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RESEARCH PAPER

Fractured Worlds and Sealed Borders: Neoliberalism, Migration, and the Politics of Exclusion in the Vignettes of *Exit West*

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ABSTRACT

This research examines Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, with a particular focus on its vignettes as literary critiques of neoliberal capitalism and its effects on global migration. The novel shows how neoliberal policies, marked by economic insecurity, systemic exclusion, and conflict, push people from the Global South to migrate, where they continue to face marginalisation and hostility in the Global North. The vignettes, presented as short self-contained narratives, highlight the ways in which neoliberal states control migration through surveillance, militarised borders, and exclusionary rhetoric. The "black doors" operate as a metaphor for the restricted and secretive routes that migrants are forced to take under rigid visa systems. Using a qualitative, postcolonial counter-neoliberal approach, this study applies thematic analysis to examine global inequality, border politics, and resistance. The findings show that the vignettes give a human face to the displaced while questioning dominant neoliberal narratives on migration and displacement.

| **KEYWORDS** | Neoliberalism, Migration, Tight Borders, Clandestine Routes, Lack of Social Protection, Marginalization, Obstruction, Economic Exclusion, Anti-immigrant Rhetoric and Resistance |

Introduction

Large-scale migration constitutes a significant phenomenon within neoliberalism. Third World and the developing countries are severely impacted by neoliberal policies and are consequently relegated to a state of dependency. Due to inadequate social protection, widespread poverty, and unemployment in these regions, individuals often seek to migrate to core and developed countries to pursue career opportunities: "It is generally believed that migration is caused primarily by the lack of economic development, which forces people to move to greener pastures" (Canterbury, 2010, p. 9). This results in a substantial flow of labour—both skilled and unskilled—from peripheral to core regions, both within and across national borders. Nonetheless, core and developed countries tend to facilitate and accommodate skilled migrants, as neoliberal capitalism exploits their labour to enhance "the overall quality of life in these states" (p. 37). Conversely, unskilled migrants frequently face marginalization, obstruction, and exclusion. Solomon (2018) asserts that, under neoliberal pragmatism and rationality, human beings are appraised as forms of human capital. Individuals deemed economically valuable are incorporated and accommodated, whereas those lacking competitive skills are excluded: "Neoliberal rationality, 'common-sense' structures a world where meritocratic individualism divides us into winners/losers, included/excluded" (p. 42). Consequently, neoliberal states actively encourage the migration of skilled workers for their contributions to economic development but simultaneously restrict the movement of unskilled migrants, regarding them as burdens upon the national economy: "Neoliberal capitalism advocates migration as an agency for capitalist development, but simultaneously takes action to constrain the movement of people" (Canterbury, 2010, p. 8).

Canterbury further observes that certain proponents of neoliberalism endorse the international flow of labour, contending that migration fosters development and alleviates poverty in peripheral or sending countries while also contributing to the prosperity of receiving states. However, he argues that the principal beneficiaries are not the impoverished countries of origin but rather the business elites and private sectors that exploit the human resources of these poorer nations: "the chief beneficiaries are the neoliberal capitalists in the rich migrant-receiving states and their collaborators in the state bureaucracy and private sector in the migrant-sending countries" (p. 7). Moreover, he posits that contemporary international organizations endorse migration primarily to serve the interests of affluent states. These states exploit skilled migrants from poorer countries and amass wealth owing to the latter's structural dependency:

> The relationship between migration and development as formulated in neoliberal theory and the international organizations serve to perpetuate the concentration of capital accumulation in the rich countries, deepen the capitalist exploitation of migrant workers, and maintain the symmetrical international division of labour that favours the rich states. (p. 8)

Presently, migrant workers from the Global South are also marginalized within Western societies, as they are perceived as threats to the stability of the Global North. Castles and Wise (2007) highlight that migrants from the Global South are regarded as threats to the living standards, security, and societal stability of states belonging to the Global North. According to Canterbury (2010), affluent states employ diverse strategies to impede the influx of labourers from the South—particularly those of Muslim backgrounds—on the grounds that they pose a cultural threat: "The cultural fear is very much present in Europe where anti-Islam, anti-immigrant, anti-African sentiments are running high. The US 'war on terror' is also another driving factor in attempts to restrict immigration" (p. 8).

Currently, far-right groups and neoliberal proponents in Western states increasingly deploy anti-immigrant rhetoric. They maintain that immigrants represent a substantial burden on public resources and jeopardize the national economy and employment opportunities for local populations. During his electoral campaign, former US President Trump popularized the slogan "America for Americans," which received vigorous support from right-wing political factions. Similar attitudes prevail in the United Kingdom and other Western nations (Lazarczyk, 2017).

Lazarczyk (2017) contends that following the 2008 neoliberal economic crisis and the concomitant concentration of wealth among a privileged few, many citizens in the UK experienced unemployment, inadequate social security, and poverty. Consequently, extreme right-wing politicians adopted anti-immigrant discourse, targeting particularly Muslim and Polish communities in an effort to secure the working-class vote. Thus, the neoliberal economic crisis, combined with the self-interested postures of right-wing neoliberal politicians, catalysed the surge in anti-immigrant sentiment and racism in the UK. Lazarczyk asserts:

> [Due to neoliberal economic crisis of] increasing job insecurity, deepening inequalities in income and wealth, unavailability of affordable higher education, shortage of reasonably priced accommodation, lack of regulations, and taxes for big banks and corporations led to the rise of anti-immigrant attitude.... Many politicians, instead of pointing out the neoliberal system's faults, deliberately choose to blame the 'other' for the economic breakdown. Thus, they [neoliberal

politicians] argue that 'others,' either immigrants overall, Muslims, Poles, or any other minority, take away local people's jobs or live off pensions paid by local taxpayers. In consequence, the scapegoating of immigrants, Muslims included, is naturally conducive to the rise of anti-Muslim racism. (X.R.R.S., para. 1)

In sum, the above literature indicates that extreme poverty compels individuals from the Global South to migrate to the North. However, in the North, skilled migrants are instrumentalised to advance economic interests, whereas the poor and vulnerable lack social protections and are regarded as burdens to the national economy and existential threats to the state. In particular, Muslim migrants are frequently perceived as threats, and coercive and violent measures are employed to repatriate them.

This study undertakes a critical analysis of the vignettes in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* as a literary interrogation of the precarious conditions endured by workers within the framework of global neoliberalism, with particular emphasis on migration to the West and the concomitant rise in resentment towards Western neoliberal policies. These vignettes foreground the vulnerability and precarity experienced by workers across both the Global South and the Global North. In less developed regions of the South, neoliberal values—characterised by inadequate social protections, pervasive job insecurity, economic instability, and conflict—coerce workers into seeking opportunities abroad, especially within the developed countries of the West. Yet, upon arrival, migrants frequently encounter comparable conditions of precarity, exacerbated by marginalization, social exclusion, and widespread suspicion. The narratives illustrate how migrant workers cultivate profound resentment towards Western neoliberalism and actively resist its exclusionary and anti-migrant frameworks.

Literature Review

Neoliberalism has been widely theorized in Western academic discourse, yet its examination within Pakistani literary scholarship—particularly regarding Anglophone fiction—remains limited. In recent years, however, scholars have increasingly begun to investigate the socio-political and economic ramifications of neoliberalism as reflected in contemporary Pakistani narratives. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* has attracted considerable critical attention, mostly centering on themes of migration, displacement, and refugeehood. Despite this interest, the novel's complex engagement with neoliberal structures and global capitalism is underexplored. Existing studies tend to focus on personal or ethical dimensions of displacement rather than critically interrogating how neoliberalism shapes and regulates these experiences through global border policies and systemic exclusions.

Farooq et al. (2022) offer a comparative analysis of *Exit West* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through the contrasting frameworks of cosmopolitanism and anti-cosmopolitanism. Using Kenneth Burke's Pentad Dramatism, their study examines how key characters in both novels undergo profound transformations in relation to their social environments and political realities. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the protagonist Changez' journey reflects a reluctant shift away from a cosmopolitan identity—one marked by global integration and openness—towards an anti-cosmopolitan stance, shaped by disillusionment and resistance to Western hegemony. Conversely, *Exit West* portrays Saeed and Nadia as evolving from locally rooted individuals into cosmopolitan figures, embracing a universal human connection despite displacement. This reading foregrounds how Hamid's novels engage with identity formation amid global socio-

political upheavals, though it remains focused on character development rather than the systemic economic forces shaping migration.

Pérez Zapata (2021) employs postcolonial and refugee studies to explore *Exit West*'s temporal themes of transience and waiting, arguing that the novel's use of magical realism collapses traditional spatial and temporal boundaries, universalising the refugee experience and urging ethical recognition of shared vulnerability.

Yalçin (2024) utilises Arjun Appadurai's "scapes" framework to unpack the novel's portrayal of global flows, showing how Hamid exposes both the enabling effects of technology and the entrenched inequalities permeating migration under globalization.

Mughal et al. (2024) approach the novel through positive psychology, focusing on cognitive traits of optimism and resilience embodied by Saeed and Nadia amidst adversity.

Carter (2020) provides a critical analysis explicitly engaging with neoliberalism in *Exit West*, contending that neoliberal values and bordering practices dehumanize displaced people by obscuring their vulnerability and fostering defensive social attitudes. Hamid's symbolic transformation of borders into "doors" is seen as an ethical intervention, suggesting new possibilities for recognition and human connection beyond exclusion.

While Carter's work foregrounds ethical concerns around neoliberal border regimes, it largely centres on symbolic and moral dimensions. This study addresses a crucial gap by examining *Exit West*'s vignettes as literary tools that expose the systemic mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism—such as surveillance, militarization, and exclusionary migration policies—within a postcolonial counter-neoliberal framework. It interrogates the radicalized and economic inequalities that structure global migration and highlights migrant resistance as represented in Hamid's narrative.

Though Hamid's other novels have been studied for neoliberal themes, *Exit West* remains underexamined in this respect. In this connection, Poon (2015) critiques the construction of the "neoliberal self" in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, revealing moral compromises inherent to capitalist success. Raggio (2016) uses Judith Butler's concept of precarity to situate *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* within the post-9/11 neoliberal context, challenging reductive views of anti-American sentiment. Shazeb and Khan (2017) discuss neoliberal commodification in Pakistani Anglophone fiction, including *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, illustrating how capitalist logics erode cultural institutions. Shah and Sheeraz (2025) adopt a neo-Marxist lens to highlight how *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critiques global capitalism's exacerbation of inequality and alienation.

Together, these studies evidence Hamid's sustained engagement with neoliberalism across his work. Yet none thoroughly explore *Exit West* as a direct critique of neoliberal border regimes and the commodification of human mobility. By focusing on the novel's vignettes and the metaphor of magical doors, this study fills a critical research gap, positing *Exit West* as a postcolonial counter-narrative challenging radicalized exclusions and injustices of neoliberal statecraft representing the centre.

While themes of migration and displacement dominate *Exit West* scholarship, the novel's explicit critique of neoliberal capitalism—especially restrictive border policies,

surveillance mechanisms, and the commodification of mobility—remains underexplored. Moreover, the vignettes as strategic literary devices exposing neoliberal structural violence and migrant resistance have not been adequately studied. This research addresses these gaps by offering a focused postcolonial counter-neoliberal analysis that highlights the novel's systemic critique of global inequality and border control under global neoliberalism.

Material and Methods

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive literary analysis method to examine the vignettes in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* as symbolic critiques of tight border policies within the framework of neoliberal capitalism. The study focuses on the novel's discrete narrative units—vignettes—which deals with the precarious experiences of migrants and illuminate the consequences of neoliberalism and its restrictive migration regimes.

A textual analysis approach is adopted to systematically identify and interpret recurring motifs related to migration control, racialisation, exclusion, and economic exploitation. These themes are explored in relation to neoliberalism's emphasis on market-driven governance, securitisation, and the construction of migrants as threats or burdens to wealthy nations.

The analysis examines the language, symbolism, and narrative strategies employed in the vignettes—such as the metaphor of 'black doors' and representations of border security personnel—to uncover how the novel critiques dominant neoliberal discourses that justify strict border enforcement and anti-immigrant attitudes.

Situated within a postcolonial and neoliberal theoretical framework, this study contextualizes the novel's depiction of migration within global hierarchies of power and capital. Postcolonial theorists critique Western border regimes as extensions of colonial control and racial exclusion. Among them Shukla and Tinsman (2007) highlight how border policies reproduce colonial racial and gender hierarchies. De Genova (2013) and Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) view borders as tools of neoliberal capitalism that regulate mobility and labour through exclusion. In this context, *Exit West* (Hamid, 2017) challenges neoliberal ideologies by humanising migrants from the developing countries (representing the marginalized) and exposing the injustices of tight border policies of the developed countries (representing the colonial centre, the neoliberal West) and thus offering a powerful literary critique of dominant migration narratives.

Results and Discussion

As previously discussed, advanced neoliberal states systematically restrict the migration of unskilled labourers and workers from economically disadvantaged countries. These developed nations employ a range of strategies designed to deter migrant entry and to compel existing migrants to repatriate. In *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid employs a series of vignettes—dispersed throughout the novel—each serving as a narrative device that critiques the anti-immigrant policies and exclusionary practices of affluent states. These vignettes challenge the barriers erected by the Global North to inhibit the movement of disadvantaged populations from the Global South, and they highlight the structural inequalities that underpin global migration regimes.

The vignettes lend narrative support to the right of mobility for impoverished individuals from less developed nations and critique the increasingly securitized and militarized border policies employed by neoliberal states. Through these interwoven episodes, the novel offers a sustained literary resistance to neoliberal capitalism's containment of transnational mobility—particularly of the poor—on the grounds that such populations are construed as economic burdens or socio-cultural threats to the host societies of the Global North.

In the majority of the vignettes, *Exit West* foregrounds the barriers that inhibit the mobility of impoverished individuals from the Global South to the Global North, primarily due to stringent visa regimes and a lack of financial resources. Consequently, these individuals are compelled to undertake irregular migration by passing through what the novel metaphorically refers to as "black doors." These black doors symbolize the clandestine and often perilous routes that migrants must take in order to circumvent the institutionalized restrictions of legal entry into developed nations.

However, movement through these black doors is constructed by the host states as both illegal and threatening. In response, developed countries implement a range of deterrent strategies—legal, physical, and ideological—to obstruct such migration. These measures reflect the securitized logic of neoliberal governance, wherein the poor are rendered undesirable subjects, and their mobility is perceived as a violation of national sovereignty and economic stability.

The first vignette in *Exit West* foregrounds the precarious experience of a migrant entering the developed nation of Australia. It narrates the story of a wealthy woman sleeping in her apartment in the Sydney suburb of Surry Hills, having forgotten to activate her home alarm. The vignette introduces the motif of the "black door," which serves as a metaphor for unauthorized, clandestine entry into the Global North— symbolizing the desperate attempts of the poor from the Global South to bypass rigid immigration controls. Out of this black door, a migrant emerges in a scene marked by intense darkness and symbolic unease:

> The door to her closet was open. Her room was bathed in the glow of her computer charger and wireless router, but the closet doorway was dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness—the heart of darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging. (Hamid, 2017, p. 10)

The migrant, after much physical struggle, emerges into the room but causes no harm; instead, he silently escapes through the window. This episode underscores the severe visa restrictions in countries like Australia, which force underprivileged individuals from the Global South to resort to irregular and dangerous routes in search of security and economic opportunity. The "black door" thus functions as a symbolic critique of neoliberal border regimes that obstruct legal migration pathways for the global poor.

Furthermore, the vignette exposes how migrants are racialized and misrepresented as threats. The man is depicted in menacing terms—"He too was dark, with dark skin and dark, woolly hair" (p. 10)—a description that reflects the racialized anxiety of host nations rather than the actual intentions or actions of migrants. Despite being perceived as a potential threat, the migrant refrains from harming the homeowner and instead departs discreetly: "He chose the window. He was through it in an instant, dropping silkily to the street below" (p. 10). This imagery disrupts dominant narratives

of neoliberal state that equate migrant presence with criminality or danger, revealing instead that such individuals seek nothing more than survival and economic dignity.

The vignette further highlights the vulnerability and fear experienced by migrants, even when they are inside supposedly safe spaces. The man's inner consciousness, marked by heightened alertness and trauma, reveals the fragility of migrant existence:

> His eyes rolled terribly. Yes: terribly. Or perhaps not so terribly. Perhaps they merely glanced about him, at the woman, at the bed, at the room. Growing up in the not infrequently perilous circumstances in which he had grown up, he was aware of the fragility of his body. He knew how little it took to make a man into meat: the wrong blow, the wrong gunshot, the wrong flick of a blade ... He was aware that alone a person is almost nothing. (p. 10)

This introspection captures the existential precarity of migrants who experience highly securitized environments under constant threat of detection, violence, or deportation. Although he has transgressed the boundary of private space, the man is portrayed as acutely aware of his own vulnerability, which underscores the deep asymmetry between the power and security of the Global North and the exposed, often criminalized, status of migrants from the Global South.

Finally, the juxtaposition of the sleeping affluent woman and the fearful migrant highlights the profound disconnect between the privileged citizens of developed nations and the lived realities of migrants. The vignette critiques the inability—or unwillingness—of Western societies to recognize the systemic hardships that drive irregular migration. Instead, they misread migrants as threats rather than understanding them as individuals fleeing poverty, insecurity and violence.

The second vignette in *Exit West* centres on the clandestine arrival of a group of Filipina women in Tokyo, Japan. Due to stringent immigration policies and the exclusion of economically disadvantaged individuals, these women—like many from the Global South—are forced to access Japan through a concealed route: a disused and perpetually locked door. This symbolic threshold, described as "a door that [is] always kept locked" (Hamid, 2017, p. 18), represents the closed borders and restrictive visa regimes that prevent legitimate entry into affluent neoliberal states such as Japan. Their arrival in the Shinjuku district initially evokes excitement and wonder, yet their presence is immediately met with suspicion and surveillance.

A male figure—clad in a suit and crisp white shirt—begins to follow the newly arrived migrants, his presence evoking institutional authority and latent threat: "fingering the metal in his pocket,"he is suggestive of an armed security agent (p. 18). This character, who quickly assumes control over the scene, symbolizes the coercive mechanisms of the neoliberal state that police and discipline migrant bodies. The girls are identified as trespassers: "They were in his territory" (p. 18), indicating a perceived violation of national and cultural boundaries.

The guard's racialised prejudice becomes evident as the narrative reveals his disdain for Filipinos, who he believes should "know their place" (p. 18). His hostility towards Filipino migrants is not newly formed but has deep historical and personal roots, dating back to his school years, when he physically assaulted Filipino classmates. His character represents the internalization and reproduction of xenophobic attitudes

within host societies, particularly towards migrants from postcolonial and economically marginalized nations.

The vignette thus functions as a critique of Japan's neoliberal nationalism, which imposes exclusionary migration policies while simultaneously maintaining the racial and economic hierarchies that underpin global labour flows. The permanently locked door is emblematic of rigid border enforcement that disproportionately affects the global poor. The hostile presence of the guard, as an enforcer of these borders, exemplifies the violence—both symbolic and material—faced by migrants attempting to cross into spaces of economic privilege.

Through this narrative episode, Hamid critiques the issues of global neoliberal capitalism, wherein states such as Japan enact and enforce policies that criminalize and marginalise vulnerable populations from countries like the Philippines. Rather than addressing structural inequalities or offering equitable access to opportunity, such policies reinforce a world order where movement is increasingly surveilled, racialised, and denied to those deemed economically and socially undesirable.

The third vignette challenges the entrenched racial discrimination and physical fortification of borders characteristic of the neoliberal state, specifically focusing on the United States. It narrates the experience of an elderly ex-Navy officer standing at the perimeter of his property in San Diego, California, observing the arrival of individuals crossing into his land. The old man inquires of a younger officer whether the newcomers are Mexicans or Muslims who are "coming through" (Hamid, 2017, p. 26). Although the younger officer shows deference to the elder's age and past military service, he declines to answer the question directly, replying curtly that he cannot provide such information. This interaction leaves the old man feeling demeaned and infantilized: "The old man felt like a child suddenly, asking this. The officer was young enough to be his grandson" (p. 26).

Furthermore, the young officer suggests that the old man could instead be accompanied by family and friends, should he be willing, thereby implicitly critiquing the elder's isolation. This vignette functions as a commentary on the persistence of racialised and exclusionary attitudes—symbolized by the old man's desire to maintain a "perimeter around his property"—which are portrayed as relics of a bygone era. In contrast, the younger generation, embodied by the officer who could be his grandson, represents a more progressive outlook that rejects such fortification and exclusion.

The old man's solitude is emblematic of the neoliberal ideals of individualism, detachment, and self-interest. These values are implicitly critiqued through the officer's recommendation that he seek companionship and connection rather than remain isolated. Thus, the vignette critiques the artificial boundaries—both physical and social—erected under neoliberal capitalism, advocating instead for a vision of social unity and borderless community.

In sum, this narrative fragment interrogates the racialised anxieties that underpin border fortification in the US, while simultaneously promoting a rejection of exclusionary practices and the cultivation of communal bonds as an antidote to neoliberal alienation.

The fifth vignette illustrates the stringent border policies and severe restrictions on migration imposed by the state of Dubai. In this vignette, a Tamil family consisting of four members—a mother, father, daughter, and son—uses the black door to migrate to

Dubai, a prosperous neoliberal state: "[Dubai] represents one of the purest incarnations of neoliberalism on the planet" (Walonen, 2016, p. 107). However, their movements are monitored through an extensive network of surveillance cameras and drones. Consequently, they are apprehended at Jumeirah Beach Residence by uniformed personnel symbolizing the authorities: "and then the minute ended and they were intercepted and led away, apparently bewildered, or overawed, for they held hands and did not resist or scatter or run" (Hamid, 2017, p. 43). Thus, this vignette critiques the strict security measures and the deployment of artificial intelligence technologies that serve to restrict the entry of impoverished migrants like the Tamil family into Dubai.

The sixth vignette addresses Islamic terrorism, which plays a significant role in justifying stringent border policies and fostering anti-migrant, particularly anti-Muslim, sentiments in developed countries. In this vignette, militants from Nadia and Saeed's country, perhaps Pakistan, cross into Vienna, Austria, and carry out attacks that kill local citizens, provoking anti-migrant hostility. These terrorist acts incite xenophobic mobs across Europe to attack Muslims, pressuring them to leave their host countries. Through violence and fear, the militants deliberately seek to incite hatred and discourage migration to European countries: "and the militants had perhaps hoped to provoke a reaction against migrants from their own part of the world, who had been pouring into Vienna, and if that had been their hope then they had succeeded" (p. 50). However, a young woman from Vienna, "wearing a peace badge on her overcoat," begins "to shield the migrants from the anti-migrants" (p. 50), recognizing that the Muslim migrants themselves are not terrorists but rather victims of those who purposely foment anti-migrant sentiments and endanger migrants.

The seventh vignette posits that individuals from Western and developed countries experience comparatively greater ease in entering developing nations than vice versa. In this vignette, a British accountant from Kentish Town contemplates ending his life by suicide but ultimately decides to seek a transformative change by travelling to Namibia. Unlike migrants from developing countries who endure significant hardships and barriers in their attempts to enter developed states, the accountant discovers a door in his apartment that leads directly to Namibia. Upon arrival, he embraces the change and begins to enjoy life (p. 58). This contrast highlights how neoliberal capitalism privileges white individuals from developed countries, enabling them to access and enjoy life in poorer nations at will, while simultaneously restricting migrants from developing countries to enter developed countries, despite their often dire circumstances and urgent motivations to migrate.

The eighth vignette foregrounds the utility of the black door as a hidden passage facilitating reunification among separated loved ones who lack the financial means or legal permission for travel in the contemporary globalized world. Here, a young mother emerges through a door in a cantina located in Tijuana, a Mexican border city, and visits an orphanage where she finds her now-grown daughter. The mother recognizes her daughter only through prior exposure on electronic screens: "she recognized only because she had seen her on electronic displays, on the screens of phones and computers, it having been that many years, and the girl hugged her mother and then became shy" (p. 69). Following their joyous reunion, the mother bids farewell to the other children at the orphanage and both the mother and daughter then return to their homes by passing back through the black door. This vignette thus endorses the black door as a symbolic and literal means of circumventing restrictive legal and financial barriers to travel, enabling emotional reunification for those unable to undertake conventional migration. Thus, the vignette supports the travel through the black door that unites the loved ones

and brings them back to their countries, as they cannot afford to do so legally just like mother and daughter in the vignette.

The tenth vignette powerfully supports the inevitability of migration as a universal phenomenon. This vignette relates the life story of an old woman and concludes that "We are all migrants through time" (p. 88). It portrays an elderly woman who has spent her entire life in the same house and city in Palo Alto. Throughout her life in this house, she ages, marries twice, gives birth to two children, and witnesses the arrival of grandchildren. Despite these changes, she never relocates or travels: "and throughout this time she had never moved [and] travelled" (p. 87). Over time, many of her relatives have either passed away or moved elsewhere, with only one granddaughter visiting her regularly, who is deeply loved by the old woman: "the old woman adored her" (p. 87). Initially, the woman knew the names of all her neighbours, but as some moved away and new people arrived, she gradually became a stranger in her own street. When she steps outside, she experiences a profound sense of displacement, perceiving herself as a migrant despite never having left her home: "when she went out it seemed to her that she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can't help it. We are all migrants through time" (pp. 87-88).

Thus, this vignette argues that migration is an inherent and unavoidable aspect of human existence. It challenges the restrictive discourses of Western nations that oppose the migration of underprivileged populations from developing countries to prosperous, developed countries, particularly in the West, while critiquing the neoliberal conception of Western identity as exclusive to Westerners.

The eleventh and final vignette illustrates the difficult conditions faced by workers both in the less developed and the developed countries in the contemporary era. It emphasizes that although migration to Europe is not favourable, many are compelled to leave their home countries due to the severe circumstances they face. This vignette specifically depicts the life of a maid employed in the household of a former prince and his foreign wife. The maid endures daily bus journeys to her workplace and survives solely on her modest wages. Unlike her affluent employers, she is deprived of life's luxuries: "for life had given the maid no space for the luxuries of vanity, but even so, she was human" (p. 94). Although younger than the lady of the house, the maid appears older due to the physical toil of her labourious occupation, highlighting the severity of her hardships.

Faced with these difficult circumstances in Marrakesh, the maid's husband migrates to Europe, and her only daughter follows, using the black door as a passageway (p. 94). At a moment when Saeed and Nadia are parting amid the migrant crisis in Europe and the US, the maid's daughter returns to Marrakesh and urges her mother to join her in Europe. The maid expresses her intention to migrate eventually but postpones the journey, responding: "the maid simply puts her hand on her daughter's, smiles, and shakes her head. 'One day she might go, she think[s]. But not today'" (p. 94).

This vignette illustrates that despite the maid's suffering in Marrakesh, she chooses not to leave immediately, aware that conditions in Europe remain unfavourable for migrants from the Global South due to stringent border policies and inadequate social protections under Western neoliberalism. Therefore, she hopes to migrate only when the situation for migrants and workers in Europe improves, as reflected in her words: "One day she might go… [b]ut not today" (p. 94).

Conclusion

The analysis of the vignettes reveals that they criticize the tight border policies and anti-immigrant behaviour of developed countries in the neoliberal era. These vignettes portray how neoliberal systems hinder the movement of disadvantaged migrants from poorer nations. They support the flow of migration, particularly of the underprivileged people from the Global South to the prosperous Global North, and point out how wealthy nations erect barriers—both physical and ideological—against these migrants, often associating them with terrorism or portraying them as threats. In this way, the vignettes question the neoliberal capitalist order that restricts the migration of poor populations and treats them as burdens or dangers rather than recognizing their struggles and rights. Thus, these vignettes resist neoliberal capitalism, which impedes the migration of poor people from the Global South to the affluent North and regards them as a burden on the national purse or a threat to the wealthy nations of the Global North.

The vignettes in *Exit West* highlight the unequal realities of global migration under neoliberalism. They expose how strict border controls and xenophobic attitudes in the developed world marginalize migrants from the Global South. Through symbolic doors and fragmented stories, Hamid illustrates the human cost of displacement and the deep inequalities in mobility. These narratives challenge the portrayal of migrants as threats and instead affirm their resilience and humanity. In doing so, the novel calls for a more compassionate and equitable approach to global movement and resists the tighter bordered policies of neoliberal capitalism.

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