

THE CONSTRUCTION OF HYBRID IDENTITY IN PAKISTANI DIASPORIC FICTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KAMILA SHAMSIE AND MOHSIN HAMID

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Annotation. *This article explores the construction of hybrid identity in Pakistani diasporic fiction through a comparative analysis of the works of Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Gloria Anzaldúa, the study examines how the authors represent issues of belonging, displacement, cultural negotiation, and identity formation in an increasingly globalized world. Particular attention is paid to Shamsie's "Burnt Shadows" and "Home Fire", as well as Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" and "Exit West". The analysis demonstrates that both writers portray characters situated between Pakistani and Western cultural spheres, whose identities emerge through continuous processes of adaptation and negotiation.*

Keywords: *hybrid identity, Pakistani diaspora, Homi Bhabha, Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, postcolonialism, Third Space, diasporic fiction.*

Annotatsiya. *Mazkur maqolada Pokiston diasporal adabiyotida gibrid identifikatsiyaning shakllanishi Kamila Shamsi va Mohsin Hamid asarlari qiyosiy tahlili asosida o'rganiladi. Tadqiqot Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall va Gloria Anzaldúa nazariy qarashlariga tayangan holda globallashib borayotgan dunyoda mansublik, migratsiya, madaniy moslashuv hamda identifikatsiyaning shakllanishi masalalarining badiiy ifodalanishini tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqotda Kamila Shamsining "Burnt Shadows" va "Home Fire", shuningdek Mohsin Hamidning "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" hamda "Exit West" romanlariga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Tahlillar shuni ko'rsatadiki, har ikki yozuvchi Pokiston va G'arb madaniy makonlari oralig'ida yashovchi qahramonlarni tasvirlaydi va ularning identifikatsiyasi uzluksiz moslashuv hamda madaniy muzokaralar jarayonida shakllanishini ko'rsatadi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *gibrid identifikatsiya, Pokiston diasporasi, Homi K. Bhabha, Kamila Shamsi, Mohsin Hamid, postkolonializm, Uchinchi makon (Third Space), diasporal badiiy adabiyot.*

Аннотация. *В данной статье рассматривается проблема формирования гибридной идентичности в пакистанской диаспоральной литературе на основе сравнительного анализа произведений Камилы Шамси и Мохсина Хамида. Опираясь на теоретические концепции Хоми К. Бхабхи, Стюарта Холла и Глории Ансальдуа, исследование анализирует способы художественного осмысления вопросов принадлежности, перемещения, культурного взаимодействия и формирования идентичности в условиях усиливающейся глобализации. Особое внимание уделяется романам Камилы Шамси "Burnt Shadows" и "Home Fire", а также произведениям Мохсина Хамида "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" и "Exit West". Анализ показывает, что оба автора изображают персонажей, существующих на пересечении пакистанского и западного культурных пространств, чья идентичность формируется посредством непрерывных процессов адаптации и культурных переговоров.*

Ключевые слова: *гибридная идентичность, пакистанская диаспора, Хоми К. Бхабха, Камила Шамси, Мохсин Хамид, постколониализм, Третье пространство, диаспоральная художественная литература.*

Introduction. *The emergence of Pakistani diasporic literature as a distinct and globally significant literary tradition over the past three decades invites renewed critical*

attention. As Pakistani writers living and working in Britain, the United States, and other Western metropolises have produced novels that span continents, centuries, and cultures, they have collectively fashioned a body of work that interrogates the meaning of identity, home, and belonging from the precarious vantage point of displacement. Among the writers who have most powerfully shaped this tradition, Kamila Shamsie and Mohsin Hamid stand out not merely for their critical and commercial success — both have won or been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize — but for the intellectual depth and formal ambition with which they explore what it means to inhabit multiple cultural worlds simultaneously. The question of hybrid identity — that is, the condition of carrying within oneself the conflicting demands of two or more cultural inheritances — lies at the heart of diasporic experience. As scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy have argued, diasporic subjects are not simply displaced persons mourning a lost homeland; they are active agents in the construction of new, dynamic identities forged at the intersection of cultures.[4] Pakistani diasporic writers, in particular, have been compelled by the events of the post-9/11 world to revisit these questions with urgent new inflections. The heightened visibility of Muslims in Western public discourse, the intensification of surveillance and border regimes, and the proliferation of Islamophobic violence have transformed the already fraught terrain of diasporic selfhood into a minefield of political and existential stakes.

This article undertakes a sustained comparative analysis of how Shamsie and Hamid construct hybrid identity in their fiction. The comparison is illuminating because, despite their shared cultural origins and the overlapping political concerns that animate their work, the two authors diverge sharply in their narrative philosophies and formal approaches. Shamsie's novels are characterized by historical sweep, polyphonic narration, and an attention to the bodily and affective registers of displacement. Hamid's fiction, by contrast, tends toward parable and allegory, stripping narrative down to its essentials to reveal the universal structures of the migrant condition. By reading these two bodies of work alongside each other, we can map more precisely the range of aesthetic possibilities available to the Pakistani diasporic imagination and trace the ideological contours of its engagement with questions of identity, nation, and belonging.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 establishes the theoretical framework, drawing on postcolonial and diaspora studies to define the key terms and concepts. Section 3 offers a focused analysis of Shamsie's construction of hybrid identity, paying particular attention to *“Burnt Shadows”* and *“Home Fire”*. Section 4 turns to Hamid, analysing *“The Reluctant Fundamentalist”* and *“Exit West”*. The conclusion reflects on the broader significance of these texts for our understanding of diasporic literature and postcolonial identity formation.

Theoretical Framework: Hybrid Identity and Diaspora Studies. The concept of hybridity has a long and contested history in postcolonial studies. In its most influential

contemporary formulation, developed by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, hybridity refers not merely to cultural mixture but to the productive ambivalence that emerges when colonial and postcolonial cultures encounter one another in conditions of unequal power.[4] For Bhabha, the "Third Space of enunciation" is the site where meanings and symbols of culture are not fixed but appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew. This space is inherently subversive: it unsettles the authority of both colonial discourse and essentialist nationalism by demonstrating that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation.

Bhabha's framework has been enormously productive for the analysis of diasporic literature, but it has also attracted significant criticism. Several scholars have noted that Bhabha's Third Space, with its emphasis on performative transgression and discursive indeterminacy, tends to celebrate the migrant intellectual's condition of in-betweenness at the expense of attending to the material realities of displacement — the violence, poverty, racism, and grief that attend the lives of most diasporic subjects. Aijaz Ahmad, for instance, famously challenged what he saw as the metropolitan privilege embedded in postcolonial theory's fascination with cultural hybridity, arguing that the celebration of diasporic ambivalence occludes the class positions of those who produce and consume it.[1]

Stuart Hall's theorization of cultural identity offers a useful corrective. In his seminal essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Hall distinguishes between two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first conceives of cultural identity in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective "one true self" hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed "selves." [7]The second — and Hall's preferred formulation — recognizes cultural identity as a matter of "becoming" as well as "being." It belongs to the future as much as the past and is subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. Diasporic identity, for Hall, is a matter of constant production rather than something already formed; it is always in the process of formation through, not outside, representation.

Paul Gilroy's concept of the "Black Atlantic" extends this argument by proposing a diasporic cultural formation that transcends the boundaries of any single nation or ethnic group. [6] For Gilroy, the diasporic experience produces forms of cultural expression — music, literature, art — that are fundamentally hybrid, drawing on multiple traditions and resisting the neat categorizations of national culture. While Gilroy's focus is primarily on the African diaspora, his model has been widely applied to other diasporic formations, including the Pakistani one.

More recently, scholars working specifically on South Asian and Pakistani diasporic literature have developed these frameworks in productive new directions. Vijay Mishra distinguishes between the "old diaspora" of indentured labour and the "new diaspora" of

voluntary migration, arguing that these two formations produce different kinds of diasporic consciousness and cultural production.[11] Ali Nobil Ahmad has emphasized the importance of attending to the specifically Muslim dimensions of Pakistani diasporic experience, noting that the interpellation of Pakistani migrants as "Muslim" subjects — with all the political freight that term carries in the post-9/11 world — has fundamentally reshaped the terrain of identity formation for this community.

Drawing on these frameworks, this article understands hybrid identity in Pakistani diasporic fiction as a dynamic, contested, and politically charged process of self-fashioning that takes place at the intersection of multiple cultural inheritances, political pressures, and representational regimes. Crucially, it attends to both the enabling possibilities and the painful costs of this condition, resisting the tendency to romanticize hybridity while also refusing the nostalgic counternarrative of cultural purity and unambiguous belonging.

Kamila Shamsie: Historical Trauma, Transnational Memory, and the Layered Self. Kamila Shamsie was born in Karachi in 1973 and has lived much of her adult life in London and New York. Her fiction is distinguished by its sweep across historical periods and geographical spaces, its rich, sensory prose style, and its consistent attention to the ways in which the political and the personal intersect in the lives of her characters. While all of her novels engage with questions of identity and belonging, "*Burnt Shadows*" and "*Home Fire*" offer her most sustained and complex explorations of the diasporic condition.

"*Burnt Shadows*" is an extraordinary novel by any measure: it traces the life of Hiroko Tanaka from the bombing of Nagasaki in 1945 through the partition of India and Pakistan, the Cold War, and the post-9/11 security state. Hiroko is a Japanese woman who falls in love with a Pakistani man, Sajjad Ashraf, and follows him from Delhi to Karachi to New York. She carries on her back the literal marks of displacement: keloid scars in the shape of birds, the permanent inscription of the atomic bomb on her body. These scars function throughout the novel as a metonymy for hybrid identity itself — they are the marks of a traumatic encounter between cultures, the bodily trace of history's violence, and a source of both stigma and strange beauty.

What is remarkable about Shamsie's construction of hybrid identity in this novel is the way she refuses to contain it within the boundaries of any single cultural framework. Hiroko is neither straightforwardly Japanese nor Pakistani nor American; she is all of these things and none of them, perpetually in transit between cultural worlds. Her identity is constituted not by any stable essence but by the accumulating weight of her historical experiences and her relationships with others. Shamsie's treatment of identity here resonates strongly with Hall's formulation: identity as becoming, as a continuous process of production through representation and lived experience.[7]

Crucially, Shamsie does not romanticize this condition. Hiroko's hybridity is not simply a source of creative freedom; it is also a source of profound vulnerability and pain. The novel insists on the costs of displacement — the losses, the dislocations, the failures of mutual understanding — while also affirming the possibility of connection across cultural difference. In this respect, “*Burnt Shadows*” participates in what Graham Huggan has called the “postcolonial exotic”: the marketing of cultural difference to Western readers who are invited to consume the spectacle of hybridity.[10] But Shamsie is too politically self-aware a writer to be fully captured by this dynamic; her novel consistently foregrounds the systemic forces — imperialism, nationalism, the war on terror — that produce and constrain diasporic experience.

“*Home Fire*”, Shamsie's retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone* in a contemporary British-Pakistani context, offers a different but related kind of hybrid identity construction. The novel follows three siblings — Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz — and their entanglement with Eamonn Lone, the son of the British Home Secretary. The Pasha siblings are British-born Muslims of Pakistani origin, and the novel relentlessly probes the fault lines of their identity: the gap between their British citizenship and their experience of being racialized as Muslim and therefore potentially suspect; the tension between their loyalty to their family and their obligations as citizens; the impossibility of belonging fully to either the British or the Pakistani cultural worlds that claim them.

What Shamsie achieves in *Home Fire* is a devastating anatomy of what Aamir Mufti has called the condition of “minority” in modernity: the situation of those who are interpellated as belonging to a national community but whose belonging is always conditional, always subject to revocation.[2] The Pasha siblings occupy a Third Space that is not Bhabha's liberating site of cultural negotiation but rather a space of political precariousness and existential vulnerability. Their hybrid identities — British and Pakistani, secular and religious, loyal and suspect — do not offer them freedom; they make them targets. Aneeka's decision at the novel's close, to reclaim her dead brother's body in a public act of grief at the Pakistani consulate in Istanbul, is a performance of hybrid belonging that is at once politically transgressive and personally catastrophic: she refuses the British state's definition of her, but at the price of her own life.

The formal dimension of Shamsie's identity construction is equally important. Her use of multiple narrators — each section of “*Home Fire*” is told from a different character's perspective — enacts at the level of form the multiplicity and instability of diasporic identity. There is no single authoritative vantage point from which the story can be told; each character's perspective is partial, limited by their own position in the social world. This formal polyphony refuses the consolations of a unified narrative and insists instead on the irreducible plurality of diasporic experience.

Mohsin Hamid: Parable, Ambivalence, and the Universalisation of Displacement. Mohsin Hamid was born in Lahore in 1971, has lived in London, New

York, and Lahore at different points in his life, and is therefore, in a literal sense, a product of the kind of hybrid existence his fiction explores. His novels — particularly “*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” and “*Exit West*” — have been widely celebrated for the elegance and economy of their prose, the cleverness of their structural conceits, and the moral seriousness with which they engage the political crises of the contemporary world.

“*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” is structured as a monologue: Changez, a Pakistani man, addresses an unnamed American interlocutor at a café in Lahore, telling the story of his years in New York as a successful Princeton graduate and analyst at a prestigious valuation firm.[9] The novel is a masterclass in the manipulation of narrative perspective: the reader is never quite sure whether Changez is a terrorist or a disaffected professional, whether his American interlocutor is a CIA agent or a tourist, whether the novel is a thriller or a meditation on the psychology of disillusionment. This structural ambiguity is not merely a formal conceit; it enacts the ambivalence of Changez's own identity.

Changez's hybrid identity is constructed in the novel through a process of identification and disidentification with America. When he arrives in the United States as a scholarship student, he is seduced by its promise of meritocracy and individual self-fashioning: “I was, in four and a half years of effort, transformed from a student of limited means into a young professional with every prospect of a glorious career” [8]. His desire to become American is not merely economic; it is psychic. He wants to inhabit the world from the position of the powerful, to escape the constraints of his Pakistani identity and remake himself as a subject of a different kind. This aspiration resonates with what Fanon described as the colonized subject's desire to don the master's language and culture as a means of achieving human recognition.[5]

But the events of September 11, 2001, disrupt this process of identification. Changez watches the towers fall on television and, to his own horror and fascination, finds himself smiling: “I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees”.[8] This moment of ambivalent identification — with the perpetrators of an atrocity against the country he has been trying to join — marks the beginning of Changez's return to his Pakistani self. The post-9/11 world does not allow him to remain in the Third Space of hybrid becoming; it forces a choice between identities that are constructed as mutually exclusive.

Hamid's treatment of identity in this novel is deeply indebted to Frantz Fanon's analysis of the colonial mirror stage, in which the colonized subject is forced to see himself through the eyes of the colonizer and to internalize the racist image that is reflected back. Changez's experience of racial profiling and social exclusion after 9/11 mirrors back to him an identity — Pakistani Muslim terrorist — that he has been trying to refuse. The novel suggests that the construction of hybrid identity is not simply an internal process but is constrained and shaped by the social structures through which identity is assigned and policed.

“*Exit West*” marks a significant shift in Hamid's aesthetic approach. Where “*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” is dense with psychological and political specificity, “*Exit West*” is deliberately spare and parabolic. The novel follows Saeed and Nadia, two young people in an unnamed country engulfed by civil war, who escape through magical doors that open onto different parts of the world. The magical realism of the doors serves a specific ideological function: by removing the logistical obstacles of migration from the narrative, Hamid is able to focus attention on the psychological and relational dimensions of displacement. The doors transform what is usually a story about papers, borders, and dangerous journeys into a meditation on what happens to identity and relationship when people are forced to leave everything they know.

The construction of hybrid identity in “*Exit West*” is notably different from that in “*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*”. Where Changez's hybridity is a matter of cultural negotiation and political interpellation, Saeed and Nadia's is more fundamentally relational and existential. Their identities are constituted through their relationship to each other and to the various places they inhabit — a refugee camp in Mykonos, a house in London, a commune in Marin County — and the novel traces the ways in which displacement both strains and transforms their sense of self. As Saeed becomes more religiously observant in exile, holding onto his Pakistani identity as a form of resistance to the homogenizing pressures of the diaspora, Nadia moves in the opposite direction, embracing her solitary, self-sufficient subjectivity and gradually detaching from the communal structures of belonging that defined her life at home.

Hamid's use of magical realism in “*Exit West*” aligns him with a tradition of postcolonial writing — Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison — that deploys the fantastic as a means of accessing truths that realism cannot easily accommodate. The magic of the doors literalizes the psychological experience of migration: the threshold crossing between one world and another, the sense that on the other side of a certain moment or decision, everything is utterly changed. But the magic also has an ideological dimension: by universalizing the experience of migration — making everyone in the novel, ultimately, a migrant — Hamid implicitly argues for a politics of open borders and global solidarity that refuses the nationalist categories through which migration is usually managed and controlled.

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