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**Investigating Emotional Displacement in *Exit west* by Mohsin
Hamid**

*A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for a
Master's degree in literature and Civilisation*

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West by Mahsin Hamid

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Dedications

To my father, who has been my quiet strength since the very beginning, carrying me through every stage of my life with patience and care. From the earliest mornings to the longest days, he never once failed to be there for me. May God protect him and bless him with a long, peaceful life

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Abstract

This dissertation is a literary examination of the depiction of emotional displacement in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. This study draws on attachment theory to argue that the spatial and political experience of migration cannot be separated from its emotional and psychological impact on relationships, intimacy, and continuity. The study investigates emotional displacement and what is called "emotional migration" to understand how this displacement causes emotional instability and how that instability alters Saeed and Nadia's relationship. This thesis draws on diaspora in Pakistani literature, emotional displacement, and John Bowlby's attachment theory. It focuses on how intimate relationships are made and re-made under difficult circumstances and during crises, such as forced displacement. Attachment theory in this thesis is not viewed as a stable way of relating, but as dynamic, unstable, and formed by instability and loss. This work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical framework focusing on Diaspora, Emotional Displacement, and Attachment Theory. The second chapter explores the psychological states of Saeed and Nadia in the wake of their displacement. The third chapter applies Attachment Theory to the novel by analyzing attachment anxiety, emotional withdrawal, and the construction of shifting attachment states amid long-term separation and displacement. Ultimately, the thesis argues that emotional displacement is a central part of the novel's development: Saeed develops an attachment pattern that depends on centrality, while Nadia develops an attachment style that depends on emotional detachment and self-creation. The contrasting attachment patterns of Saeed depend on their relationship over time, showing that even under prolonged separation and emotional displacement, intimacy and identity continue to shift.

Keywords: emotional displacement, attachment theory, migration, diaspora, anxiety

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General Introduction

Literature historically addresses human experience in all its aspects, including loss, separation, displacement, and transformation, among others. Among these, migration holds a significant position, as it involves movement from one location to another and also affects human emotions, relationships, identity, and belonging. Many writers, especially in postcolonial literature, are interested in the emotional and psychological dimensions of displacement and migration. Their interest lies in understanding how human beings cope with an uncertain, unstable, and changing world while maintaining their attachment, relationships, and emotional stability.

Among all literature fields, Pakistani literature often concerns issues of identity, diaspora, exile, and displacement. It is within this literary context that Mohsin Hamid's novel, *Exit West*, serves as an interesting representation of emotional and psychological transformation amid migration and uncertainty. The novel describes the experiences of two characters whose homes have been destroyed by war and instability, and their transformation. Hence, the novel asks important questions on attachment, belonging, intimacy, emotional loss, and relationships as affected by the notion of mobility and displacement.

Exit West is an important contribution to contemporary literary and cultural studies for its attempt to address migration, globalization, identity, and emotional change within globalized, diasporic contexts. The novel has received considerable attention as an exemplary representation of the emotional consequences of displacement and the instability of living between different spaces and identities, for its treatment of critical issues such as migration, identity, global relations, and emotional change in postcolonial and Pakistani literature.

Mohsin Hamid is a British-Pakistani novelist, essayist, and literary writer born on July 23, 1971, in Lahore, Pakistan. He spent part of his childhood in the United States before returning to Pakistan, an experience that later influenced many of the themes in his writing, including identity, migration, belonging, and globalization. He studied international relations at Princeton University and later earned a law degree from Harvard Law School. Before becoming a full-time author, Hamid worked as a management consultant while writing his first novel.

Exit West is a contemporary narrative about a young pair in an unnamed country during times of social and political strife. Their relationship develops from a sense of knowing and emotional connection during a time of increased violence. Still, it soon encounters mysterious doors that transport people instantly across the world, prompting the migration of these two individuals. After the characters are separated from their native lands, they traverse several locations: Mykonos, London, and San Francisco.

The book ceases to center on the physical journey of migration. Instead, it focuses on its emotional and psychological journey, in which the nature of Saeed and Nadia's relationship changes over time and across locations. Saeed becomes dependent on the notion of continuous emotional states, cultural familiarity, and relationship stability, whereas Nadia cultivates an emotional tendency towards greater self-sufficiency.

The selection of this novel is informed by the researcher's interest in emotional relations and human attachment in literature. Literature that deals with love, emotional struggle, separation, and resistance has always captured my interest because human relationships in crisis are inherently complex. This study focuses on the relationship between Saeed and Nadia and the changes in their emotional bond amid fear, distance, displacement, and instability; it is their

relationship that inspired me to explore the phenomenon of emotional displacement and attachment in the literature of migration.

Although extensive studies on the novel *Exit West* have dealt with topics such as migration, global culture, postcolonial identity, and diaspora, limited research has examined the concept of emotional displacement as a psychological and relational process. Most of these analyses focus on aspects such as mobility, border crossings, cultural identities, and the politics of the global world. However, scholarly attention regarding emotional displacement as a transformation of relational identity remains sparse.

The objective of this dissertation is to analyze how Mohsin Hamid explores emotional displacement in his novel *Exit West* and how migration affects emotional attachment and relational identity through the transformation of Saeed and Nadia's emotional relationship in the context of displacement and continuous mobility. Moreover, this dissertation aims to explain the transformation in the emotional relationship of Saeed and Nadia through Bowlby's Attachment Theory.

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- How does Mohsin Hamid depict emotional displacement in *Exit West*?
- How does migration and displacement impact the emotional relationship and attachment between Saeed and Nadia?
- How is Attachment Theory useful to explain the emotional and relational change that Saeed and Nadia undergo throughout the narrative?

The following hypotheses arise from the research questions:

- Migration and displacement, while affecting people's lives psychologically and physically, will transform the attachment patterns among characters.
- Emotional displacement affects Saeed and Nadia's relationship by progressively reshaping their emotional bonds and sense of belonging.
- Attachment theory provides a psychological lens for analyzing emotional responses, separation, anxiety, and relational changes portrayed in *Exit West*.

This study is rooted in Bowlby's Attachment Theory as its major theoretical framework. The theory deals with important concepts like attachment, separation, emotional regulation, anxiety, loss, and internal working models as an explanation for people's reactions and relationship changes in unstable conditions. Attachment theory can serve as an essential concept in this study, providing a psychological perspective on the characters' emotional changes and their relationship.

Methodologically, this dissertation follows a qualitative literary approach. The analysis focuses on key scenes depicting the protagonists' interactions and internal emotional responses, selected for their representation of attachment transitions, dialogue, and transformations, as well as emotional reactions and relational changes within a text-based study in connection with Attachment Theory.

This study is divided into three chapters. Chapter one, "Literature Review: Diaspora Studies and Attachment Theory," covers the theoretical and contextual framework of the study by discussing diaspora in Pakistani Literature, emotional displacement in literature, and Bowlby's

Attachment Theory, and by reviewing relevant literature on *Exit West*. Chapter two, "Physical Migration: Spatial Disorientation and The Breakdown of Love," discusses the emotional and relational impact of migration and displacement on Saeed and Nadia through focusing on emotional instability, continuity of emotion, and relational transformation within the novel. Chapter three, Psychological Adaptation: Saeed and Nadia's Divergent Paths," tries to explain the characters' emotions through Attachment theory, focusing on attachment styles, anxiety, emotion regulation, separation response, and modification of relational identity in the novel.

This dissertation contributes to literature and cultural studies by examining migration stories from a psychological perspective, focusing on emotional displacement. It has been shown that displacement affects not only movement between locations and cultures but also deeply affects human emotional attachment, intimacy, belonging, and relational stability.

Chapter One:

Literature Review:

Diaspora Studies and Attachment Theory

Introduction

The issues of migration, belonging, and identity are ever-present topics in literary and cultural studies and often become central topics in spaces marked by history's fractures and global/transnational crossings. These concerns are more acutely represented in Pakistani literature, where depictions of displacement are at times more about emotional than physical dislocation and about the constant re-evaluation of selfhood across transnational borders. In this genre, “diasporicity” is less of a spatial condition than an emotional one, which has a profound sense of loss, memory, and continued questioning of home within volatile spaces.

In this context, emotional displacement is given psychological depth, as literary representations show that displacement concerns not only material life but also emotional attachments and the continuous reassessment of one's attachments, loss, and sense of continuity. Rather than merely a physical absence from a place, displacement is related to affect, in which the human sense of self is continuously reconstituted by longing, rupture, and the negotiation of the unknown. The emotional characteristics of displacement provide important context for understanding diasporic texts.

Adding more conceptual layers to this issue, the chapter then draws on John Bowlby's attachment theory, which provides a psychological understanding of how emotional attachments in early childhood develop in response to conditions of separation, loss, and insecurity. Using this theory makes explicit a link between literary narratives of displacement and the processes that drive people's emotional lives and reactions to their uncertain situations. To conclude, this discussion also revisits studies in both critical and theoretical fields that address diaspora, emotional displacement, and identity to ground the subsequent reading of the work in context.

1.1 Diaspora in Pakistani Literature

The concept of diaspora has found a significant place in literary discourse because it addresses displacement, memory, and belongings that inform identity. Diaspora is evident in Pakistani writing through characters and stories marked by displacement, migration, loss, dispersal, and homesickness. In this context, diaspora does not simply refer to movement but also to alienation on a psycho-emotional level, in which the individual's identity is fragmented between the country of origin and the country of residence. The idea of the diaspora, then, serves as a crucial construct within the analysis of displacement and identity in Pakistani writing.

1.1.1 Diaspora and The Experience of Displacement

In Pakistani literature, Diaspora can be understood as linked to the lived realities of displacement, which isn't confined to the act of migration but extends to a psycho-emotional disruption. For example, in several Pakistani literary texts, the experience of displacement entails an unsettling of the self, a rupture of continuity in familiar places, and an ongoing conflict between memories and present circumstances.

In this sense, migration is not solely depicted as a means to acquire opportunities but rather, with a sense of rupture, uncertainty, and a sad recognition of not having belonged to that language and home, it produces the diasporic subject who lives in the in-betweenness where belonging no longer is certain and one lives on loss and struggle.

Writers have explored this sense of diaspora in a variety of texts, in which characters live with the memory of their homeland, even when physically absent. Hence, diaspora is a deeply human and multi-layered phenomenon in which what is being displaced is not just the body but

also the mind, memory, love, and sense of self. Understanding diaspora in this light is significant for this thesis, as it enables a more critical analysis of migration not merely as a sociological phenomenon but as an experiential one that structures the characters' psychological states.

1.1.2 Partition, Migration, and The Making of Pakistani Diaspora

To begin thinking about the Pakistani diaspora, it is necessary to address the Partition. The creation of Pakistan led to one of the largest migrations of modern times, one that had a far-reaching historical and existential rupture, redefining homes, lives, and identities.

12 million people were displaced during the Partition process. The partition of India in 1947 led to the displacement of 12 million people, which remains the largest migration in modern history (Kalra, 2013, p.1). The idea of refugee diasporas originates with the British Partition of India in 1947, which created lasting effects of displacement and established a notion of migration as an historical reality and emotional fact rather than simply as a means of movement.

The importance of this rupture was not solely that 12 million people were displaced; it was also that it instituted a persistent awareness of loss and exile that shapes Pakistani cultural memory and that migration across borders thereafter spread this condition onto new, transnational spaces of settlement, where home could never be just one place. In fact, diaspora can be read as a 'non-linear dynamic inherent in migratory movements' (Kalra, 2013, p.2); it is neither a one-way journey nor a fixed point of arrival, and Pakistani literature on the theme often uses memory to re-articulate how homes are re-membered, reconstructed, and held within emotions across boundaries when real, tangible return is impossible.

Post 9/11, diaspora took on yet another layer of meaning, turning the Pakistani migrant and the diasporic subject into an object of suspicion, especially in Western spheres, as the Muslim subject became a political one. The attacks of 2001 produced a newer and more hostile climate for all people on the move, but one that is targeted at Muslims and those who look like them (Kalra 12). This rendered displacement as more than just absence and exile, as an enduring awareness of a space of suspicion, misrecognition, and a burden of proof required in hostile public spheres. Together, Partition, the migration that followed, and the post-9/11 climate suggest that the Pakistani diaspora is not an event but a multilayered, historical, and psychological process that literature revisits time and again, addressing displacement, memory, fragile identities, and the politics of belonging.

1.1.3 Emotional Effects of Diaspora in Pakistani Literature

Diaspora in Pakistani literature isn't only visualized as a migration of people triggered by historically imposed events such as partition. But more than that, it is an emotionally and mentally devastating experience that writers emphasize by describing the consequences of being forced out of one's own country on the feelings of identity, emotional stability, belonging, etc. In this sense, diaspora is described as a predicament that simultaneously alters one's inner self and external world.

The focus of the writer lies on the emotional dimensions of migration, since migrants face constant emotional and mental dilemmas, grief, and instability due to severing ties with their homeland. For this reason, the writer maintains that even if migrants reach their destinations and settle there, their emotional bonds with their homeland still exert a strong sway over their

thoughts and actions. This creates emotional conflict between the two eras, leaving people constantly torn between the present and the past.

Therefore, in Pakistani novels, diaspora is strongly associated with emotional imbalance, where individuals feel insecure on account of loss of stability owing to alienation from their roots. Migration, in such contexts, is seen as an emotionally charged phenomenon that affects characters' perceptions of love and attachment.

This confirms that Diaspora, rather than merely as spatial crossing, is also an emotional condition that redefines relations, memory, and sense of homeland.

1.2 Emotional Displacement in Pakistani Literature

Emotional displacement is a major feature of diasporic literature because it demonstrates how the self, rather than just the location, is affected by migration. This experience is manifest in Pakistani writing through a host of characters who suffer from exile, yearning, loss, and insecurity about their sense of belonging after leaving home. Emotional displacement thus extends beyond geographical relocation and informs memory, ties, identity, and emotional continuity. Emotional displacement thus constitutes a central dimension in Pakistani literature and paves the way for the headings that follow through its portrayal of migration as an intensely psychological phenomenon.

1.2.1 Partition Trauma and the Emotional Rupture of Home

The trauma of Partition lies at the core of displacement as it marks the historical point at which the space of home itself becomes volatile, bloody, and lost forever. Since the violence of 1947 caused mass upheaval and displacement, Partition fiction always confronts us with the

experience of bloodbath, displacement, dispossession, and death, which witnessed the inception of the two nations of post-independence India. Here, home is no longer a protected place of origin but the site of a wound because displacement is equated not only with relocation but also with the crumbling of the psyche and emotions.

As Partition fiction critics observe, the historical event left its survivors with a psychological and emotional injury. So this wound of separation continued to haunt personal identity long after the event itself became a piece of history. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the images of the family unit, where the violation of domestic space corresponds with the violation of communal and cultural identities. Among those subjected to the violence were the most vulnerable: women and children, and it is frequently documented that it was the women who "bore the brunt of the violence while the children would suffer the emotional fallout of communal hatred and displacement for decades to come Reimagining Post-Partition Identity in Sorayya Khan's *Five Queens Road*.

Pakistani literature uses this wound of history to suggest that emotional displacement is a state of ongoing loss, in which memory perpetuates the historical rupture and the vision of home persists in the void of absence, memory, and longing.

1.2.2 Emotional Instability and Displacement

In Pakistani literature, it is expressed as a chronological state that becomes an inseparable part of the migration and physical travel process. It is not just about the body's departure, but about the emotional journey of the psyche that accompanies the person. It signifies insecurity, mental imbalance, and insecurity.

Migration scholars explain that displacement disrupts emotional continuity, separating individuals from familiar social and spatial environments that normally provide psychological stability (Papastergiadis 2018). This helps explain why emotional instability in literature is often linked to the loss of familiar surroundings and stable environments.

In Pakistan's literary scene, this emotional crisis is evident in characters whose bodies are in the present but whose hearts are lost in the past. So, though the physical transition from one place to another is made, the transition from past to present is far from complete, resulting in a continued emotional crisis of never being fully at peace with either their past or present situation.

Further attachment and migration studies suggest that prolonged instability can weaken emotional security and affect how individuals regulate their emotional responses in relationships (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2016). This may be illustrated by the ways displaced characters can react differently to the same migration event depending on how they cope emotionally.

Emotional displacement, thus, is an ongoing process rather than an event. It affects people's identity, emotional stability, and relationships. Pakistani literature employs this phenomenon, depicting displacement as not only spatial but also psychological, bringing imbalance throughout the displacement.

1.3 Bowlby's Attachment Theory

In part, our interpretation of human emotionality has been shaped by early relationships with caretakers that remain influential in attachment patterns, sense of security, and relationship style throughout life. Within this frame, attachment theory, as originally theorized by John Bowlby, has served as an important framework for understanding the ongoing, lifelong consequences of early emotional relationships, loss, separateness, and the sense of belonging.

To analyze the emotional dynamics within *Exit West*, it is necessary to distinguish between three key relational concepts. Emotional distance refers to the psychological and spatial gaps that emerge when partners adopt disparate adaptation strategies to cope with external stress. Emotional detachment serves as a self-protective mechanism, in which an individual deactivates attachment behaviors to mitigate the pain of instability. Finally, emotional disconnection represents the subjective experience of a breakdown in shared intimacy, characterized by a failure to synchronize emotional rhythms with one's partner.

1.3.1 Foundations of Attachment Theory: From Childhood Bonds to Emotional Security

John Bowlby's theory of attachment stems from the idea that early emotional relationships with an individual's primary caregiver are essential to shaping one's psychological development and sense of security. First proposed by Bowlby (1969), Attachment Theory replaced the previous psychoanalytic ideas, which defined attachment as a secondary drive related to feeding. Bowlby's theory illustrates that attachment is a primary behavioral system critical to survival (Bowlby 1969). Influenced by research in ethology and developmental psychology, Bowlby demonstrated that children are inherently inclined to seek proximity to a caregiver during moments of crisis, thereby allowing for protection and emotional reassurance.

At the heart of Bowlby's theory are the concepts of internal working models. Through consistent interaction with their caregiver, a child develops cognitive and emotional schemas that represent themselves, the caregiver, and others in general. When the child receives consistent, sensitive care from the caregiver, it creates secure attachment—a belief in security and self-trust. If, instead, the care is inconsistent or neglectful, insecure attachment results in a belief that the

caregiver is unreliable, which can create insecurity. The importance of these internal working models extends beyond childhood, affecting an individual's emotional stability, relationships with others, and coping strategies throughout later adulthood (Bretherton 1992).

Finally, Bowlby's theory establishes that security is the result of a relationship, not necessarily something an individual inherently possesses. Security can be defined by the caregiver as a secure base from which a child can explore, knowing he can always return for support. The development of a healthy balance between exploration and security is vital for normal emotional development, and, according to subsequent attachment research, those with secure attachments have greater emotional resilience, social competence, and overall adjustment than those with insecure attachments (Sroufe 2005). Given the significance of emotional bonds in the early years of life, attachment provides an essential tool for further research into emotional displacement.

1.3.2 Separation and Emotional Distance in Attachment Relationships

Separation is defined as the subjective feelings of distress occurring during physical or emotional separation between an individual and their attachment figure (Bowlby 25). Bowlby states that attachment figures can be perceived as a source of safety and emotional security, and that during separation, these feelings of security and the close bond between the attachment figure and the individual are interrupted, resulting in insecure attachment and a strong drive towards proximity (Bowlby 25). This is what makes the emotional gap between Saeed and Nadia in *Exit West* tense without physically separating them completely.

In relationships, separation refers not only to absence but also to the emotional gap that can develop over time through experience. The constant experiences of repeated instability and

displacement that migration entails make separation an ongoing process rather than a one-time event, affecting emotional security and the maintenance of emotional connection. *Exit West* also depicts the gradual emotional distancing between its two protagonists as the migration unfolds. Their distance is present even when they are together in their lack of a shared emotional space.

1.3.3 Loss and Emotional Disruption in Attachment Bonds

Loss in attachment theory refers to the emotional reaction experienced when an attachment figure becomes unavailable, either temporarily or permanently. Bowlby explains that loss is not only a physical absence but also an emotional experience that can lead to grief, insecurity, and long-term changes in emotional stability (Bowlby 1980). From this, it is clear that in *Exit West*, loss does not solely constitute division through distance but also an alteration in emotional state, which diminishes the sense of continuity between individuals over time.

Loss changes the perception of relational experiences by affecting feelings of security and connectedness within an individual. In conditions of migration and displacement, experiences of different forms of loss-home, place, stability, certainty, security, emotional security, etc., multiply, and consequently, the way that attachment relationships are functioning can slowly be altered. The feeling of loss can often take time to work through in literary representation and can make relationships increasingly fragile as their emotional component becomes tied to memory and an unstable context.

1.3.4 Anxiety and Emotional Insecurity in Attachment Behavior

Anxiety in attachment theory refers to the fear of losing emotional connection and the uncertainty about whether an attachment figure will remain available and emotionally responsive.

Bowlby explains that anxiety develops when individuals perceive their emotional bond as unstable or threatened, leading to heightened emotional sensitivity and insecurity (Bowlby 1988). This heightens the emotional tension as Saeed and Nadia's relationship becomes unstable amid constant displacement in *Exit West*.

Anxiety is a crucial predictor in attachment behavior, especially in contexts of instability and stress. When confronted with attachment anxiety, individuals can respond by approaching more closely or becoming distant from others, depending on coping styles to deal with instability and emotional demands.

Within migratory settings, anxiety becomes significantly important since instability is constant and unpredictable; thus, emotional security is continuously undermined. Anxiety becomes an integral element in understanding how attachment relationships develop.

Conclusion

The theoretical and contextual background to the present research, which examines emotional displacement in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, is laid out. This section has introduced the context of diaspora in Pakistani literature, highlighting how migration is not simply a geographical movement but an emotional one that involves an investment in belonging, security, and identity.

The study highlights how emotional displacement has an integral role in a character's psychological and relational responses in migrant situations. I have also established the significance of emotional disruption, which can result from processes such as instability, insecurity, and sustained emotional strain. Such elements, as well as the role of memory as the

vehicle for sustained emotional connection in the absence of stable presence, are integral in an exploration of characters' responses to change, absence, and the unfamiliar.

The central framework guiding this dissertation, Bowlby's attachment theory, has also been introduced and examined in terms of the central concepts it encompasses, namely, separation, loss, and anxiety, to provide an understanding of emotional bonds and the impact upon them of instability and distance, which will inform the textual analysis that follows.

Chapter Two

Physical Migration: Spatial Disorientation and The Breakdown of Love

Introduction

Exit West depicts the displacement not only of geography but also of emotional architecture surrounding love. In Saeed and Nadia's story, with each border crossed, a more invisible border is crossed between them; the emotional borders that contain and mediate intimacy are continually adjusted by transience, uncertainty, and the specific pressures of diasporic life. What appears to be a shared emotional territory initially becomes, with each geographic shift, an increasingly complex interior space, where new tensions generated by this dislocation continually affect how connection can be maintained, negotiated, and eventually lost. Their relationship becomes a space where the pressures of diaspora can be not just seen but deeply felt: the vulnerability of human connection in times of great upheaval is evident in every exchange, in the constant uncertainty they face, and in the emotional disequilibrium in which stability is replaced by vulnerability and attachment by distance, by adaptation, and shifting needs. They are living a sort of emotional displacement, an upheaval in which the very understanding of love, rather than being about permanence, comes to be about a capacity to withstand change.

Meanwhile, the relationship also serves as a conduit to memory: the past is not a space that can be abandoned but continues to have a profound, present effect on how the two lovers connect and understand their environment. The interplay of dislocation, emotional displacement, and memory is central to Saeed and Nadia's experience as their relationship evolves and they themselves adapt to a constantly shifting world.

2.1 The Impact of Diaspora on The Relationship between Saeed and Nadia

Migration, in *Exit West*, operates both as a literal voyage, in the form of geographical change, and as an emotional journey, one that perpetually rewires the nature of human bonds. Amid the flux, the relationship between Saeed and Nadia becomes the locus for the renegotiation of intimacies, separations, and homelands under the burden of diaspora.

2.1.1 Emotional Distance in The Relationship

Saeed and Nadia's relationship in *Exit West* unfolds against a background of social unrest and political turmoil, conditions conducive to both immediate emotional attachment and weakened long-term relational security. Beginning with an intimacy rooted in emotional openness and mutual curiosity, their bond grows progressively distant as migration proceeds. The physical ruptures caused by their transit through the doors of the unknown make even their temporary shared physical space emotionally unstable.

This reconfigures their connection into a sense of displacement-induced separation, in which mobility re-evaluates intimate partners through both spatial and psychological means (Liaqat 2022). This highlights that displacement affects both spatial and psychological relationships. It can be seen here in the widening gap between Saeed's and Nadia's emotions over the course of their transit.

The destabilized intimate space triggers the internal working models acquired in previous emotional contexts. Saeed's emotionally rooted identity relies on memory, tradition, and the security of familial ties, whereas Nadia adapts to a forward-thinking perspective that will later influence the emotional dynamics of her partnership. As studies on attachment theory indicate,

migration will exacerbate between-partner differences in emotional regulation and different modes of response under stressful conditions (Mikulincer and Shaver 112). This suggests that migration intensifies differences in emotional regulation between partners, which explains why Saeed and Nadia are differently affected by the conditions of their displacement and ultimately weakens their emotional oneness.

Gradually, this intimacy is neither shared nor sustained; instead, it exists as separate trajectories of feeling, and these small moments of closeness become fractured by periods of silence, emotional disengagement, and detachment. This process is described as emotional desynchronization among migrant partners, implying that partners' feelings become misaligned with shared temporal rhythms (Shinan et al. 2025). This notion is evident in the novel, which also illustrates how these separate rhythms result in a breakdown of shared attachment and emotional intimacy.

Thus, the relationship does not ultimately break down at one singular moment but gradually shifts through a continual reconfiguration of their emotions. Their love and distance coexist in the same relational space, and this continues until they are both separated. It demonstrates that diaspora refers not only to the existence of space, but also to an emotional structure that rebuilds intimacy, connection, belonging, and partner identity.

2.1.2 Effects of movement and instability on emotions

In *Exit West*, Saeed and Nadia's movement from one place to another through the magical "doors" creates a mobility that is neither paced nor patterned, but rather disruptive and erratic. Frequent travel to unfamiliar sites and cities leaves no room for temporal continuity in emotional processing, creating sustained pressure on the couple's relationship. Unlike classical narratives of

migration in which movement is horizontal and temporal, this narrative presents an instantaneous, repetitive process of displacement that results in an unstable context, making it hard for the couple to sustain emotional attachment.

Psychologically, such instability directly threatens the ability to maintain attachment security within a relationship. Attachment theory explains the link between relationship security and the stability of the relational context: when environmental settings remain stable, individuals are better equipped to manage dependency, availability, and trust in an interdependent relationship (Bowlby, 1988; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2016). Emotional security is not only internal but also shaped by external environmental stability, which is constantly disrupted within the narrative.

In the case of Saeed and Nadia, the chronic lack of environmental stability exacerbates these regulative systems. Every move necessitates new emotional adjustments that eventually drain the relational system, as the couple becomes less concerned with external displacement and more worn down by its internal emotional costs.

With migration, gradual detachment emerges through subtle indicators such as changing topics, prolonged silence, or divergent emotional responses to the same event. Saeed is focused on stability of familiar structures, the sense of security that comes from religious observance, and the validation and intimacy he receives from Nadia, whereas Nadia focuses on her internal stability, her detachment, and her autonomy, which reflect "uneven adaptation trajectories" as theorized by scholars who study migration (Papastergiadis 102). This shows that shared migration does not produce shared emotional responses but instead leads to divergent psychological adaptations within the same experience.

Although physically present in each other's lives, they are no longer emotionally synchronized because their physical and psychological lives diverge. In addition, the displacement of home disrupts the symbolic anchorage of intimacy. The home serves as an anchor in most intimate relationships.

Displacement from home destabilizes intimacy, a concept conventionally grounded in this specific architectural and domestic space. The inability of the couple to anchor their relationship leads to the erosion of relational security, in which attachment cannot be reinforced by physical proximity, and the couple must navigate a continuously uncertain world with limited anchoring structures to strengthen trust. Ultimately, the novel doesn't just provide the physical displacement of its characters; it also unravels the emotional architecture of their relationship. The emotional insecurity is not sudden; it develops slowly through the characters' actions.

2.1.3 Changes in Love during Migration

The cumulative experience of migration eventually reconfigures emotional attachment in *Exit West*: love is no longer based on continuity and shared stability, but is driven by distance, assimilation, and individual survival and coping. As Saeed and Nadia move from one displaced space to another, their relationship eventually ceases to be a collaborative emotional effort and morphs into two parallel life courses, each informed by their own responses to displacement, loss, and memories.

From the perspective of attachment theory, persistent instability and frequent separation can erode relational cohesion between couples, particularly if their coping strategies have become increasingly disparate over time. Attachment and migration research claims that chronic uncertainty leads to the "deactivation" or "hyperactivation" of attachment strategies depending on

an individual's emotional orientations (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). This indicates that emotional responses during migration are not uniform but depend on how individuals regulate attachment under stress.

In this relationship, Saeed's attachment has been consistently oriented toward preserving his memories, traditions, and fantasies of continuity, while Nadia's attachment has shifted toward self-reliance and emotionally autonomous coping. While not necessarily indicative of a sudden rupture, this gradual drifting in attachment patterns eventually transforms their bond into something altogether different.

Love is not just an integrated emotion anymore; it is a fractured structure, continuously reconstructed by distance and individual assimilation processes. Without a continuous and stable home space, love does not become just fragmented but increasingly individualized: according to migration theorists, love attachment in the forced mobile environment must often remain intact not through cohabitation but through "intermittent and fragile ties" (Papastergiadis 2018). This shows that even when emotional bonds persist, they are still evolving into weaker, less stable forms due to constant movement.

Still, the connection between Saeed and Nadia is too unstable to sustain any meaningful bond due to the rapid pace of migration and the inability to achieve shared emotional coherence. In effect, the Saeed-Nadia relationship did not end abruptly but deteriorated over time as their attachment styles gradually shifted.

2.2 Emotional Maze in *Exit West*

In Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*, the landscape of emotional experience is confusing and unstable, where feelings have ceased to follow a coherent, predictable trail and are hopelessly entangled in a changing world of motion and transit.

2.2.1 Emotional Confusion and Loss of Stability

The accelerated, inexplicable transit that the magical doors enable creates a scenario in which emotional stability becomes inherently unstable. The characters are plunged from one unfamiliar context to another without ceremony, preparation, or continuity, instantiating a kind of psychological disorientation that shapes their experiences and perceptions of themselves and each other within the relational bond. The migrant experience for them doesn't necessarily follow a sequential or linear pattern, but instead appears as disjointed episodes, and for them, emotional orientation becomes inextricably bound to contingent circumstances.

In this context, the emotional dyadic structure between Saeed and Nadia starts to mirror the patterns associated with disturbed attachment functioning. Studies in attachment and stress show that persistent uncertainty interferes with individuals' ability to regulate their emotional states and sustain attachment signaling (Mikulincer and Shaver 88). This highlights that emotional regulation in relationships becomes unstable when individuals are continuously lost in uncertainty, as seen in Saeed and Nadia's changing responses to displacement.

The characters demonstrate the effects of constant uncertainty on their attachment behaviors through differing orientations towards each other and towards the environment, with Saeed increasingly dependent on external emotional anchoring and familiarity, while Nadia's approach to emotion centers on detachment and eschewing predictable attachment objects. This

divergence in their orientations produces a sense of increasing emotional incommensurability, whereby the same event does not elicit the same emotional response from the characters.

As migration progresses, the characters' orientation becomes ever more precarious, as they cannot orient themselves to either an external or an internal stable ground or place of being; each new location and each new displacement constitutes a forced psychological recalibration that diminishes the consistency of the affective connection between Saeed and Nadia. Migration and affect theorists point to such recurring interruptions as generating "affective disorientation," in which affectivity itself is fragmented due to the removal of stable environmental markers (Papastergiadis 2018). This shows that disorientation is not only spatial but also emotional, as constant movement disrupts the continuity of affective attachment between characters.

This psychological disorientation serves as the precursor to a more fundamental disintegration of the characters' bond. It sets the stage for intimacy built on immediate responsiveness and instant adaptation, rather than on continuity and stability in their emotional selves and in the relationship itself.

2.2.2 Broken Connection between Place and Emotions

With portal migration, which opens up a world of broken spatial continuity, Hamid creates a space where the two characters are unable to sustain a coherent emotional connection to place, and thus an equally unstable emotional connection with each other. They are not given time to experience migration as a slow, ongoing process. However, they are shifted between locations and settings that they can only view through the emotional mappings and familiarities of other places. The fragmentation of space leads to a breakdown of their emotional consistency as a couple, because their points of emotional and relational stability are continuously erased.

From an attachment perspective, it has been posited that emotional security stems from environmental predictability, such that a consistent environment helps foster predictable relations and a coherent emotional experience (Bowlby, 1988). This suggests that emotional stability in relationships depends on the stability of the external environment, which the novel's migratory structure constantly disrupts.

The loss of this environmental stability can destabilize one's relational expectations, leading to inconsistent emotional regulation. In the novel, Saeed and Nadia are forced to create fragmented emotional and relational experiences akin to individual emotional "islands," where their shared intimacy is lost, and each successive destination has yet to take root. The lack of spatial continuity, therefore, translates to a lack of emotional continuity between the characters as well.

Scholars in migration and spatial relations argue that forced displacement often creates fractured spatial identities in which past and present environments do not merge to inform a coherent emotional experience (Massey 2005). This highlights that displacement disrupts continuity not only in space but also in emotional memory and relational experience.

In the same vein, the characters lose temporal and emotional continuity as their intimate experiences are no longer tied to a consistent physical context but are suspended in time and space by a series of shifting locations. Over time, they develop a certain amount of emotional fatigue from being compelled to repeatedly re-establish their relationship.

2.2.3 Adaptation and Emotional Distance

Prolonged exposure to constant instability forces Saeed and Nadia to construct alternative mechanisms for emotional survival, as it increasingly undermines their ability to maintain unified emotional integrity. As a result, the emotional instability of their surrounding environments transforms into an inherent condition of their relationships and a different logic of attachment: connection is formed less around the idea of permanence and more around the negotiation of constant change, of psychological and spatial shifting, requiring the constant redirection of emotional states in response to instability. Thus, both characters adapt to the challenges of displacement and begin to have fundamentally different emotional trajectories.

From a perspective informed by attachment dynamics and the psychological impact of stress, extended conditions of instability often call forth differential adaptive responses contingent on an individual's relational orientation. Attachment theory and stress research posit that some individuals, in the face of instability, tend to seek greater emotional closeness to attachment figures. In contrast, others adopt a more detached and self-reliant coping response (Mikulincer and Shaver 55). This suggests that instability does not produce a single emotional reaction but instead leads individuals to develop different coping strategies depending on their attachment orientation.

In Saeed and Nadia's case, Saeed continually relies on memories, tradition, and connection as an anchor against this change. At the same time, Nadia learns a different way to

live and survive through a controlled distance, adaptability, and a contained self. This does not lead to immediate dissolution of the relationship but to a shift in its inner workings.

As they both continue to move and respond to instability, the relationship enters a phase in which proximity and distance coexist within the relational space, and moments of closeness are disrupted by separation and withdrawal. Migration scholars talk about "asynchronous emotional adaptation," in which partners share a migration experience but develop emotional trajectories that move at different speeds and, at times, in opposite directions (Papastergiadis 102). This means that shared experience does not guarantee emotional synchronization, as each partner develops a distinct emotional rhythm within the same context.

Ultimately, rather than producing a fixed meaning of attachment rooted in stability and closeness, the relationship is defined by movement, disconnection, and adaptation. The emotional complexity of migration leads to a state of ambiguity where love persists but no longer functions as a stable structure.

2.3 Memory, Time, and Emotional Continuity

In the broader context of diasporic experience in *Exit West*, migration and physical displacement shape emotional ties and the ways time and memory participate in the making of intimacies. In the chaotic course of their migration and displacement, Saeed and Nadia's bond becomes increasingly dependent on memory of the past: remembering, reframing, and re-feeling that past. In this section, the analysis shifts from fragmentation in space and psyche to time, focusing on the impact of memory and time on intimacy and change in love.

2.3.1 Love through Memory

Love is not a permanent emotional state in *Exit West*, but rather as something in flux, influenced by distance and memory over time and through an unstable conception of temporality. Though Saeed and Nadia's relationship is initially based on presence and immediate experience, as they are forced to abandon their shared physical space and become geographically fragmented, the memory of intimacy replaces physical intimacy as the means by which their love is maintained and recreated. Love does not simply cease to exist under the conditions of dislocation; rather, it transforms into an attachment based on memory, caught between anticipation and absence. In this sense, in the diasporic world depicted in the novel, emotional continuity is no longer based on physical proximity but on remembrance.

From a theoretical standpoint, memory is neither a simple reproduction of the past nor the absence of presence, but rather an active construction of experiences; memory always implies presence and absence and their relation (Ricoeur 369). This suggests that memory does not preserve relationships exactly as they were but reconstructs them according to emotional experience and personal interpretation.

Paul Ricoeur further argues that remembering plays a central role in self-identity, as individuals reinterpret the past to maintain continuity. For Saeed and Nadia, memories of intimate experiences serve as points of connection, anchoring them together as they lead increasingly separate lives. Remembering, however, is not an objective process and is influenced by emotional needs and past emotional experiences; therefore, the same experiences may not be recalled in the same way by each party (Møbjerg 373). This shows that memory in the novel functions differently for each character, reflecting their distinct emotional responses to displacement.

Similarly, Jan Assmann argues that memory functions as a social, relational phenomenon through which lived experiences can be recorded, transmitted, and preserved over time and through evolving circumstances. In the context of the diasporic world, memory serves as both an artifact of a disappearing shared past and the foundation for future continuity when migration ruptures the flow of lived experience, replacing it with fragments of the past. Saeed is shown as someone who wants to retain memories of love to uphold an emotional bond, while Nadia eventually attempts to decentre memory and adopt a perspective on life that will permit her to adapt; the two remember the relationship differently over time.

Literary scholars of migration narratives highlight the link between love and time instability in these works: Almquist notes that 'contemporary migration literature generally depicts time compressed and in crisis' which consequently impacts the way that relationships are experienced and remembered (Almquist 2021). This highlights the instability in time and movement, which directly affects emotional continuity and the characters' perception of love.

Under these circumstances, the memories of intimacy change because love no longer exists as a continuous progression of time and shared moments but rather as reassembled memories of fleeting instances.

Additionally, the significance of emotional memory for Diasporic individuals lies in affective attachment, where, as Asha Sen contends in her discussion of *Exit West*, 'emotional attachment reconfigures with separation and mediated practices of connection', creating a relationship that is neither wholly absent nor wholly present (Sen 2022). This reinforces the idea that memory allows emotional attachment to survive despite physical separation and instability.

2.3.2 Changing Memories of Love

Instead of being an accurate depiction of a bygone event, memory functions in *Exit West* as a fluid and sometimes-fragmented retelling of personal feelings. The distance Saeed and Nadia achieve with each passing moment, the greater distance they become from the beginning of their relationship and their homes, causes their respective memories of intimacy to grow apart, as memory is not a repository of love, but an unstable reinterpretation...shaped by the pressures of an emotional necessity and time and distance. The two versions of intimacy are not equivalent to the original shared feeling of closeness and are distorted to fit their respective post-displacement emotional landscapes.

From a more theoretical standpoint, memory has always been perceived as a reconstructive mechanism influenced by perception and an individual's current psychological state. As Ricoeur observes, remembering is not a copying of events, but rather a constant rewriting of them so that they can maintain themselves in the face of changing identity. In the context of diasporic displacement, this tendency to rewrite is intensified because loneliness amplifies the emotional imperative for the reconstruction of relationships that no longer exist.

Similarly, Jan Assmann highlights that memory is socially and emotionally driven, meaning that whatever a person chooses to remember is always determined by loss and by the context of their position within culture. Saeed attempts to preserve his memories of Nadia and their physical closeness, idealizing what they shared to maintain his emotional continuity, while Nadia seems to rewrite those same memories, allowing the distance between them to let the feelings attached to them sink in. This disconnect illustrates how memory loses consistency under

the immense pressure of displacement, leaving two divergent emotional reconstructions of what once was one.

This fragmentation also speaks to the psychological reality of displacement, in which an individual's emotions, or even physical survival, depend on the recreation of experience. As Almquist states in discussing modern diasporic migration narratives, displacement affects not only where people are but also how they speak about and understand their past selves and relationships (Almquist 2021). Memory becomes the emotional salve that attempts to preserve intimacy even as it continues to change and erode.

Ultimately, fragmented memories demonstrate how continuity of emotion is not a factual reality, but the act of continually writing and loving, because physical belonging is gone, so the physical aspect of love must live on in emotional terms.

2.3.3 Emotional Survival and Continuity

Within the emotional world of *Exit West*, memory serves not just to retrieve the past but also as an integral form of emotional survival amid separation and loss. When Saeed and Nadia become ever more divided by space, distance, and their own distinct emotional trajectories, memory becomes their only enduring link; even though their lived proximity and shared experiences have ceased to exist, the act of remembering gives fragments of their relationship new form as a kind of endurance.

Memory functions in this capacity as a survival mechanism, providing continuity in its absence. Jan Assmann argues that memory is both a resource for cultural memory and an entity for subjective processes, preserving identity in the midst of flux. For displaced people, this means memory does not simply maintain what has been; rather, it reworks it to make life possible.

Saeed's relationship with Nadia, for example, endures through his constant recollection of moments with her, serving as points of emotional grounding amid physical and existential distance. Paul Ricoeur also connects remembering to selfhood, stating that one's existence relies upon memory for its cohesion.

However, within the context of *Exit West*, the continuation of their bond in memory is not entirely robust but is constructed based on emotional need and selective recall, by the human impulse to maintain meaning even in the midst of irrecoverable loss. Indeed, Almquist notes that in conditions of migration, emotional connection is not grounded in physical presence but is instead maintained through discontinuous, psychological, and chronological processing (Almquist 2021). This demonstrates that emotional survival in displacement depends on unstable, reconstructed forms of attachment rather than on stable presence. Through memory, then, both resist disappearance while emphasizing fragility.

It is through remembering, then, that emotional survival exists in the diaspora, although this survival never reaches wholeness. Saeed and Nadia's love is always now caught in between: still alive but always distant.

Conclusion

The relationship between Saeed and Nadia, and its progression through *Exit West*, indicates that diaspora is a state of mind as much as a state of physical movement, and that it irrevocably alters one's emotional life. As it introduces insecurity, distance, and instability into life, the relationship itself becomes increasingly unstable, representing how love struggles to endure amid shifting conditions and contexts.

The changing relationship is a gradual unfolding, not a sudden breakdown, and it describes the complex processes of love as it is challenged, renegotiated, and weakened. The migration takes an emotional toll on its subjects and causes disorientation, in which their close relationships undergo new emotional encounters; it becomes a relationship under construction, where love and intimate ties evolve as they adapt to instability.

Furthermore, their relationship is shaped by memory, which allows them to maintain a sense of constancy in a fragmented world and makes it difficult to fully grasp the new spaces they inhabit and the identities they adopt. The relationship, a reflection of the characters' inner lives and the external conditions they face, illustrates how intimacy changes amid displacement. Overall, it shows that diaspora has long-lasting effects beyond distance; the development of their intimacy sets the foundation for understanding the complex internal experiences of attachment, separation, and identity in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Three

Psychological Adaptation: Saeed and Nadia's Divergent Paths

Introduction

Separation, instability, and emotional ambivalence are significant factors shaping human relationships and emotional connections among individuals in contexts of displacement and migration. In *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid illustrates the emotional transformation in Saeed and Nadia as they move through diverse locations and encounter unique experiences that continually shape their bond and emotions toward each other.

Using Bowlby's attachment theory, this chapter analyzes Saeed and Nadia's attachment in the context of displacement and migration. The study specifically examines the fundamental concepts of Bowlby's theory – attachment anxiety, emotional distancing, separation, and loss – and their manifestation in the characters' responses and behaviors throughout the narrative.

Through textual examples from *Exit West*, this chapter attempts to illustrate the contrasting emotional techniques adopted by Saeed and Nadia in the wake of unstable situations and how, over time and through migration and separation, the nature of their attachment patterns is redefined.

3.1 Attachment Anxiety

Attachment anxiety occurs when an individual feels the threat of losing emotional closeness, separation, or instability. In *Exit West*, Saeed's fear and dependence intensify due to the insecurity of migration. Attachment theory by Bowlby shows how migration can foster insecure attachment and individual attachment.

3.1.1 Saeed's Emotional Dependence

Saeed demonstrates several signs of attachment anxiety throughout *Exit West*, especially after the beginning of displacement and separation from familiar spaces. According to Bowlby, individuals with anxious attachment often seek emotional closeness and reassurance during periods of instability and fear of loss (Bowlby 1973). This is evidenced in Saeed's own actions, as the process of migration intensifies his need for emotional reassurance and attachment to close relationships.

Throughout the novel, Saeed grows increasingly dependent on memories, traditions, religion, and the emotional belonging and familiarity they evoke. While Nadia eventually acclimates herself to change, Saeed finds it very difficult to relinquish the emotional solace that he felt connected to his previous life and relationship. His dependence on emotional safety becomes particularly evident when he loses his mother and experiences his loss of homeland and his persistent seeking of emotional anchorage amidst his own state of constant instability.

Hamid shows this clinging behavior in Saeed's continued need to remain connected and have validation from Nadia. As their emotional bond begins to decay, Saeed still seeks emotional closeness and a continuing routine between them. This demonstrates Bowlby's theory in which attachment anxiety arises in periods of instability, separation, and abandonment (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2016). These findings indicate that Saeed's attachment behavior is primarily driven by displacement and emotional insecurity. Increased fear of emotional loss is then amplified.

The novel also demonstrates how Saeed's emotional dependence influences the balance of the relationship. While Nadia increasingly seeks independence and adaptation, Saeed becomes more emotionally attached to stability and continuity. This emotional imbalance gradually creates

distance between them, as each character develops a different coping strategy in response to displacement.

3.1.2 Fear of Separation

One of the key components of Bowlby's attachment theory, the fear of separation, also manifests in the emotionally strengthened relationships that occur in the absence of stability and security. In *Exit West*, the nature of displacement repeatedly causes Saeed and Nadia to fear separation, especially for Saeed, whose attachment to familiarity and intimacy only intensifies throughout the novel.

According to Bowlby, separation anxiety appears when individuals fear losing attachment figures or emotional security (Bowlby 1988). The same principle can be applied to the persistent emotional closeness Saeed requires to be with Nadia, amidst their turbulent reality.

As the migration process continues, Saeed starts to be terrified of a new kind of distance – an emotional and psychological one. Even though he and Nadia stay physically together most of the time in the novel, a gradual detachment develops between them because they respond to the displacement in opposite ways. Saeed tries to maintain a sense of continuity by anchoring himself in his memories, routines, and his emotional connection with Nadia. However, Nadia is gradually moving toward independence and making adjustments.

This fear of separation is demonstrated through Saeed's emotions towards transition and uncertainty. He finds it difficult to embrace the change in his relationship with Nadia and makes several attempts to rekindle the emotional connection they once shared. According to Mikulincer and Shaver, "individuals with attachment anxiety feel more acutely sensitive to indications of

rejection and distance in times of stress" (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). This explains how trivial issues in his relationship with Nadia, during displacement, distress Saeed.

3.1.3 Emotional Imbalance between Saeed and Nadia

From the start of the novel, displacement builds on the emotional discord between Saeed and Nadia because they each find their own ways of dealing with insecurity; Saeed remains emotionally familiar with continuity, while Nadia develops distance and independence that make this connection less reliable. These attachments will erode the emotional balance of their relationship.

Attachment theory explains that individuals respond differently to stressful situations depending on their attachment styles and emotional needs (Bowlby, 1973). This is why the characters Saeed and Nadia behave differently regarding the migration and why their emotions for each other evolve slowly throughout the novel.

The two protagonists seek emotional security differently: Saeed relies on nostalgia, religion, and a secure emotional bond; Nadia adjusts by accepting change and establishing emotional distance from her partner. Thus, despite migrating together, they both experience displacement in different ways. Their relationship begins to move further away from attachment to detachment. The narrative exemplifies this disproportion through their respective attitudes towards foreign surroundings and unfamiliar situations. In the meantime, Saeed keeps seeking stability and belonging, and Nadia keeps seeking independence and adaptation. As Mikulincer and Shaver observe, stressful situations are more likely to amplify the discrepancy in regulation and attachment behavior between partners (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). The increasing

emotional detachment between Saeed and Nadia over the course of their migration illustrates this well.

The emotional dynamic of Nadia and Saeed's relationship deteriorates over time as their emotions diverge. Love persists between them, but they do not share the same emotional needs or strategies for dealing with emotion. The emotional disparity in *Exit West* highlights how displacement can restructure attachment within intimate relationships.

3.2 Emotional Detachment

Emotional detachment can be viewed as a second way of coping with the stress and uncertainty encountered in migration. In *Exit West*, Nadia becomes increasingly emotionally detached and self-reliant as she struggles to survive in a world turning upside down. Within the framework of Bowlby's attachment theory, emotional detachment is seen as a mechanism of self-protection in response to unfavorable conditions.

3.2.1 Nadia's Emotional Withdrawal

Nadia's emotional distance during the course of the novel mirrors a subtle but clear progression in her attachment behaviors as the trauma of displacement increases. Unlike Saeed, who increasingly craves intimacy and confirmation, Nadia starts to develop emotional space around her, a coping mechanism for constant flux and insecurity. This does not imply an erosion of love or care, but an alteration of her attachment styles through change and flux. As Bowlby posits, avoidant attachment behaviors that seek emotional distance develop in situations of stress and insecurity as self-protective measures (Bowlby 1988). For Nadia, this implies that emotional

withdrawal is not abandonment but rather a survival mechanism developed through years of precarious migration.

As the novel unfolds, Nadia decreases her dependence on shared routines and on the feeling of lasting connection. She stays with Saeed but has increasing control over her own emotions and the internal experience of them. In place of seeking emotional grounding, Nadia is increasingly concerned with self-reliance and coping, causing the balance of emotionality to shift between the two characters, even as they occupy the same space.

The novel captures this emotional transition as Nadia experiences her own displacements. In these experiences, she becomes adept at surviving in spaces of transience yet increasingly emotionally detached from them. This corresponds to Mikulincer and Shaver's description of emotional deactivation: a reduction in attachment needs in a response to chronic stress and instability (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). It is possible that the framework above clarifies how Nadia's emotional behavior is kept within its limits by pursuing security through autonomy rather than dependence.

Nadia's emotional withdrawal highlights *Exit West*'s portrayal of distance not as absence but as an internal psychological strategy. Her changing attachment pattern displays how migration can alter intimacy in romantic relationships, leading to varied emotional responses within the same relationship and experience.

3.2.2 Adaptation Through Emotional Distance

Adaptation through emotional detachment in *Exit West* shows how Nadia develops a coping mechanism of emotional distancing rather than intimacy. Through continuing displacement, Nadia finds a way to adapt to new environments by moving from attachment to

Saeed towards a self-sufficient way to build stability. This does not mean that Nadia loses all feelings for Saeed, but her emotional expression becomes less apparent and more restrained.

From a psychological perspective, Bowlby's attachment theory suggests that a person facing sustained strain can regulate emotion by reducing attachment behavior when proximity comes to represent instability or emotional stress (Bowlby 1988). It seems that Nadia may develop towards emotional independence to create a sense of continuity, given that everything around her remains so unstable.

We see Nadia's adaptation manifest when she manages a new situation without excessive reassurance from Saeed. Saeed becomes more attached to their relationship as a source of emotion, while Nadia becomes more emotionally distant. Their synchronization emotionally breaks down.

Mikulincer and Shaver categorize this as an avoidant coping strategy. They explain: "[t]his coping style involves reduced emotional reliance on the attachment figure(s)" (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). Nadia also follows the trend of valuing autonomy over mutual emotional experience.

In doing so, the ability to maintain adaptive emotional distance within the text, *Exit West*, provides an image of attachment that is not static, but rather becomes and continues to reinvent itself when faced with outside influences such as immigration. Nadia's assimilation serves as an example where emotional survival is attained by increasing the distance within a close relationship.

3.2.3 Divergent Emotional Coping in Saeed and Nadia

As the process of displacement progresses in *Exit West*, Saeed and Nadia's methods of dealing with the situation grow more dissimilar as they diverge in the attachment style they develop to it. Saeed moves toward emotional reliance on memory, the familiar, and affirmation, while Nadia moves toward emotional self-reliance and self-regulation, their contrast growing more evident in the continuous movement through fluid landscapes.

From an attachment theory perspective, individuals exposed to prolonged stress tend to develop different emotional regulation patterns depending on whether they lean toward anxious or avoidant attachment styles (Bowlby, 1988). This is why the same migratory experience leads to different feelings between Saeed and Nadia.

The more the relationship develops, the more Saeed needs to feel close, and Nadia learns to become more emotionally independent to survive. This does not cause immediate breakdown, but reduces emotional synchronization.

Mikulincer and Shaver argue that stressful environments often intensify differences in attachment behavior between partners, leading to mismatched emotional regulation within relationships (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). This appears in the novel in the deepening emotional rift between Saeed's desire for closeness and Nadia's need for distance.

In employing these two dissimilar emotional management techniques, *Exit West* shows how migration alters attachment at the individual and dyadic levels, progressively changing the partners' emotional balance.

3.3 Loss and Relationship Change

In this section, I examine how separation and emotional loss affect the bond between Saeed and Nadia throughout *Exit West*. Throughout the continuing displacement, Saeed and Nadia are dealing with multiple different types of emotional loss, not only because they have been separated from their homeland, but they are also experiencing a steady loss of connection between the two of them. Bowlby's attachment theory can aid us in understanding how repeated separation and instability can alter attachment relationships and affect relational security.

3.3.1 Emotional Responses to Loss

In *Exit West*, the arrival of loss unfolds as a slow process of displacement, separation, and the erosion of the emotional connection between Saeed and Nadia. For the two protagonists, the experience of loss is varied as they move through space. Saeed does so out of emotional discomfort, and a connection to the absence of what is missing, and Nadia does so as a means of distancing and coming to terms with that loss. This influences how each will deal with the relationship's ongoing nature.

From an attachment theory perspective, loss activates emotional distress and different coping responses depending on the individual's attachment style (Bowlby, 1980). And that is why, for example, Saeed feels more emotional distress when separated, while Nadia reacts by emotionally detaching.

As the story progresses, Saeed's concern turns increasingly toward his lost connection, a sense of being known and settled with Nadia. Nadia, meanwhile, begins to distance herself from

her sense of loss as she navigates new spaces; hence, it no longer holds the emotional importance it does for Saeed.

Mikulincer and Shaver explain that loss often intensifies attachment anxiety in individuals who seek emotional closeness, while others may respond by increasing emotional detachment as a coping strategy (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). The novel shows this by highlighting the differences in their emotional responses to the same event of separation and uncertainty. By framing their responses to loss in distinct ways, *Exit West* illustrates that migration is not simply a relocation of physical space but also a reorganization of psychic space.

3.3.2 Changing Attachment Patterns

In *Exit West*, the experience of continuous displacement gradually transforms the attachment patterns between Saeed and Nadia. What begins as a relationship based on emotional closeness and shared stability slowly shifts into one marked by emotional distance and differing coping styles. This transformation is not sudden, but develops over time as repeated movement and instability reshape how each character connects emotionally.

From an attachment theory perspective, prolonged stress and repeated separation can lead to changes in attachment behavior, where individuals adjust their emotional strategies to cope with insecurity and loss (Bowlby, 1988). This may go some way to illustrate the fluctuating nature of Saeed and Nadia's relationship.

Over time, Saeed comes to adopt characteristics of an anxious attachment style, seeking assurance and consistency in the relationship. In contrast, Nadia becomes increasingly avoidant, relying on her autonomy and the ability to maintain emotional equilibrium. These tendencies

develop not in isolation but through the constant, repeated experience of dislocation and unpredictability.

Mikulincer and Shaver argue that attachment systems are flexible and can shift under chronic stress, leading individuals to modify how they seek or avoid emotional closeness (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). In the novel, this can be seen in the fact that Saeed becomes increasingly emotionally reliant on, and Nadia progressively more distant from.

Through these fluctuations in attachment, *Exit West* articulates how migration, in effect, reorganizes domestic space and changes the very emotional bonds that bind them together in the first place.

3.3.3 Transformation of the Relationship

Saeed and Nadia's relationship in *Exit West* transforms slowly through dislocation, separation, and the movement of feeling. Their emotional attachment to each other begins as proximity-driven, emotion-led intimacy and falters into an increasingly distance-led, emotionally fragile union.

From an attachment theory perspective, relationships can change over time as individuals experience repeated stress and insecurity, weakening emotional stability and relational security (Bowlby, 1988). This is also why Saeed and Nadia's relationship does not remain the same but develops throughout the migration process.

Throughout the novel, Saeed maintains a desire for emotional connection, whereas Nadia develops emotional independence and aloofness. The opposite direction of their emotional needs ultimately alters the dynamic of their relationship, leading to a less harmonious and more lopsided connection.

Mikulincer and Shaver note that under prolonged stress, attachment bonds may shift from secure emotional interdependence to more unstable forms of connection, depending on how individuals regulate emotional distress (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). This appears in the novel as the widening emotional gap between Saeed and Nadia throughout their travel.

Ultimately, the transformation of their relationship in *Exit West* can be seen not as a single rupture but as a continuum of change, in which the effects of being refugees alter the conditions and nature of love, connection, and safety.

Conclusion

In this chapter, John Bowlby's attachment theory is applied to Saeed and Nadia's relationship in *Exit West*, *emphasizing* how displacement, instability, and loss shape their attachment behavior and emotional states. It has been demonstrated through the discussion of attachment anxiety, detachment, and loss that migration not only affects one's physical movement but also has a profound effect on emotional attachments and relations.

The findings of this chapter indicate that Saeed and Nadia begin to respond differently to stressful situations: Saeed becomes more dependent on proximity, memory, and comfort, which can be seen as signs of anxious attachment, whereas Nadia gradually chooses to distance herself and be self-reliant, which suggests detached attachment. This opposite reaction weakens their emotional bond.

Basically, the chapter revealed that their relationship is not about instantaneous dissolution but an evolving one with recurring episodes of displacement and unpredictability, in which attachment patterns shift, emotions become unbalanced, and proximity is constantly being reconfigured with every instance of loss, displacement, and instability.

General Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, emotional displacement in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* has been conceptualized as a complex, multifaceted, and ongoing process that extends beyond simple geographical borders and the characters' physical movement across them. Far from being the simple act of geographical displacement, migration is seen as a lived condition that can fundamentally transform one's inner emotional life, destabilize intimate relationships, and reconstruct identities; in Saeed and Nadia's relationship, we witness the psychological, relational, and existential dimensions of displacement continuously reforming individuals' capacities for attachment, separation, and connection.

The theoretical framework proposed in Chapter One advanced an argument for situating diaspora and emotional displacement within literary and psychological theory. In Pakistani literature, diaspora is not merely a physical state. However, it is a lived reality, an experience characterized by fragmentation, memory, and the persistent, dynamic tension between absence and presence. Within this framework, emotional displacement expands this conceptualization of migration into an individual's internal emotional sphere, a realm in which identity is continually constructed through discontinuity and continuity. John Bowlby's theory of attachment provided the necessary psychological foundation, explaining individuals' psychological and relational responses to feelings of separation and insecurity rooted in their early emotional connections with primary caretakers.

Expanding on this foundation, Chapter Two specifically explored the direct and extensive impact of diaspora on the emotional lives of Saeed and Nadia's relationship. Throughout the characters' arduous journey, we see that migration is not a neutral context that merely frames the development of their relationship, but a force that actively transforms their emotional experiences. Through the experience of migrating into an increasingly uncertain and fractured world, their relationship is transformed into a nexus of interaction between closeness and

independence, love and longing, continuity and rupture; emotional instability, therefore, did not simply emerge suddenly but instead developed as a result of a consistent experience of repeated vulnerability and loss. Memory proved instrumental in the construction of this emotional landscape, serving as both a source of solace and of conflict. As they negotiated their present state, they were constantly bound by the remnants of their past, thus preventing an easy acceptance of new realities. Love, consequently, is understood not as static or ideal but as a precarious, adaptive structure that can be shaped and reshaped by external conditions.

Building on the understanding of the extensive impact of the context on emotional lives presented in Chapter Two, Chapter Three analyzed the underlying psychological mechanisms of these transformations. From the perspective of attachment theory, we can see how the characters developed fundamentally different attachment strategies to navigate these conditions of vulnerability, which subsequently led to divergent emotional trajectories for them as individuals. Saeed's simultaneous need for closeness and continuity reflects his acute need for security in an increasingly unpredictable world. In contrast, Nadia's growing need for independence speaks to an attempt to develop an adaptive, stable form of emotional separation and resilience. This highlighted not the universal nature of attachment but its individuality and capacity to evolve with circumstances.

Across these three chapters, it has become increasingly apparent that emotional displacement is not merely a byproduct of migration, but perhaps the single most defining component of the experience. Emotional displacement serves as the engine of change that continuously reshapes the individual and their relationships to others. As Saeed and Nadia traverse this world, their relationship does not endure in an ideal fixed form nor does it simply crumble and disintegrate, instead, it is perpetually reformulated by conditions of volatility and constant flux and, through its continuous construction of attachment, reveals the extent to which

our most intimate relationships are deeply rooted in the stability of our environments, the receptiveness of those we care about, and our mutual emotional capacity.

Thus, this research confirms the hypotheses. The analysis confirms that patterns of attachment are psychologically and emotionally transformed through migration and displacement, affecting the emotional bond between Saeed and Nadia by creating separation, instability, and evolving forms of intimacy. Also, attachment theory served as a sufficient framework for explaining psychological and emotional reactions, separation anxiety, and relational transformation within the novel. Using this theoretical approach, the novel *Exit West* conveys how forced migration continuously recreates intimate relationships, personal identities, and emotional continuity.

The most compelling evidence presented is ultimately a story of the resilience and fluidity of human connection in conditions of imposed mobility. Although migration typically leads to estrangement, it can also lead to the development of unique emotional perspectives and radically new relational forms; the divergent paths of Saeed and Nadia do not necessarily negate the profound emotional connection they shared, but illustrate how enduring relationships continue to resonate in memory, shape our individual identities, and inform our emotional experiences even when those with whom we connect are separated from us. In this regard, emotional displacement can be seen not merely as the process of absence and loss, but also as a process of reinvention in which identity and connection are perpetually renegotiated in response to an individual's ever-changing circumstances.

Combining literary and psychological methods in this dissertation has provided the opportunity to bridge the gap between internal subjective experience and structural explanations, offering a reading of *Exit West* not simply as a narrative of migration, but as a penetrating exploration of humanity's ability to adapt to crisis emotionally, rebuild intimacy when faced with

immense pressure, and derive meaning from existence despite uncertainty. This work demonstrates how an understanding of diaspora studies and attachment theory contributes to a more comprehensive approach to interpreting how outward movement affects interior transformation.

Ultimately, this study intends to offer a valuable reading of the prevalence of emotional displacement as a central thematic concern in contemporary literature, especially within postcolonial and diasporic writing traditions. This work has illustrated how migration must be seen not merely as an outward journey across physical borders, but as a journey across inner, psychic terrains that ultimately reconstitute identity and our relationship with others. Saeed and Nadia's story articulates this journey with nuance and depth, highlighting the fact that in an increasingly unstable world, perhaps the most consequential voyages we can make are those of the soul.

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