

Narrative of Self Identity: Cultural Clash in *Exit West* and *Home Fire*

Govinda Sanjel¹

Abstract

*In the present globalized world, unprecedented movements of people across borders have become very common. The movements traverse the unstable terrain of displacement and belonging. Whether it is propelled by technological advancements, educational opportunities, employment opportunities, or by internal conflict, war, oppression, persecution, suppression, and political instability, the movements have become unstoppable. Such migration has scaled up complexity in negotiations as individuals from across the world that straddle multiple cultures creating intercultural interactions. And, these intercultural interactions challenge the traditional, static conception of identity making it more fluid and complex. The study bases its analysis on the content of the selected two texts applying Social Identity Theory (SIT) developed by Henri Tajeful and John Turner and Cultural Conflict Theory, developed by Lewis A. Coser. It investigates character development, narrative structure, and thematic elements in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*; the two novels published in the same year -2017 by Pakistani-American and Pakistani-British novelists respectively. Through comparative analysis, the study concludes highlighting the nuanced ways in which self-identity manifests fluidity in response to cultural clashes. It further reveals the complexities of the process of self-redefinition offering insights for the broader implications to individuals of the globalized world.*

Keywords: cultural clash, identity crisis, cultural conflict, self-identity

Introduction

Immigration refers to the movements of people across societies and countries. At present, it seems to be a simple and common phenomenon in almost all societies throughout the world and such unprecedented movements have scaled up complexities in many ways. It is tied to global economic, political and social dynamics. There is a wide array of reasons why people immigrate around globe termed as "push factors" like war, poverty, unemployment, natural disasters, political persecution etc. and "pull factors" like job opportunities, safety, better education, family reunification etc. Immigration heralds as a source of cultural enrichment, economic growth and innovation, and meanwhile it also challenges cultural cohesion.

¹ Lecturer, Jana Bhawana Campus, Godawari, Lalitpur.

Email: sagovinda@gmail.com  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7648-4787>

The interplay between immigration and culture has always been substantial as immigration affects cultural landscapes and vice versa. Singh and Patel (2018) state that migrants bring diverse cultural practices and perspectives, which can enrich the social fabric of host communities but also pose challenges to social cohesion. In this sense, on the one hand, immigration contributes to cultural enrichment, and on the other hand, it also challenges social integration and identity formation. Indicating the challenges of immigration, Ahmed (2019) claims that migrants frequently face identity conflicts as they navigate between their native culture and the dominant culture of the host country, which can lead to cultural clashes. And, cultural clashes occur in host societies, particularly when there are significant differences between the cultural norms of migrants and the native population.

The phenomenon of cultural clash has gained significant attention in the context of globalization proving itself an inevitable aspect when diverse cultural groups frequently interact. A cultural clash occurs when individuals or groups with different cultural backgrounds interact and encounter. It arises from differences in cultural values, beliefs, and practices where interactions between diverse cultural groups become frequent and complex. According to Smith and Bond (2019), cultural norms influence communication styles, decision-making processes, and conflict-resolution strategies that fuel conflicts. On a broader scale, cultural clashes influence various levels of social dynamics. Further, cultural clashes can occur at various levels such as at individual level, interpersonal level, and societal level. This dynamic system can either support or hinder one's sense of self, depending on the degree of cultural integration and acceptance within society (Hamedani & Markus, 2019). As individuals struggle to reconcile differing expectations and values, cultural clashes often lead to identity crises.

Identity crisis has become a controversial issue in many societies due to migration and globalization. In preset rapidly changing world, individual struggles with various aspects of identities including national, cultural and personal identity too. In such context, the issue of self-identity becomes central to the cultural clash. It happens as the process of self-identity formation is deeply intertwined with cultural experiences and the negotiation of cultural values causing friction. S/he has to struggle and undergo through the combat between differing cultural values, beliefs, and practices resulting cultural clash. Such a clash has a profound effect on individuals' self-identity which is an individual's perception of themselves, encompassing their values, beliefs, and roles within the society influenced by cultural contexts. This provides the framework within which individuals interpret their experiences and define their place in the world (Adams & Markus, 2004). In this context, *Exit West* and *Home Fire* are two contemporary novels that address the themes of migration, identity, and cultural clashes.

Exit West and *Home Fire* are the two novels published in the same year -2017 by Pakistani-American and Pakistani-British novelists respectively. The former novel follows the story of Nadia and Saeed, two young lovers who flee their war-torn homeland through mysterious doors that transport them to different parts of the world. As they navigate the challenges of displacement and migration, both Nadia and Saeed encounter diverse cultures and communities, reflecting the complexities of globalization and the fluidity of identity. The later novel follows the lives of three British siblings of Pakistani descent: Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz – whose lives become intertwined with cultural clashes and identity crises.

Critical assessment of such cultural clashes and their impacts on self-identity remains crucial not only for understanding the personal experiences of individuals in a multicultural world. Further, it also helps for addressing broader societal issues such as integration, discrimination and social justice. A critical comparative analysis thus becomes more suitable phenomenon that goes beyond mere description. Such analytical study interrogates the power structures and reveals psychological consequences and looks for the possible social implications offering insights for the broader implications to individuals of the globalized world.

Literature Review

The fluidity of identity has become a central theme in contemporary works of literature. Previous studies have extensively examined migration and identity in numerous literatures. Scholars like Stuart Hall (1990) have argued that identity is not a fixed essence but a continuous process of becoming. However, literature often mirrors this dynamic, showcasing characters who undergo significant transformation in response to external pressures. The integration of immigrants into the host society often involves a process of mutual adaptation. Immigrants adapt to the new cultural context, while the host society adjusts to the presence of new cultural influences. This bidirectional process can lead to the emergence of hybrid cultural identities. A study on second-generation immigrants in the United States highlights how young immigrants navigate dual identities, blending their heritage with the mainstream culture (Portes & Rumbaut, 2021). Further, Alba and Foner (2021) studied how immigrants integrate into their host societies, focusing on cultural assimilation and identity formation. The authors found that while first-generation immigrants often maintain strong ties to their native cultures, subsequent generations gradually adopt the cultural norms of the host society, leading to a blend of cultural identities (Alba & Foner, 2021). This finally brings hybridity in culture.

Conversely, the integration process can also be fraught with challenges. In many cases, the immigrants experience the state of being statelessness. Such condition of being statelessness is not merely a legal anomaly; it is a lived experience of invisibility, where individuals exist in the shadows of nation-states, denied recognition and belonging (Liew, 2024). Research by Hainmueller and Hopkins (2020) showed that public attitudes toward immigrants are influenced by various factors, including economic conditions, cultural differences, and political rhetoric. Their study underscored the importance of addressing xenophobia and promoting inclusive policies to foster social cohesion (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2020). Apart from this, security concerns to the vulnerabilities and rights of migrants seek for policies that are centered on human dignity and protection. According to Hernandez (2024), understanding not only what can be gained from welcoming newcomers but also what can be lost by giving into our worst impulses can ignite more passion among those who argue in favor of immigration. Thus, immigrants not only assimilate but, in many contexts, their identities are shaped by their experiences of cultural clash as well. Such cultural clashes can lead to significant psychological stress and identity confusion resulting identity crisis. According to Hamedani and Markus (2019), the culture cycle approach illustrates how interactions at individual, interpersonal, institutional, and societal levels shape psychological experiences and self-identity. These cultural interactions can either support or undermine an individual's sense of self, depending on the degree of cultural integration and acceptance within society (Hamedani & Markus, 2019). For this reason, developing cultural competence in both their heritage and host cultures is crucial, challenging and inconsistent resulting complexities in the process of self-redefinition.

Exit West Versus Home Fire. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* is a novel published in the year 2017 that has poignant narratives which explores themes of migration, love and identity. It presents the story of two protagonists, Nadia and Saeed, living in an unnamed city on the brink of war. The plot unfolds with their meeting of these two characters in which former's bold independence and the later's more traditional values set the tone for their contrasting personalities (Hamid, 2017). Despite their differences, they form a romantic bond as war intensifies their city.

As the war intensifies, their lives are toppled by the destruction of their home and the death of Saeed's mother. Then, they decide to flee the city through mysterious doors that serve as portal to other parts of the world. Hamid's use of such magical doors as a metaphor for migration challenges traditional narratives offering a fresh perspective on the refugee experience (Mączyńska, 2021). They confront the harsh reality of displacement and the fragility of their relationship in their first destination – a refugee camp in Mykonos (Hamid, 2017). Their journey continues to London - a microcosm city

of global migration. Saeed, on the one hand, finds solace among his compatriots while Nadia, on the other hand, adapts more readily to the multicultural environment, highlighting the divergent ways individuals cope with displacement (Hamid, 2017). Finally, they move to California, where their relationship reaches its breaking point. Nadia embraces independence whereas Saeed seeks community and tradition. According to Clemens (2017), Hamid's concise prose delivers profound emotional impact, capturing the complexities of love and loss amidst upheaval. And, despite depicting the hardships of refugees, the novel maintains a hopeful tone, emphasizing human resilience and the possibility of new beginnings (Tolentino, 2017). Thus, *Exit West* blends personal stories, basically of Nadia and Saeed, with global issues demonstrating how migration reshapes not only geographic boundaries but also personal identities, relationships and self-redefinition.

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* is a modern reimagining of Sophocles' *Antigone*². It explores the themes of loyalty, love and political identity within the framework of a British-Muslim family. According to Hoque (2017), *Home Fire* delves into the complexities of Muslim identity in Western societies, addressing issues of radicalization and belonging. Further, through the Pasha family's experiences, Shamsie in *Home Fire*, examines the intersection of personal relationships and political ideologies (Haynes, 2017). The novel commences with Isma Pasha leaving for the United States to pursue her academic aspirations. She decides to leave her two siblings, Aneeka and Parvaiz, after the death of their mother and the radicalization of their father (Shamsie, 2017). Then, Aneeka, being independent and protective of her twin brother Parvaiz, starts a secret relationship with Eamonn Lone who was the son of Karamat Lone – a controversial figure of Pakistani decent. Aneeka's relationship with Eamonn become a strategy to appeal for her brother's safety after Parvaiz is lured to Syria by ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) recruiters (Shamsie, 2017). His attempt to return to the UK realizing the harsh realities of life under ISIS ends tragically.

He is killed at the Turkish border and his body was denied for repatriation under Karamat's strict policies (Shamsie, 2017). Aneeka's grief drives her into a public confrontation with Karamat as she demanded her brother's body be brought home. Her love for both her brother and Eamonn intertwines personal and political loyalties. Aneeka and Eamonn meet in Karachi attempting to mourn Parvaiz. Parvaiz's former associates plot for a terrorist attack, in which both of them are killed, leave their families

² Sophocles' *Antigone* is a classical Greek tragedy, written around 441 BCE, that explores themes of civil disobedience, familial loyalty, and the conflict between individual conscience and state law.

shattered (Shamsie, 2017). *Home Fire* ends in tragedy, grappling with Karamat's estrangement from his cultural roots and the personal cost of his political ambitions. The novel is divided into five sections with shifting points of view. The shifting perspective among characters provide a multifaceted view of the central conflict, enhancing the narrative's depth (Weiss, 2022). It adopts a universal perspective on migrations offering complementary insights into the interconnectedness and the compromises of immigrants who distance themselves from their cultural heritage to assimilate into dominant power structures.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis to examine the literary elements, thematic concerns, and contextual interpretation of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017). It adopts a comparative literary framework to juxtapose the narrative techniques, character development, and thematic preoccupations of the two novels. This method allows for a nuanced exploration of how both novels address migration, identity, and the interplay of personal and political narratives as an outburst of cultural clash. The analysis focuses on how both texts engage with the socio-political realities of displacement, cultural identity, and global conflict, with particular attention to their treatment of migration and its impact on human relationships. And, it bases its analysis on the content of these selected two novels applying Social Identity Theory (SIT) developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner and Cultural Conflict Theory, developed by Lewis A.

Theoretical Ground

Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT) (1979) is a theoretical framework which helps to understand the interplay between individual identity and group members. It suggests that individuals categorize themselves into social groups, internalize the group's values and norms and develop a sense of self based on these affiliations. The theory identifies three key processes: social categorization, social identification and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Likewise, Lewis A. Coser's Cultural Conflict Theory (CCT) (1956) is a theory which examines the role of cultural differences in creating and sustaining social tensions. The theory explores the functional aspects of conflict in promoting social change and group cohesion. It focuses on how societal tensions arise from competing cultural identities and interests (Coser, 1956).

SIT elucidates how individuals derive self-esteem from group membership, leading to biases against out-groups whereas CCT complements this by showing how differing

cultural values can intensify these tensions within broader cultural and societal frameworks. In addition, both the theories, in together, offer a robust framework for analyzing group dynamics, intergroup biases, and cultural clash. They accentuate the necessity of fostering inclusivity, dialogue and shared understanding in diverse social setting with an assumption that migration scales up complexity in negotiations as individuals from across the world that straddle multiple cultures creating intercultural interactions and cultural clash.

Intercultural interactions and cultural clash due to migration, issue of identity, and the process of self-redefinition in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* offer various grounds to analyze the situations using both the theories - SIT and CCT. In *Exit West*, Saeed and Nadia's identities are shaped by their cultural and religious affiliations, especially during their migration to different cities of the world. Saeed's attachment to his heritage is evident in his adherence to ritual like prayer that symbolizes his in-group identity (Hamid, 2017). Contrarily, Nadia challenges traditional norms, signaling her complex relationship with her in-group. In *Home Fire* Isma struggles to balance her Muslim identity with her desire for acceptance in British society. Further, Parvaiz's radicalization exemplifies how alienation from one's in-group can lead to seek acceptance in extremist out-groups (Shamsie, 2017). These experiences, caused due to cultural clash, finally lead to identity crisis and further reveal the complexities of the process of self-redefinition.

Comparative Analysis

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* are two critically acclaimed novels that explores into themes of displacement, identity and socio-political dynamics published in the same year 2017 by Pakistani-American and Pakistani-British novelists respectively. Both the novels explore the themes of cultural clash and its profound impact on self-identity. They employ different and unique narrative structure and intricately develop characters to explore 'self-identity' in respect to their socio-cultural preoccupations. Further, they also examine how external cultural pressures force individuals to renegotiate their sense of self, exposing the psychological toll of belonging on conflicting cultural groups.

Thematic Concerns

Migration and negotiation of identity in multicultural context act as the main thematic concerns of *Exit West* and *Home Fire*. Nadia and Saeed, the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, undergo profound transformations as they traverse physical and metaphorical landscapes of migration. In the beginning of the novel, Nadia, on the one

hand, is depicted as independent and assertive who rejects societal norms by living alone and wearing a black robe as a form of defiance. She says, "I don't pray. May be another time" (Hamid, 2017, p. 3). Saeed, on the other hand, is deeply connected to tradition and family. He embodies a sense of rootedness. As the novel proceeds, the relationship between these two characters evolves to be so intimate. They navigate various global cities and the deterioration of their intimacy parallels their changing identities. As Naida observes, "When we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (Hamid, 2017, p. 94), highlighting the emotional cost of displacement. Saeed, meanwhile holds on to prayer and family as anchors, as shown in his recurring ritual, "Saeed prayed even more, several times a day, and he prayed fundamentally as a gesture of love for what had gone would go and could be love in no other way" (Hamid, 2017, p. 201).

Kamila Shamsie, in her novel *Home Fire*, captures the internal struggles of three siblings Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz. These three siblings are richly layered with their development rooted in familial and political tensions. Isma, the eldest, represents sacrifice and responsibility where as Aneeka and Parvaiz embody both vulnerability and rebellion characteristics. Parvaiz's trajectory is perhaps the most tragic as his naivety leads him to radicalization. Parvaiz reflects, "How it felt to float on a surface of freedom and safety, to feel himself buoyed up by it, and longing tugged at his heart " (Shamsie, 2017, p. 164) during his recruitment. Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz weave their choices into a broader critique of identity and loyalty in a polarized world. Aneeka's declaration, "Give us our boy to bury, give his mother the company of her son in the grave" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 191), shows the deeply human longing for dignity and belonging. Isma notes feeling of loss and, "That had been the only time she had truly, purely missed her brother without adjectives such as 'ungrateful' and 'selfish' slicing through the feeling of loss" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 12) as she sees her brother's name on the online contact list, which reinforces the theme of home and identity.

Both novels present intercultural interactions that challenge the traditional, static conception of identity making it more fluid and complex interrogating the notion of home and the human desire for belonging. *Exit West* explores the precariousness of refugee identities and the liminal spaces they inhabit whereas *Home Fire* examines cultural displacement. The former critiques the global power structures that perpetuate inequalities and the later critiques the political apparatus of the modern state. Hamid in *Exit West* reveals how displacement is not just a personal experience but a political reality shaped by war, economics, and climate change whereas Kamila exposes the compromises of immigrants who distance themselves from their cultural heritage to assimilate into dominant power structures.

In *Exit West*, migration is presented as a metaphor for the fluidity of borders and identities. The magic doors symbolize how movement reshapes identity, with Saeed and Nadia embodying different responses to cultural displacement (Hamid, 2017). Whereas, in *Home Fire*, migration shapes the character's experience of belonging and exclusion. Parvaiz's radicalization and subsequent alienation reflect the psychological impact of diasporic displacement and systemic cultural marginalization (Shamsie, 2017). On the one hand, Hamid illustrates how migration forces individuals to navigate cultural conflicts. Evidently, Nadia feels a sense of liberation in the Greek refugee camp whereas Saeed remains deeply connected to his cultural traditions, creating tension in their relationship (Hamid, 2017). On the other hand, Shamsie portrays cultural conflict through the lens of British policies on radicalization and Muslim identity. Eamonn's father's role as a Home Secretary enforcing anti-terrorism policies intensify the cultural divide, showing how political systems institutionalize cultural conflicts (Shamsie, 2017). In this way, both the texts demonstrate how cultural manifest in interpersonal relationship fractures between tradition and assimilation.

Further, in *Exit West*, Saeed and Nadia's contrasting approaches to tradition reveal the deep personal fractures caused by cultural clashes. Saeed's adherence to religious rituals and familial root underscores his struggle to preserve his in-group identity, whereas Nadia adopts modern, cosmopolitan behaviours which reflect an active rejection of her origins (Hamid, 2017). Shamsie, in *Home Fire* presents the political and cultural polarization that Parvaiz experiences. It forces him into an extreme out-group which fractures his sense of self. Cultural Conflict Theory explains this as a result of systemic pressure as British policies criminalize and alienate his Muslim identity (Shamsie, 2017). Both the novels show that cultural clashes lead to fragmented self-perceptions, as struggle to reconcile internal identities with societal expectations.

Narrative Structure

The narrative structures of both the novels intertwine personal experiences with sociopolitical realities. Hamid employs a detached third-person omniscient perspective to provide a global lens on migration and cultural clash. It emphasizes the universality of displacement, portraying Saeed and Nadia's experience as emblematic of broader human struggles (Hamid, 2017). Shamsie employs multi-perspective narrative that divides the story into five sections each from a different character's point of view. This fragmented structure mirrors the fractured identities of the protagonists as they navigate cultural clashes (Shamsie, 2017).

The episodic structure of the novel *Exist West* mirrors the fragmented journey of migrants and each location represents a shift in Saeed and Nadia's identities shaped by

their interactions with new cultural environments (Hamid, 2017). Hamid indicates such identity shift expressing "It might seem odd that in cities teetering at the edge of the abyss young people still go to class – in this case an evening class on corporate identity and product branding – but that is the way of things with cities as with life" (Hamid, 2017, p. 1). This temporal fragmentation underscores the instability of identity during cultural clashes aligning with Cultural Conflict Theory's assertion that cultural conflict disrupts cohesive self-perception. Hamid further describes the shifting world as, "The doors were everywhere but finding one the militants had not yet found, a door not yet guarded" (Hamid, 2017, p. 85). In reflecting the transformation, Hamid adds, "As had been the case with many of the natives of Britain, many of these people too seemed stunned by what was happening to their homeland, what had already happened in so brief a period" (Hamid, 2017, p. 196).

In contrast, Shamsie's linear narrative reflects the inevitable consequences of cultural conflict. The progression from Isma's peaceful academic life to Parvaiz's tragic death demonstrate the cumulative impact of cultural polarization on identity (Shamsie, 2017). Early in *Home Fire*, Isma says "I've lived here all my life" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 242) and it meant there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part. The climactic final section, focusing on Aneeka and Eamonn, highlights how systemic cultural conflicts force characters into irreversible identity transformations. Karamat remarks about his son to James, "With respect, James, he's a British national who made a choice and has to face the consequences" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 176). It indicates the fragility of identity. In gist, *Exit West* portrays identity as adaptable while *Home Fire* shows its fragility under systemic pressures.

Further, Saeed and Nadia's final separation represents their acceptance of individual paths shaped by cultural clashes. Saeed reconnects with his roots, while Nadia continues to explore her independent identity, symbolizing the adaptability of self-identity (Hamid, 2017). Whereas, Isma's survival and perseverance suggest the potential for reconciliation, but the overall narrative underscores the destructive consequences of unresolved cultural clashes (Shamsie, 2017). While *Exit West* portrays identity as fluid and adaptable, *Home Fire* emphasizes the rigidity and fatal consequences of unresolved cultural conflict.

Character Development

The character development in both the novels illustrate the profound impact of cultural clashed on self-identity. They present the character development highlighting how cultural clashes reshape their self-identity through personal and societal challenges. Social Identity Theory and Cultural Conflict Theory lay strong foundation for analysis of

how characters respond to sociopolitical pressure, intergroup dynamics and the struggle for belonging in both the novels. They emphasize on the protagonists' transformation examining how cultural conflicts shape their evolving identities, indicating complexities for assimilation and indicating identity more fluid.

Together, these works provide a nuanced exploration of how cultural conflict shapes the human experience offering complementary perspectives on the resilience and fragility of identity. Saeed's, the protagonist of *Exit West*, identity serves as anchors amidst cultural dislocation which is deeply rooted in traditional values and religious practices. As Hamid writes about Saeed's prayer detailing, "When he prayed he touched his parents, who could not otherwise be touched, and he touched a feeling that we are all children who lose our parents, all of us, every man and women and boy and girl" (Hamid, 2017, Pp. 201-202). His attachment to prayer exemplifies his effort to retain in group identity as described by Social Identity Theory. Whereas, Nadia rejects societal norms and embraces an individualistic, secular identity becomes a symbol of her independence and illustrates how cultural clashes prompt the reevaluation of self-perception (Hamid, 2017). Further, Hamid shows Nadia's independence stating, "She found these people who were both like and unlike those she had known in her city, familiar and unfamiliar, she found them interesting, and she found their seeming acceptance of her" (Hamid, 2017, p. 145). When facing new environment in Marin, Nadia believes, "There was nonetheless a spirit of at least intermittent optimism that refused entirely to die in Marin, perhaps because Marin was less violent than most of the places its residents had fled" (Hamid, 2017, Pp. 192-193). Meanwhile, Saeed along with his parents cling to prayer – a cultural marker - as "By the time he entered university, Saeed's parents prayed more often than they had when he was younger, maybe because they had lost a great many loved ones by that age" (Hamid, 2017, p. 201). In this way, Saeed clings to familiar traditions to cope with displacement, Nadia adapts to new cultural environments, showcasing the tension between preservation and transformation of identity.

Isma's, the protagonist of *Home Fire*, character development reflects a pragmatic response to cultural conflict. Her decision to pursue academic success in the U.S. while adhering to her Muslim identity highlights the balancing act between integration and cultural preservation (Shamsie, 2017). As Isma admits, "I'd find it more difficult to not be Muslim" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 21). Further, Aneeka's unwavering loyalty to her brother and cultural heritage demonstrates the emotional toll of cultural clashes. Her actions, driven by familial bonds, underscore how cultural identity can intensify in-group loyalty under external pressure (Shamsie, 2017). Aneeka's such desperation is captured when she talks to Eamonn about Parvaiz, "He wants to come home. He wants me to bring him home, even in the form of a shell" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 196). In addition, Parvaiz's

radicalization reveals the destructive impact of cultural alienation. His yearning for belonging and exploitation by extremist groups indicates the rejection from dominant in-groups which fosters susceptibility to alternative identities. Karamat Lone's advice "Let her continue to be British; but let her be British outside Britain" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 230) clearly reflects the societal demand for identity compromise.

Saeed's longing for shared cultural practices reveals the persistence of in-group bias in the face of new out-groups whereas Nadia's adaptability in the face of hostility is assertion that exposure to diverse cultures can either heighten conflict or foster identity integration. Likewise, Isma's efforts to integrate into Western society, despite facing Islamophobia, underscores the challenges of dual identity. Her internal conflict exemplifies Social Identity Theory's notion of identity compromise. Further, Isma confesses that hijab feels like a mark of separation (Shamsie, 2017). And, Parvaiz's attempt to seek acceptance in a radical in-group, reveals how cultural clashes exacerbate identity crises.

Both novels depict hostile environments as catalyst for character transformation. Saeed's adherence to tradition clashes with Nadia's embrace of change, symbolizing the broader tension between cultural preservation and adaptation (Hamid, 2017). Their eventual separation underscores the fluidity of identity in the face of cultural conflict aligns with Cultural Conflict Theory's emphasis on the transformative impact of cross-cultural interactions. Further, Isma's pragmatic approach contrasts with Parvaiz's emotional vulnerability, illustrating how individuals within the same cultural framework respond differently to external pressures (Shamsie, 2017). Both novels present a microcosm of cultural conflict revealing how interpersonal dynamics mirror broader societal tensions.

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* offer compelling explorations of cultural clash and its profound impact on self-identity, highlighting the psychological and sociopolitical challenges faced by individuals navigating conflicting cultural groups. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory and Cultural Conflict Theory, these novels illustrate how cultural tensions disrupt self-perception, relationships, and a sense of community belonging. Both works emphasize that identity is not static but is continually shaped by external cultural, political, and societal forces. The novels illuminate how protagonists like Saeed, Nadia, Isma, and Parvaiz shape their self-concepts through group affiliations and how these affiliations are strained under cultural dislocation. Saeed's reliance on prayer and tradition, contrasted with Nadia's quest for independence, typifies the tensions between in-group loyalty and personal evolution. This aligns with a dynamic central to Social Identity Theory. And, in *Home Fire*,

Parvaiz's radicalization and Isma's efforts toward integration reveal the destructive and transformative forces that cultural conflict can exert on self-perception and belonging. Similarly, the episodic displacements in *Exit West* echo Coser's assertion that conflict not only challenges existing identities but can also foster social change, albeit at great personal cost. This parallels with Lewis Coser's Cultural Conflict Theory that offers a compelling framework for understanding how systemic pressures and competing cultural norms catalyze identity fragmentation and reformation.

Both novels employ distinct narrative strategies to explore the fluidity and instability of identity, portraying cultural clash not as a singular event but as an ongoing, multifaceted process that deeply impacts individuals at personal, familial, and societal levels. By applying Social Identity Theory and Cultural Conflict Theory, this comparative analysis reveals that identity is neither fixed nor easily reconciled within multicultural environments; instead, it is a dynamic negotiation shaped by affiliation, alienation, adaptation, and resistance. And, by employing distinct narrative structures and character arcs, Hamid and Shamsie illuminate the intricate interplay between personal and societal factors in shaping identity. These narratives affirm that while cultural conflict can fragment and destabilize the self, it can also act as a catalyst for transformation, pushing individuals to renegotiate and redefine their place within complex social landscapes. Together, their works underscore the complexities of the process of self-redefinition, offering valuable insights into the broader implications of cultural conflict for individuals in an increasingly globalized world.

Reference

- Adams, G., & Markus, H. R. (2004). Toward a conception of culture suitable for a social psychology of culture. In M. Schaller & C. Crandall (Eds.), *The psychological foundations of culture* (pp. 335-360). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ahmed, S. (2019). Identity conflicts and cultural clashes among migrants. *Journal of Migration Studies*, 25(3), 211-229. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jms.2019.03.005>
- Alba, R., & Foner, N. (2021). Strangers No More: Immigration and the Challenges of Integration in North America and Western Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(3), 512-530. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1750347>
- Clemens, C. L. (2017). Review of *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid. Gale Academic OneFile.
- Coser, L. A. (1956). *The functions of social conflict*. Free Press.
- Hainmueller, J., & Hopkins, D. J. (2020). Public Attitudes Toward Immigration. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23, 227-247. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-110718-032713>

- Hall, S. (1990). "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 222-237.
- Hamedani, M. Y. G., & Markus, H. R. (2019). Understanding culture clashes and catalyzing change: A culture cycle approach. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 700. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00700>
- Hamid, M. (2017). *Exit West*. Penguin.
- Haynes, N. (2017, August 10). Home Fire by Kamila Shamsie review – a contemporary reworking of Sophocles. The Guardian. <https://shorturl.at/M3vKo>
- Hernandez, Z. (2024). The Truth About Immigration: Why Successful Societies Welcome Newcomers. Book Fave. <https://shorturl.at/V5K0W>
- Hoque, A. (2017, August 29). Review: Kamila Shamsie's finely drawn Home Fire resonates with increasing intensity. The Aerogram. <https://theaerogram.com/home-fire-by-kamila-shamsie>
- Liew, J. C. Y. (2024). Ghost Citizens: Decolonial Apparitions of Stateless, Foreign and Wayward Figures in Law. Fernwood Publishing.
- Mączyńska, M. (2021). "People Are Monkeys Who Have Forgotten That They Are Monkeys": The refugee as eco-cosmopolitan allegory in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 28(3), 1089–1106. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isaa082>
- Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2021). *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (4th ed.). University of California Press.
- Shamsie, K. (2017). *Home Fire*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Singh, R., & Patel, S. (2018). Migration and social cohesion: Balancing diversity and integration. *Social Sciences Journal*, 23(4), 301-318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796818793210>
- Smith, P.B., & Bond, M.H (2019). *Culture and psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.
- Tolentino, J. (2017, March 10). A novel about refugees that feels instantly canonical. The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/jia-tolentino/a-novel-about-refugees-that-feels-instantly-canonical>.
- Weiss, N. (2022). Tragic form in Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire. *Classical Reception Journal*, 14(2), 240–263. <https://doi.org/10.1093/crj/clab008>