



AT THE CROSSROADS OF IDENTITY IN MOHSIN HAMID'S NOVEL *EXIT WEST* (2017)

Asherly Randa¹, Desvalini Anwar²

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Arts

Universitas Negeri Padang

email: ashleyranda694@gmail.com

Abstract

This article is about the analysis of a novel *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid. The problem of this analysis focuses on the issue of being at the crossroads of identity. The aim of analysis is to find out how far the characters Saeed and Nadia expose the issue of being at the crossroads of identity. This analysis involved fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting to reveal the issue of being at the crossroad of identity in the novel. The analysis deals with the concepts of hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha that is supported by the text and context based interpretation. The result of this analysis shows that the protagonists are a young man and a young woman who are faced with a condition that places them to be at their identity in being at the crossroads of identity. Thus, the character makes effort to assimilate and imitate to the new culture. These can be seen through their ways to blend with the society in attaining their identity.

Key words: *Mimickry, Assimilation, Identity.*

A. INTRODUCTION

In postcolonial era, many people from the former Western colony used cultures from the West. They think that the Western culture can improve their social status. They mix their native language with the language of the West. They eat the same food as westerners. Many of them want to go to the West. They want to go to the West because various reasons. Many of them migrate from their homelands because of the civil war. The migrants leave their homeland to seek for shelter. The war that took place at Middle East pushes many people to migrate to European countries. Although they were able to stay in a country, they receive a lot of restrictions from European. Due to the excessive number of migrants coming to Europe, many European give rules for the refugees who burden them and a number of anti-immigrant right wing groups also emerged exploiting the

¹English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on March 2020.

²Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



huge crisis. The refugees have to leave the refugee camps in west to escape the restriction of anti-immigrant.

In order to survive in a new country, the refugees have to obey the regulation made by host country, even though the government has provided a place for migrants. The refugees still get bad treatment by native people. They get the rules that must leave the culture of their homeland. They are trying to choose their identity. According to Collins dictionary (2019), identity is the characteristics they have that distinguish them from others. In the process of being at the crossroad of identity, the refugees have to choose between uses the culture of the society or use their homeland culture. They are faced with conditions where they must choose to blend in with the culture of the new area or must leave the area. They have to survive to getting their identities. They keep moving in one place to another place.

The issue of being at the crossroads of identity is reflected through the efforts made by the refugees in order to choose their identity. They try to adopt the culture of the society to survive in the new country. In some cases, one of them cannot fit in the new culture and back to their homeland culture. In other case one of them can fit in to the new culture although they are difficult to be able to become a Western. A lot of them move from the West because they cannot be able to become Western. In moving to other country, they prepare the plan in order to escape from Europe determining. They are out of all the rules that are not appropriate, discriminate and the oppression they got.

This study analyzes the issue of crossroad of identity which refers to the act of getting the identity when leaving their homeland. They are faced with having to keep using their culture or having to use western culture. The ways of getting their identity is interesting. It is described in the novel *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid. This novel shows the struggle of the refugees. The characters have their own ways to get their identities. They show how the refugees can feel the prosperity of their identities.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of this research is qualitative, content analysis that is to analyse the text of the novel *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid. The data were collected from the quotations of the novel itself. The analysis was done through text and context-based interpretation. The novel was analyzed by fictional devices such as, character, setting, and plot (conflict). These devices connected to each other and gave the contribution in revealing the meaning of the novel. Characters and conflicts are used to reveal the way to attain their identity by analyzing character's reactions toward the conflict. Then, it gives contribution in process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. In addition, this analysis is used the theory of Hybridity who argued by Homi K. Bhabha.

B. DISCUSSION

This chapter consist of the analysis of the novel *Exit West* (2017). It was analyzed by using the fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict) and setting to reveal the issue about crossroad of identity. In this analysis, being at the crossroad of identity refers to the efforts which done by two characters, Saeed and Nadia to be accepted in the new society. Both characters have different ways of choosing their identity.

1.1 The First Character

The first character's ways to get identity can be seen through his way to choose leaving the West culture. He cannot adjust his self to the West culture. He tries to reject the West culture. He cannot adjust his self to the West culture. He chose to back to his homeland culture. He chose to use his homeland culture and leaves the West. He chose to married a religious woman who came from descendants of his homeland.

Being at the crossroad of the identity, the both characters have different ways to face up their crossroad of identities. The way of the first character chooses his identity can be seen through his way of picking out from the West and choosing to use his culture. It is started by escaping from the West. He chooses to return to his homeland culture. It can be seen from the following quotation;

“Around a bend, on Vicarage Gate, was a house known to be a house of people from his country. Saeed began to spend more time there, drawn by the familiar languages and accents and the familiar smell of the cooking. One afternoon he was there at prayer time, and he joined his fellow countrymen in prayer in the back garden, under a blue sky that seemed shockingly blue, like the sky of another world, absent the airborne dust of the city where he had spent his entire life, and also peering out into space from a higher latitude, a different perch on the spinning Earth, nearer its pole than its equator, and so glimpsing the void from a different angle, a bluer angle, and as he prayed he felt praying was different here, somehow, in the garden of this house, with these men. It made him feel part of something, not just something spiritual, but something human, part of this group, and for a wrenchingly painful second he thought of his father, and then a bearded man with two white marks in the black on either side of his chin, marks like those of a great cat or wolf, put his arm around Saeed and said brother would you like some tea. (p. 60)

Through the text above, the setting refers to situations of regret that lead to external and internal conflicts. The setting refers to a difficult situation when the

difference conditions between the homeland and the newland. The first character who try to escape from the west. The external conflict is being a new people in newland. Then it leads to his mentally unstable as internal conflict because he misses his homeland and he found it difficult to live in a newland. To solve those problem, he releases it in two ways; he tries to leave the west culture and he prays at the praying time. He started again to mingle with his countrymen. The phrase "*Saeed began to spend more time there*" shows he is trying to leave the Western culture. He is trying to back to use his homeland culture. Besides he tries to back his homeland, the first character also calms his mentally unstable through spiritual way by praying at prayer time. It can be seen through the sentence "*One afternoon he was there at prayer time, and he joined his fellow countrymen in prayer in the back garden*". It shows the calm felt by the first character. It makes him feels be a human. It followed by the phrases "It made him feel part of something, not just something spiritual, but something human, part of this group," shows he felt he was quicker to adapt to people from his homeland culture. It also shows that his painful to adapt the new land culture because the coercion from native people to use their culture in their area. In this text, he uses the adapt phase in adaptation process because he modifies what culture that fits him to create new purpose in getting his identity. He tries to back to his homeland culture because he had forgotten his homeland culture. He has mimicry because he has lost his way to return to his homeland culture.

Another quotation that supports his determination is shown through the quotation below;

"Now, though, in Marin, Saeed prayed even more, several times a day, and he prayed fundamentally as a gesture of love for what had gone and would go and could be loved in no other way. (P. 79)

The quotation above shows his commitment and determination to back to his homeland culture. The setting refers to tense and shock situation that character feels as an immigrant. The internal conflict comes from lack of knowledge to use his homeland culture because he had lost everything he has. Despite he has lack of knowledge to use his homeland culture, he has a strong commitment to shows his identity as his homeland people. It is shown in the statement "*now, though, in Marin, Saeed prayed even more, several times a day*" that he releases his stress with pray to refreshing his mind. The first character want to return to his homeland culture with his prayed. The text above shows remorse for the character who forgot his homeland culture while in homeland. It also shows the inability of the characters to adapt to Western culture.

The first character chooses to escape the West because he cannot adjust his self to the Western culture. He get shock culture while he stays in West. It is important to avoid disoriented or feel shocked and unsettled. It is shown through the following quotation;

“Saeed made it point to smile with Nadia, at least sometimes, and he hoped she would feel something warm and caring when he smiled, but what she felt was sorrow and the tense that they were better than this, and that together they had to find a way out.” (P. 74)

The quotation above shows the first character want to go out from the West. The setting refers to discomfort situation because the first character feels shock to blend in West culture. This situation then creates the internal conflict. It make him stress to stay in West. He chooses to leave West as a way to release his strees through refreshing his mind. It can be seen through the phrase *“and that together they had to find a way out”* which means he want to escape from the West culture. The external conflict is coming from the war of migrant and nativist.

Another quotation that support this condition can be seen through the following below;

“Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory, and people were questioning what role they had to play. Many were arguing that smaller units made more sense, but others argued that smaller units could not defend themselves.” (P. 62)

The quotation above shows the confusion of the first character in immitating the Western culture. The setting refers to the tense situation because the first character cannot adjust to the West society. The external conflict come from warfare between the migrants and the nativist. This situation makes him confused to stay in West as an internal conflict. It is shown by the following phrase *“and people were questioning what role they had to play”* which means the first character confusion to use the West culture. The confusion come from the first character cannot adjust his self to the West society. It also shows that the migrants have to escape the West who cannot become West people as it is shown through the phrase *“but others argued that smaller units could not defend themselves”*. It shows that he has to fight with the native if cannot blend to the society.

Besides cannot adjust his self to the West culture, the first character also cannot being his homeland people. He had lost his homeland culture. He becomes a mimicry. It is shown through the following quotation below;

“Nadia looked him in the eye. ‘you don’t say your evening prayers? She asked

Saeed conjured up his most endearing grin. ‘not always. Sadly.’ (P. 3)

The quotation above shows the first character is not using his homeland culture. The setting refers to inconvenient situation because he has wasted his culture. The external conflict comes from disrespectful women. This situation make him embrassed as an internal conflict. It is shown through his utterance “*Saeed conjured up his most endearing grin, ‘not always’ sadly.*” which means he is not obedient to his culture. It also shows thathe does not explore his homeland culture.In this situation shows that he is trying to leave his culture. This situation makes him become mimickry because he cannot blend to Western culture and cannot back to his homeland culture.

Another quotation that support the mimickry condition can be seen through the following quotation below;

“-----
He ran a small but efficient organization staffed with volunteers, young men and women, all Saeed’s color or darker, which Saeed too had soon joined, and among these young men and women that Saeed now labored alongside was one woman in particular.”
(P. 78)

“He thought further that here, for him, lay something best not explored at all.” (P. 78)

The setting here refers to the familiarity toward the society because he feels can back his own culture with this society. It is proved that he feels the society looks like his homeland people. It can be seen through the phrase ‘*all Saeed’s color or darker*’ which means he thinks can back to his own culture. It also shows he is immitating the society without explores it as it is shown through the sentence, “*he thought further that here, for him, lay something best not explored at all.*”It explaines that he becomes mimickry situation because he cannot adjust his self to West culture and cannot become his homeland people. he thinks he can back to his homeland culture with praying.

Besides immitating the society who come from his homeland, the first character also married a religious woman who comes from descendant of his homeland as a pointer to his identity. He thinks can back to his own culture with married the woman who comes from descendant of his homeland. It can be seen through the quotation below;

“in the morning when she woke he was looking at her, and he stroked the hair from her face, as he had not done for months, and he said if anyone should leave the home they had built it was him. But as he said this he felt he was

*acting, or if not acting then so confused as to be in capable of gauging his own sincerity. He did think that he ought to be the one to go, that he had reparations to make for becoming close the preacher's daughter.-----
-----“ (p. 84)*

The internal conflict comes from his inconvenient feeling to leave his friend with the new culture. He chooses to get relationship with the woman who comes from descendant of his homeland as it is shown in the phrase, “*he said if anyone should leave the home they had built it was him*”. It shows the first character want to leave the West culture. He becomes mimickry because he does not back to his homeland culture. He cannot call as his homeland people as well because he stay with the descendant of his homeland. He blends to the society who does not the authentic people of his homeland.

Briefly, in war country, many people has wrong perspective to be an immigrant in West. The dominant setting refers to the difficult situation that the first character experiences. The conflict refers to the internal conflict because the difficulties to blend with the culture of Western people. Thats why sometimes the people becomes mimickry. To overcome the conflict the first character shows his identity with leave the west culture and blend with the descendant of his homeland people. It shows the first character become mimickry because his identity cannot said as Western people and not as his homeland people.

1.2 The Second Character

Unlike the first character, the second character ways to show her identity can be seen through her assimilating to the West culture. She changes her lifestyle when she was at university. She assimilate to the West culture. She is being exploited by the nativist. She become a mimickry. She never be a Western people.

Assimilation is the ways that immigrant use to blend with the society. In this analysis, the migrant does not have knowledge to live in a new country. The second character ways to show her identity is trying to blend with the society. It is shown through the following quotation below;

“-----
Her constant questioning and growing irreverence in matters of faith upset and frightened him. There was no physical violence in Nadia's home, and much giving to charity, but when after finishing university Nadia anounces, to her family's utter horror, and to her own surprise for she had not planned to say it, that she was moving out on her own, an unmarried woman, the break involved hard words on all sides, from her father, from her mother, even

*more so from sister, and perhaps most all of all from Nadia herself, such that Nadia and her family both considered her thereafter to be without family.-----
----“ (P. 9)*

Through the quotation above, the setting refers to the tense and inconvenience situation because she was upset. The external conflict comes from the influence of her universities that change her mindset about culture. She wants to leave her family and her culture as the internal conflict. She feels her own culture is too restrictive her as it is shown through the utterance; *“Her constant questioning and growing irreverence in matters of faith upset and frightened him.”* It also shows that she upset to her own culture. Despite she leaves her family and her own culture but she gets ban by her family, as it is shown through her utterance; *“The break involved hard words on all sides”*. It also shows that she gets prohibition from her family because she adopts the West culture.

Another quotation that supports her adaptation is shown through the quotation below;

*“She interrupted him, ‘i don’t pray,’ she said
She continued to gaze at him steadily.
Then she said ‘maybe another time.’” (P.2)*

The setting refers to the discomfort situation and she has inconvenience atmosphere. From the conversation above she feel more comfortable with her new life. The second character approve that she has left her own culture when she was in her homeland. She feel embarrassed about her own culture. That’s why she tries to assimilate the new culture to make she can increase her social status.

Live in the civil war country makes the second character wants to leave her homeland to seek the shelter. She chooses to leave her homeland. She thinks can get the shelter with her assimilating the West culture. In living a new country, she feels never get the shelter, though she thinks can adjust herself to the West culture. She gets a job in the new country but she gets oppression by the native people. It can be seen through the following quotation below;

“One day Saeed and Nadia were returning home with no food but modestly full bellied, after a reasonably good evening of foraging, and she was experiencing the peculiar sweet aftertaste and acidity of mustard and ketchup, and Saeed was looking at his phone, when they heard shouting up ahead and saw people running, and they realized that their street was under attack by a nativist mob, Palace gardens terrace being roiled in a way that belied its name. The mob looked to Nadia like a strange tribe, intent on their destruction, some armed with iron bars or knives, and she and Saeed turned and ran, but could not escape.” (p. 53)

Through the text above, the setting refers to the hard and tense situation which leads into the external and internal conflict. The setting refers to the difficult and the same condition of the high oppression between her homeland and the society. The external conflict comes from the nativist oppression. Then it leads to her mentally unstable as the internal conflict because the second character feels confused about her life as immigrant in London. It is shown by utterance *‘she and Saeedd turned and ran, but could not escape’* which means the second character feels the same of difficult condition of staying in the West. She feels confused to live in West, because she feels can adjust herself to the West society. She is assimilating to the West culture as the utterance *“the mob looked to Nadia like a strange tribe”*. It means she cannot become the same of the West society. She becomes mimicry to the West culture because she cannot adjust her self to the society.

Another quotation that supports her mimicry to the West culture is shown through the following quotation;

“ Together in this group they conversed in a language that was built in large part from English, but not solely from English and some of them were in any case more familiar with the English than were others. Also they spoke different variation of English, different Englishes, and so when Nadia gave voice to an idea or opinion among them, she did not need to fear that her views could not be comprehended, for English was like theirs, one among many” (P. 59)

The setting refers to the difficult situation that the character feels as an immigrant in London. The external conflict comes from the other migrant who has a different accent with the English language. She gets familiar with her language as the internal conflict. She thinks she can attune to the West culture as it is shown by the utterance *“she did not need to fear that her views could not be comprehended, for English was like theirs”*. It means that the second character is being assimilating to the West culture. She feels she can become the Western people. Though, she just adjust her self with another migrant. She never attunes to the West culture.

Become a mimicry to the West culture, the second character gets the oppression of the native people. She is being exploited with nativist. It is shown by the following quotation below;

“As usual, disaster attracted the most outside interest, such as a nativist raid that disabled machinery or destroyed dwelling units nearing completion or resulted in the severe beating of some workers who had strayed too far from camp. Or alternatively the knifing of a native foreman by a migrant or a fight among rival groups of migrant.” (P. 69)

The setting refers to the tense situation of being migrant. The external conflict comes from the migrant who fights among their rival. The fights is caused mentally shock to the migrant as the internal conflict. The second character gets mentally shock of the migrant fights as it is shown through the sentence“*such as a nativist raid that disabled machinery or destroyed dwelling units nearing completion or resulted in the severe beating of some workers who had strayed too far from camp*”. It means the second character gets oppression by nativist. She feels shock of staying in West. She feels the same condition between her homeland and the West. She does not get the shelter in West.

Clearly, being at the crossroad of identity is the difficult choice. The dominant setting refers to the difficult experience that the second character gets. The conflict refers to the external conflict because of the fight of the migrant and native and between migrant and migrant. Thats why living in West is not what the migrants want, because they never get the shelter in the West. The migrant have to blend to the new society. The immigrant is forced to live a differrent life from their homeland. The immigrant need to have the affirmation fo their identity to survive in the newland. The affirmation of their identity give the contribution to form the immigrant’s mind about leaving in the new land. To solve the problem, the second character give the affirmation of her identity to get survive in the new land.

C. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

To be a migrant, human needs to a strong comitment in their identity to survive in the new land. The people must not to stop explore the new things to blend with the new society. The migrant have to learn the culture of the new land without forgetting their homeland culture. The migrant need to adjust themselves to the culture of the new society to survive in the new land. Some people get mimicry because they never explore about the culture of the society. They show off the culture base on what they look without learn about the ulture of the society.

Bibliography

- Barry, P. (2002). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Dia, A. A. (2014). Diversity vs. Difference: A Critical Analysis of Hybridity and Cultural Identity Crisis in the Novels of Cheikh Hamidou Kane and Chinua Achebe. *International journal of english language and translation studies*.
- Guerin, W. L. (2005). *a handbook of critical approaches to literature*. new york: oxford university press.

Hamid, M. (2017). *Exit West*. New York: Riverhead Book.

Klages, M. (2006). *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Continuum.

Klarer, M. (1999). *An Introduction to Literary Studies*. London: Routledge.

Mizutani, S. (2009). Hybridity and History: A Critical Reflection on Homi K. *Kurenai*.

Salahudheen, M.P.V. (2017). 'Exit West' Of Mohsin Hamid: An Analysis In The Light Of Global. *Literary Herald*.

Souissi, R. (2015). Drawing the Human Face of a Homeland: A reading of Khaled Hosseini's Novel; *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountain Echoed*. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*.

Wyver, R. (2018). Mimicry, Mockery and Menace in Swedish International Adoption Narratives. *Borderlands e-Journal*.

“Definition of Crossroad” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/crossroad>

2019. Web. Retrieved on 25 June 2019

“Definition of Identity” <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/identity>

2019. Web. Retrieved on 25 June 2019