Negotiating Identity in Migration Spaces: A Postcolonial Reading of Hamid's Exit West and Rawlence's City of Thorns

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Abstract

This study examines the theme of identity crisis in refugee narratives through a postcolonial perspective, with particular focus on the novels *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *City of Thorns* by Ben Rawlence. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha, particularly his concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and Third Space, this research study investigates how forced migration molds and reshapes the pattern refugees' sense of self, belonging, their identity, and specifically their cultural identity.Using textual and thematic analysis as an analytical framework, the researcher in this study explores the way displacement and forced migration destabilizes the established identities and compels the refugees to negotiate between preserving their cultural roots, their norms, and adapting to a totally new social environment. The findings of this study suggest that migration does not simply produce a psychological sense of loss rather, it also generates complex, and hybrid identities that reflect ongoing tensions between memory, home, and survival. Both the texts in this study illustrate that identity crisis emerges not only from personal trauma but also from broader structural inequalities embedded in a globalized and post-colonial world order. The study concludes that interpreting refugee narratives through a postcolonial lens deepens our understanding of the transformative impact of displacement. At the same time, it highlights the resilience, adaptability, and evolving selfhood of displaced individuals who reconstruct meaning and belonging in unfamiliar spaces. By situating identity within historical, political, and cultural contexts, this research contributes to contemporary discussions on migration, globalization, and human agency.

Key words: Urdu Orthography, Rashid Hassan Khan, Dr. Abu Muhammad, Urdu Linguistics, Hamza and Izafat, Phonetic Logic, Linguistic.

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 9/11 the world has seen terrorism, war and resultantly the UNHCR reports displacement of billions of people across the globe. This displacement of people from their native countries and societies has exemplified itself into a global issue. The word refugee is defined as an individual who has been mistreated for the reason of his nationality, race, political identity, and religion, such a person is out of his native country and is unable to find protection for himself in the native country Gallien (2018).

Refugees are the people whose basic needs are not protected by their native countries or their countries of origin, in such condition refugees have an opportunity to avail themselves of international assistance (UNHCR, 2023). The status of people in foreign lands with the name given to them as the refugees gives birth to numerous other issues. The problems faced by refugees need to be addressed as a global issue because the number of refugees and their vulnerability is increasing annually. The international community and the agencies established for the assistance of the refugees ought to take steps to improve the lives of billions of people abandoned from their homes and are deprived of the basic needs and rights of normal life Zetter (2007).

Very few writers have addressed major contemporary global issues in their works among them one of the most prominent literary figures is a Pakistani British writer; Mohsin Hamid, whose novel Exit West revolves around refugee life and migration (Khalid, 2018). Through this narrative, Mohsin Hamid not only explores the emotional and psychological dimensions of displacement but also highlights the global human struggle for belonging and identity in an age of conflict and border restrictions.

Extending this study of refugee experiences, Ben Rawlence in his nonfiction work City of Thorns presents a realistic portrayal of Somali refugees living in the Dadaab camp on the Kenyan Somali border. His academic background in history and international relations, coupled with his experience as a researcher for Human Rights Watch from 2006 to 2013, equips him with a deep understanding of humanitarian crises. In 2010, during his fieldwork in Dadaab home to nearly 300,000 refugees, Rawlence gathered firsthand insights that later shaped the authenticity and depth of his narrative.

In City of Thorns, Ben Rawlence clearly depicts the profound identity crisis experienced by Somali refugees living in the Dadaab camp. Displaced from their homeland and imprisoned within the rigid boundaries of the camp, many refugees struggle to preserve a sense of self while experiencing loss, uncertainty, and the constant threat of violence. The younger generation faces a tension between inherited cultural identities and the pressures of adapting to life in exile, often leading to feelings of alienation and dislocation. Rawlence highlights how the lack of opportunities for education, employment, and social mobility worsens this crisis, leaving individuals trapped between the memories of a lost homeland and the harsh realities of their present. Through personal stories and testimonies, the novel underscores that identity for refugees becomes fluid, fragile, and contingent, shaped as much by displacement and survival as by heritage and tradition.

Writing about the challenges and problems faced by refugees in their displacement, recent researchers have emphasized that among the many issues encountered in refugee camps, the preservation of identity remains a primary concern for international agencies. According to Zaman (2021), the organizations working for refugee welfare must also prioritize the protection of identity and cultural belonging, in addition to providing necessities such as food, healthcare, and shelter. Among the most vulnerable aspects of refugee life, the threat to identity and nationality stands out. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the movement of refugees has increasingly been viewed as a potential threat to national security and stability in

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host countries too.

The study uses postcolonialism as a theoretical lens to analyze the identity crisis faced by refugees in their migratory spaces. Postcolonial theory emerged in response to the devastating impact of colonialism on colonized communities, addressing issues such as power imbalances, exploitation, and cultural erasure. It seeks to reclaim voice, identity, and cultural autonomy after the end of colonial rule. According to Gikandi (2019), such literature offers a platform for marginalized voices and draws attention to the complexities of displacement and statelessness in the postcolonial world.

This study focuses on two works, Exit West and City of Thorns, portray the life-threatening challenges faced by refugees worldwide. The study aims to interpret these novels from the perspective of identity crisis, highlighting its impact on refugee lives. Several different literary texts have been produced that deal with the theme of displacement, migration and transportation of billions of refugees that have taken place. Almost all genres of literature, whether that is poetry, short story or a novel has discussed the life of refugees and migrants. Literature produced on refugee life has generally subjected the refugees to be traitors, terrorists and some portray their image as an abandoned community in dire need of international assistance (Berry, 2001).

In both Exit West and City of Thorns the protagonists confront a profound identity crisis triggered by their refugee status and the ensuing forced migration across borders. Their immediate displacements weaken stable notions of self, precipitating the emergence of renewed and fragmented self-identities within the liminal spaces of exile. Despite the prevalence of these themes in contemporary refugee narratives, literary studies have insufficiently examined the relationship between displacement and identity formation (UNHCR, 2025). This study therefore addresses the research problem of exploring how refugee literature portrays identity crisis, asking specifically, how are the sufferings of refugees depicted in "Exit West" and "City of Thorns"? In what ways does migration become a nightmare for refugee identity? And how does forced displacement impact the identity of refugees? The urgency of this exploration is reinforced by the recognition that   legal identity, and by extension personal identity can be severely disrupted in displacement contexts.

Significance of the Study:

The novels Exit West and City of Thorns have been analyzed by scholars from various perspectives, including political conflict, alienation, and socio-economic dimensions. However, the present study is significant because it explores these texts through the lens of identity crisis, an often underrepresented yet crucial challenge faced by refugees during their forced migration. This movement from place to place profoundly affects their sense of self and belonging. As Ramsay (2020) argues, refugee narratives are vital in unpacking how displacement disrupts personal and collective identity. The study thus contributes to a deeper understanding of the refugee experience and the evolving global landscape through the lens of refugee literature.

Literature Review:

Migration, displacement and refugee prejudices have become prominent themes in contemporary literary studies, as the global scale of forced migration and exile increases. In discussions of postcolonial literature and migration studies, much attention has been paid to the spatial, political and economic dimensions of migrant lives: border crossings, camp-spaces, liminality, hybridity and belonging. For instance, Exit West has been analyzed for its liminal setting and transnational movement of characters, engaging with theories of liminality and diaspora. Similarly, City of Thorns has been read principally through the lens of humanitarian crisis, camp life, and the geopolitics of displacement. These thematic strands have enriched our understanding of migration in literature but predominantly emphasize structural, geopolitical or socio-economic frameworks rather than the deeper question of how identity itself is unsettled by forced migration.

However, a closer inspection reveals a clear gap in how these literary texts treat identity crisis, how refugees negotiate, fragment, reconstruct or lose their sense of self in migration spaces. There remains limited engagement with identity crisis as a sustained thematic focus, the disruption of selfhood, continuity, belonging and recognition in the refugee condition. In the case of City of Thorns, although Rawlence richly depicts the material, social and psychological hardships of refugee camp life, scholarship rarely explores the specific dynamics of identity disruption among the camp inhabitants, how forced migration engenders self-alienation, identity limbo, and existential uncertainty. This oversight opens the space for a study of Negotiating Identity in Migration Spaces: A Postcolonial Reading of Hamid's Exit West and Rawlence's City of Thorns that centers identity crisis as its core focus.

Research on migration and identity has generated a significant body of scholarship that explores how individuals reconstruct a sense of self in transnational contexts. Scholars such as Creswell (2018) emphasize that identity formation among migrants involves navigating complex social, cultural, and emotional spaces shaped by displacement. In literary studies, identity is often represented as a process of negotiation between the homeland and the host land, where belonging is constantly redefined. Machi and McEvoy (2016) note that the diasporic experience challenges fixed notions of identity, urging readers to understand identity as fluid and dynamic. Within diasporic narratives, authors frequently employ metaphors of movement, border crossing, and hybridity to represent this struggle for self-definition.

While much of the early literature on migration focused primarily on socio-economic or political dimensions, recent scholarship has shifted toward exploring the psychological and cultural implications of displacement. Snyder (2019) highlights that contemporary refugee fiction moves beyond statistics and policies to humanize the migrant experience through personal stories of loss, trauma, and adaptation. This approach aligns with Hart's (2018) assertion that identity in migratory contexts cannot be understood merely through external circumstances but must also consider the internal transformations that occur as individuals navigate unfamiliar worlds. These studies together underscore the significance of literary representations as a space for negotiating belonging and resistance.

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Booth et al. (2016) further argue that migration literature functions as a narrative map that charts the routes of dislocation and resettlement. Such works not only document physical journeys but also trace emotional and cultural passages, offering readers insight into the migrant's search for continuity amid rupture. Ridley (2012) similarly observes that contemporary writers depict the migrant's condition as an ongoing dialogue between memory and change, illustrating how displaced individuals reinterpret home and identity in shifting contexts. Through these perspectives, researchers demonstrate how migration transforms personal and collective identities, inviting reflection on what it means to belong in a globalized world.

In reviewing these contributions, it becomes clear that scholars have explored migration and identity from multiple theoretical and methodological angles. Creswell (2018) and Machi and McEvoy (2016) emphasize sociocultural adaptation and narrative agency, while Snyder (2019) and Hart (2018) foreground emotional resilience and identity reconstruction. Despite this diversity of approaches, a shared concern persists: the negotiation of selfhood within spaces marked by instability, exclusion, and hope. By synthesizing these insights, the present study positions itself within ongoing discussions of migration and identity, seeking to extend them by examining how literary representations illuminate the human dimensions of displacement.

Scholarly engagement with Mohsin Hamid's Exit West (2017) and Ben Rawlence's City of Thorns (2016) reflects an ongoing intellectual movement in migration studies toward understanding displacement as both a material and psychological process. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest, the act of reviewing literature clarifies conceptual understanding, and within this field, scholars increasingly view identity not as fixed but as continually reshaped by migratory experiences. In Exit West, Hamid dramatizes this fluidity through his protagonists, Nadia and Saeed, whose identities evolve as they move across borders geographically, culturally, and emotionally. Similarly, City of Thorns illustrates the lived dimensions of displacement through Rawlence's ethnographic depiction of the Dadaab refugee camps, where identities are formed and reformed under conditions of statelessness and surveillance. Both works compel researchers to refine their theoretical approaches, moving from simple categorizations of "refugee" or "migrant" toward more dynamic and relational models of selfhood (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

A growing body of criticism recognizes that Hamid and Rawlence's texts contribute distinct but complementary perspectives on displacement and belonging. As Booth et al. (2016) and Snyder (2019) note, the value of a literature review lies in situating new inquiry within established debates, and here, existing studies have analyzed how Hamid employs magical realism and symbolic doorways to collapse temporal and spatial boundaries. This technique universalizes the migrant condition, presenting migration as an existential rather than purely geopolitical experience. Conversely, Rawlence's documentary style exposes the institutional and humanitarian frameworks that define refugee life, thereby foregrounding the socio-political constraints on identity formation. By reading these works together, scholars illuminate how fiction and non-fiction collectively map the refugee's journey from visibility

to invisibility, from autonomy to dependency.

From an anthropological standpoint, displacement involves continuous negotiation with loss, adaptation, and cultural hybridity. Malkki's (2015) seminal work on the anthropology of displacement aligns with the challenges faced by Hamid's characters and Rawlence's subjects. Both narratives reveal the emotional dissonance and social marginalization that accompany uprootedness. The concept of the "refugee," as defined by UNHCR (2023), encapsulates the legal and moral framework underlying these stories, but both authors move beyond definition to explore the lived implications of refugee status, the sense of estrangement, resilience, and identity reconstruction that emerges from life in transit. In this light, Hamid's and Rawlence's texts serve as essential literary and documentary testimonies that humanize the abstract category of "refugee," encouraging readers to rethink identity through the lens of movement and survival.

This section discusses identity crisis and its application on various literary texts over the years. It then moves on to the overview of the refugees and their lives, the challenges and the problems they face in the foreign land, especially with their identity and their existence over there, as the others, who do not physically, psychologically and emotionally belong to the land they live on. Further, relevant literature available on both the selected literary works has been discussed to discover the possible gap that's to be focused on. The researcher discussed the subject matter of the selected works, the experiences of the authors regarding migration and identity which would help in the in-depth analysis and understanding of Exit West and City of Thorns and would possibly add more to the existing knowledge regarding the theory and the selected works of literature.

Understanding the Term Refugee:

Refugees are categorized based on their type of exile and status. Refugees are those who fear persecution for their gender, religion, or identity, and are declared refugees under the 1951 United Nations Conventions. Asylum seekers are also considered refugees, but their status remains fragile until their application is fully documented. Displaced people are forced to leave their place of residence due to religion, race, or political ideology, and Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) individuals have permission to stay in the host country for a specific time period, but do not receive full status and assistance. These individuals often face psychological pain and trauma, overlooking essential resources like clothing, education, and water.

Sharma (2019) critiques the political manipulation inherent in forced migration, arguing that Western hegemonic powers deliberately destabilize the identity, culture, and traditions of Eastern nations through socio-economic mechanisms such as warfare and media influence. This manipulation does not merely displace populations geographically but also fragments their sense of self and belonging. As a result, refugees experience cultural alienation, identity crises, and the erosion of communal values. Mohsin Hamid's Exit West vividly portrays this phenomenon through the characters Saeed and Nadia, whose escape from a war-torn homeland exposes them to the existential "otherness" and "nothingness" of displaced identity, a condition marked by the struggle to preserve selfhood amid social and

spatial dislocation.

Building on this discourse, Alansary (2015) and Sztompka (2008) expand the understanding of identity formation within migratory and transnational contexts. Alansary (2015) differentiates between Diaspora, a condition of cultural loss and estrangement and Transnationalism, wherein individuals negotiate multiple cultural affiliations and hybrid identities. Both concepts underscore the evolving relationship between place and identity, emphasizing that identity construction is fluid and context-dependent in the modern globalized world. Complementing this perspective, Sztompka (2008) conceptualizes everyday life as an observable and embodied process characterized by routines, rhythms, and social interactions that anchor identity. These habitual practices ranging from professional engagements to cultural participation form the scaffolding upon which displaced individuals attempt to reconstruct a sense of normalcy and belonging in unfamiliar environments.

Dombrovskis' Perspective on the Impact of Environment on Identity:

Dombrovskis (2010) stated that, Identity is the influence of the environment on an individual, and identity crises are when an individual fails to achieve ego identity. This problem is particularly prevalent in colonized communities, where they are divided between two countries, cultures, and identities. Victims often find themselves in third place, considered "Others" with no true culture and identity. Postcolonial writers like Edward Said aim to dismantle the values and culture imposed by colonizers.

Environmental contexts including family, community, cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, and physical surroundings profoundly shape individual identity by influencing values, roles, and self-concept. Early caregiving environments support temperament and attachment patterns, while schools and peer groups reinforce social roles and aspirations. Locality, resources, economic stability, and exposure to discrimination affect psychological development and opportunities for identity exploration. Cultural narratives provide interpretive frames that guide meaning-making, and migration or environmental change prompts identity negotiation and hybridization. Empirical research links supportive, resource-rich environments to clearer identity formation and better well-being. Consequently, environments that promote autonomy, inclusion, and stability foster resilient, integrated identities across life generally.

Scholars examining refugee narratives increasingly stress that forced migration produces not only material displacement but also profound psychological and cultural dislocation. Guyot (2007) underscores the necessity of supporting refugees' psychological well-being, suggesting that recognition of their agency and potential is vital to rebuilding fractured identities. This perspective resonates with recent studies that interpret refugee fiction as a site where trauma, belonging, and selfhood intersect (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016; Malkki, 2015). In such texts, displacement becomes both a literal and metaphorical condition that challenges characters to reconstruct meaning in spaces of uncertainty. Mohsin Hamid's Exit West and Ben Rawlence's City of Thorns exemplify this dynamic: both depict refugees whose loss of homeland destabilizes their sense of identity and belonging, revealing how migration transforms personal and cultural consciousness.

While prior scholarship has explored the humanitarian and socio-political dimensions of refugee experience, comparatively little attention has been paid to how these narratives articulate the psychological negotiation of identity within migratory spaces. The present study addresses this gap by analyzing how Exit West and City of Thorns portray identity as a fluid construct, continually reshaped by displacement, nostalgia, and the search for belonging in postcolonial contexts.

Theoretical Framework:

Homi K. Bhabha, a foundational figure in postcolonial theory, offers crucial insights into identity, culture, and belonging in contexts of displacement and globalization. In The Location of Culture (1994), Bhabha challenges the notion of fixed identities, proposing instead that identity is fluid and continually negotiated. Cultural identity emerges in "in-between" spaces where different cultures meet, clash, and overlap. This framework is particularly relevant for refugee narratives such as Mohsin Hamid's Exit West and Ben Rawlence's City of Thorns, where migration disrupts conventional attachments to place and community, producing profound crises of identity and belonging.

Central to Bhabha's theory is the concept of hybridity, which describes the formation of new cultural expressions through the interaction of different cultural systems. Hybridity resists cultural purity, emphasizing the negotiation and transformation of meanings, practices, and symbols. Identity, therefore, is never singular or complete but inherently fractured. In Exit West and City of Thorns, characters' identities are similarly hybridized, reflecting both the pressures of displacement and the creative adaptation to new sociocultural environments.

Closely related is Bhabha's notion of the Third Space, an in-between realm where cultures intersect and identity is constantly reconstituted. This space destabilizes binary oppositions, such as East/West or self/other, allowing for the emergence of new forms of belonging. Yet, it is also unsettling that individuals navigating this space often experience ambivalence, belonging partly to one culture and partly to another. In the context of Hamid's and Rawlence's works, this ambivalence mirrors the refugees' fractured identities, as they negotiate between their lost homelands and the demands of new environments.

Finally, Bhabha's concept of mimicry illuminates how displaced individuals adapt to dominant cultures while retaining traces of their original identities. Mimicry is never a perfect imitation; it produces a "blurred copy" that simultaneously challenges authority and preserves difference. For refugees in Exit West and City of Thorns, mimicry reflects the tension between survival and self-preservation, producing complex, "cracked" identities that navigate between adaptation and continuity. This lens underscores how migration and forced displacement provoke ongoing identity crises in contemporary refugee fiction.

Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, the Third Space, and mimicry offer a compelling framework for understanding identity as dynamic, contested, and socially constructed. While these ideas effectively illuminate how displacement produces tension and negotiation in cultural identity, they also carry certain limitations. For instance, Bhabha emphasizes fluidity and ambivalence but underplays the structural inequalities—such as political, economic, or legal constraints—that can constrain migrants' agency in real-world contexts. Nevertheless,

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his theory remains particularly useful for analyzing refugee narratives, as it foregrounds how characters navigate multiple, often conflicting cultural norms. In Exit West and City of Thorns, hybridity explains how refugees simultaneously retain traces of their homelands while adapting to new sociocultural environments; the Third Space highlights their existential ambivalence, belonging neither fully to the past nor the host society; and mimicry exposes the tensions between survival strategies and self-preservation. Critically, Bhabha's framework allows scholars to interrogate identity not as a static attribute but as a continuous process shaped by displacement, power relations, and cultural negotiation, though it must be complemented with socio-political analyses to fully capture the realities of refugee life.

Identity Crisis in Exit West and City of Thorns

In Exit West (Hamid, 2017), the novel stages an interior negotiation of selfhood through Saeed's persistent ambivalence and the residue of habit. The narrator remarks, "Saeed desperately wanted to leave his city…in his imagination he had thought he would leave it only temporarily" (Hamid, 2017), a line that encapsulates longing for safety alongside grief for ruptured routines and kinship ties. Hamid's magical doors make liminality tangible: thresholds translate private doubt into decisions that reshape belonging. Nadia's practical openness contrasts with Saeed's attachment to ritual, producing hybrid subjectivities formed in reflective time rather than public adjudication. Critically, Hamid depicts migration as an interior project in which memory, affect, and selective adaptation actively reconfigure post-migration selfhood.

In City of Thorns (Rawlence, 2016), identity is primarily produced through public structures camp administration, aid modalities, and securitized discourse rather than solely through private reflection. Rawlence records a resident saying, "It's only the poor left in Mogadishu now," which reveals how economic dispossession and political exclusion precipitate mass movement (Rawlence, 2016). Describing Dadaab as "their last resort," Rawlence exposes legal liminality and social stigma that define everyday life. Under these external pressures, mimicry and cultural mixing are constrained by scarcity, classification, and surveillance; adaptation often becomes a strategy of survival mandated by institutions. Thus, Rawlence presents subjectivity as a social status contested in bureaucratic and political arenas.

Taken together, Exit West and City of Thorns illuminate hybrid subjectivities that arise between inward negotiation and external imposition, tracking different axes of post-migration selfhood. Hamid emphasizes affective reconstruction of how rituals, memory, and private ambivalence rework belonging while Rawlence foregrounds institutional forces that circumscribe identity by means of law, aid, and stigma. Framed through Bhabha's Third Space, both texts depict ambivalence and provisional belonging (Bhabha, 1994), but a critical comparison shows that literary interiority and ethnographic reportage differentially reveal the mechanics of hybridity. This study fills a gap by juxtaposing narrative interiority with camp-level socio-political analysis; hybrid selves are co-produced by emotional economies and structural constraints. This links feelings with institutional policy outcomes.

Research Methodology

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In literary research, methodology refers to the approach a researcher adopts to interpret and analyze texts, rather than to collect empirical data as in social sciences. Unlike surveys or experiments, literary studies are inherently interpretive, and the "data" consists of novels, plays, poems, or other textual works. The methodology defines the lens or strategy through which these texts are examined, shaping how meaning is derived from narrative structures, characters, and themes. In this study, the novels Exit West and City of Thorns are analyzed as primary sources to explore the negotiation of identity in migratory and displaced contexts. This research employs qualitative textual analysis guided by postcolonial theory. Through systematic examination of narrative elements, character behavior, and recurring motifs, the study identifies thematic patterns related to identity crisis. The approach combines close reading attention to language, imagery, and symbolic structures with thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), to trace underlying patterns of meaning within the texts. This enables an in-depth understanding of how characters' identities are reshaped through migration, displacement, and socio-cultural pressures, both internally and externally. The methodology also situates the analysis within a theoretical framework, allowing the study to interpret identity not as a fixed attribute but as dynamic and negotiated, consistent with postcolonial perspectives. By explicitly detailing the interpretive strategy, this approach ensures transparency and scholarly rigor. It clarifies how themes are identified, how narrative strategies are examined, and why these choices are appropriate for addressing the research questions. Ultimately, this method provides a structured, systematic, and justifiable approach to reading Exit West and City of Thorns, highlighting the interplay of narrative form, cultural context, and postcolonial identity formation.

Analytical Framework:

This research aims at studying or exploring how identity is impacted by displacement, how forced migration of the refugees results in identity crisis and how the selected literary works: Exit West and City of Thorns, represent the sufferings of refugees in migration spaces. The researcher in this study is focused on analyzing Exit West and City of Thorns from the standpoint of identity crisis as a major challenge faced by the protagonists of Exit West and the Somali refugees in City of Thorns. The aim of this study is to analyze the characters of the two selected literary texts, their behavior, their personalities and their reactions to situations they face in the migration spaces. Consequently, this study will be helpful in a better understanding and interpreting of the literary works under study.

Textual Analysis:

The selected research method in this research study is textual analysis as proposed by Belsey (2005), who relies on research to make some contribution to the field of information which can be small, but it should make a difference to the topic. Belsey is of the opinion that textual analysis meaningfully contributes to those studies which are done in the field of cultural criticism that may include English or Cultural Studies or any other discipline that depends on the text to explore it more elaborately. Textual analysis involves analyzing a work of art or literature, considering it as a site where divergent meanings from other texts are unmoved. Research aims to reveal new knowledge and influence existing knowledge.

Originality is crucial, combining ideas systematically and in a regular pattern. Explanation involves extra textual evidence from multiple sources.

Belsey (2005) emphasizes the importance of textual analysis in understanding the meanings of literary works and the theory under study. The process of interpretation is based on the interaction between the reader and the text, with dialogues allowing readers to decide the range of possible interpretations. The chosen text is given prime importance, and the research is the process of finding answers to the questions posed by the text. Literary interpretation involves a critical study of the text's context and genre.

Thematic analysis, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), uncovers the underlying themes and meanings of a text or data, providing meaning to the researcher and reader. Textual analysis aids in interpretation by extracting key constructions and themes from chosen texts.

Analysis and Discussion:

This chapter examines Mohsin Hamid's Exit West and Ben Rawlence's City of Thorns to answer research questions related to identity crisis in postcolonial and refugee literature. In Exit West, Saeed and Nadia's journey underscores the internal re-shaping of identity as they traverse magical doors to new lands. Early on, the narrator reflects: "We are all migrants through time" (Hamid, 2017, p. 09). Hamid's novels, including Exit West, depict social, economic, and political issues, and his concern for the future of the world. Exit West highlights the powerlessness and vulnerability of refugees, as they leave behind everything they possess and prefer living in strangers' land. Nadia's stance is more adaptive in Exit West, "she was always clad from the tips of her toes…" (Hamid, 2017, p. 15), a signifier of negotiation between inherited identity and new modes of being. The novel thus illustrates identity not as fixed but as a field of alteration: Saeed's longing for rootedness clashes with displacement's demands, while Nadia's hybrid selfhood embodies mobility's potential and risk. Their mutual experiences demonstrate that when place, tradition and routine slip away, identity becomes a process of constructing, discarding and constituting. In contrast, City of Thorns, explores the humanitarian crisis faced by refugees in Dadaab, labeled as a sanctuary for terrorism and terrorists by the Kenyan government. In Hamid's Exit West, identity is described as fluid and uneven, constantly shifting with movement of the characters across borders. Saeed sticks to his cultural and his religious roots, finding relief in his traditions that anchor him to his homeland, while Nadia distances herself from convention, accepting change as a need for survival. The divergent responses of both Saeed and Nadia to displacement underscore how relocation disturbs the self, forcing individuals to negotiate between the past and the demands of a new present. The novel therefore demonstrates identity as a place of tension, where memory, belonging, and adaptation collide.

In City of Thorns, Rawlence captures the external dimensions of identity transformation among people living in the vast camp of Dadaab. One report reads: "the prolonged waiting for resettlement creates a crisis in personal identity" (Rawlence, 2016, p. 22), indicating how structural liminality disrupts self-perception. Residents inhabit an in-between status neither fully integrated into Kenyan society, nor connected to the homeland

they left behind. Rawlence details how young men adopt "aspects of Western culture through music, clothing, or language while also holding onto elements of their Somali heritage" (Rawlence, 2016, p. 35), demonstrating mimicry as a survival strategy that simultaneously underscores marginality. In a context where identity is shaped by bureaucratic labels, aid classifications and camp politics, the self emerges as fragmented and contested. Camp life enacts Bhabha's Third Space: identity is constituted not in a stable locale but in the interstice of home-land and host-place, policy-regime and survival-strategy. Here identity crisis is not simply internal anguish but imposed by socio-political structures: to belong is impossible, yet to depart is unresolved.

City of Thorns exposes the harsh realities of identity crisis in a documentary style. The refugees living in Dadaab are stuck between various identities: they are Somali by heritage, homeless in practice, and often perceived as outsiders wherever they seek refuge. Ben Rawlence shows how administrative structures and humanitarian systems reduce individuals to mere statistics, stripping them of personal agency and dignity. The resulting crisis is not only psychological but also political, as identity becomes a contested space controlled by institutions rather than individuals.

Together, the two works reveal that identity for refugees is never fixed; it is broken, restructured, and often endangered by displacement. Both texts emphasize that survival is not merely physical but also deeply tied to preserving, negotiating, or reconstructing one's sense of self. These aspects of self, identity, displacement, and sense of loss of identity in the two novels are highlighted throughout the storyline.

Identity:

Identity crisis is a significant issue in postcolonial literature, as seen in the experiences of Saeed and Nadia in Exit West and Somali refugees stationed at the Kenyan border. These individuals feel their identity is missing as they live in countries and states other than their own. Identity is a product of one nation's cultural heritage, traditions, and norms, and is not subjective or limited to an individual. In the contemporary world, identity is not just subjective but represents a community, society, and culture. Colonial discourse can create knowledge about colonizers and the colonized community based on stereotypes, aiming to validate or advocate for the colonizers' conquest of the established system of administration and instruction. This can lead to discrimination and divisions based on racial discrimination and differences. In the novel City of Thorns, Guled, a refugee, faces constant attacks from various groups and communities, making his identity at risk. This constant threat to their lives can lead to a sense of loss of identity.

Identity is a complex construct that shapes an individual's sense of self within their personal history, social roles, cultural narratives, and future aspirations. It plays a crucial role in psychological well-being, social integration, and adaptive functioning. A clear and coherent identity supports decision-making, goal pursuit, and resilience in the face of stress, as people with greater identity clarity are better able to prioritize values, mobilize resources, and sustain effort toward long-term aims. Classical developmental frameworks highlight identity formation as a critical task of adolescence and young adulthood, with enduring

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consequences such as reduced existential uncertainty and role continuity. Social identity theory and related empirical work show how group memberships contribute to self-esteem, provide social support, and offer practical frameworks for interpreting social events. The collective component of identity operates as a resource that buffers individuals against discrimination and stress while fostering cooperative behavior and civic engagement. Identity is not only about stability but also contains a dynamic, narrative quality: autobiographical reasoning and narrative identity research show that the stories people construct about their lives shape their emotional regulation, meaning-making, and moral choices. Coherent life stories are linked to higher well-being, greater psychological maturity, and better interpersonal functioning. From a practical standpoint, identity supports agencies by undergirding self-efficacy beliefs, clarifying role expectations, and guiding the selection of social contexts, careers, and intimate partners that fit core values and abilities. However, weak or fragmented identities can undermine motivation and produce vulnerability to external pressures. Cultural and structural forces also shape identity, with migration, social change, and globalization necessitating active identity negotiation. Intersectional approaches reveal that identity is layered and unequal, with multiple axes such as gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality interacting to structure opportunities and constraints. In clinical practice, identity disturbances are recognized features of several psychiatric conditions, and therapies that foster self-continuity, narrative coherence, and value-based commitments can produce measurable improvements in functioning. Educational and organizational settings also benefit from attention to identity, as programs that support exploratory learning, mentorship, and reflective practice facilitate the development of vocational and professional identities that align personal strengths with societal roles. In conclusion, identity is an empirically grounded construct with profound practical implications, including stabilizing experience, guiding moral and practical choices, structuring social belonging, and providing narrative continuity for meaning and purpose. Supporting identity development through education, social policy, and therapeutic practice is therefore a key route to promoting individual well-being and resilience.

Conclusion:

The study focuses on the selected novels; Exit West and City of Thorns by Mohsin Hamid and Ben Rawlence respectively. These novels have been analyzed based on the interpretation of the novels from the perspective of identity crisis as a major issue faced by the refugees living in a foreign land away from their homes. The results after the analysis of these novels focus on the idea of identity and its significance for an individual. Though these novels have been discussed and interpreted by other researchers from various other perspectives, the researcher in this research work has limited the focus on identity crisis, trying to prove that lack of solid and rigid identity in people who migrate from place to place causes all sorts of emotional, psychological and even physical unease. An analysis has been carried out keeping in view the Avtar Brah's and Bhabha's understanding and definition of identity and keeping in view the post-colonial theory.

This chapter summarizes the findings of the research and offers insights into the

refugee experience as portrayed in Exit West by Mohsin Hamid and City of Thorns by Ben Rawlence. Beginning with an overview of refugee identity struggles, the study emphasized that displacement is not just a loss of home but a fragmentation of self, rooted in the loss of nationality, culture, and belonging. The literature review revealed the depth of existing research in postcolonial and refugee studies, particularly the ways in which identity crisis is central to refugee narratives across borders.

The research methodology focused on qualitative, thematic analysis of the two selected texts; Exit West by Mohsin Hamid and City of Thorns by Ben Rawlence. While using the postcolonial theory, the study examined how characters like Saeed and Nadia in Exit West, and the Somali refugees in City of Thorns, reflect the psychological toll of dislocation. Both narratives reveal how refugees are frequently viewed as outsiders, others unwanted, either suspected as threats or terminated as burdens. As Alammouri (2020) noted, Hamid universalizes the refugee experience, showing that the struggles currently faced by a few may soon represent a global reality as conflict and migration escalate worldwide.

Ben Rawlence's firsthand interviews in Dadaab reveal the harsh realities of Somali refugee life, where they are trapped between two states, leading to loss of identity, psychological distress, and financial instability. The study emphasizes that identity crisis is central to refugee existence and calls for a renewed global response to recognize displaced individuals as people seeking identity, dignity, safety, and belonging.

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