contributes to literary discussions of contemporary global refugee crises. It was published in 2017, a year before the world's population of forcibly displaced people reached a high of 70.8 million (UNHCR). This mass displacement has caused scholars in the field of migrant literature to debate human rights, the influence of the nation-state on an individual, and the shift from national to global identity. Migrant literature scholar Joseph Slaughter asserts that human rights are limited to people who have national citizenship, and this excludes much of the world's population. This said, the genre of migrant literature serves to humanize the migrant and challenge the human rights bias towards white, heteronormative and middle to upper class people. In his essay "The Legibility of Human Rights" Slaughter asserts that the relationship between the novel-genre and the liberal human rights discourse are "more than coincidentally, or casually, interconnected" (4). The depiction of migration through literature allows for representation of the individual migrant's experience. In contrast, media reports tend to group migrants together, emphasizing the sheer numbers of displaced people and generalizing the migrants' experience. Such reports tend to overlook the individual experience. By engaging with individual migrants' stories and by communicating the individual's emotions as they process change in environment, literature can evoke readers' sympathy. Hamid does this in *Exit West* by humanizing his principle characters, and focusing on their individual developments and emotions as they migrate.

Saeed and Nadia's migration begins when they are forced to leave their unidentified city. While their initial departure is about finding safety, Saeed and Nadia struggle to find their respective home-places over the course of the novel. Again, Hamid humanizes Saeed and Nadia

by following the changes in their individual identities. Migrant identities in this context are defined by one's needs in relation to their surroundings, and one's manner of expressing those needs. For example, war in Saeed and Nadia's country causes the two to experience vulnerability and therefore crave the comfort of one another. Their identities form—and diverge from one another—when unanchored from the nation state and all its proscribed national identities. Hamid is interested in how migrants' journeys both result from and cause change. He does not depict migration as an interval between departure and arrival, but rather as a condition of existing in the world. We often imagine that the normal state of being for humans is life within a nation-state, but *Exit West* shows us how migration is itself a very normal way of life where identity is fluid. Hamid asserts this through his characters Saeed and Nadia as they migrate from their home-place to Mykonos, London, and San Francisco. Each of these locations affects Saeed and Nadia's respective relationships with one another and with the home-place.

Many contemporary migrant and immigration novels focus on the migrant's struggle as an outsider. *Exit West* contrarily universalizes migrancy; Hamid imagines a world in which migration is accelerated through the existence of magical doors, allowing people to cross national borders freely. Many authors are weary of universalizing migrancy for fear of diminishing the migrant's struggle, but Hamid avoids doing this by attributing individual emotions to his characters as they face war and migration. He claims that “we are all migrants through time” (209), and emphasizes this claim through the use of vignettes. Each chapter, a simultaneously occurring event interrupts Saeed and Nadia's story. This notion of shared time challenges national identity by comparing migrants and refugees to people who have never migrated. For example, the characters in Hamid's vignettes experience changes in identity as a result of time passing. In other words, Hamid humanizes refugees by asserting that regardless of

whether or not one physically migrates, every person will experience changes in their environment in due time. He therefore does not depict migration as an interval between departure and arrival, but rather as a condition of existing in the world. This is not to say that each person experiences migration in the same way—in fact, Saeed and Nadia’s experiences with migration are vastly different—but that every person will experience changes in both environment and identity as a result of migrating through time. This also means that as time passes a migrant can no longer rely on the home-place to validate identity, not only because the migrant is in motion but because time re-shapes what the migrant knows as home. Therefore, people who do not physically relocate (Saeed’s parents, for example) still experience a re-shaping of home:

This building had taken the same name as the cinema that preceded it: both once had the same owner, and the cinema had been so famous as to have become a byword for that locality. When walking by the arcade, and seeing that old name on its new neon sign, sometimes Saeed’s father, sometimes Saeed’s mother, would remember, and smile. Or remember, and pause. (Hamid 13)

Although Saeed’s mother and father are able to visit the arcade, they are unable to replicate the concept of home that it once created. They, like Saeed, rely on memory and nostalgia to evoke the notion of home.

Hamid’s incorporation of magical realist elements further distinguishes *Exit West* from other migrant novels. Throughout the novel, characters travel through doors that instantaneously transport them to new locations. Saeed and Nadia escape their war-torn city through one of these doors, and find themselves in Mykonos. They subsequently travel to London and San Francisco, knowing the doors’ destinations cannot be pre-determined. Hamid writes: “Rumours had begun to circulate of doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away, well removed from

this death trap of a country. Some people claimed to know people who knew people who had been through such doors. A normal door, they said, could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all” (69-70). Saeed and Nadia take their chances each time they enter through a door, as they could easily be transported to another war-torn city like their own. In his article “‘Black Holes in the Fabric of the Nation’: Refugees in Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West*” Michael Perfect notes that: “the repeated emphasis on the darkness of the doors might be read as an admission on Hamid’s behalf that such suffering is ultimately unrepresentable in narrative fiction and, perhaps, unimaginable” (196). In addition to this, the doors complicate migrants’ possibility of return not only because their destinations are unknown but because “finding one the militants had not yet found, a door not yet guarded, that was the trick, and might take a while” (Hamid 89-90). As Perfect observes, the doors’ unreliability represents the suffering that migrants experience when return is not guaranteed. Refugees like Saeed leave their families without knowing if they will ever see them again.

Beyond the struggle of migration, Hamid’s doors represent an increase in global movement. It is not just refugees who pass through these doors; some of Hamid’s vignettes account for people who migrate voluntarily. Hamid writes: “An accountant in Kentish Town who had been on the verge of taking his own life woke one morning to discover the blackness of a door where the bright entrance to his small but well-lit second bedroom had been...he thought he might step through the door, just once, to see what was on the other side, and so he did” (129-130). This resonates with the notion that migrancy is a condition of existence, as people are not only forced to migrate but choose to migrate. The doors also represent a passing through time; a migrant cannot return through a door much like a migrant cannot return to a previous time. Migration through time thus unifies global movement, and plays a part in the migrants’

transitions from national to global identity. In the novel, global identity is characterized by a fluidity of migration, meaning that contemporary restrictions on migration such as immigration policies are removed from the novel, allowing characters to travel across borders with ease.

Hamid explores how Saeed and Nadia's identities change along with setting. As the couple travels from their home country to Mykonos, London and finally San Francisco, the two have distinctly different reactions to each relocation. As Perfect describes: "*Exit West* seeks to shift focus away from the notion of a single, identifiable geopolitical crisis and insists, instead, on acknowledging the countless individual human crises experienced by displaced people in the contemporary moment" (194). A potential problem with the notion of global identity is that it can cause ignorance towards a migrant's individual experience and struggles with loss, hostility, and/or displacement. Hamid challenges this by presenting Saeed and Nadia—who share the same home-place—as two significantly different characters. Saeed and Nadia's individual relationships to their home-place and to one another evolve as they migrate from city to city. In their home-place, Saeed and Nadia's differences complement each other, and their relationship works well. Migration however causes them to crave stability, and over time Saeed relies less on Nadia and more on his nostalgic memories for a sense of stability. Nadia's home-place reminds her of war time and vulnerability. She instead is empowered by her developing independence and sexuality.

The nature of Saeed and Nadia's relationship changes as the loss of home affects their individual identities. Their relationship is suitable at first, meaning their love for each other is inherently comforting, desired, and reciprocal. As their environment becomes increasingly stable, Saeed and Nadia's desire for each other fades. Their initial dependence on each other shifts; safer environments allow them to become more independent. As the novel progresses,

Saeed and Nadia's struggle to find a living-space becomes less about finding safety and more about finding comfort and belonging. When they first migrate to Mykonos, Saeed and Nadia's main concern is safety, and it is not until their migration to London that they seek a comfortable space to call home. The two finally find their respective home-places in San Francisco. Saeed recreates notions of home with a group of people who are from his country and practice his religion. Nadia finds solace in expressing her individuality and queer sexuality; she was unable to do so in her home-place, where signs of individuality could result in danger.

The inevitability and fluidity of movement in *Exit West* allows Saeed and Nadia to identify with more than one home-place. As they travel from one location to the next, the two are individually influenced by their surroundings; war, for example, influences Saeed and Nadia in distinctly different ways. With each shift in location, Saeed and Nadia's surroundings cause them to value different aspects of their lives such as relationships, religion, and family. This being said, each destination offers the potential to impact both Saeed and Nadia, and this results in a layering of identities, suitable for a certain place and time.

The conditions of war in Saeed and Nadia's home country limit their freedom. Not long after Saeed and Nadia meet, Hamid notes that "Their city had yet to experience any major fighting, just some shootings and the odd car bombing" (4). This suggests that fear affects how Saeed and Nadia perceive each other in their relationship; the more they fear for their lives, the more their relationship gains a sense of stability. For example, Nadia's freedom is compromised once the militants in her country begin assaulting women who walk alone. Saeed's presence protects her from the militants' violence. Consequently, the violence they experience is one of the reasons for their relationship. Hamid writes: "Saeed was certain he was in love. Nadia was not certain what exactly she was feeling, but she was certain it had force. Dramatic

circumstances, such as those in which they and other new lovers in the city now found themselves, have a habit of creating dramatic emotions” (54). These ‘dramatic circumstances’ refer to the uncertainty surrounding their safety, and thus Saeed and Nadia construct the need for one another. This is not to say that their love is an illusion, but that it is a product of circumstance. Additionally, Hamid proposes that finding comfort in a stranger during war-time is not uncommon: “War in Saeed and Nadia’s city revealed itself to be an intimate experience” (68). In effect, Saeed and Nadia’s relationship is temporary, as if it is part of the ‘experience’ of war. It is not based on desire so much as necessity and instinct in war-time; they find a sense of home in one another.

Saeed and Nadia’s relationship becomes more complicated when Nadia desires sexual intimacy for comfort: “Nadia tried again to make Saeed have sex with her, not because she felt particularly sexy but because she wanted to cauterize the incident from outside the bank in her memory” (Hamid 64-65). The relation between Nadia’s fear and her need for intimacy suggests that she does not desire Saeed specifically, rather she desires sex as a distraction from her fear. Saeed in contrast finds relief in simply being in Nadia’s company; because of his religious beliefs Saeed is opposed to per-marital sex. Nonetheless, the comfort Saeed and Nadia give one another cause them to overlook their differences during war.

Apart from seeking comfort in one another, Saeed and Nadia have distinctly different reactions to war in their city. As safety becomes more of a concern, Saeed and Nadia respectively find comfort in familiar aspects of their lives. Firstly, Saeed drawn closer to the things that are most familiar. He turns to his family, and religious practices in times of distress:

Saeed went with his father to pray on the first Friday after the curfew’s commencement, and Saeed prayed for peace and Saeed’s father prayed for Saeed

and the preacher in his sermon urged all the congregants to pray for the righteous to emerge victorious in the war but carefully refrained from specifying on which side of the conflict he thought the righteous to be. (Hamid 51-52)

Saeed prays with his family for the same reason he spends time with Nadia; both bring him comfort. He invites Nadia to live with him and his parents because he fears leaving any one of them alone (Hamid 74). In doing so he creates a comforting space for himself, where he can pray with his loved ones and cauterize fear.

In contrast, Nadia finds solace in being able to make choices for herself and assert her dominance. War-time restrictions limit her freedom, such as the implementation of curfew, militant checkpoint searches, and the suspension of cellular service. When Saeed first meets Nadia he learns that she wears all-concealing black robes not because she is religious but so that “men don’t fuck with [her]” (Hamid 17). The robes act as protection; more importantly, Nadia wears her robes because they represent a choice she has made by herself and for herself. The robes also symbolize Nadia’s non-conformity and rebelliousness. When Saeed and Nadia break rules together, it is usually by Nadia’s influence. They smoke weed and take psychedelic mushrooms together—Nadia acquires and then offers these things to Saeed. Notably, she takes advantage of her situation and uses it to benefit her individuality.

As Saeed and Nadia journey through Mykonos the nature of their relationship changes. Saeed is nostalgic for his home-place, while Nadia finds comfort in distancing herself from what she remembers of her war-torn city. As their individual relationships to the home-place change, their perceptions of each other change as well. Nadia identifies herself as the more dominant party in the relationship. For instance, Nadia asserts herself by inviting Saeed over: “‘Nothing is going to happen,’ she explained. ‘I want to make that clear. When I say you should come over,



I'm not saying I want your hands on me'" (Hamid 26). This reflects her desire to feel powerful in a nation that controls much of what she does. With her migration to Mykonos, Nadia feels more comfortable being passive, and in contrast to her relationship with Saeed she allows herself to be vulnerable. Rather than asserting her dominance, Nadia allows a nurse to take care of her: "A partly shaved-haired local girl who was not a doctor or a nurse but just a volunteer...cleaned and dressed the wound, gently, holding Nadia's arm as though it was something precious, holding it almost shyly...the girl said she wanted to help Nadia and Saeed, and asked them what they needed. They said above all they needed a way off the island" (Hamid 117). Nadia is attracted to the nurse for the same reason she was initially attracted to Saeed; both offer her comfort when she is feeling vulnerable. However, Nadia is attracted to the physical feeling of vulnerability when she is with the nurse whereas Saeed's company allowed her to escape from the feeling of vulnerability (caused by violence) in her home country.

Unlike Nadia, Saeed draws on notions of the past for comfort during his migration; he feels recognized and protected by a sense of sameness. He begins to rely on nostalgic memories for a sense of stability, rather than on Nadia. He reflects on his home nostalgically, for he is deeply saddened by his departure and the loss of his family. Hamid writes that Saeed "doubted he would come back, and the scattering of his extended family and his circle of friends and acquaintances, forever, struck him as deeply sad, as amounting to the loss of a home, no less, of his home" (94). Migration contributes to Saeed's grief as well. He is aware that an exact reconstruction of his home is impossible, regardless, he attempts to recreate notions of familiarity. April Joy Pequeña, author of "Representations of Home and Identity for the Migrant Woman in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*" recognizes that the desire for home can result in an inability to adjust to new environments: "the migrant's separation from his place of origin is traditionally

depicted in a way whereby the migrant fails to adapt to his present society due to an incessant longing for the past and for his homeland” (9). In other words, the notion of belonging may be linked to a home-place, but this does not necessarily mean that a recreation of one’s original home-place will result in a feeling of belonging. In Mykonos, Saeed meets one of his acquaintances from home who claims to be a “people smuggler” (Hamid 113). Saeed calls this “a happy coincidence” which “cheer[s] him greatly” (Hamid 113). Wanting to put trust in someone from his home Saeed agrees to pay his acquaintance: “Saeed trusted him and so they stayed where they were for a week, stayed at the same spot in the same camp, but they never saw him again” (Hamid 114). Nadia recognizes that Saeed has been swindled, distracted completely by the comfort of seeing someone from his city. In this sense, Saeed’s longing for home place affects his decision making, sometimes for the worse.

In London, Saeed and Nadia experience a freedom that does not require the constant company and affirmation of one another. Their perceptions of each other continue to change in their new environment as they are influenced by their physical surroundings and other migrants they encounter. Saeed is suddenly reminded that Nadia has no religious beliefs, and Saeed in turn reminds Nadia of her experience in a war-torn city under surveillance. They dispute minor things such as the length of Nadia’s shower: “‘It’s been forever,’ he said. ‘This isn’t our house’” (Hamid 125). She replies “‘Don’t tell me what I can do’” (Hamid 126). These tensions reflect their individual relationships with the home-place. Saeed does not feel that he can call the community house his home, and is upset when Nadia treats it as such. Nadia, on the other hand, is angered when Saeed tells her what to do; it reminds her of the militants’ restrictions in their city. She prefers to make her own choices. For this reason, Nadia creates a sense of belonging through a divergence of home-place nostalgia rather than through an indulgence of it. On the

topic of belonging, Pequeña notes that “the migrant woman’s sense of home is achieved when she is able to secure a place in a community where she feels that she belongs” (11). Nadia’s sense of belonging in each new location is rooted in people who both represent safety and confirm her individuality.

In London, Nadia attends meetings for Nigerians, and although she is the only “non-Nigerian who attended” (Hamid 147), Nadia finds solace in the group. The group members speak different languages and come from different regions in Nigeria, however Nadia is accepted into the group by an old woman Nadia “help[s] on more than one occasion to ascend the stairs” (Hamid 147). Nadia feels comforted in this group because they recognize her as an individual. She thinks: “They represented something new in her mind, the birth of something new, and she found these people who were both like and unlike those she had known in her city, familiar and unfamiliar, she found them interesting, and she found their seeming acceptance of her, or at least tolerance of her, rewarding, an achievement in a way” (Hamid 148). Nadia is empowered by the others’ recognition of her, as recognition in her home country often resulted in threat: “there was a burly man at the red light of a deserted late-night intersection who turned to Nadia and greeted her, and when she ignored him, began to swear at her, saying only a whore would drive a motorcycle” (Hamid 42). Because of incidents like this, Nadia values the positive recognition given to her by the Nigerians, and feels comfortable around them. This is also the first time in the novel that Nadia is able to interact with a group of women, giving her a sense of freedom that she did not have in her home country. The concept of home for Nadia is therefore not defined by geographical location but by a sense of community and belonging.

In line with the embodiment of more than one home-place, Anastasia Christou’s “The Significance of Things: Objects, Emotions and Cultural Production in Migrant Women’s Return

Visits Home” states that “Transnational relationships are embodied in the objects shuttled over the borders. Having different purposes, they can be symbolic or nostalgic, holding memories of earlier experiences” (656). Nadia’s robes carry symbolic significance; initially she wears them as protection, but continues to wear them as she migrates, even when she is no longer in danger. Her robes symbolize her individuality; she takes pride in subverting the assumptions people make about her, as it gives her a sense of control. This control is especially important throughout Nadia’s uncertain migration, yet Saeed is bothered when she continues to wear her robes after leaving the city:

it was inexplicable that she continued to wear her black robes, and it grated on him a bit, for she did not pray, and she avoided speaking their language, and she avoided their people, and sometimes he wanted to shout, well take it off then, and then he would wince inwardly, since he believed he loved her, and his resentment, when it bubbled up like this, made him angry with himself. (Hamid 187)

Saeed’s anger is rooted in Nadia’s ambivalence towards recreating their city’s culture, namely her reluctance to practice religion. He recognizes (and is angered by) the significance of her robes; he is reminded that they symbolize her individuality, and that she is subject to change as they migrate.

In London, Saeed attempts to recreate his sense of home with a community of people from his and Nadia’s country. Saeed’s attraction towards people of his country—and fear of those who are not—affects his relationship with Nadia:

For Saeed existence in the house was more jarring. On Mykonos he had preferred the outskirts of the migrant camps, and he had grown accustomed to a degree of independence from their fellow refugees. He was suspicious, especially of the

other men around, of whom there were many, and he found it stressful to be packed in so tightly with people who spoke in tongues he did not understand.

(Hamid 132)

Saeed is unwilling to affiliate himself with anyone who is not from his country. This being said, Saeed and Nadia's experiences of migration are conditioned by their abilities to recognize and be recognized by others. Joseph Darda, author of "Precarious World: Rethinking Global Fiction in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" draws on Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* to explain what it means to be recognized during war-time: "Who we are able to recognize as a living being is always conditioned by social norms, and these norms are all the more limited during times of war. This is what Butler refers to as 'recognizability'" (110). The social norms that condition 'recognizability' are also limited during times of migration, as it is difficult to affiliate a person with a specific nation-state. This applies to Saeed who has difficulty trusting people that are not of "[his] own kind" (Hamid 152). Instead, Saeed prefers to spend time with people from his country: "Around a bend, on Vicarage Gate, was a house known to be a house of people from his country. Saeed began to spend more time there, drawn by the familiar languages and accents and the familiar smell of the cooking" (Hamid 151). Saeed is more willing to recognize those who share his nation as worthy of his time, while ignoring the matter that every other person in the household is also a migrant. Nadia finds this problematic, as Saeed is unwilling to accept that she has found a home amongst Nigerians.

Saeed's identity is associated with his home-place more than Nadia's; his nostalgia for home is reflected in his attempt to create a home in his new surroundings. However, like Nadia even Saeed's positive memories of home are sometimes associated with war. In one instance, a man speaking about martyrdom reminds Saeed of the militants:

he was moved by these words, strengthened by them, and they were not the barbarous words of the militants back home, the militants because of whom his mother was dead, and possibly by now his father as well, but at the same time the gathering of men drawn to the words of the man with the white-marked beard sporadically did remind him of the militants, and when he thought this he felt something rancid in himself, like he was rotting from within. (Hamid 115-116)

Through this passage, Hamid asserts that memories of war for some migrants (like Nadia) conflict with the recreation of home. Even those who wish to recreate home (like Saeed) encounter flashbacks of bad memories when making associations with the home-place. Here, Hamid emphasizes Saeed and Nadia's individuality.

When Saeed and Nadia finally reach San Francisco, they settle into their new respective homes. Pequeña speculates that a recreation of home can benefit the migrant: "the notion of nostalgia can actually enable or empower...it likewise results for the migrant to acquire a new sense of home which is not reliant on a place but more of as a feeling or as an affective construct" (50). In this passage, Pequeña is referencing Nadia's empowerment through nostalgia; however, Saeed is the more nostalgic of the two. He creates moments of happiness in the present by re-living memories: "Until the end of his days, prayer sometimes reminded Saeed of his mother, and his parents' bedroom with its slight smell of perfume, and the ceiling fan churning in the heat" (Hamid 201). Saeed—unlike Nadia—intentionally remembers his home-place in order to establish a sense of belonging. He practices religion during his migration not only because he is religious, but because prayer reminds him of home. Furthermore, Pequeña states that "unlike Saeed who remembers home in order to escape the realities of their situation in foreign countries, Nadia makes use of her memories of a lost homeland as a means for her to build a home in their

new destinations” (51). While it is true that Saeed uses nostalgia to escape the present, he, like Nadia, uses his memories to create a sense of belonging during his migration. Saeed uses nostalgia as a tool to help him build a life around people that remind him of home. In San Francisco he finally finds a sense of home and familiarity in his relationship with the preacher’s daughter: “The preacher was a widower, and his wife had come from the same country as Saeed, and so the preacher knew some of Saeed’s language, and his approach to religion was partly familiar to Saeed, while at the same time partly novel, too” (Hamid 199). While Pequeña contends that Saeed’s “nostalgic memories make him a prisoner of the past” (51), Saeed’s past is what allows him to find comfort in his new home. The past is not a barrier, but a bridge between Saeed’s old and new forms of identity.

Nadia in turn does not intentionally conjure feelings of nostalgia. When she finally separates from Saeed and moves into a new apartment, Nadia is “reminded of her apartment in the city of her birth, which she had loved, reminded of what it was like to live there alone, and while the first night she slept not at all, and the second only fitfully, as the days passed she slept better and better, and this room came to feel to her like home” (Hamid 217). Her new home-place is different from—yet influenced by—her original home-place. In fact, each step in her (and Saeed’s) migration is influenced by the last. For example, Nadia explores her sexuality with a woman from her cooperative; her ability to do so is influenced by her relationship with Saeed as she recognizes that he was mainly comforting to her during war-time. Nadia’s sexuality allows her to find a more suitable partner, but more importantly, enables her to become less dependent on Saeed. Saeed too finds a partner who allows him to better express his identity. The preacher’s daughter is both religious and “born of a woman from Saeed’s country” (Hamid 219), and thus she reminds him of home.

Saeed and Nadia's new partners are an important aspect of their new homes. Part of the notion of home for Saeed and Nadia is being able to relate to another person. In their city, Saeed and Nadia shared the common fear of war, but in safer environments their needs diverge. Hamid writes: "in [Saeed's] devotions was ever more devotion, and towards [Nadia] it seemed there was ever less" (195). This represents how migrants' needs change as their surroundings change. While they were able to fulfill each other's needs for a period of time, Saeed and Nadia realize that they were brought together by loneliness, and stayed together because of the fear that they might completely detach from their home-place. When Saeed and Nadia separate, it is because they are detached from the versions of themselves that they were when they first met. Although Saeed and Nadia recognize their incompatibility, they stay together even after they begin to feel attraction towards others. It is only when they have found new partners that they finally separate. This is because they feel "...a sense that what they might break was special and likely irreplaceable. But while fear was part of what kept them together for those first few months in Marin, more powerful than fear was the desire that each see the other find firmer footing before they let go" (Hamid 204). The fear of not having one another is rooted in the fact that they remind each other of home. Although they experienced migration differently, they experienced it together, and are each other's last physical connection to their city. Saeed and Nadia's relationship is wonderfully represented in the following passage: "In the city of their birth they had smoked joints together with pleasure, but a year had passed since then, and he had changed since then, and perhaps she had changed too, and the distance that had opened between them was such that things once taken for granted could be taken for granted no longer" (Hamid 195). While Saeed and Nadia have vastly different experiences of migration, both experience changes due to their surroundings. Each location affects the development of their personal desires,



including the development of their relationship. Saeed and Nadia are in the same locations, yet they have distinctly different reactions to—and changes as a result from—their migration. In this way, Hamid individualizes the migrant.

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