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‘‘ Migration is what our species does’’. A study of migration and refugees in Samuel Selvon’s “The lonely Londoners”, and Mohsin Hameed’s “Exist West”

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Abstract

The topic of migration has conquered literature considerably during the last decades especially those writers that want their writings to be considered as the world literature. Also it influenced a number of specialties such as sociology, economic, politics and etc. But as the case of literature the influence is very different since writers across the world particularly from South Asian have written remarkable literary texts in English. Non English writers have created stories which can be an effective ways for exploring migrants’ experience and refugees’ sufferings in countries away from their homelands. This study explores migration and migrants’ experiences since it has an impact on their lives economically and socially too. Migration is not only moving from one country to another but is a complex process that requires to keep the original values then changing some of them and getting used with new values in the host country. The research examines Samuel Selvon’s “*The lonely Londoners*, and Mohsin Hameed “‘Exist west”. The study relies on post-colonial theory to draw deeper analyses and adopts MLA style for documentations, and ends up with the conclusions and the works cited.

Key Words: Exit west, experience, Lonely Londoner, migration, refugees

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"الهجرة هي ما يفعله جنسنا البشري". دراسة عن الهجرة واللاجئين في رواية صامويل سيلفون
" اللندنيون الوحيدون"، ومحسن حميد " الخروج غرباً".

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المستخلص

لنقد تطور موضوع الهجرة في مجال الأدب بشكل كبير خلال العقود القليلة الماضية. كما أثرت على عدد من التخصصات مثل علم الاجتماع والاقتصاد والسياسة وما إلى ذلك. ولكن كما هو الحال في الأدب، فإن التأثير مختلف تمامًا نظرًا لأن الكتاب في جميع أنحاء العالم وخاصة من جنوب آسيا قد كتبوا نصوصًا أدبية رائعة باللغة الإنجليزية. ابتكر كتاب غير إنجليز قصصًا يمكن أن تكون وسيلة فعالة لاستكشاف تجربة المهاجرين ومعاناة اللاجئين في البلدان البعيدة عن أوطانهم. تناول هذه الدراسة تجارب الهجرة والمهاجرين لما لها من تأثير على حياتهم اقتصاديًا واجتماعيًا أيضًا. الهجرة ليست مجرد انتقال من بلد إلى آخر بل هي عملية معقدة تتطلب الحفاظ على القيم الأصلية ثم تغيير بعضها والتعود على القيم الجديدة في البلد المضيف. تبحث هذه الدراسة في كتاب صامويل سيلفون "أهل لندن الوحيدون"، وكتاب محسن حميد "يوجدون الغرب". وتعتمد الدراسة على نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار لاستخلاص تحليلات أعمق وتعتمد أسلوب MLA في التوثيق، وتنتهي بالاستنتاجات والأعمال المستشهد بها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهجرة، التجربة، اللاجئين، اللندنيون الوحيدون، الخروج غرباً.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nearly all people in the world know about the case of migration; as it has been carrying the notion of survival thus it considered one of the features of evolution. Human beings are no exception to this tendency to move from a place to another, looking for a hope to change some bases or factors in their lives (Vijayalayan 17).

Migrants face problems in the new countries, depending on the case of migration, means and outcomes. The process puts the migrants at the risks of homesickness and cultural displacement, and being forced to adopt new cultural conditions. While it is not easy to forget their homeland, in which they were forced to leave; it becomes impossible to survive in new countries where they are going to be treated differently and given new stereotypical images. (Elakkiya 442)

In a novel like *The Lonely Londoner* by a novelist who wrote in English Samuel Selvon, tries to describe the experience of readers across the world by creating the mirror image of the daily live in postwar Immigrant communities of the British capital. Also, the novel based on some of his early life experiences with a group of black immigrants who lived and interacted with him when they newly moved to London.

Another novel by a Diaspora writer, Mohsin Hameed is again an example of the experiences of migrants and refugees. Examining this work the influence of migration is discussed, with a focus of the cultural differences, racial, and economic difficulties in which judge the way of living of the couple Saeed and Nadia to go on in a foreign country because of the civil war in their homeland.

Samuel Selvon, , was born in 1923 in South Trinidad to an Indian father and an Indian-Scottish mother. He graduated from San Fernando's Naparima College in 1938. He was the author of novels, plays, film, television, and radio programs. He left his Country india and he began his literary carer as the fiction editor of the Trinity Guardian's literary magazine until he journeyed to Britain in 1950.

Selvon began writing fiction and poetry while he served in the Royal Navy reserve during World War II. He is perhaps best known for his novels "From a Brighter Sun" and "The Lonely Londoners". Both are findings about the life of Caribbean migrants in Britain, using different experiences to show the fact behind moving and living in a bigger city (Filippi and etal 3).

In London Selvon's short stories and poetry were published in various journals and newspapers, including the London Magazine, New Statesman, and the Nation. He worked with the British Broadcasting Corporation during the 1960's and 1970's to produce two television scripts, Anansi the Spiderman, and Home Sweet India. He also produced numerous radio programmes, and a film version of "The Lonely Londoners". (Michael & Ifeoma 124)

Mohsin Hameed is a Pakistani-British novelist and essayist. Born in Lahore, Pakistan, Hameed spent part of his childhood in the United States before moving back with his family to Lahore. He graduated from Princeton University in 1993 and from Harvard Law School in 1997. While working at a consultancy firm, he wrote his first novel, *Moth Smoke* (2000), which was a hit in India and Pakistan. His second novel, [The Reluctant Fundamentalist](#) (2007), was an international bestseller and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

Hameed's third novel was *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), his fourth was [Exit West](#) (2017), and he has published numerous articles, some of which are collected in *Discontent and Its Civilisations: Dispatches from Lahore* (2014). He published the novel [The Last White Man](#) in 2022. (Mir)

2. SAMUEL SELVON'S "The lonely Londoners"

The Lonely Londoners was the first and most influential book about African-Americans in England, and the black Caribbean migrants who arrived in Britain after decolonization are depicted in great detail and realism in the novel. Selvon focuses on the

experiences of colonial migrants in London, a relatively small area; it is inextricably linked to the greater issues of post-war reconstruction and, not least of all, the decline of the British Empire. It focuses on at the West Indians who came to Britain in the 1950s in pursuit of a better life.

Selvon also highlights the continued control white British citizens have over the formerly colonized West Indian community, especially through racially motivated attacks. In the 1950s, a group of West Indian migrants settle in London, where they experience a number of internal conflicts that Selvon explores. Tensions arise within the community as a result of members' conflicting desires to assimilate into contemporary London culture and maintain ties to their indigenous heritage. The more they try to blend in with modern London's diverse culture, the more they're met with hostility. (Mankhi 48-50)

That is the reality faced by West Indian immigrants arriving in London, one of several barriers and limits to their mobility and freedom (physical, social and political). A reality that clashes with the immigrants' expectations about the 'Big City': a city of dreams, prosperity and streets 'paved with gold'. This idyllic idea of London "granted by imperial tutelage had a much more powerful influence on many of them immigrants than their experience of the actual reality". (Castelo 198)

The protagonist of the novel, is called Moses, travels to London sooner than the other ones thus he is shown earlier than the other characters in the novel. Since he has been settled earlier, so has been a useful source in helping and directing West Indians with finding jobs and good places for living. His heart goodness pushed him to help the newcomers in the harbor and offers advice to when they face problems and was waiting for them with passion. Moses used to remember his first days in London: "But all the same he went out with them, because he used to remember how desperate he was when he came to London for the first time and didn't know anybody or anything." (Eckstein 15)

The novel opens with him travelling to Waterloo station to meet a newly arrived fellow- Trinidadian:

"One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet, Mose Aloetta hop on a number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove to go to Waterloo to meet a fellar who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train"
(Eckstein 6-8)

Thus a strong and disarming sense of nostalgia comes over Moses when he visits Waterloo Station to meet Galahad for the first time and is overwhelmed by memories of his own arrival in the very same station. In this moment, Waterloo's embodiment of "arrival and departure" causes him to experience a swell of emotion so intense that he has

to sit down. Spotlighting the extent to which Moses is deeply affected by watching “people crying goodbye and kissing welcome,” Selvon shows that the idea of transition invites strong emotions for even the most seasoned immigrant, emotions that Moses has clearly repressed until this moment. To get by in London, it seems, he has ignored—or has tried to forget—the memory of home, and of what it felt like to first come to England. (Eckstein 10)

Unlike many of his fellow immigrants, Moses often tries to fight off the nostalgia he feels for his home country and its way of life. He seems to think that full integration into English life means rejecting nostalgia, instead concentrating on the present circumstances even if doing so means acknowledging the harsh realities of immigrant life in London. The narrator takes note of this mentality during a conversation between Moses and Galahad in which, having eaten a good meal of pigeon and rice, the two men speak nostalgically about Trinidad, sharing funny stories about people they both know. After some time, while Galahad is in the middle of a hearty laugh, Moses suddenly becomes sober, feeling guilty and thinking “it not right” to be enjoying himself so much “in these hard times.” In this moment, Moses becomes hyperaware of the juxtaposition between his happy memories and his currently dismal circumstances.

Despite Moses’ aversion to nostalgia, he ultimately allows himself to accept that sometimes nostalgia especially when it’s shared with others has the power to help him thrive in London. In a conversation with Galahad, he remarks, “This is a lonely miserable city, if it was that we didn’t get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell.” (Castelo 192). Sharing good memories with friends, then, can make London feel less lonely and make its brutal realities easier to bear.

Although Moses is often hesitant to speak “old talk”(Eckstein 12) with his friends because he feels that nostalgia doesn’t do anything to make his life better, he also relies on the truth behind these conversations which provide, as made clear by his assertion that he would “suffer like hell” if he didn’t “ get together now and then to talk about things back home” (Castelo 88) with his friends. In this way, Selvon underlines the value of maintaining tight-knit immigrant communities, groups of fellow countrymen who can help sustain each other in a country that otherwise lacks a sense of community and support. Indeed, in response to the lonely isolation of immigrant life, Moses comes together with his friends and listens to their stories, “and he feel[s] a great compassion for every one of them, as if he[has] live[d] each of their lives.” (Eckstein 22)

3. MOHSIN HAMEED “Exist west”

“Exist West” by Mohsin Hamid is his fourth novel in which is a trail of showing Hameed’s message towards the global case concerning the issue of migration and refugees everywhere in this world especially because it’s getting greater in range due to political and economic changes, since he experienced this fact about being abroad and forced to live the different situations and circumstances of the characters even by himself that is why he has been able to deliver this message .

 Mohsin Hamid’s fourth novel marks an early and particularly prominent literary response to sharp increases in the numbers of displaced people during the second decade of the twenty-first century, and to the sense of political and humanitarian crisis that has accompanied these increases. Clearly, works of literary fiction are unable to respond to

geopolitical events with the kind of immediacy possible in fields such as journalism, particularly in the age of digital communications technology. (Perfect 3-7)

Being published in 2017, “Exist West” is a novel that sounds prophetic about Afghan crisis, which saw the Taliban regime take control of the country after the withdrawal of the US troops, causing the pro-American government to collapse and thousands of Afghans to flee abroad. The Americans had invaded Afghanistan in 2001 in response to the 9/11 attacks, in order to wage war on terror, that is, on Osama bin Laden and the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda, who were considered responsible for the attacks and had taken sanctuary there.

In *Exit West* the two protagonists, Nadia and Saeed, are a young couple fleeing from a Muslim country that is never openly mentioned and is devastated by a civil war. Feeble government forces are unsuccessfully trying to neutralize the terroristic and military activity of bands of religious fundamentalists, called “the militants” (Valle 9), who are occupying increasingly larger areas of the country and will end up controlling all the most important cities. The militants, who are also supported by foreign powers, spread a reign of terror, brutally killing anyone contrasting their views, in terms of religious doctrines, prescribed social behaviour, and gender relations. More generally, they are violently enforcing a theocratic cultural and political regime. (Valle 3-5)

Hamid depicts the contemporary migrant and anti-migrant conflict where migrants’ better future and natives’ attitude of non-acceptance of migrants come in direct clash. Parallel comparison and contrast of natives with refugees form the core of the novel. The detailed of exploitation and victimization of refugees with balanced view given to the fear of natives marks its beauty and sensitivity. Refugees have feeling of insecurity and uncertainty as they have left their home country for better prospects and natives are apprehensive as refugees are seen as danger and burden on their land and economic sources. In one of the incidents, refugees occupy an empty building in the sub-urban area of London and natives attack refugees violently with their iron bars or knives. It seems like an attempt to claim their own space in their own country deemed to be usurped by refugees.

Thus, refugees were considered as a source of problem and violence. Hamid presents an impartial viewpoint as an outsider as well as an insider who knows what it is to be a refugee and a native and how their feelings are towards each other. He does not identify refugees belonging to particular religion, country or sect rather they are presented as a universal category of humiliated and degraded beings who demand their rights as human beings. Simultaneously, his unbiased narration of natives’ attempt to secure their space in their own country reflects his keen sensitivity towards current issues. (Farooq & etal 90-93)

The mentioned texts critically examine the exploitation of migrants and refugees in the west. Observing that refugees step towards West for their better future and struggle hard to achieve their freedom only to find themselves caught in the conflict with natives.

The invisible borders and boundaries forced the migrants to bear the pain of alienation, and loss of identity in the initial period. Their ordeal of extreme level and reluctant leaving of birth land and loved ones to find their imaginary home away from their original home bear fruit after fighting back.

But the positive outlook of Hameed in giving individuality to both the characters where they are able to gain their home, identity and belonging along with their hardships make the text a unique one. It brings a new dimension in the study of mobility and identity in trans cultural context advocating global connectivity. The in-depth study of these novels shows the universality of human experience of mobility and international borders disturbing and curbing it. Nevertheless, the trans cultural orientation in life creates a global mosaic of separate entities rooted in transpose forming a complex system of cultural flows to form a kaleidoscope of multiple identities.

4. CONCLUSION

Both texts address the tough life of migrants and their victimization of refugees in West countries. Observing that they turn west for a better future and struggle hard to achieve their freedom while they find themselves caught in conflict with the indigenous people. Hidden or sometimes visible factors forced them to endure alienation and loss of identity in the first time they make it to a foreign country. Their tough trails and their departure from the homeland and loved people to find their fantastical home far away comes to fruition after long resistance. Each text can bring a new direction change about the context of migration and studies about identity and multicultural issues. A deep of these narratives shows how universal is the human experience with the issues like migration and refugees across the world and the internationality behind its borders that helps to disturb and inhibit it.

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