

## EXILIC DIMENSIONS IN MOHSIN HAMID'S EXIT WEST

Waqar Ul Haq<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Ibrahim Khokhar\*<sup>2</sup>, Syed Faisal Sajjad Shah<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MPhil Scholar (English Literature), National University of Modern Languages, NUML Islamabad;

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Institute of English, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>MPhil Scholar (English Literature), National University of Modern Languages, NUML Islamabad

Corresponding Author:\* [mike@salu.edu.pk](mailto:mike@salu.edu.pk)

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### ABSTRACT

This study paper explores the recurring theme of exile in literature, particularly examining its evolution in the modern era characterised by increased immigration and the consequences of decolonization. The current study explores the concept of "unhomeliness" among displaced individuals and how it influences their identity, focusing on its portrayal in Mohsin Hamid's "Exit West". The researchers use Bhaba's notion of "unhomeliness" to analyse the text and demonstrate a direct connection between exile and the feeling of displacement, showing that exile leads to a sense of "unhomeliness." The study further examines how "unhomeliness" impacts the protagonist, Saeed, emphasising its clear influence on his behaviour, sense of alienation from his surrounding, and the dilemma of non-belongingness. This research also provides vital insights into the intricate relationship among exile, "unhomeliness," and identity in contemporary literature.

**Keywords:** Exile, Unhomeliness, Bhaba, Mohsin Hamid, Exit West, Exilic Dimensions

### INTRODUCTION

Exile has remained not only an essential problem but also a prominent theme of literary works for centuries. In the contemporary world, it continues to loom large in the cultural and academic scenarios. Not only, in the course of history, people have to have lived in exile, but they have enjoyed prosperity and good status in the host countries. T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are among them. However, it is a fact that there has been an increase in the number of exiles in the wake of decolonisation. Especially the wave of terrorism that has intensified in the post-9/11 world has even added more to the numbers.

With such large-scale immigration, the concept of exile has undergone a complete change. The displaced people are not allotted the status that the old and traditional exiles had. As a result, they are subject to marginalisation and even hatred on the part of the people of the host countries. Consequently, ambivalence and unhomeliness characterise their relation to the host country (Khokhar and Malik, 2022).

Owing to immigration, the modern world is the home to multicultural societies. America is the

prototype example of such a society. Cultural diversity is not viewed as negative but an essential aspect of society that provides a healthy and positive environment to its members. Contrary to commonly held assumptions, a multicultural society is not easy to achieve. Usually, some groups can be marginalised, for instance, Muslims in post-9/11 America. Such marginalised groups are vulnerable to the influence of "unhomeliness".

Some of the contemporary writers like Mohsin Hamid have addressed exile and cosmopolitan societies, as well as the issue of "unhomeliness" in their works.

The menace of terrorism has become a global concern, especially in the wake of 9/11. In third-world countries, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Syria, it has made life full of danger and analogous to hell, increasing the numbers of people fleeing their countries of origin. Consequently, they have to live in societies where they are considered to be outsiders and displaced. The awareness of being an outsider coupled with a strong connection with the roots may give rise to the unhomely moment in the

displaced and threaten to impede the process of assimilation. The researcher will discuss this issue in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*.

This study is significant because it seeks to highlight how exile precipitates "unhomeliness", influencing the identity of a displaced person in the light of *Exit West*. This study is also important because it provides scholars and students in the field of literature with insight into the identity of the exiles. The lack of research from the perspective of this study on Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* also makes it important.

### Research Objectives

This study aims:

1. To analyse the pre-exilic and exilic conditions of Saeed.
2. To find out how Saeed experiences "unhomeliness" in the condition of exile.
3. To highlight how "unhomeliness" affects Saeed.

### Research Questions

This study attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent does exile precipitate the feeling of "unhomeliness" in Saeed?
2. How does the "unhomely moment" influence Saeed?

### Delimitations

There are some delimitations to this study.

1. The study is confined to only Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. The researcher does not intend to take any other novel of the author into account.
2. The study only analyses the protagonist, Saeed, in the novel.

### Literature Review

This section of the study revolves around the issue of exile and unhomeliness. In the first place, definitions of both terms will be sought; after that, findings of a few studies regarding them will be discussed.

Said, in his renowned essay, elaborates on "exile" in a brilliant way. "It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between a self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (Said, 2002, p. 7). Said (2002) argues that exiles may achieve great feats in the domain of literature and art. Still, the view of the

condition of the "exile" as having humanistic virtue is analogous to ignoring the ravages it brings about. It is "Fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, and their past" (Said, 2002, p. 4).

Said (2002) asserts that a distinction should be made between exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés. Exile as a phenomenon and practice came into existence in the old time of banishment (Said, 2002). When exile is forced upon someone, he has to live a "miserable" and "unhomely" life, having been regarded as an outsider (Said, 2002). On the other hand, refugees are attributable to twentieth-century states (Said, 2002). Juxtaposing "exiles" with "refugees", Said (2002) argues that the term "refugee" has a political connotation, suggesting a large group of innocent people in need of international assistance, while "exile" is accompanied by solitude and spirituality. As for "expatriates" and "émigrés" Said (2002) maintains that the formers voluntarily live in a foreign country, they may experience the same loneliness and alienation as experienced by "exiles, but it is not always the case, on the other hand, "émigrés" can be anyone who emigrates to a new country.

Homi K Bhaba gives the notion of "unhomeliness" in his two brilliant books, "Nation and Narration" and "The Location of Culture". He owes this term to Freud's concept of the uncanny, but his own experience has also contributed to it. Referring to his own experience as someone who is living in an alien country, he says, "I have lived in that moment of the scattering of the people that, in other times and other places in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees, gathering on the edge of foreign culture. (Bhaba, 1990, p. 291)

"Unhomely" or "unheimlich" is a powerful condition that forces its presence upon our minds; it becomes our shadow (Bhaba, 1994). Bhaba (1994) argues that it is the halfway between, where the boundary between public and private is blurred, making the latter the former. It is an overwhelming feeling that brings double-self into existence, creating an unstable identity (Bhaba, 1994).

To develop an understanding of "unhomeliness", we must attempt to catch the concept of home. Home is the domain of stable

identity where one has been and is understood; in the case of oppressed people, it is tied up with positive memory and version of the past (Bhaba, 1994). Having been captivated by the condition of “unhomeliness” cannot be accounted for by being homeless (Bhaba, 1994). “To be unhome is to feel not at home even at your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you refugee, so to speak” Tyson, 2006, p. 421). It is the feeling of non-belongingness, of being caught between two worlds or cultures, of belonging to neither, that is given rise by cultural displacement (Tyson, 2006).

Kunz (1981) seeks to highlight the factors that determine the assimilation of refugees to a foreign country. Kunz (1981) distinguishes home-related factors and host-related factors; the formers include the types of refugees, that is, the majority-identified refugees, event-alienated refugees, and self-alienated refugees. Host-related factors comprise the compatibility of culture and population policy of the host country (Kunz, 1981). Kunz (1981) argues that the majority of identified refugees have deep links with their native country; hereby, they are less susceptible to assimilation; on the other hand, event-alienated refugees are more likely to abandon their connections with their homeland because they are either rejected by the whole nation or its section. The same goes for “self-alienated refugees”. They are mainly accounted for by philosophers and thinkers who are devoted to their ideas. This is the reason that they have a rather high chance of assimilation (Kunz, 1981). However, the above are not the only factors that determine the assimilation of refugees. Kunz (1981) asserts that if cultural compatibility exists between refugees’ home countries and foreign countries, the susceptibility to assimilation will be high. The population policy of the host country also affects the assimilation (Kunz, 1981). Mostly, under-populated countries tend to welcome refugees as they add to their population, but countries that do not have any population issues do not encourage emigration (Kunz, 1981). Kunz (1981) argues that underpopulated countries welcome refugees, but they are used as manpower, with fewer chances of assimilation, because the native people want to retain their superiority; on the other hand, emigration to populated countries may be difficult,

but assimilation is likely because the native people do not have the paranoia of being outnumbered.

The article is commendable for dealing with the issue of assimilation, which is relevant to exiles and refugees, but nothing can be further from the truth; the weaknesses of the article cannot be overlooked. The researcher dwells on the factors affecting the processing of assimilation in great detail, but he does not mention alienation. Moreover, he is ignorant of the shocking experience that exile entails; the feelings of “unhomeliness” and “ambivalence”.

Schlesinger (2004) seeks to trace the theme of exile and the power of memory in relation to identity in Sebald’s “Austerlitz”. Unlike the above-discussed article, his study deals with the experience of exiles, incorporated into the novel. He adopts the theory of dislocation for analysis of the text.

Schlesinger (2004) asserts that the exile portrayed in the novel is a condition of non-belongingness, emotional loss, loss of identity, and an unending process. Exile experiences alienation from everything: from the host country, from love and friendship (Schlesinger, 2004). Schlesinger (2004) states that for some memory, it may be helpful to palliate, if not neutralise, the ravages caused by exile, but in Austerlitz, it is not the case. The recovery of memory engenders the pain of having lost something in the past, but as annoying as it is, abandoning memory is also not an option; in that case, the exile pays a different price; he does not know who he is (Schlesinger, 2004).

Unlike Kunz, the researcher is commendable for focusing on the experiences of individuals who have been forced to live in exile. If he had adopted “unhomeliness” as a theoretical framework, his analysis would have been even more commendable because he would have been able to reveal and explain the shocking experience entailed by the condition of exile.

O’Callaghan (2004) seeks to find out how female Caribbean writers living in the diaspora configure the “unhomely moment”. She applies the theory of “unhomeliness” given by Bhaba. O’Callaghan (2004) argues that although the main characters of the four novels by four different female Caribbean writers that she selects experience trauma caused by the feeling of “unhomeliness” and “displacement”, they find new opportunities in the

foreign land. Note that the main character in Cassin's novel, Morea, is an exception, as she meets her death in a foreign land (O'Callaghan, 2004). The condition of exile is not seen as negative in the majority of works (O'Callaghan, 2004).

This study is a valuable contribution to literature, focusing on the theme of exile, but the researcher downplays and backgrounds the horrors of exile to highlight its positive points. Unlike Schlesinger, she overlooks the alienation and identity crisis engendered by "unhomeliness" and "displacement".

Houwelingen (2012) seeks to highlight in Niekerk's *Aggat* how land establishes identity and how "unhomely" moment causes estrangement and alienation. One of the main characters in Niekerk's *Agaat*, Milla creates her identity as a powerful white African through her farmland (Houwelingen, 2012). Her loss of power and physical strength coincides with her not being able to inhabit her farm (Houwelingen, 2012).

When Milla is confined to her home because of her illness, she experiences "unhomeliness"; as a result, she is alienated from everything, including her home and her daily routine (Houwelingen, 2012). But *Agaat* experiences "unhomeliness" in a different way (Houwelingen, 2012). Milla adopts her when she is a childless young woman; hence, she is given a room in the house, but as Milla gets pregnant, she is relocated to the servants' rooms outside the house (Houwelingen, 2012). It is rightly in the wake of her relocation to the servants' rooms that she experiences "non-belongingness" and "unhomeliness", creating a sense of estrangement in her attitude towards Milla (Houwelingen, 2012). This study is significant since it provides new insights as to how identity is created.

Moreover, it shows how individuals can experience the "unhomely moment" differently. However, it does not discuss the experience of "unhomeliness" in the condition of exile since the novel the researcher analyses does not incorporate characters who live in a foreign land. It may be regarded as its sole weakness, particularly from the vantage point of my work, which deals with exilic dimensions.

Rostami & Parvaneh (2016) trace the theme of "unhomeliness" in Gordimer's "The Pickup" to some extent, like Houwelingen, Rostami et al. (2016) assert that the feeling of "unhomeliness" has nothing

to do with the borders, in Gordimer's "The Pickup". Both the protagonists feel "unhomely" in their homelands (Rostami et al., 2016). Rostami et al. (2016) argue that Abdu, who is living in South Africa when the novel begins, feels "unhomely" in his native country; this is the reason that when he comes back to his country of origin after his lover Julia forces him to go there, he feels uncomfortable as a result he leaves for the US without his wife. In the same way, Julia, the lover, and wife of Abdu, feels unhomely in her native country (Rostami et al, 2016). Rostami et al (2016) argue that driven by "unhomeliness", she buys two tickets to Abdu's country and asks him to go there. She feels at home, and she stays when he goes to the US (Rostami et al., 2016). This study is worthy of admiration for tracing the theme of "unhomeliness" in Gordimer's "The Pickup", in a brilliant way. Still, like Houwelingen, the researchers do not relate the experience of "unhomeliness" to the condition of exile.

Awan (2013) traces exilic perspectives incorporated in the works of Zulpikar Ghose and Mohsin Hamid, respectively. Awan (2013) wants to highlight and differentiate old and traditional exilic perspectives and the reformulation of new exilic perspectives of Muslim migrants to the US and Europe in the aftermath of 9/11, with a focus on alienation and identity crisis in their works. He wants to answer three questions. In the wake of global mordancy and the formation of cosmopolitan societies, to what extent can the harmonising of different cultures be achieved without any compromise on the part of either the host or the migrant community? What is the place of an author whose roots are situated in one culture and whose mind is nurtured in other and how 9/11 has become a point to differentiate between the traditional and the new exilic perspectives (Awan, 2013)?

Awan (2013) argues that a creative writer is constructive and has a better sense of home than common people living in the diaspora. Differentiating between pre-9/11 and post-9/11 exilic perspectives, Awan (2013) asserts that in pre-9/11 West, in which the experience of Ghose is located, the encounter between hosts and migrants is passive, while in Hamid's pre-9/11 West, the encounter is violent, involving struggles between host and migrant communities. In addition to that, in Ghose's work, the agony experienced is the

consequence of his identity crisis; on the other hand, in Hamid's work, an American national and a Muslim migrant are treated differently (Awan, 2013).

The researcher has done a great job of highlighting classic and post-9/11 exilic perspectives in the works of Zulfikar Ghose and Mohsin Hamid. His focus is on the identity crisis and alienation engendered by the condition of exile. Still, if he had highlighted the unhomeliness embodied in the selected works, particularly in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, it would have added more to the glory of the study.

Hartnell (2010) analyses Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in the context of American multiculturalism. While Hamid highlights the racist attitude in America, his novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, shows that there may be a possibility that the dream of a cosmopolitan American nation can be Achieved (Hartnell, 2010). She provides new insights into the novel, but as Awan (2013) points out, Native Americans and a Muslim migrant are treated differently. She downplays the racist attitude incorporated in the novel to suggest that the novel shows that there is a possibility of an American Cosmopolitan society.

This section has provided the researchers with a framework to carry out their research. They have acquired a way to find answers to their research questions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researchers have employed Bhaba's theory of unhomeliness and Saeed's theory of exile. Bhaba postulates his theory in his books "Location of Culture" and "Nation and Narration". He draws on Freud's concept of uncanny and his own experience as a diasporic subject. Just as suppressed memories and desires of childhood can create a dual identity, so does the unhomely moment. The exile is divided between his primordial ties to his roots, based on shared memories, culture, and songs, and his desire to assimilate into the foreign culture. Referring to his own experience as an Unhomely person, Bhaba says, "I have lived that moment of scattering which in other time and places, the nations of other". Naturally, the creation of a dual identity or personality affects the social relations of the diasporic person. Seed, in *Reflection of Exile*, brings

to the attention the ravages caused by the moment of exile. He believes that by counting the achievements of exiles, we forget that they yearn for their home. He calls it a rift between the human and his country and the self and his home; therefore, its sadness cannot be surmounted.

### **Research Methodology**

The researchers have adopted Alan McKee's model of textual analysis.

Step I: Choosing the topic of interest

The researchers seek to foreground the diasporic perspective in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*.

Step II: Specifying the topic of interest

The researchers are interested in the exilic dimensions portrayed in the novel.

Step III: Listing the relevant texts and formulating a theoretical framework

Relevant to the text are Bhaba's *Location of Culture and Nation and Narration* and Saeed's *Reflections on Exile*. The researcher employs a conceptual framework comprising elements from the theory of Bhaba and Saeed. The study will be qualitative. Thus, it does not require the presentation of data in tables and charts. It is qualitative because the researchers seek to theorise on the basis of the text.

### **Analysis**

Diasporic literature has been the site for the negotiation and exploration of exile. One of the important themes that loom large in this literature is "unhomeliness." "Exit West", which can be termed as one of the specimens of the genre of post-colonial literature, surfaces its instances. In particular, the protagonist, Saeed, experiences the "unhomely moment" to the extent that it affects his relationship with Nadia.

### **Pre-exilic conditions of Saeed**

To highlight how "unhomeliness" is engendered by the "condition of exile" in Saeed's life, in a better and appropriate way, his pre-exilic conditions demand a thorough discussion. Saeed, who is the protagonist of the novel, "Exit West", before he is forced into exile, lives in a city that falls prey to the menace of terrorism. The situation gets so desperate that "One's relation to windows now changed in the city" (Hamid, 2017, p. 68). "Windows could not stop even the most flagging round of ammunition: any spot

indoors with the view of the outside was a spot potentially in the crossfire” (Hamid, 2017, p. 68). Before it becomes a war zone, owing to the presence of militants, he is comfortable and feels homely in the company of his parents. Even when the war erupts, he tries to live his normal life as much as possible, with no instant feeling of “unhomeliness”.

It is beyond doubt that his life in his native country is without a single trace of “unhomeliness”. He has a strong connection with his parents. In fact, on cloudless nights, the family would sip green tea, enjoying the cold breeze and taking turns looking at stars and planets with his father’s telescope (Hamid, 2017). Later in his life, when he is forced to leave his country, this connection ties him to his father and the people from his country, giving rise to an “unhomely moment” in his life that turns out to be detrimental to his relationship with Nadia.

Saeed’s relationship with Nadia also testifies to the fact that he is homely in his native city. One evening, after a class on corporate identity and product branding, he asks her out for a coffee (Hamid, 2017). As the plot unfolds, their relationship ripens to the extent that no day is spent without talking to each other on their phones.

Even when the war is in its full bloom, the city is divided into “Patches of government land and patches of militant land” (Hamid, 2017, p.66). They enjoy a strong bond that draws them to each other. It is evident from the fact that now and then, Saeed goes to her apartment to meet or even to spend the night with her (Hamid, 2017). “He regarded Nadia and saw that she was regarding him, and her eyes were like worlds” (Hamid, 2017, p. 44).” Saeed was certain he was in love” (Hamid, 2017, p. 52). The above quotations suggest that Saeed’s bond and feelings for Nadia are so strong that they are difficult to change or weaken. But there is no escaping the fact that they change, creating a rift in their relationship, when “unhomeliness” takes hold of Saeed in the “condition of exile”.

### **The “condition of exile” and the feeling of “unhomeliness” by Saeed.”**

When danger to Saeed and Nadia’s lives becomes imminent, the couple is forced to abandon their native city. They save their lives, but Saeed is never comfortable in the “exile” because the “unhomeliness” takes hold of him. This is the reason

that he is drawn to his fellow countrymen in London, while Nadia is comfortable with Nigerians.

Even before Saeed abandons his native city, and as a result, exile is forced upon him, he is not comfortable with it. In particular, he is opposed to the idea of leaving his home forever.

Saeed desperately wanted to leave his city; in a sense, he always had. Still, in his imagination, he had thought he would leave it only temporarily, intermittently, never once and for all. This looming potential departure was altogether different, for he doubted he would come back. The scattering of his extended family and his circle of friends and acquaintances forever struck him as deeply sad, amounting to the loss of a home, no less his home. ((Hamid, 2017, p. 90)

It is evident from the above quotation that, like a normal person, Saeed wants to go abroad and explore the world, but he never means to settle there. In fact, he cannot do so because his affection for his country and his connection with it is so deeply ingrained in his mind that leaving it forever is analogous to losing his home. I do not use home literally but in a figurative sense. It is tied up with the notion of positive memories, and it is a place where one is understood and belongs (Bhaba, 1990). Because of the dilemma of non-belongingness, its absence causes and reflects “unhomeliness”. In simple words, the “condition of exile” is linked with the feeling of the “unhomeliness” for Saeed.

When Saeed and Nadia go to Mycono through a secret door, leaving their city behind, the “unhomely moment” surfaces in Saeed's life. It is reflected in the way he treats Nadia while they set up camp there. “When Nadia squatted down beside a scraggly bush and bade him squat down as well, and their concealed tried to kiss him under the open sky, he turned his face away angrily” (Hamid, 2017, p. 102).

It is the most important passage in the novel. When Saeed is in his own country, he never turns his face away from her, let alone does so “angrily”. It suggests that something is changing in him, something so profound that it can change his behaviour towards Nadia. Something must be responsible for the change because his feelings for her are undeniably strong. It can only be explained in terms of the unhomeliness”. In simple words, when he is exiled from his native city, the “unhomeliness”

takes hold of him. Ironically, although he is not hitherto aware of it, it starts influencing him, as shown by the above quotation.

Even Nadia feels the change in Saeed, brought about by “unhomeliness”, which is in turn caused by the “condition of exile”.

She was surprised because what she thought she had glimpsed in him at that moment was bitterness. She had never seen bitterness in him before, not in all those months, not for one second, even when his mother had died; then he had been mournful, yes, depressed, but not bitter, not as though something was corroding his insides. (Hamid, 2017, p. 102)

The above passage suggests two things: first, it is for the first time that Nadia feels bitterness in him; second, it happens in exile. Both point to the fact that exile in gender is “unhomeliness” in Saeed; its presence is reflected in his behaviour towards her.

After living in “exile” for some time, the feeling of “unhomeliness” intensifies in Saeed, creating a strong sense of nostalgia and strengthening his already connection with his parents. It is clearly manifest in his character when he and Nadia go to London through another secret door from Mycon. When they occupy a small bedroom in a palace there, Saeed’s one particular action makes it evident. Nadia only takes out of their backpack the things that are required because the palace where they live, along with other refugees, does not belong to them, and they will likely be removed from there (Hamid, 2017). “For his part, Saeed removed the photo of his parents that he kept hidden in his clothing and placed it on a bookshelf, where it stood, creased, gazing upon them and transforming this narrow bedroom, at least partially, temporarily, into a home” (Hamid, 2017, p. 120). This passage is evidence of the nostalgia he feels; in addition to that, it reveals his strong connection with his parents. The former is total, and the latter is partial, and they are the result of the “unhomeliness” that has taken abode in his consciousness of reality.

The above passage also reflects Saeed’s attempt to avoid the “unhomely moment”. The photo is not a mere object, but it symbolises his past and his country where he was comfortable and felt homely. Now that he is in “exile”, experiencing “unhomeliness”, it seems to be the only way to feel homely again. Because it not only represents his past

but bestows the past on the bedroom, making it home. Although the influence of the “unhomeliness” is so strong and penetrating that the room feels like home to him for a short time, and not in a complete sense, he tries to palliate it in this way.

It is beyond doubt that owing to “unhomeliness, Saeed feels alienation from the domain he lives in as exile. The photo of his parents suggests that he lives in his past, having no interest in the bedroom that he occupies. The reason is obvious: he does not feel homely there and has a strong sense of alienation from it. This is why when Nadia takes a shower and washes her clothes in the washroom, he is seized with fury. He says, “What the hell are you doing? It has been forever! This isn’t our house” (Hamid, 2017, p. 122). Because of his alienation from London, when Nadia asks him to leave it for Marin, he complies, although he is entitled to his own house the next autumn after working hard.

Living in a building mainly occupied by Nigerians who do not belong to the same ethnic group that he does and who have different nationalities and cultural origins from his, Saeed’s sense of unhomely is heightened. He feels alone, with no one to establish a rapport with him. “Here in this house, he was the only man from his country, and those sizing him up were from another country, and there were far more of them, and he was alone” (Hamid, 2017, p. 146). This passage is important because it shows the loneliness felt by him. To put it in other words, under the influence of “unhomeliness”, he has an acute sense of non-belongingness.

He could have been comfortable sharing the building with the Nigerians, even like Nadia, attending the meeting of the council of their elders, if he had not had the overwhelming sense of the “unhomely moment”. Because Nadia, who does not share his feeling of “unhomeliness”, is comfortable with them. As a matter of fact, she even attends the meeting of their council, not to mention that her opinion is heard there (Hamid, 2017). In simple words, she does not feel lonely, but she is surrounded by them. Thus, when Saeed’s attitude towards Nigerians is juxtaposed with hers, it serves to prove the fact that fault does not lie with the Nigerians, and neither is it the result of Saeed being the only man from his country there. Still, it is the working of

“unhomeliness” which has become ingrained in his psyche. As a result, he faces the dilemma of non-belongingness, having not been able to connect with them.

In his “unhomely moment”, being not able to establish rapport with the Nigerians, Saeed is drawn to people from his native country. They are the ones to whom he can connect. There is a house on Vicarage Gate that is occupied by people from his country (Hamid, 2017). He often goes there, “drawn by the familiar languages and accents and the familiar smell of the cooking” (Hamid, 2017, p. 148). “As he prayed, he felt praying was different here, somehow, in the garden of this house, with these men. It made him feel part of something, not just something spiritual, but something human, part of this group” (Hamid, 2017, p. 148).

In the company of these people, Saeed feels homely. The above passage shows that offering prayer with them is a different experience for him because it makes him part of their group. It is noteworthy that being a part of their group creates a sense of belongingness in him; as a consequence, he feels human again. This is the reason that he wants to shift to their building, even at the cost of losing a separate bedroom and separating from Nadia, because there is not enough space.

Saeed is not particularly drawn to his fellow countrymen who live in the house but to everyone who shares his origin. His affection for them is not confined by the barriers of space. He was drawn to people from their country, both in the labour camp and online.

It seemed to Nadia that the further they moved from the city of their birth, through space and through time, the more he sought to strengthen his connection to it, tying ropes to the air an era that, for her, was unambiguously gone. (Hamid, 2017, p. 187)

The above passage suggests that Saeed is physically in London, but mentally and emotionally, he is still in his country. Owing to this conflict between his mental and physical worlds, “unhomeliness” takes hold of him. Because he cannot identify and relate to the people living in his building in particular and in London in general, he faces the dilemma of non-belongingness. To remedy the situation, he connects to the people from his country since he belongs to them.

It must be mentioned that the sense of belongingness is of paramount importance for Saeed, as it is opposed to the feeling of “unhomeliness”. It can be the reason for their appeal to him because he wants to get out of the mental prison, he finds himself in, owing to his overwhelming feeling of “unhomeliness”. In other words, it is his strategy of neutralising its influence. To some extent, their company serves the same purpose as the photo of his parents did. He is employing it as a tool to break free of what he feels in the “condition of exile” and connect with someone whom he calls his own. In this way, he feels homely, when he is in their company.

Because of the “unhomeliness” experienced by Saeed and, as a result, his inclination towards the people from his native country, his relation with Nadia does not last. The reason is obvious: Nadia wants to get along with people of other ethnicities, while Saeed is stuck with his own people. To put it in other words, she abandoned her native country completely, but because of the acute sense of the “unhomely moment”, he left it only physically. He has a strong connection to it; in turn, he prefers the company of his fellow countrymen. Their different attitudes towards their country are revealed when he asks her to shift to the building that is occupied by the people from their country. “Why would we want to move? To be among our kind, Saeed answered. What makes them our kind? They’re from our own country. from the country we used to be from. We’ve left that place” (Hamid, 2017, p. 149). The last sentence, uttered by Nadia, is evidence of what she feels about the place she was born in. Thus, their different attitudes and inclinations make them completely different from each other; one becomes the antithesis of the other. As west and east winds cannot coincide, so cannot they. As a result, they separate from each other.

Thus, Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* addresses the issue of “unhomeliness” in the “exilic condition. It testifies to the fact that exile is vulnerable to its effects. The character of Saeed is evidence of it.

### **Conclusion**

After carrying out a textual analysis of Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West*, in the light of Bhaba’s theory of “unhomeliness”, the researchers conclude that the study finds answers to its research questions. Regarding the first question, which seeks the causal



relation between exile and “unhomeliness” in the novel, the study proves that the former gives rise to the latter. The novel does not surface any instant, suggesting that the protagonist, Saeed, in his pre-exilic life, has the characteristics of an unhomely character. But when the “condition of exile” is forced upon him, it makes him vulnerable to the “unhomely moment”. In simple words, “the condition of exile” engenders the feeling of the “unhomeliness” in Saeed. As for the second question, which seeks to inquire into its effects on Saeed, the study testifies to their existence. The influence of “unhomeliness” is manifest and evident in his behaviour with Nadia after being forced to abandon his native country. As an exile, his feeling of alienation from his surroundings points to the same fact. Not to mention, the dilemma of non-belongingness that he faces in his exilic life is the working of the same phenomenon. Moreover, feeling unhomely draws him to his fellow countrymen.

The researchers would like to make some recommendations. The theory of “unhomeliness” can be applied to the same novel, focusing on the other protagonist, Nadia, to find out whether the feeling of “unhomeliness” has the same influence across the globe and if it is always engendered by the “condition of exile”. The same theory can be useful for sociologists as exile is a social phenomenon, and the theory explains the behaviour of the displaced.

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