

**T.C.  
ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**



**DISRUPTING THE ORIENTAL REPRESENTATION OF  
REFUGEES IN KHALID HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER AND  
MOHSIN HAMID'S EXIT WEST**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Areej ALKHALAF**

**Department of English Language and Literature  
English Language and Literature Program**

**MAY, 2024**



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## THESIS EXAM REPORT

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that all information in this thesis document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results which are not original to this thesis.



Areej ALKHALAF

## **FOREWORD**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Tülay DAĞOĞLU for the continuous support of my study, her patience, motivation and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. I would like to thank my family, who love and support me in whatever I pursue. I wish to thank my loving mother Feryal Al Mehdawi for her continuous guidance. Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to the soul of my dear father.

May, 2024

Areej ALKHALAF

# **DISRUPTING THE ORIENTAL REPRESENTATION OF REFUGEES IN KHALID HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER AND MOHSIN HAMID'S EXIT WEST**

## **ABSTRACT**

The refugee crisis is more than just a forced displacement from one's own country to another, with all the associated individual and global consequences. It is an issue of representation and identity formation. This depiction has always been founded on a biased vision of the West, similar to Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, which regards the Orient as inferior, static, backward, and violent. Orientalism is based on the belief that the West considered themselves superior to the Orient or the East. In this way, the West can shape and control the portrayal, representation, and description of the eastern people, even if it is unreliable. Drawing on Said's theoretical framework, this study seeks to challenge the oriental image of refugees, specifically Muslim refugees who came from the Middle East, in Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017). It also investigates how refugees' identities have changed and been reshaped due to shifting their locations to highlight a positive, authentic, and vivid portrayal of a powerful and universal model of refugees that challenges the mainstream oriental discourse. Finally, it has been concluded that in both works, the protagonists have succeeded in disrupting the negative depiction and in providing a positive portrayal of modern refugees that contradicts the stereotypical oriental image of them. The study has contributed to enhancing empathy and true understanding of the displaced that disrupt the oriental representation, constructed on the theory of Orientalism.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, Identity formation, Refugee Crisis, Oriental Representation.

# KHALİD HOSSEİNİ'NİN THE KITE RUNNER VE MOHSİN HAMİD'İN EXIT WEST ESERLERİNDE MÜLTECİLERİN DOĞU TASVİRLERİNİN BOZULMASI

## ÖZET

Mülteci krizi, bireysel ve küresel sonuçlarıyla birlikte, kişinin kendi ülkesinden diğerine zorla yer değiştirmesinden çok daha fazlasıdır. Bu bir temsil ve kimlik oluşumu meselesidir. Bu tasvir, tıpkı Edward Said'in Doğu'yu aşağı, durağan, geri ve şiddete meyilli olarak gören Oryantalizm teorisine benzer şekilde, her zaman taraflı bir Batı vizyonu üzerine kurulmuştur. Oryantalizm, Batı'nın kendisini Doğu'dan veya Doğu'dan üstün gördüğü inancına dayanmaktadır. Böylece Batı, doğu halkının temsilini ve tasvirini güvenilir de olsa şekillendirip kontrol edebilmiştir. Said'in teorik çerçevesinden yararlanan bu çalışma, Khalid Hosseini'nin The Kite Runner (2003) ve Mohsin Hamid'in Batıdan Exit West (2017) eserlerinde mültecilerin, özellikle de Orta Doğu'dan gelen Müslüman mültecilerin doğuya özgü imajını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, ana akım doğu söylemine meydan okuyan güçlü ve evrensel bir mülteci modelinin olumlu, özgün ve canlı bir tasvirini vurgulamak için, bu çalışma mültecilerin konumlarının değişmesi nedeniyle kimliklerinin nasıl değiştiğini ve yeniden şekillendiğini de araştırmaktadır. Son olarak her iki eserde de kahramanların olumsuz tasviri bozmayı başardıkları ve modern mültecilerin kalıplaşmış doğulu imajıyla çelişen olumlu bir tasviri sağlamayı başardıkları sonucuna varılmıştır. Çalışma, Oryantalizm teorisi üzerine inşa edilen oryantal temsili bozan yerinden edilmişlere dair empatinin ve gerçek anlayışın geliştirilmesine katkıda bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Oryantalizm, Kimlik oluşumu, Mülteci Krizi, Doğu Temsili.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- BCG** : Bostan Consulting Group
- PESTLE** : Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental
- ROA** : Return on Assets
- ROE** : Return on Equity
- SWOT** : Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats



## **I. INTRODUCTION**

“No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark” (Shire, 2011).

The concepts of Refugee, Orientalism, Oriental Representation and Identity are the keys that lay the groundwork for this study. Linking them with each other encourages us to think critically and ask the following questions: Who is exactly a refugee? Or what makes someone a refugee? Why is this word frequently used in conjunction with the word crisis? Other fundamental questions are: What exactly is meant by the terms Identity, Orientalism, and the Oriental Representation? Finally, in order to get to the heart of this study's main argument, we need to ask: how the identity can be reshaped as a result of displacement? How the oriental representation of the refugees can be disrupted, despite being portrayed in a negative oriental stereotypical image? The preceding questions establish a link to the core of this study, and they will eventually be answered through the analysis in the following chapters. The definitions of the previously mentioned concepts, like refugee, Orientalism, and identity, are presented in the following paragraphs.

Oriental representation is based on western conceptions of Eastern people as strange, backward, weak, exotic, fundamentalists, and a threat to the host countries to which they have migrated. Disrupting that oriental representation of refugees in the selected works who came from the Middle East as *Orients* means uncovering all the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the real *Orients*, as well as uncovering all the prescribed set of characteristics and stereotypes that reinforce the notion of othering.

However, it should be explained the precise meaning of oriental representation before defining the other concepts. Said (1978, p. 96) noted that Orientalism as a way of thinking often created big ideas about the Orient from certain, separate details. For instance, a look at one ancient Arab writer from the tenth century could lead to big assumptions about how people think in Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia. This shows that people who study orientalist thought often jump from certain events in a culture or history to broad, frequently wrong ideas about the East and this

is a form of oriental portrayal or representation.

Said (1978) stresses that Orientalism thought the East was always the same and all in one, very different from the West. This part of his theory criticizes the habit of looking at eastern countries as always the same and not changing. It blames this on a focus on how different western societies are, making them seem complex and active. This fixed view overlooks the changes in history, different cultures, and differences within these groups (p. 96).

This thesis focuses on the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century refugee crisis, especially in the Middle East region, to show how they can be represented in a more, optimistic and powerful image using the protagonists as representatives of this model of modern refugees. The protagonists are taken from Khalid Hussein's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017). This thesis is qualitative research based on a literature review. It centralizes on two novels: *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khalid Hussein, an American Afghani writer, and *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid, a British Pakistani writer. The selected novels were written originally in English.

This introduction will provide an overview of the whole study by first presenting a background and context of the topic, highlighting its importance as a crucial phenomenon in the current era, along with the key concepts and definitions that will be used throughout the whole study. This will be followed by a brief review of relevant literature from previous studies conducted in the same selected works in order to fill the gap that has not yet been filled by the previous studies. Then the main argument of the research, followed by its aims, will be stated. After that, the current study's theoretical and practical contributions to the field of literature will be highlighted, and finally, a general organization of each chapter of this thesis will be provided.

The refugee crisis of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has become the main global issue in our current situation and the most painful diasporic reality the world has so far experienced and researched through refugee literature. The situation of refugees has created economic, political, social, and cultural pressures, and the matter has captured the world's attention and has become the most debated topic at government and global institution dinner tables. The effects of refugee issues have grown considerably, particularly in the recent decade, with more refugees expected in the

future. The global phenomenon of migration, whether forced or voluntary, has a variety of effects on the lives of migrants, including economic, sociopolitical, cultural, and other effects. It is more than just going from one place to another; it is an intricate process of holding the original values and accepting novel values in the destination country. As a result, studying the refugee crisis through literary works with an emphasis on refugee or migrant narratives is a useful way of exploring their lived experiences and related challenges, primarily the question of identity formation. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to recognize how refugees struggle to cope with the cultural and other changes they face in alien or foreign lands, how they struggle to set themselves free from the suppressed status imposed on them, and how some xenophobia practices against them lead to a tensioned relationship with the natives, particularly when this type of migration is from the East (developing countries) to the West (the United States and European countries). Both novels are true reports in which the novelists realistically document and show the challenges and terrible experiences. This makes them a good example for studying the plight of refugees, besides their ability to portray the transformational journey of the protagonists, which allows readers to connect it with refugees' identity formation in order to demonstrate how their identities are reshaped and reconstructed through a developmental process while going from homeland to alien place. Therefore, conducting this study will shed more light on the issue of refugee crisis, their representation and identity transformation.

To begin, and to answer the question, what exactly is a refugee? The term refugee or refugees is defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as "persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection" (UNHCR, 2016). In answer to a question: What is the refugee crisis? An appropriate answer can be found in the following lines:

There are more people on the move than ever before. Every minute, 30 people around the world are newly displaced. Half of the world's refugees are children and thousands take flight without the protection of parents or other family members. Most people on the move are from poor countries, and most seek safety in nearby developing countries or within their own country's

borders. The communities who welcome them are often struggling to survive themselves. Forced to leave behind jobs, personal belongings and loved ones, vulnerable people fleeing conflict and poverty urgently need shelter, food and water (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), 2023).

Although we have a general understanding of the issue of the refugee crisis, we need to ask: Why is the refugee crisis a major problem? The answer is simply that it is not due to the migrants or their desire to flee. In reality, the needs of the migrants themselves are frequently the most pressing concern in the refugee crisis. The challenges and obstacles they face in displacement include language barriers, the inability to find legal work, inadequate living circumstances (often in tented refugee camps), and sometimes sexual abuse and psychological trauma. The burden put on host countries, particularly developing ones, is also one of the main challenges facing governments as well as natives of the host countries. Thomas Nail, in his article *Migrant Cosmopolitanism*, describes the forced migration of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He states:

The Twenty-first century will be the century of the migrant. At the turn of the twenty-first century, there were more migrants than ever before in recorded history. Today there are over 1 billion migrants. Each decade, the percentage of migrants as a share of total population continues to rise, and in the next twenty-five years, the rate of migration is predicted to be higher than in the last twenty-five. More than ever, it is becoming necessary for people to migrate due to environmental, economic, and political instability. In particular, climate change may even double international migration over the next forty years. What is more, the percentage of total migrants who are nonstatus or undocumented is also increasing, thus posing a serious challenge to democracy and political representation (Nail, 2015, p. 187).

One of the main reasons that makes the refugee crisis a more complicated issue in the western world is the notion of uncertainty about whether a refugee comes to live as a peaceful individual in the western land or as a source of threat to the host nations. Eugene Quinn, in his journal article titled *The Refugee and Migrant Crisis: Europe's Challenge* (2016) states, “Forced migration is complex and challenging for all concerned. The call to EU citizens to welcome the stranger may jostle with a real uncertainty as to whether the stranger in question comes in peace or to cause harm”

(Quinn, 2016, p.1). Refugees' suffering for being strangers in alien lands has caught the world's attention as well. Maher Al Kasem, in his article *Orientalism Redux: Unheard Voices of Syrian Refugees in Exit West*, illustrates that meaning:

It is not the man-made barbed wire borders that trap refugees; rather, the psychosocial, socio-political, and socioeconomic and illusory borders that fuel hate against the other, thus generating ideologically yet emotionally charged mindset that scare off refugees and migrants (Al Kasem, 2022, p. 120).

The impacts of the refugee crisis on the host countries have usually been negative, as previously mentioned, but on the other side, what has also captured the world's interest are the effective and positive roles of refugees in some businesses. Paolo Verme, a lead economist who specializes in forced displacement affairs, emphasizes this idea. He says:

Local landlords, entrepreneurs, producers, and suppliers of goods and services are likely to experience a surge in income, which can lead to an expansion of their businesses and an overall growth in household income. In economic terms, these are referred to as "expansionary effects" of the economy (Verme, 2023).

In addition to Verme's view, refugees can contribute to host countries in a variety of ways. They frequently offer valuable talents, activities, and variety in culture to their host community, which can enrich it. Many refugees have advanced degrees and excellent professional abilities that can benefit the economy. They are also able to provide new insights and breathe new life into old ideas. Furthermore, refugees can aid in the construction of links among diverse groups, promoting tolerance and cooperation.

Another supporting view of the refugee crisis's impacts on host countries from an economic perspective is what was mentioned in a journal article titled *What is refugee history, now?* As illustrated in the following lines:

Refugees are and have been economic actors and agents in different local, regional and global contexts. The economic components of refugee history are varied, and they include not only state imperatives but also the broad dynamics of the international business cycle. Katy Long points out that in the

1920s and early 1930s Western governments were disposed to accept refugees based on economic criteria, in effect treating them as migrants when they were needed to replenish the labour force (Banko et al., 2022).

The refugee crisis is always linked with the occident-orient relationship through the representation of refugees which is based on the orientalist perspective by the West against the East in order to represent refugees as inferiors, dehumanized, backwards, and dependent on others. Edward Said defines Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident.” (Said, 1978, p. 2). His definition is the key to the concept of othering, which, according to Said, is based on the idea of studying the others (the East) as inferiors after dividing the world into a binary opposition structure through attributing negative traits to the Orientals, and as a result, it has become a dominant public discourse by the West against the East.

In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said presents this negative western dominant discourse about the East as he states:

And yet, one must repeatedly ask oneself whether what matters in Orientalism is the general group of ideas overriding the mass of material—about which who could deny that they were shot through with doctrines of European superiority, various kinds of racism, imperialism, and the like, dogmatic views of "the Oriental" as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction? (Said, 1978, p. 8).

Said shows how orientalist ideologies by the West have shaped the world they want about the East and how these misconceptions of the Orient perpetuate views of Oriental people as inferior, subservient, and in need of saving. As a result, this worldview they have created justifies western colonialism and imperialism. In his book, Said also shows the view of the Orient by the West, as he states, “The Orient appeared lamentably underhumanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric, and so forth” (Said, 1978, p. 150). Therefore, based on Said’s theory, there were many literary works that have been analyzed in the scope of his theory of Orientalism by focusing on the oriental representation of the East by the West, which has created a dark image of the Orient and later of the immigrants as well.

Despite this dark image, the growing crisis has opened the door to a modern

view of refugees, not as a burden on the shoulders of the host countries but rather as powerful citizens. Therefore, instead of representing refugees through the lens of a western mindset within the oriental representation and as a reason of political, economic, and social pressure, they can be represented and analyzed as a model of modern, powerful, productive, and independent citizens. Therefore, presenting a model of oriental characters capable of participating in common human development and disrupting the stereotypical image of Orientals and refugees, whether Muslim male or female, is the best way to show an authentic image of oriental Muslim refugees capable of crossing social, cultural, and political barriers and creating new values and identities. As a result, disrupting the oriental representation of refugees, particularly those who are Muslims and came from the Middle East, and presenting an authentic image of them is the most effective way to overcome cultural conflicts and build homogeneous communities in today's globalized world.

Furthermore, eliminating misrepresentation of refugees will help in challenging the stereotypical image of them not only as refugees, but also as Muslims. This can be accomplished by humanizing and diversifying the characters, demonstrating the actual image of Islam as a religion of peace rather than violence, and avoiding oversimplification, generalization, and labeling all Muslims as fundamentalists. Eventually, this will promote the culture of coexisting, living together, and dealing with one another as humans rather than WE and THEY or US and THEM, because we are all connected, and we share the same planet.

The refugee crisis as a journey of individual transformation, cannot be separated from the reconstruction of human identity, particularly cultural identity, because the hardship of refugees has a profound impact on their identity reconstruction. As a result, it is difficult to find a refugee who has not been influenced by this significant social phenomenon. This brings us to the conclusion that the struggle refugees experience in the new places where they settled has given rise to new forms of identities that allow some refugees to be more dependent, hybridized, and, in most cases, more developed. In other words, their identity is transformed because of displacement and all the barriers they have experienced, such as language, culture, religion, and other social challenges.

Before diving into a more in-depth analysis, it is vital to define identity. In its broadest sense, identity refers to how we perceive ourselves and others. It is a

combination of personality qualities, values, and physical appearance that differentiates one individual or group from another. To summarize, our self-perception is influenced by numerous elements, such as culture, religion, and so on. To be more academic, if we take the definition of identity from the linguistic level, Cambridge defines it as “the fact of being, or feeling that you are, a particular type of person, organization, etc.; the qualities that make a person, organization, etc. different from others” (“Meaning of Identity,” 2023). In addition to that, some other scholars presented many definitions of identity and cultural identity, one of those who presented a good definition of the concept of cultural identity, is Anne Milne. He presented two definitions by Bennett and Phinney:

Cultural or ethnic identity refers to the degree to which a person feels connected with a racial or cultural group (Bennett, 2004, p. 862). Cultural identity is described by Phinney (1996, cited in Bennett, 2004) as a complex cluster of factors, "including self-labelling, a sense of belonging, positive evaluation, preference for the group, ethnic interest and knowledge, and involvement in activities associated with the group (Milne, 2017, p. 48).

According to the previous definition, the primary meaning of the word identity is a sense of belonging to a given culture, nation, society, community, ethnic group, or organization. In the case of a refugee or migrant who integrates into a new multicultural group, they have the opportunity to construct a new identity. This type of person is not only attached to or belongs to the local culture and has affiliation to his or her roots, but he or she could also have a sense of universal belonging, be open to others, and eventually could create a hybrid identity. Here it is good to mention a definition of one of the theorists who has made a contribution to the concept of identity, Amin Maalouf, who stated in his book *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*:

Each individual's identity is made up of a number of elements, and these are clearly not restricted to the particulars set down in official records. Of course, for the great majority these factors include allegiance to a religious tradition; to a nationality sometimes two; to a profession, an institution, or a particular social milieu. But the list is much longer than that; it is virtually unlimited (Maalouf, 2003, p.10).

Maalouf's main argument regarding identity is that humans have their own identities

based on a collection of identification features and affinities that cannot be listed. So, according to Maalouf, identity is a complex term with no single standard definition, which, in my opinion, makes it simpler to be reformed or reconstructed during the transformational process that refugees or migrants go through.

The western world's perception of migrants has long been based on oriental representations of the refugees as inferior, exotic, the Other, and a source of threat. Therefore, studying the refugee crisis might serve as a mirror to reflect the interaction between the West (host countries or dominant communities) and the East (refugees), which resembles the relationship between colonizers and colonized. Furthermore, the refugee crisis is inevitably linked to identity formation, which cannot be separated from the state of being a refugee, so the process of identity reconstruction is a fundamental issue that should be highlighted in the selected works of this study because the external and internal suffering that refugees experience plays a significant role in forming their identities.

Some previous related studies, mostly articles, have discussed the issues of migration, identity, and refugees and their position in the host countries, with a focus on the two selected novels. For example, in a journal article under the title *Crisis of Cultural Identity in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner* (2021) by Adhikary, the researcher tries to sketch the cultural hybridity of Muslim people in America who became refugees because of the violence in Afghanistan. In this article, the author focuses on the issue of cultural identity and how it has influenced the identity formation of the main characters of the novel. The researcher in this article connects the main cause of this issue with Afghanistan as a country of multicultural ethnic groups, which is the primary cause of the cultural crisis. According to the researcher's perspective on the concept of cultural crisis:

Cultural Crisis is one of the most used terms in postcolonial studies. It commonly refers to an incident that leads to a dangerous situation, affecting individual and society as a whole. Since culture has a varied connotation varying from personal to the collective frame of life, cultural crisis may also appear in different fields like education, politics, human resource management etc. (Adhikary, 2021, p. 182).

Here, what should be emphasized is that identity crisis is a result of cultural crisis, which occurs when a person navigates among different cultures, which can be

difficult and result in identity crisis causing a sense of loss, confusion, and sometimes a struggle to maintain the local identity despite trying to be integrated within the new multicultural community. This ongoing struggle to reconcile two or more cultures generates a cultural identity crisis, which may be quite dangerous if not handled. It is critical to understand that one does not have to adhere to any of society's norms or be restricted to one specific culture. Any individual can design a style of life and values that are consistent with his or her principles and priorities, taking into consideration and respecting others' differences.

*At The Crossroads of Identity In Mohsin Hamid's Novel Exit West (2020)* by Randa and Anwar is a study concerned with the issue of being at the crossroads of identity; it shows how far both protagonists exposed that issue. In this article, the authors discuss the issue of identity when a person exposes the issue of being at the crossroads of human identity and show how the protagonists (Saeed and Nadia) as young refugees trying to merge with societies in order to attain their identity. From my perspective, this study demonstrates the concept of hybridity: when a person or refugee, as in the case of *The Kite Runner* and *Exit West*, is confronted with cultural diversity, he or she must choose between continuing to use their culture or adopting new values and perspectives, so in such a case they acquire a new form of hybridized identity. To summarize, Mohsin Hamid's story not only exposes the hardship of refugees but also demonstrates how the protagonists each have their own technique of obtaining their identities and to what extent they have succeeded in integrating with the communities they encounter along their displacement trips, and this is also applied to *The Kite Runner*.

Novels such as *The Kite Runner* and *Exit West* expand our understanding of migration and the experiences of migrants and refugees, implying that as individuals begin to observe the plight of refugees from various perspectives as a way of creating a universal conversation rather than as a source of conflict, which emphasizes the concept of coexistence and tries to achieve a greater understanding of other human beings by transcending borders and barriers, A research scholar whose name is Jaspreet Singh asserts my idea in his article *Envisioning Co-Existence: Exploring Responses to Migration in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West* (2019). He states, "It [the phenomenon of migration in *Exit West*] represents an exit from the policy of conflict. It propounds the idea of coexistence as the only plausible solution for the

survival and betterment of humanity” (Singh, 2019, p. 1818). The researcher depicts the conflicts that face migrants and the alternatives to resolve them as they appear in Hamid’s *Exit West*.

As previously stated, coexistence is the key to developing a homogeneous community, but this cannot be achieved with a continuing representation of a dehumanized image of refugees; thus, it is critical to shed light on a humanized image of them. Humanizing refugees in literary works means portraying refugees in a way that emphasizes their value as human beings rather than portraying them as victims of their political situations or giving them negative traits. An example of the humanized image is portraying them as modern individuals who use communication technology, like social media, to stay connected with the rest of the world despite the problems and hardships they face during and after migration. This shows their ability to create new electronic communities in the virtual world while being obliged to live in confined geographical territories they did not choose to dwell in, as opposed to the world of social media. Humanizing refugees in a literary work can help to bridge the divide between "us" and "them," as well as enhance readers' understanding, empathy, and appreciation for refugees. This is what Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* does, in which he portrays the protagonists Nadia and Saeed as a modern cosmopolitan model of refugees, with their desire to use social media as much as their demands for basic necessities like food and shelter. In this respect, a study conducted by a scholar Ani Gazazyan under the title *Humanization of the Refugee as the Modern Subject in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West*, the protagonists are analyzed as modern refugees that Hamid humanizes in his work. In other words, the researcher spots the light on the ways that Mohsin Hamid uses to portray both of the protagonists as humanized characters and a type of modern-day refugee. He also emphasizes the role of technology, such as social media, in recognizing refugees as modern individuals. The following lines are part of the researcher’s analysis, showing the way he analyzed to portray the protagonists in a humanized way:

Hamid uses technology as a mechanism of the modern condition when allowing his characters to communicate with loved ones and connect with the outside world but strips them of their humanity when depicting them in the fictional form of media, naturally reflecting on modernity. Hamid both contradicts and affirms his beliefs that technology can benefit and alienate

society in the modern world, especially with its rapid advancements (Gazazyan, 2023, p. 4).

Based on the previous related studies and other studies conducted on the issues of refugees and their identity, there was not sufficient analysis that offered a new representation of refugees. Thus, this study tries to distinguish itself through a detailed examination and analysis based on disrupting the oriental representation of them and to show how protagonists' identities are reconstructed as a result of their displacement. This will be done by representing them not as strangers or passive individuals but rather as individuals who are enjoying cultural and social diversity with the ability to create new identities and as independent, powerful, and diversified Muslims in the foreign lands they have been settled in.

The study will explore how the protagonists of both novels as refugees represent a model of powerful modern refugees and how they have succeeded in disrupting the dominant oriental representation of refugees that always portrays them negatively. Also, the study tries to prove how they have succeeded in creating new forms of identities as an inevitable result of their exposure to cultural, social, and other forms of diversity. Therefore, my study tends to show the productive role and the positive representation of refugees in the modern era and their contribution to the community they have become part of as moderate Muslims not fundamentalists by choosing the protagonists as representative models.

The object here is to present and provide an alternative representation of refugees in comparison with the dominant oriental public discourse. Furthermore, the study explores the protagonists' suffering as representatives of a broader refugee crisis and the struggle they face to get out of the suppressed status imposed on them to explore how this has affected their identity reconstruction. The study contributes to literature by offering analysis that could re-conceptualize understanding of orientalism in the two selected works.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with the refugee crisis and the theoretical background of the study, along with the key concepts related to it. The first section of the first chapter includes a brief overview of the refugee crisis by presenting a historical background. Then, there is a focus on the major refugee crises that occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The main facts, reasons, and consequences of the crises are included. There is also a

glimpse into diasporic studies and the main approaches and theorists who work in this field. The second section deals with the theoretical background and key concepts. This part provides an illustration of the key concepts of the study, with a mention of the major representatives who work in the fields of identity formation theories. This section includes the main concepts the study is based on, which are oriental representation within the scope of Edward's Said's theory of Orientalism. The aim here is to provide a general understanding of the oriental representation of refugees. This will be followed by concept of Identity by providing an elaboration of the mentioned concept.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* within the scope of Orientalism. This will be done through disrupting the oriental representation of refugees, in particular those who came from third-world countries to show how Khalid Hosseini has challenged the stereotypical oriental image of the refugees. Finally, there will be a greater focus on disrupting the oriental representation of refugees who are Muslims, and the reason behind this part of the analysis is that in both novels, the protagonists are Muslim refugees.

The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of Hamid's *Exit West* within the scope of Orientalism. This will be done through disrupting the oriental representation of refugees, particularly those who came from third-world countries to show how Mohsin Hamid has challenged the stereotypical oriental image of the refugees in particular the Muslim ones. There will be a greater focus on disrupting the oriental representation of refugees who are Muslims. Finally, in the conclusion, this last part concludes the discussion mentioned in the previous chapters and connects the previous analysis with the hypothesis of the study in order to prove that the questions of the study have been answered.

## **II. THE REFUGEE CRISIS AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **A. The Refugee Crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> and Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The concepts of refugee, the refugee crisis, and migration have recently become a center of debate all around the world. The acceleration of forced migration and refugee flows in particular from the Middle East region have caused a marked change and transformative effect in all aspects of life, especially on the host nations that have experienced these massive forms of forced movements of refugees. The term refugee has emerged as a problem that needs a solution after the first world war in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and as a result of the destruction of the second world war. During that period, a number of international organizations have been established to create efforts that care about displaced people and control the migration process. One example here is the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950, which is also known as the UN Refugee Agency. The UN Refugee Agency defines a refugee as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (*Who we Protect Refugees*, 2023). According to the preceding description, a refugee is someone who has experienced the actual sense of loss, persecution, danger, racism, prejudice, and the confusion of belonging to two or more cultural communities. Some refugees decided not to return to their homelands, despite their loyalty to their birthplaces; besides that, they are suffering from their inability to fully integrate into the new society; therefore, they are caught in the middle. In a general sense, refugees are forced migrants who have left their homes or states forcefully when they have no other choice. Another definition of the term could broaden our understanding of the plight of refugees. Her definition is taken from the political philosopher Hannah Arendt in her essay *We Refugees*, where she states the following:

A refugee used to be a person driven to seek refuge because of some act committed or some political opinion held. Well, it is true we have had to seek refuge, but we committed no acts and most of us never dreamt of having any radical opinion. With us, the meaning of the term “refugees” are those of us who have been so unfortunate as to arrive in a new country without means and have to be helped by Refugee Committees (Arendet, 1943, p. 69).

Hannah's explanation highlights how difficult it is to be a refugee attempting to find peace, security, and shelter. It is always associated with the idea of engaging with other people who are neither kind nor friendly to individuals who have come to their land for the first time. Her statements emphasize the difficulties migrants face when adapting to a new society and the extent to which they expect not to be accepted into the new community, creating a sense of alienation and inferiority. As a result, the objective here is not a matter of physically leaving one's homeland for another land and facing the terrible experiences while migrating. It is the consequences that follow their journey, including social, linguistic, and cultural challenges, in addition to the traumas that can be added to it.

Refugees, who have been defined according to international refugee laws, are of two types: those who are forced to cross the borders of their country and those who have not crossed the international borders. In this case, they are internally displaced. According to UNHCR, an IDP is “an internally displaced person, or IDP, is someone who has been forced to flee their home but never crosses an international border. These individuals seek safety anywhere they can find it” (The UN Refugee Agency, 2023).

The two terms, migrant and refugee, are not the same. The UN Migration Agency, International Organization for Migration (IOM), [defines a migrant](#) as:

Any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his or her habitual place of residence, regardless of the person's legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, what the causes for the movement are, and what the length of the stay is (IOM, 2023).

UNHCR's statistics database at mid-2023 has shown that: “More than 110 million individuals have been forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of

persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. We are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record” (*Refugee Data Finder*, 2023).

According to UNHCR’s Refugee Population Statistics Database, at the end of 2022, there were 108.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide; 62.5 million are internally displaced people; 35.3 million are refugees; and 5.4 million are asylum-seekers. (*Refugee Statistics*, 2023). The UNHCR states that 83% of refugees worldwide reside in developing countries. 52% of all refugees in the world came from just three countries by the end of 2022: Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. Turkey hosts more refugees than any other country (*Refugee Facts*, 2023). According to UNHCR, "Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees, with 3.6 million people, followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran with 3.4 million people (UNHCR, 2023).

Since the current study focuses on the Middle East region, the conflicts in the countries of this region have contributed to the emergence of the refugee crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and as a result, the neighboring states have faced the biggest challenges in absorbing the impacts of such a crisis. Some of those impacts have economic effects, as many countries do not have the ability to absorb this rapid increase in population. Therefore, the influx of refugees in the developing states has led to a lack of services, which causes a strain on the country’s resources.

As stated in the book *The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa* (2016), “A refugee crisis bigger than any since World War II is affecting the MENA region, Europe, and beyond, straining economies and social systems. Given the significant political polarization, economic inequality, and rapid population growth in the region” (Rother et al., 2016, p. 5). This indicates to what extent conflicts and civil wars have affected the whole region. One of the clear consequences of the refugee crisis is the refugee camps. According to [UN](#) estimates, approximately 6.6 million people live in refugee camps. There are at least 500 refugee camps in the world” (*Five Largest Refugee Camps in the World and How People Live There*, 2023). The negative impacts of the refugee crisis on the refugees themselves range from their struggle to accept their new life and to assimilate into the new culture, especially in the case of living in a western culture. They also hold psychological traumas as a result of the horrible situations they face in their war-torn countries, like sexual violence and exploitation as well.

Many refugee crises have occurred throughout old and modern history, and all those crises share similar reasons. Some of these reasons are man-made, connected with political unrest, which has created forced migration; other reasons are related to environmental or climate changes or natural disasters that forced millions to leave their lands to survive. Forced migration is also a result of economic benefits like the slave trade during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some facts and examples of each one of these reasons will be mentioned in the following lines.

Political unrest and other human conflicts, such as cultural and religious conflicts, have forced millions of people around the world to leave their places of settlement, either inside or outside their countries' borders, to flee from armed conflicts, violence, genocides, ethnic cleansing, religious discrimination, and violations of human rights. A good example here is the Rohingya, who are a Muslim minority in Myanmar and are considered victims of ethnic and religious discrimination. As mentioned by UNHCR, “the Rohingya have suffered decades of violence, discrimination, and persecution in Myanmar. Their largest exodus began in August 2017 after a massive wave of violence broke out in Myanmar’s Rakhine State, forcing more than 742,000 people to seek refuge in Bangladesh” (*Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained*, 2023).

Climate change and natural disasters are detrimental reasons that forced millions of people from different parts of the world to flee in search of survival. Those reasons include floods, droughts, and famines, and this type of displaced person is called a climate refugee. In an article titled *Climate refugees: The world’s silent crisis*, it is stated that “At present, there are three times more "climate refugees" than people forced to flee due to armed conflict, and their number is forecast to top 200 million by 2050." Also "In 2020, 30.7 million people became climate refugees, three times more than the number affected by armed conflict and violence, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, a Geneva-based research organization” (Hosokawa & Kidera, 2022). According to UNHCR, the UN’s refugee agency, an average of [21.5 million people](#) were forcibly displaced each year by weather-related events, such as floods, storms, wildfires, and extreme temperatures, between 2008 and 2016. This climate-forced migration is expected to surge in the coming decades, with forecasts from an international think tank, the IEP, predicting that [1.2 billion people](#) could be displaced globally by 2050 due to climate

change and natural disasters (McAllister, 2023, para. 3).

## **1. Historical Background**

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to the brutality and destruction of the first and second world wars, consequences followed, such as famines, starvation, and extreme poverty, which were immediate reasons for the emergence of the refugee crises around Europe. As stated in the *Introduction: Refugees and the Nation-State in Europe* (2014) article, “Some 60 million Europeans were uprooted during and after the Second World War, more than 10 times as many as had been part of the refugee movements accompanying and following the First World War” (Frank & Reinisch, 2014, p. 478). The early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the first and second world wars, witnessed the formation of nation-states, including the transition from imperial powers like the Ottoman Empire, which was a multiethnic and social empire. The emergence of separate states led to the exclusion of many people from being citizens of the new states because of differences in languages, religions, beliefs, race, and ethnicity that led to ethnic cleansing and the committing of many genocides. These actions led to the creation of more homogeneous nation-states. The next historical phase was after the Second World War, when millions of people were uprooted from their homes in some parts of the world, like the period of creation of the state of Pakistan during 1947–1948, when there was a widespread of violence and conflicts between different ethnicities to combat, like Muslims against Hindus or Sikhs. The result was that 14 million people were displaced.

In order to respond to the ongoing refugee crisis, there was a need to form international relief organizations. UNRWA, which was established in 1949, was one of them. Many principles were created to protect refugees and draw solutions for their crisis. The 1960s saw the rise of labor migration when states had started to recover from the economic consequences of the first and second world wars. In the European countries, there was a need for cheap labor; therefore, people from Latin America, West Africa, and other areas started to migrate to the UK, USA, and France in a search for a better life. The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were periods of decolonization; thus, refugee movements, especially from the Middle East or the former colonies of Europe, started to move more and more to the West. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the era that witnessed the fall of communism in the 1990s and the rise of civil wars and conflicts in the region of the past Soviet Union, violence has

increased, forcing many to flee their homes.

The refugee crisis has continued to be a major feature of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the war on terror and the western occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq have led to more refugees leaving their countries seeking peace, either in neighboring countries or western countries. In the last decade, the refugee crisis has grown and increased the number of forcefully displaced people, which is a result of political or religious oppression and the widespread of authoritarian regimes such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda, and other radical militant groups. All of that caused more and more violations of human rights, criminal activities, armed conflicts, political unrest, and more destruction of the economy in the Middle East region, and eventually, this has increased the suffering and hardships of people from these areas, so some of them have escaped internally, while others have succeeded in moving out to neighboring or western countries in order to obtain a stable life.

In addition to the previous short historical background, there should be a mention of two of the largest and most prominent refugee crises that have occurred in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21st century, and since one of the novels this study is focusing on revolves around the refugee crisis in Afghanistan, there will be a glimpse into the history of this crisis.

Afghan refugees are the third-largest displaced population in the world after Syrian and Ukrainian refugees. In 2023, there are at least 8.2 million Afghans hosted across 103 different countries. Many have been in the region for decades, and a vast majority are living in Pakistan and Iran. (*Afghanistan Refugee Crisis Explained*, 2023). The Afghan refugee crisis has been going on for more than forty years, and it has passed through four waves of forced migration. According to UNHCR (2023), today, more than 8 million Afghans have been driven out of their homes or their country by conflict, violence, and poverty. At least 3.2 million Afghans are displaced within their own country. The first wave occurred during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, when many Afghans left for safety to avoid the conflicts between three groups: Afghan soldiers, Soviet soldiers, and Mujahideen, who were supported by the USA to combat Soviet military forces. The refugees at that time moved internally and externally; part of them became internally displaced people, moving from some rural areas to the city of Kabul to avoid the violence and

conscripted, so there were a million Afghans who were forced to migrate.

The second wave started in 1989, the same year of the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan. After the Soviet withdrawal, a civil war in Afghanistan erupted, creating more refugees, reaching the number of five million who left the country and 800,000 who became internally displaced. The third wave began when the Taliban took over the country in 1994, and when the civil war ended, many fled to the USA, others to western countries, and the last group to some neighboring countries. After September 11, 2001, when the US started the war against terrorism, the next few years witnessed the fall of the Taliban. During this stage, the fourth wave of refugees has begun, which has led more Afghans to become refugees.

In the article *Afghanistan: conflict and displacement 1978 to 2001* (2002), there are three important facts about Afghanistan refugee crisis “In fact, Afghanistan has experienced one of the world’s largest refugee crises for more than two decades. Between the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the present day, one in four Afghans has been a refugee. At the peak of the crisis in the late 1980s, there were more than six million Afghan refugees” (Ruizz, 2002). The previous facts regarding the Afghan crisis show how this crisis has caused a shift in Afghanistan's history that cannot be ignored, not because of the large number of refugees, but because of the dramatic shift in Afghanistan's history from the late 1970s to the current day.

The Syrian refugee crisis has had far-reaching social, economic, and political consequences for both the host countries and the refugees themselves. The flow of refugees into neighboring nations, in particular, has strained their economies and depleted their resources. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR):

After over a decade of conflict, [Syria](#) remains the world’s largest refugee crisis. Since 2011, more than 14 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety. More than 6.8 million Syrians remain internally displaced in their own country. Approximately 5.5 million Syrian refugees live in the five countries neighboring Syria—Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Germany is the largest non-neighboring host country with more than 850,000 Syrian refugees. (*Syria Refugee Crisis Explained*, 2023).

## 2. Diaspora Studies

The definition of the concept of diaspora is debatable. Scholars or theorists have given more than one standard definition since it is a social phenomenon, so it's hard to characterize it with fixed features. To begin, from the linguistic level, the Britannica encyclopedia defines the word diaspora as "populations, such as members of an ethnic or religious group, that originated from the same place but dispersed to different locations. The word *diaspora* comes from the ancient Greek *dia speiro*, meaning to sow over." ("Diaspora," 2023, History & Society section, para. 1). The word, in its Greek form, means dispersing or scattering of seeds during the process of sowing. However, today, the primary understanding of diaspora is the dispersion of people rather than seeds. The idea of diaspora is associated with the notion of exile, or being removed from one's homeland. Besides the linguistic and metaphorical explanation of the word diaspora, Robin Cohen, a contemporary theorist in the field of diaspora, defines the word as:

First, the classical use of the term, usually capitalized as Diaspora and used only in the singular, was mainly confined to the study of the Jewish experience. The Greek diaspora made an off-stage appearance. Excluding some earlier casual references, from the 1960s and 1970s the classical meaning was systematically extended, becoming more common as a description of the dispersion of Africans, Armenians and the Irish. These peoples conceived their scattering as arising from a cataclysmic event that had traumatized the group as a whole, thereby creating the central historical experience of victimhood at the hands of a cruel oppressor (Cohen, 2008, p. 1).

Based on Cohen's previous definition, it can be noted that there was a need to create an academic field of study called Diaspora Studies. Therefore, diaspora studies as an academic field was established in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to study dispersed ethnic populations; before that, it was merely a notion or a meaning that described the experiences of diasporic people around the world. One of the main theorists in this field is Robin Cohen, who is considered one of the founding figures of diaspora studies. He is also a social scientist, working in the fields of globalization, migration, and diaspora studies. In this part, there will be a focus on Robin Cohen's and William Safran's theories of the diaspora and the difference between the two. In the

second edition of his book, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (2008), Robin Cohen specifies the phases of diaspora studies and mentions Safran's argument about diaspora. He states:

In the second phase, in the 1980s and onwards, as Safran notably argued, diaspora was deployed as 'a metaphoric designation' to describe *different categories* of people 'expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*. Moreover, a point again made by Safran, the term now designated a vast array of different peoples who either applied the term to themselves or had the label conferred upon them (Cohen, 2008).

According to Safran's definition of diaspora, it's noted that he thinks that diaspora has only one particular form of migration that is based on forced exile. In his article, *Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return*, Safran (2011) identifies people of the diaspora as sharing six main characteristics. The first one is based on the idea that diasporic people have been dispersed forcefully from their original center to two or more peripheral or foreign regions. They also retain one collective memory of their homeland. They share the belief and sense of alienation and are not accepted by the host society. In addition to that, they regard their homeland as an ideal place they should return to when it's possible. They are also characterized as being committed to the maintenance of their homeland and to its safety and prosperity. Finally, they are strongly motivated and in solidarity to maintain their support for the homeland.

Robin Cohen has widened Safran's definition by including migrants who have voluntary purposes for their movements, not only because of persecution. He also took into consideration the positive aspects of migrants' lives in the host societies, like the possibility of being assimilated and integrated into the host cultures. Cohen classifies diasporas into six types. As he states in the third and expanded edition (25th Anniversary Edition) of his book *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (2023) "I am now, finally, ready to get to the point. By using six qualifying adjectives: victim, labor, imperial, trade, deterritorialized, and incipient." He also illustrates, "The expressions 'hybrid', 'cultural' and 'post-colonial' also are linked to the idea of deterritorialization" (Cohen, 2023, p. 11). Cohen theorizes the main features of diasporic people, as he thinks that these groups share the following

characteristics: they are dispersed from their original homeland to two or more foreign regions; this dispersal can be traumatic, forceful, or in search of work, trade, or colonial expansion. Diasporic people also share a collective memory and myth about the homeland; they also have an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, and prosperity. They share the idea of a return movement. They have a strong ethnic group consciousness that has been sustained over a long time. At the same time, they have a troubled relationship with host societies; on the other hand, they share a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement. Finally, there is the possibility of a distinctively creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (Cohen, 2008, p. 6). According to that, the main questions here are: why do diasporic people share the same mentioned characteristics? And how can their experiences be depicted? In answer to the first question, one probable reason is that diasporic individuals frequently share cultural and historical roots. They may face similar societal, economic, and political challenges, which might influence their ideas, attitudes, and beliefs. Furthermore, diasporic communities can develop tight-knit relationships in which individuals offer assistance and help to one another, which can strengthen shared cultural practices and values. Nevertheless, it is vital to remember that diasporic people's features are not universal and can vary widely across groups and historical situations.

The second question is: how can diasporic people's experiences be expressed or depicted? A good tool for diasporic expression is the world of literature. Therefore, writing about diaspora studies imposes on us a small glimpse into the category of diasporic literature. Diasporic literature refers to the literature produced by displaced people who migrated from the colonial periphery in the global south and gathered in the metropolitan centers in the global north. The USA today has inherited the mentality of the colonial West. Diasporic writings reflect the displaced conditions of their authors and are usually informed by the pains of exile and a nostalgic desire to reunite with the homeland that has been lost during the migration. The sense of lack and loss of identity of the displaced sometimes generates a sense of multicultural possibilities, meaning that not belonging to any of the cultures creates a gap, which puts the person in a position to borrow appropriate elements from different cultures.

Suman Rani, a research scholar, summarizes some of the main features of diasporic literature in his article *Theme of Alienation and Displacement in Diasporic Writing in Relation to Indian Writers in English* (2018). He states:

Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation. Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement (Rani, 2018).

We can conclude from the above quotation that the main characteristics of diasporic literature are longing for home, search for identity, nostalgia, conflict between cultures or religions, a sense of loss, and alienation. Thus, this type of writing is full of feelings and a detailed description of the harsh journeys undertaken by refugees. Also, it focuses on the relationships between the minority groups, who are migrants or refugees, and the majority groups, represented by the natives or the dominant communities. The protagonists and the fictional characters of this type of literature are, most of the time, representatives of their authors' lives, experiences, and reactions towards what has occurred in their countries.

Diasporic writers are not only re-visualizing their history and homeland but also reaffirming their clear and distinct identity. They are trying to portray the image of migrants or refugees while seeking to rebuild, recreate, and reshape their lost, fragmented, and marginalized identity. In other words, diasporic writers depict the identity crisis of diasporic people. Therefore, diasporic writing holds a notable and significant position in the field of literature; it has been very popular and favored among readers and authors as well.

## **B. Theoretical Background and Key Concepts**

This part establishes a theoretical foundation for the theories and notions that will serve as keys and tools in the analysis of the two selected novels. It begins with Said's Orientalism Theory, which provides a systematic approach to the western imagination's image of the Orient. The emphasis here is on how it relates to the western perception of refugees. In general, refugees have been portrayed as victims,

incapable of living independently, reliant on others, and frequently dehumanized. This is the fundamental tenet of Orientalism as a hegemonic narrative. In other words, the representations of refugees in the literary works of many authors and critics revisit Orientalism, dramatize, and universalize the migrant and refugee experience in an Orientalist setting. As Edward Said says in his book *Orientalism* (1978), “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (Said, 2003, p. 3). A division like this between the West as (us) and the East as (them) or the Other highlights the West's importance while dwarfing the East, and this brings us to the notion of oriental representation of refugees.

Therefore, disrupting this oriental representation of refugees and migrants reveals a vivid image of them in contrast to the oriental perspective developed by the West against the East. Aside from being viewed as inferiors and strangers, refugees are also viewed as people who are unwilling to accept differences and are often unable to be associated with other cultures and values.

## **1. Orientalism**

Edward Said (1935–2003), the Palestinian-American academician and former professor of comparative literature, is widely regarded as one of the world's foremost cultural thinkers. Michael Sprinker, who edited one of the earliest books on Said, observed that he embodied the "cosmopolitan intellectual" ideal that is still important to the humanities in our modern era. Said contributed to key discussions in a wide range of social science fields, including history, sociology, anthropology, and area studies, particularly Middle Eastern studies. Edward Said is widely regarded as the founder of post-colonial studies, now known as Colonial Discourse Analysis. This style of thought can be applied today in relation to the plight of refugees.

*Orientalism* (1978) is Said's most well-known book. With its examination of how the West sees the East and the tales that accompany that vision, this book positioned Said as a literary and cultural critic. The aim of his book was to describe how the Orient is constructed in western imagination through orientalist discourse, and that discourse can't be studied without studying the power structure of the West that enables them to create such discourse. Said's Orientalism theory outlines what he

considers to be a false image of the Orient or the East, which has been created by western academicians, historians, cultural and political thinkers, and colonial leaders.

In its general sense, Orientalism started with the study of the Orient to understand it, then ended with military expeditions. The power of oriental discourse lies in the idea that Europeans have the power to define what the Orient is because of their imperial power, then they internalize that view discursively, and this discourse creates a body of academic work developed by historians, writers, travelers, and so forth.

According to Said, Orientalism in its full form started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it relies on the orientalist knowledge that was gathered before that. Orientalism is connected with colonialism; as Said believes, the expansion of colonialism was inherently connected with a particular kind of discourse, which is called Orientalism. This discourse justifies the existence of the colonial powers in the East, in which the colonizers created certain assumptions about the Orientals by seeing them as passive, must be controlled, and unable to govern themselves while the Europeans see themselves as superiors; therefore, the entire project of colonialism and imperialism is underwritten by the discourse of Orientalism. As a result, with the belief of being more civilized, they gave themselves the right to occupy others and govern them, which eventually enabled the political structure of colonialism and imperialism. In short, oriental discourse has been used as an umbrella to degrade a number of different nations and cultures for western interests. Part of oriental discourse is based on the idea of European superiority against the Orient backwards to internalize the idea of domination, either culturally or militarily.

Said's theory can be studied through two main approaches: otherness and representation. Orientalism is defined as a way of thinking pivoted on creating a contrasting distinction between the Orient and the Occident. This style of thought is based on the notion of othering, which is, according to Said, studying the Other (the East) as inferiors after dividing the world into a binary opposition structure. In order to create the Other, as Said illustrates, you need to create a binary opposition structure, which means defining the other on the basis of the opposite, so the privileged side belongs to Europeans while the non-privileged side belongs to the Orient or the East. In his book, Said states: "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even

underground itself” (Said, 2033, p. 3). Otherness can be done on the basis of origin, race, nationality, religion, gender, physical appearance, and much more, and here it’s concluded that the concept of othering is linked with discrimination. When the Other is created and stabilized, it becomes associated with essentialist traits, and this leads to the second approach, which is the notion of representation.

When the Orient is represented as being the Other on the basis of We and They or Us and Them, this representation, according to Said, cannot capture the truth itself because this truth is represented by an orientalist who creates it according to his own intentions or the negative discourse he has to follow and the choices he made of what to include and what to exclude. Therefore, when the orient is detached from the act of representation, this representation, as Said believes, is impossible to be true. Orient is represented to western audiences according to their expectations within the parameters of the orientalist discourse that already exists, then they create a kind of Orient they want to represent so they are influenced by their knowledge and imagination, and in this process, the real Orient is not the one that guides these authors or scholars; rather, it’s their desire, vision, and imagining of the Orient. This authority of the West to represent the East comes from power, hegemony, and the prior knowledge of the East, and this justifies why everything that was known about the East came from Eurocentrism. Said believes that this discourse of Orientalism does not give a realistic portrayal of Eastern Others but rather constructs them based on western anxieties and preoccupations. Said examines how western texts construct the Orient through imaginative representations.

In a study titled *Orientalism: The Making of the Other* (2012), the author Shehla Burney, indicates the importance of Edward Said’s work *Orientalism* in the following lines:

Edward Said's groundbreaking critical work *Orientalism* (1978) is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of what has evolved into a multifaceted and diverse conceptual framework known as 'postcolonial theory.' Oriental-ism questions the very foundations of western representation and the social construction of the 'Orient' as the ultimate Other in history, literature, art, music, and popular culture (Burney, 2012, p. 23).

As it can be seen from the previous quotation to what extent Edward Saeed’s book has significantly improved our knowledge of power relations and cultural interaction

between the East and West. It continues to be useful in combating Western prejudices and biases against non-Western cultures and communities. Said's work has prompted numerous researchers and authors to investigate the function of cultural portrayal in forming our perspectives as well as our views toward other cultures and peoples.

The oriental representation of the East throughout history includes the same discourse, which is shared by different branches of knowledge, including the historical field, scientific, anthropological, sociological, linguistic, and political. Said brought them together to show that all of them share the same discourse of Orientalism. Depending on that, Said believes that no writer can be detached from the world around him, whether it is social or political.

## **2. The Concept of Identity**

Identity has many definitions and theories because the issue of identity has long been identified and examined by many scholars and theorists in different disciplines, such as philosophy, colonial studies, social and cultural studies, psychology, and so forth. It's constructed on the basis of many factors, experiences, and characteristics, and it's defined with various interpretations based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, nation, and so forth. Identity is also affected by society and the transformational processes that humans experience, like migration, colonialism, and the issue of globalization in our modern era. These factors have resulted in identity duality, loss, or fragmentation, and this has resulted in what is known as an identity crisis, which is a human psychological issue characterized by misunderstandings about one's social position and, frequently, a sense of loss of cohesion with one's character. Because identity crisis arises as a result of human transition from one stage to another, from one location to another, or from one local or specific culture to another, theories of identity have emerged to be related to the concept of identity crisis. Several theorists and intellectuals have hypothesized about identity. This section provides a brief overview of the major identity theories and their definitions.

Stuart Hall, the pioneer of cultural studies and conceptualized identity, or what he terms cultural identity, in his well-known article *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, published in 1996, known as The Theory of Cultural Identity, is the first

theorist to be cited here. Besides his seminal essay, Stuart Hall, in his 1992 book *Modernity and Its Futures*, describes how the crisis of identity emerged as a result of transformation, like changing the location:

These transformations are also shifting our personal identities, undermining our sense of ourselves as integrated subjects. This loss of a stable 'sense of self' is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centring of the subject. This set of double displacements - decentering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves,- constitutes a 'crisis of identity' for the individual ( Hall, 1992, p. 275).

The previous lines by Hall summarize the main reason for the identity crisis, which is linked with the notion of dislocation, in particular moving from the home of origin to other locations. During this stage, a cultural identity crisis occurs when the norms of the individual's cultural heritage collide with the norms of the newly adopted culture and when someone with a pre-existing collective identity strives to integrate into a new culture.

In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1996), Hall presents two definitions and types of cultural identity. The first is a stable identity (the essentialist), while the second is unstable. In the first definition or type of identity, Hall theorizes that this type of identity is affiliated with a race or ethnicity, which is considered a stable or not-changing one. This identity reflects common historical experiences and cultural codes, and this is known as the oneness of cultural identity (Hall, 1996, p. 223). The second form of cultural identity, which is unstable, undergoes a constant transformation transcending time and space. Hall indicates that if someone wants to understand the trauma of immigrants in a post-colonial context, then the second definition is more appropriate (Hall, 1996, p. 223). In this sense, Hall explains that it is not necessary to know who we are or from where we have come; in fact, what we might become is more important. As he states, “Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture” (Hall, 1996, p. 225). Therefore, based on Hall’s perspective, cultural identity is always altering and changing, rather than being permanent. It is influenced by historical and social contexts. It is something changeable within a continuous process.

Hall believes that there is no one cultural identity but that there is a multiplicity of different cultural identities. He also thinks that through cultural practices, new identities will be born through everyday contacts. Therefore, identity is not a finished product; instead, it's a production that is never complete and is always in progress. Hall states that in the following words, "we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall, 1996, p. 222). Identities don't have universality, so they can shift or change themselves at any time and place.

The second theory of identity to be mentioned here is according to Kwame Anthony Appiah. In his book *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (2018), Appiah presents his definition of identity, which consists of three main elements. Firstly, he defines identity as a label, meaning that to have an identity, you must have a label that defines you, which a philosopher might describe as nominalist, for instance, male, female, black, white, homosexual, and so forth. It does not have to be just based on one label; some identities have several labels, but you must have at least one. Secondly, the label must have meaning for the people who use it. This is essentially subjective identification, or the method by which individuals believe they fit the label. It has impacts on people, some of which are referred to as norms of identification. There are proposals about what you ought to do because you are male or female, homosexual or straight. The third element is what creates a social dimension. People react to labels; in other words, they react to identity. They have a different treatment of females than males. They differentiate between people according to these labels. These are the three human identity elements: labels, identification, and treatment.

However, these elements might be a subject of debate. For instance, there can be arguments regarding whether a person who was born and identified as a male can truly become a woman. There may be conflicts about the label, the standards of identification, and what it means to be a person who has that specific label. Finally, certainly, there will be disagreements on how to deal with people according to their identity. Based on Appiah's definition of identity, it can be noted that every form of identity involves assumptions, stereotypes, and pictures of how people can be identified. Appiah also believes that identity is built by society according to categories like creed, country, color, class, nation, gender, race, and culture, which

can be deep-rooted beliefs based on misunderstandings. To sum up Appiah's theory of identity, identities come first with labels about why and whom they should be applied, and identity shapes your thoughts about how you should behave and feel; then they affect the way that people treat you; and finally, all these dimensions of identity are contestable and always up for dispute.

The third theory of identity here is from Homi Bhabha's perspective. Homi Bhabha is an important figure and a crucial theorist in postcolonial studies. He developed some critical concepts, such as Hybridity, Mimicry, Ambivalence, and others, in order to explain the colonial relationship and the formation of identity based on that relation. All the Bhabha's concepts are key features of describing identity and its transformation, and they can be applied not only to colonial literature but also to any kind of literature that presents a binary opposition between the West and the East or the natives and the refugees, like in the current study. The first and most used concept developed by Bhabha is Hybridity, which is a trait adopted by the colonized subjects when they strike a balance between their culture and the colonizer's culture. Hybridity occurs when cultures get infused into each other and when one tries to imitate the other. The colonized try to imitate the colonizers to be part of their culture. In this process, the colonizer brings the ideology that their culture is superior. Hybridity describes the emergence of new cultural forms as a result of multiculturalism. Bhabha believes that cultural purity is a myth since there is no cultural isolation; therefore, the binary of superior culture and inferior culture will immediately break down. Like Stuart Hall, Bhabha believes that cultures are dynamic processes characterized by continuous change, flux, and hybridity. This process of hybridity is accompanied by the process of mimicry, which is another theory created by Homi Bhabha. Mimicry is a strategy used by the colonized people with the mindset that by imitating the people in power, they will be able to have power one day. The colonized in this study are represented by refugees, and the colonizers, or the people in power, are the native or local citizens of the nation-states. This will lead us to the theory of Ambivalence, which occurs when both the colonizer and colonized affect one another. In post-colonial theory, both sides accept and adopt influences from either side of the colonial divide. Ambivalence plays with both Hybridity and Mimicry and all three theories contribute to the process of reconstructing the human identity of refugees. Ambivalence occurs when both the

colonizer and colonized affect one another, because in post-colonial theory, both sides accept and adopt influences from either side of the colonial divide.



### **III. CHALLENGING ORIENTAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE *KITE RUNNER***

#### **A. Amir in Afghanistan**

Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) is a historical fiction novel that has received international praise for accurately depicting the horrors of war and its impact on Afghan society. The story spans three decades of Afghan society, from the gloriously peaceful days before 1978 to the terrible decade of the 1990s, which concludes in 2001. Before delving into the details, it is worth noting that the story is separated into three parts: Amir and Hassan's childhood in Afghanistan, Amir's life as a refugee in America, and Amir's quest to release Sohrab from Taliban terrorist commander Assef. Hassan is the illegitimate half-brother of Amir, he is also his servant. The first part of the story describes the two boys' strong relationship, followed by the devastation that ruined their relationship because of Hassan's brutal rape scene, which Amir witnessed with no action to save his friend from the hands of the bullies. As a result of this, Amir's own internal shame and personal regret shape a turning psychological shift in Amir's personality. The second part of the story follows Amir's journey as a refugee with his father to the United States after fleeing Afghanistan the same year Hassan was raped. In America, the author depicts Amir and Baba's experiences in the alien land, Amir's education, his love and marriage to Soraya, Baba's death, and the stages of becoming a well-known writer, all while Amir is haunted by his unforgettable betrayal of Hassan, this big secret that has never left his memory despite passing more than 26 years. In the third part of the story, Amir successfully takes Sohrab to America after making a significant sacrifice to free him from the Taliban's sexual abuse. The tale ended with readers feeling hopeful and believing that forgiveness is possible even in the face of darkness.

To observe the transformation in Amir's identity, it is important to begin the analysis with his life as a young boy in Afghanistan and discover how his character grew more when he became a refugee in the United States. *The Kite Runner* is not

based on an actual story, but it does contain elements of autobiography. Hosseini, like the protagonist Amir, was born and raised in Afghanistan before migrating to the United States as a refugee in the 1980s. The first part of Hosseini's work was dominated by childhood occurrences.

It is important to consider the novel's main setting: Kabul, where Amir and Hassan spent their early years. Kabul is regarded as a cosmopolitan city, and Hosseini depicts a variety of cultural environments in which the protagonists interact with people from many countries, communities, and ethnic groups. Western culture, which includes cinema and literature, is interwoven with Afghan customs, such as a kite flying tournament in the winter season and a rich lifestyle of some upper-class families mixed with the religious and traditional ways of living of other members in the same society. As a result of this global diversity, Amir has developed a kind of flexible identity, that enables him to act out of the oriental standards, though not to the same level as when he moved to the United States:

We saw our first Western together, *\_Rio Bravo\_* with John Wayne, at the Cinema Park, across the street from my favorite bookstore. I remember begging Baba to take us to Iran so we could meet John Wayne. when he could talk again, explained to us the concept of voice dubbing. Hassan and I were stunned. Dazed. John Wayne didn't really speak Farsi and he wasn't Iranian! He was American, just like the friendly, longhaired men and women we always saw hanging around in Kabul, dressed in their tattered, brightly colored shirts (Hosseini, 2003, p. 14).

Amir here is describing his global interests in the world of cinema with Hassan, showing how Kabul embraces western culture. It can be also concluded how Amir has been influenced by cosmopolitan ideas since an early age, allowing him to see the oriental culture from a different angle, not as an imitator, but as a challenger and this has helped him not to feel alienated to the new culture when he moved to the United States, which helped in his assimilation into the new community as a migrant or refugee. Baba has helped to raise Amir with such an outlook.

## **B. Amir as a Refugee in America**

This part of analysis is allocated to Amir's journey as a refugee to the United

States. After fleeing from Afghanistan, Amir with his father have experienced the hardships that any refugee could face, the father son relation has been changed in the new land. Amir has undergone a form of identity transformation, and he also appears as a powerful oriental moderate Muslim man.

According to the orientalist viewpoint, refugees, particularly those from the Middle East, are generally portrayed as weak, primitive, and fundamentalists causing a threat to the host countries, whereas Westerners or inhabitants of the host countries are depicted as powerful, progressive, and rational. This way of thinking, in which East and West, or Orient and Occident, are put in a contradictory dichotomy, is important to Orientalist theory. In this regard, similar oriental perspective is being used on the subject of refugees, which is consistent with the same oriental discourse. A journal article titled *Should They Stay or Should They Go?* (2023), is an example of such an approach from a Western viewpoint. The scholar Sultan Baig highlights how the Western communities deal with the issue of refugees and how refugees are being viewed through the lens of the host communities:

On the social dimension of refugees living within local communities, there are two popular narratives. The dominant narrative is the negative one, which is the threat perception of the refugees that believe refugees would culturally clash with the locals and the chance of co-existence and acceptance is very narrow and limited. In the “threat” narrative, immigration is seen as threatening British values, culture, and living standards, public services, and security through rising extremism and criminality (Baig, 2023, p. 232).

According to the researcher’s observations of how the western societies deal with refugees, it is clear from the previous extract that the responses of the western societies of the refugees are divided into two main dimensions; the first one considering them as inferiors unable to be integrated with the local communities, and the second dimension which sees them as a source of threat. It was also noted that the researcher asserts that the metaphors or language used in the media are applied to dehumanize refugees, among other methods. The media's usage of these terms can shape our perspective and understanding, leading to bias among readers and viewers. Therefore, the mainstream media’s inhumane treatment of migrants can lead to bad attitudes and perceptions, influencing people' perspectives in particular the natives of the host countries.

Returning to Khalid Hosseini's protagonist, we see Amir does the opposite. Despite the identity crisis which is accompanied by the refugee crisis that any refugee may suffer from when moving to alien lands, Amir has the ability to find himself in America, discover his identity as a powerful and global citizen not as a refugee. When Amir arrives to the United States, he seeks to integrate himself into the new culture and manages to reconstitute his identity. Being assimilated and integrated within the multicultural society in America, has not taken much time to achieve it, at the same time, Amir kept his roots with him as an Afghan man proud of his culture while appreciating other cultures.

In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said discusses the misleading image and misconceptions about the Orient as he states: "The Orient suddenly appeared lamentably under-humanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric, and so forth" (1978, p. 150). Said depicts the western perception of Middle Eastern people as uncivilized and inferior, in addition to other negative features and prejudices that shape the worldview, and this mindset is applied to the issue of refugees.

Khalid Hosseini, on the other hand, depicts or models an oriental, cultured, creative, civilized, powerful, and open-minded man. Amir, a new well-known writer and Afghan refugee, exemplifies this model. For example, he decided to specialize in creative writing in English as soon as he had finished his high school education. In this stage, the important question here is: why did Amir choose this major over his father's objections? Answering this question properly leads to two conclusions: the simplest one is to fulfill his childhood desire to be a well-known writer, but if we take it from a critical analysis, it is crucial to note that Amir's willingness to be an English storyteller demonstrates his forward-thinking and strong identity he is trying to create. Furthermore, Amir wants to be a writer to help others who have been assaulted, psychologically harmed, and suffered, and he chose the English language as a writing tool since it is the fastest and easiest way to make his voice reach the whole globe. It is an active role he has created for himself as a refugee, which is considered a kind of power, the power of the pen.

In the novel, Amir feels a responsibility to convey the stories of individuals who are unable to speak for themselves or do not have a chance to be humanized. He aims to establish a society of tolerance and acceptance through his writing because literature can bring individuals from different cultures and ethnicities together. Amir

sees the written word as a powerful tool for making a change and transforming the world into a place where people celebrate their diversity at the same time acknowledging their differences, and enriching their minds with more valuable knowledge, which is the real meaning of strength as a writer whose power lies in his mind and pen.

Amir, as an immigrant writer, desires to be someone who has a broad perspective of the globe and is interested in exploring diverse cultures and experiences. As a writer, Amir is open to new ideas and viewpoints, as well as interested in understanding diverse ways of living in the globalized world we live in, which helps him to be a powerful immigrant writer.

Amir has a high sense of sensitivity to cultural differences and a high level of empathy since he was a child, due to his close relationship with Hassan. He recognizes the effects of cultural prejudices on the mindset and social perspectives of any society, which leads to conflicts and persecution of one group over the other. Amir, as an immigrant writer, has an intense sense of global consciousness and is curious about discovering the world beyond his own cultural roots and background. Amir is a productive writer, creative, civilized, and has a high level of sensibility and emotions since not anyone can be a writer, so as a refugee, he is able to create a positive image of refugees. Therefore, based on what was previously stated, it is obvious how Hosseini has succeeded in portraying his protagonist in a way that disrupts misconceptions about the orientals, in particular those who came from the Middle East, because being a refugee or a migrant does not mean being weak, less improved, or less developed than those who are natives and Hosseini tries to modify this image. Furthermore, this brings us to the issue of representation, which means that Amir, through his talent and pen, is able to present himself and his nation in an authentic image, especially when he writes stories about his homeland, and this contradicts the famous line from Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* when he states: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (Marx, 1852). This statement is relevant to Orientalism because it describes the West's tendency to identify, view, and recognize the East and its people through an inaccurate and usually degrading prism. This includes portraying other cultures and people as inferior, strange, and weak, and the statement represents that attitude. The claim that Orientals cannot represent themselves and must be represented

by outsiders perpetuates the myth that their voices and views are disregarded, muted, and ignored. On the other hand, in the story, we find Amir among those who struggle against this misrepresentation through his pen, demonstrating the Orient's ability and strength to represent himself without the interference of others. In a study conducted in 2020 by a group of researchers under the title *Evolution of negative visual frames of immigrants and refugees in the main media of Southern Europe*, the researchers reached the conclusion that a large percentage of European citizens and western media consider refugees and immigrants as a burden on or threat to the country or local culture to which they migrated. Their study is based on connotative depictions of immigrants and refugees disseminated in Southern European mainstream media. Based on the researchers' observations, it is stated:

In the majority of studies analyzing Western perceptions of immigrants and refugees, a connection is made between negative attitudes and the perception of these groups as a burden on or threat to the host societies[...] as European citizens see newcomers as a threat, both to economic prosperity and to peace, respect, and social welfare (Amores et al., 2020).

The preceding study's findings show how the image of a refugee is linked to the concept of need, meaning that a refugee is a burden. The negative representation of refugees in the West as aid recipients has been a recurring theme in media, economics, and political discourse. This image is widely used to devalue and stigmatize immigrants, indicating that they are not self-sufficient, depend on charity, and do not contribute to society or the country where they have settled, which is a false perception. We cannot deny the fact that many refugees are vulnerable and require aid from the international community; it is their right to do so, and humanitarian organizations and governments work to provide refugees with food, housing, healthcare, and educational opportunities. However, not all refugees require charity; some refugees have talents, and they can contribute to their new communities in a variety of ways. Furthermore, some refugees who moved to Western countries started reconstructing their lives and finding jobs, demonstrating the true meaning of self-sufficiency. This point leads us to a positive image represented by Khalid Hosseini's characters Amir and Baba in terms of their choice to be self-sufficient, despite having the legal right to receive financial aid as refugees; they refuse to be burdens, which contradicts the general western image as

previously mentioned in the western media.

This has been highlighted in the text when Amir and his father refused to take assistance from the eligibility officer in San Jose, as the American system of welfare provides financial assistance to unemployed and disadvantaged people like refugees. This depiction helps in eliminating the stereotyped image of refugees through the western media. We find Amir declining the donation because he is a self-dependent man and ashamed of accepting assistance from others. He insists that he is capable of caring for himself and others, despite being in need. Baba as well declines charity since he believes that relying on others to provide one's own necessities means dehumanizing oneself. He insists on preventing his small family from being reliant on charity and losing their self-worth. Although they are refugees and it is normal to accept governmental charity, they refuse to accept it. This situation demonstrates Khalid Hosseini's humanized image of refugees in general, using his fictitious characters as a representative model. The below quotation describes Baba's reaction the moment he was given the food stamps:

Baba dropped the stack of food stamps on her desk. "Thank you but I don't want," Baba said. "I work always. In Afghanistan I work, in America I work. Thank you very much, Mrs. Dobbins, but I don't like it free money." Mrs. Dobbins blinked. Picked up the food stamps, looked from me to Baba like we were pulling a prank, or "slipping her a trick" as Hassan used to say. "Fifteen years I been doin' this job and nobody's ever done this," she said. And that was how Baba ended those humiliating food stamp moments at the cash register (Hosseini, 2003, p. 71).

As can be seen from the quotation above, to what extent Hosseini tries to convey his message to the whole world through this detailed scene. Hosseini wants to show that refugees in particular those from the Middle East are not problems or burden on the shoulders of the host countries, they are not waiting someone to solve their financial problems, they can depend on themselves and find their own path and this will help in reducing the gap and crack the polarity between the East and the West and disrupt the notion of western supremacy over the East.

Another issue related to Hosseini's work is volunteer work. This type of work carried out by Amir, the main protagonist, with his wife Soraya as Orphans and refugees indicates the meanings of responsibility, power, and the willingness to be

engaged with different people from different backgrounds, and all of these meanings have been represented in a way that equalizes both main characters as male and female, implying that Amir and Soraya share the same level of responsibility, power, and the ability to create a positive atmosphere, be open to others, be selfless, contribute to society, and have a beneficial impact on the world around them. They engage in this activity with the same level of passion and enthusiasm. This portrayal, which has been represented in the novel, contradicts the general stereotyped image found in the Orientalist discourse of the West, which portrays Orientals as indolent, inactive, and unproductive. Furthermore, the fact that Amir chose to be engaged in voluntary work alongside the power of his pen as a writer is a notable example of his global outlook and the productive role he hopes to achieve through this humanitarian mission alongside Soraya. Amir describes his experience as follows:

Soraya and I became involved in Afghan projects, as much out of a sense of civil duty ...when a man named Kabir, a former Afghan ambassador to Sofia, called and asked if I wanted to help him with a hospital project, I said yes. The small hospital had stood near the Afghan-Pakistani border and had a small surgical unit that treated Afghan refugees with land mine injuries. But it had closed down due to a lack of funds. I became the project manager, Soraya my comanager. I spent most of my days in the study, e-mailing people around the world, applying for grants, organizing fund-raising events (Hosseini, 2033, p. 201).

The quotation above demonstrates how Amir, along with Soraya, has created a new space for him, emphasizing the importance of removing all the divisions that separate us as human beings into groups, nations, or parts such as East and West since participating in humanitarian activities such as donations, charity, helping others, and even teaching them; removing all the separations or gaps that have been created by humankind, and Hosseini is trying to emphasize this. Furthermore, it may be inferred that the greatest method to establish harmony is to feel for others and support those in need. To achieve this, we need to stop using labels such as, refugees, Orient, West, and East, since we are all human beings sharing the same planet and having equal rights.

The next part of analysis is allocated to the character of Amir as a civilized modern oriental man. According to Orientalism, an Oriental man is commonly

described as someone who is lacking rationality, backward, exotic with a tendency to violence. The term backwardness has legitimized the oriental male through creating a false image and representing him neither intelligent nor acknowledged, and the one who lacks social skills or has a restricted outlook. Edward Said indicates this false portrayal in his book when discussing the stages of Orientalism as a discourse, which is founded on a number of misconceptions about the Orient. As he states, "Now one of the important developments in nineteenth-century Orientalism was the distillation of essential ideas about its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness" (Said, 1978, p. 205). In this quotation, Said demonstrates the creation of the oriental discourse, which constitutes the western world's understanding of it in specific ways. This discourse resulted in the construction of an imagined, essentialized, and fetishized "Orient" that promoted and distorted West' understanding of eastern civilizations, particularly those of the Middle East region, while also stigmatizing them with a number of negative characteristics. With an emphasis on the oriental male, Said also conveys this image in the perception of the West as he states "An Oriental man was first an oriental and only second a man. Such radical typing was naturally reinforced by sciences or discourses, as I prefer to call them" (Said, 1978, p. 231). The observation by Edward Said is a critique of the Western worldview, which holds that a person's worth is basically determined by the cultural and ethnic origin, implying that an eastern man is not "completely" human. It emphasizes the dehumanized image of the Oriental man.

In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini depicts an oriental man who challenges the stereotyped image formed by the West, and this can be noted through different examples in the story. For example, Amir is a sensitive civilized man who regards women as human beings equal to himself. He chose to marry Soraya based on his love for her rather than any social, ethical, or societal standards. He has valued and respected her ambition since the beginning of their relationship.

Amir does not need to bring her down to show his worth or importance. In other words, he deals with her as an equivalent human being not as a body or as an object and must be put under examination to see if she is suitable for marriage or not. No matter for him if she is virgin or not, if she is beautiful or not, if she would be a good housewife or not. He wanted to marry her as she is Soraya no more than. One

of the situations is a notable example of that is when Soraya confessed to Amir before their marriage about her previous affair with an Afghan guy, she asks “Does it bother you enough to change your mind?” No, Soraya. Not even close, I said. Nothing you said changes anything. I want us to marry. She broke into fresh tears” (Hosseini, 2003, p. 90). Amir’s reaction proves Khalid Hosseini's success in eliminating the common misconception of the oriental man. Amir does not value woman as a toy to be created according to his imagination or societal standards. To put it simply, a civilized male acknowledged a woman's professional accomplishments, intellectual aspirations, and leadership role, highlighting her equality and importance in society. A rational man favors a woman's brains and soul over her body or seduction. In other words, the civilized man does not consider women's beauty, physical attractiveness, and femininity as the primary factors that determine a woman's worth or value. Amir is an image of such a man.

In *The Kite Runner* Hosseini presents new evidence of the powerful model of refugees in the character of Amir as a diasporic writer intended to begin his career as an author in the United States by writing about his home country, hence the location of his debut work was Kabul. In his first literary attempt, Amir has linked his work to collective memory and the past, documenting stories or experiences from his hometown or the customs and culture of the Afghan people. In other words, he provided a vivid image of real Eastern culture by using Afghanistan as a model to offer the globe an authentic representation of the oriental world's richness. Amir has used his pen and creativity to create a striking image of his birthplace that will be noticed all around the world and this indicates that he feels a sense of duty for his culture and nation.

Amir's decision to set his first work in Afghanistan can challenge the binary opposition between the western world and the Middle East by constructing a bridge and a path of understanding of the other culture, explaining to the West and the rest of the world that Afghanistan and the Afghan people have valuable heritage and culture like all the orients of the other eastern nations and they are proud of that; they are powerful and humans; they are not numbers of subjects of news; and this is what Hosseini himself wanted to convey in the novel since he has come to correct these misconceptions and give light on the historical context of Afghanistan's refugee issue.

Both the author and Amir encourage the reader to see Afghan refugees by painting a vivid image of them. We could see Amir as a writer who has never forgotten to carry his roots with him and to be proud of being Afghan. In describing his first experience as a novelist, he states “The novel was released in the summer of that following year, 1989, and the publisher sent me on a five-city book tour. I became a minor celebrity in the Afghan community” (Hosseini, 2003, p.100). Amir’s novel portrays Afghanistan in a way that "humanizes" Afghan people and their culture while also providing significance and depth to non-Afghan readers in the context of the modern world. Hosseini created his fictional character Amir to send the same message to the western world as a way of disrupting the oriental image of the East, in particular Afghanistan.

In the same sense as the preceding analysis, we see Hosseini delivering a valuable image of Afghan culture through Amir's words, which will contribute to the awesome image of oriental civilizations. At the wedding ceremony, Amir recalled a very traditional Afghan scene in which he and Soraya sat together in front of all the guests:

I remember sitting on the sofa, set on the stage like a throne, Soraya’s hand in mine, as three hundred or so faces looked on. We did Ayena Masshaf, where they gave us a mirror and threw a veil over our heads, so we’d be alone to gaze at each other’s reflection. Looking at Soraya’s smiling face in that mirror, in the momentary privacy of the veil, I whispered to her for the first time that I loved her. A blush, red like henna, bloomed on her cheeks (Hosseini, 2003, p. 93).

The scene is depicted fantastically, enriching the western audience's knowledge of Afghan culture as a Middle Eastern country. As a result, this storytelling way creates a vivid image of the Orient as individuals from other parts of the earth or strange regions in western perception. This image allows people to envision the Orient as valuable, civilized, and humanized.

### **C. A Fundamental Shift Towards Responsibility**

Achieving identity is a transformational process that occurs in stages and steps. Amir, for example, depicts that approach. One of the significant steps toward

developing Amir's developed identity was his attempt to free Sohrab from Assef, who has become a Taliban commander. First, Sohrab is the son of Hassan, his childhood friend and half-brother. Hassan is killed with his wife in a brutal act of violence by the Taliban, leaving his child Sohrab as orphan and here Amir decides to return to Afghanistan to save the life of Hassan's son, Sohrab. Before he had gone to Afghanistan to save Sohrab, Amir discovered from his father's old friend that Hassan is his half-brother and the illegitimate child of his father.

At this stage, it is significant to understand how Amir has truly started a new stage of a newly developed and reconstructed identity. His decision to save Sohrab, an innocent boy who had been raped and sexually exploited by Assef and later suffered from psychological trauma, serves as evidence of that change. One may wonder how this transformation might counter the oriental discourse on migrants. First, we must remember the dominant oriental image of refugees, which mirrors the western perception of the Orient as weak, helpless, or dangerous, therefore, having the responsibility to save people who are in danger can contradict the conventional image of the weak oriental man because when Amir left his homeland and migrated to America, he wanted to start a new life with a new identity; he did not want to be a coward again; his decision to free Sohrab, even though he is not obliged to do so from a legal standpoint; this decision indicates the strength and powerful image of a refugee who left his land and past behind him but did not leave his sense of courage as a free individual who must set a good future for a child to live a decent life. A further point worth mentioning is Amir's adoption of Sohrab. In this part of the story, Amir makes amends to Hasan by adopting Sohrab, saving him from a terrible destiny and the challenges of life in Afghanistan while also freeing himself. He also eliminates racial discrimination in order to live a peaceful life with a new personality, and this is a fundamental change in itself. He liberates himself totally from the imposed conventions he encountered in Afghanistan, which marks a huge transformation in his identity. A single instance of Amir's transformation was when Soraya's father, General Taheri, described Sohrab as a Hazara boy. Amir reacted angrily. "You will never again refer to him as 'Hazara boy' in my presence. He has a name and it's Sohrab" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 200).

This contradicts the oriental representation by the West as Edward said mentioned that in his book *Orientalism* (1978) "with doctrines of European

superiority, various kinds of racism, imperialism, and the like, dogmatic views of "the Oriental" as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction" (Said, 1978, p. 8). In this quote, it is important to highlight Said's notion of the abstraction of the orient of any kind of progress. Said means that the oriental subject is viewed as something rigid, unimproved, and stable, as opposed to the western subject. Therefore, Hosseini portrayed the character of Amir as a developing character for the better, a transformation in his identity in which he becomes more open to difference, more responsible, and motivated to help others, either through his intellectual tool as an immigrant writer or as a risk-taker to save Sohrab from the terrorism of the Taliban.

This part of analysis also revisits Stuart Hall's theory of identity. Hall argues that identity is not a completed product; rather, it is a process that never ends and is always in progress; it is not stable. We ought to consider, instead, identity as a 'production', which is never finished, always in process, and always constituted inside rather than outside (1996, p. 221). Thus, Amir's identity shift lines up with Hall's theory of the unstable identity.

#### **D. Questioning the Representation of the Oriental Woman**

The representation of woman in Khalid Hosseini's novel emphasizes the vital role of them in the new Afghan's and eastern society. Women's roles in the narrative are to demonstrate how they are breaking away from their culture's customs and making a new social norms for themselves, striving for equality and achieving societal balance which helps in questioning the oriental and stereotyped image of Afghan and eastern woman who has always been represented as oppressed, mute victims of patriarchal society, not well-educated, and tradition-bound, without considering of diversity and multiplicity of them in the eastern society. In other words, from a western perspective, women are given a monolithic classification which categorizes them as religious, oppressed, and domestic, which is consistent with what Edward Said mentioned in his book *Orientalism* (1978) of how the western perceptions towards the eastern female that women are frequently the objects of a male power desire. They express infinite sensuality; they are more or less foolish; and most importantly, they are receptive, not productive (p. 207). They are seen below men not equal to them. Men are viewed as strong and powerful, whereas women are portrayed as weak, marginalized and lacking power. Hosseini in his novel

questions and challenges this stereotypical image of the oriental woman. Therefore, we see Hosseini's main female character, Soraya, resists and liberates herself from the oppressive circumstances that surround her. Soraya, an oriental female character, represents the model of a woman who speaks up for other women and portrays a positive image particularly of Muslim women who are represented as oppressed and covered in black robes or veils to make them invisible and secure from men.

In this part of the analysis, the female characters in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* are analyzed and studied to find out how Afghan and oriental women are portrayed as powerful, strong, resistant, educated, and equal to men, proving how Hosseini has cracked the oriental representation of women and succeeded in disrupting this negative image. Hosseini's message will be emphasized by investigating the characters of Soraya and Amir's mother (Sofia Akrami). Both female characters play significant roles in the story. Hosseini tried in his novel to provide an authentic image of a woman either in Afghanistan or in the United States as an immigrant or refugee.

Soraya Tahiri who is General Tahiri's daughter is the main female character in this novel. Although Soraya, as portrayed in *The Kite Runner*, represents the injustice and prejudice to which women in Afghanistan are subjected, she shows the resistance of patriarchal power in Afghanistan and the dominant oriental culture. Soraya defies cultural norms, in other words, Soraya is portrayed as a modern eastern woman who does not adhere to all Afghan social norms. Such rules are followed as a system of social and cultural standards rather than legal standards. Soraya is the one who fights the patriarchal community that imposes such strict rules on women. She also exemplifies freedom in her personal choices. She is portrayed by the author as an ordinary American woman capable of making decisions and taking responsibility for her own choices. She has freedom and independence in various areas, such as dress and public interactions with men. For example, Soraya exemplifies an uncommon oriental woman by boldly conversing with men in public without her father's consent. This happened when she met Amir in the flea market where they used to meet on Sundays. In these situations, despite Amir's fear of being criticized by his society for speaking with a woman as it is against the social and cultural values of some eastern societies, we see Soraya challenging these norms and allowing him to communicate with her in the same place where Afghans are present.

The novel depicts the flea market as a cultural center for Afghan families living in the US. “Where you can sip green tea with almond kolchas and learn whose daughter has broken off an engagement and run off with her American boyfriend” (Hosseini, 2003, p.138). In the following quotation we find Amir describing his hesitation when he wanted to speak with Soraya as an Afghan man:

But I'd asked her a question and if she answered, we'd be... well, we'd be chatting. Me a mojarad, a single young man, and she an unwed young woman. One with a history, no less. This was teetering dangerously on the verge of gossip material, and the best kind of it. Poison tongues would flap. And she would bear the brunt of that poison, not me--I was fully aware of the Afghan double standard that favored my gender. Not Did you see him chatting with her? but Woooooy! Did you see how she wouldn't let him go? What a lochak! (Hosseini, 2003, p.79).

In the preceding quotation, we observe Amir's hesitation to converse with Soraya as an Afghan man of eastern background, and we see Soraya as an Afghan lady who is supposed to be bound by the same oriental culture. However, when Amir greets Soraya, she speaks to him freely without hesitation and without seeking permission from her father. This demonstrates Soraya's ability to make her own decisions about whom she chooses to talk with. She also disregards and ignores how Afghan people at the flea market will perceive her when they see her speaking alone with a man.

Soraya is an educated woman who is aware of her rights and her important role in shaping a good society. She exemplifies the type of oriental woman who is equal to man, receives a high education, and plays a powerful role. She understands that a woman's role is not limited to cooking, cleaning, and having children. This is the true image of today's oriental female that Hosseini wishes to present to his western readers. Soraya indicates how education empowers Afghan women and promotes gender equality. Soraya receives instruction from both school and her mother, Jamila Taheri, a Persian and history teacher at a girls' high school in Afghanistan:

I want to be a teacher,” she said. “Really? Why?” “I've always wanted to. When we lived in Virginia, I became ESL certified and now I teach at the public library one night a week. My mother was a teacher too, she taught Farsi and history at Zarghoona High School for girls in Kabul (Hosseini,

2003, P.81).

The preceding quotation demonstrates the strong role she plays in the new community to which she has immigrated by working as her mother did in Afghanistan. The same quotation leads us to the next evidence Hosseini provided his readers to disrupt the stereotyped image of the oriental woman in the character of Soraya when she decided to complete her studies at the college she wants to join and to challenge her father's decision to study law and become a lawyer “My father wants me to go to law school, my mother’s always throwing hints about medical school, but I’m going to be a teacher. Doesn’t pay much here, but it’s what I want” (Hosseini, 2003, p. 82). In this quotation we see how Soraya indicates the ability of an eastern woman to select the type of education she chooses and the type of career she wants to have in the future, demonstrating that women can decide and are aware of their rights in education and employment.

Sofia Akrami is the second female character that disrupts the oriental representation of woman, she is Amir's mother, died from a hemorrhage after giving birth of Amir. Sofia Akrami was widely recognized as Kabul's most elegant and religious woman. She was also a highly educated woman, and she taught classical Persian literature at the University of Kabul. Despite her absence from the first part of the novel, her role was effective. Hosseini sheds the light on the role of woman and gives her a value and authentic image through the character of Sofia Akrami not only through the character of Soraya. The novel's portrayal of Amir's mother disrupts the oriental representation of women because Hosseini shows us a model of well-educated and progressive woman, compassionate, and a sympathetic person with those who are oppressed from other ethnicities. She appears in the novel as a well cultured woman who loves literature and has the poetic sense through writing poems. Amir is describing his mother in the following words:

My mother, Sofia Akrami, a highly educated woman universally regarded as one of Kabul’s most respected, beautiful, and virtuous ladies. And not only did she teach classic Farsi literature at the university she was a descendant of the royal family, a fact that my father playfully rubbed in the skeptics’ faces by referring to her as “my princess” (Hosseini, 2003, P. 8).

Hosseini used the aforementioned quotation to convey the positive image of the eastern female within her country. That person is educated, cultured, strong, and

plays an important part in her community, as well as being attractive and beautiful.

### **E. Disrupting the Oriental Representation of Muslim Refugees**

Muslims in the West are often misrepresented; they are usually considered others, extremists, backwards, and a source of threat, so being a Muslim refugee in the United States or other western countries, according to the orientalist perspective, can widen the gap between the Occident and the Orient world, in particular the Islamic Orient world. All these concepts were created by the West to distort the image of Islam, leading to Islamophobia. This phenomenon is part of oriental representations of Muslims and some refugees as conceived by a large portion of the western world. According to Khusbu (2019, p. 1), Islamophobia, often fueled by the aftermath of 9/11, is used as a pretext for legitimizing hate and racism towards Muslims. This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as Muslim-phobia, is largely a result of the way governments, media, and literature have shaped and sustained the false narrative that portrays Muslims as extremists or fundamentalists. This perpetuated myth has significantly contributed to the widespread prevalence of Islamophobia.

In this regard, a number of articles and views have been written and documented which show the western view towards Muslim refugees in particular and connecting them with the notion of fundamentalism and islamophobia. Some of these views said by western public figures were documented in an article titled *Constructing cultural borders: depictions of Muslim refugees in British and German media* (2017) by Tobias Müller who states, “Muslim refugees are not only considered to be unfamiliar with tolerance and principles of liberal democracy but also conceived as culturally completely different” (cited in Müller, 2017, p. 271). This comment suggests a negative perception about Muslim refugees, implying that they are cultural outsiders unfamiliar with tolerance and free democratic policies and this biased generalizing fosters the discrimination against Muslim refugees. In the same article the writer presents some other views of how Muslim refugees are depicted in the western world from a religious perspective as he states “Another central pattern in the depiction of Muslim refugees is the association with jihadist terrorism. The connection between Muslim refugees and terrorism is established through different narrative elements and chains of association. First, texts indirectly

quote politicians warning of the so-called Islamic State smuggling “sleeping terror cells” as refugees to Europe” (cited in Müller, 2017, p. 269). This shows that stereotypes and prejudices about Muslims are common in the western world, and this has been fostered by the wars on terror and media portrayals of Muslims as fanatics. To support this discourse, Abubakar presents how the misconceived views by the west about Muslims are depicted in the western media in his article *The Political Economy of Hate Industry: Islamophobia in the Western Public Sphere* (2020), as he stated:

Their presence [Muslim refugees] as a threat is prevalent in the media. Dissemination of patented images of Muslims as irrational, susceptible to violence, medieval, anti-modern and incompatible to Western civilization, have been the thrust of Western media since the late 1960s (Schwartz, 2005; Said, 1993, 1980, 1981). And after 9/11, hostile essentialization of Muslims intensified in the US media, according to Professor K. A. Powell (2011, 2018) (Bukar, 2020, p. 154).

The above view shows the oriental perspective of Muslim refugees, which has been reinforced as a hegemonic narrative through the media which has been employed as the primary tool to accomplish this purpose. Media has influenced the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral levels of Westerners toward Islam in general as a religion and Muslims as individuals, ignoring the diversity among them and placing them in a single label based on generalizations.

This part of my analysis examines at the portrayal of Muslims and Muslim refugees in *The Kite Runner*. The emphasis will be on Amir's character, demonstrating how he was portrayed as a moderate Muslim free of all types of western biases and orientalist beliefs that classify a Muslim man as someone who has a tendency for violence, as noted in prior studies. Khalid Hosseini gives a vision of a Muslim refugee that dispels the myth that Muslim immigrants are fundamentalists, extremists, rigids, and anti-cosmopolitans with stable identities and a singular worldview that rejects all other perspectives.

In *The Kite Runner*, the tale spans several years, capturing the horrors of war in Afghanistan. As well as how Afghan Muslims have lived in Afghanistan, particularly during the golden age preceding the Taliban regime, and how Afghan Muslims have lived in the diaspora as immigrants or refugees. Both have the same

perception of Islamic culture, which contradicts the oriental depiction of Muslims in general. This point aligns with what Samiei mentioned in his article *Neo-Orientalism? The relationship between the West and Islam in our globalised world* (2010), in which he emphasizes on the notion of coexistence between eastern and western people in the western lands asserting that Muslim communities are not a threat on the contrary they are equal brothers:

The experience of having Muslim communities inside has been quite useful for enhancing a novel global vision. For peoples in frequent contact with Muslims as their colleagues, neighbors, friends and at times a member of their family, the bipolar perception of 'us' and 'them' seems to be much less meaningful than for previous generations (Samiei, 2010, p. 1151).

The researcher here discusses the benefits of living in Western society for Muslims, which leads to coexistence and finally reduces the distance between the two groups, East and West. As a result, refugees are portrayed positively as brothers and sisters, rather than as strangers or outsiders.

Before delving deeper into the character of Amir, it is necessary to see how Muslims are represented in Hosseini's novel in a real-life context. For example, the following quotation shows the first example of that. Amir here is recounting the Islamic education he received at school when he was in fifth grade:

He told us one day that Islam considered drinking a terrible sin; those who drank would answer for their sin on the day of Qiyamat Judgment Day. In those days drinking was fairly common in Kabul. No one gave you a public lashing for it but those Afghans who did drink did so in private out of respect (Hosseini, 2003, p.8).

The above quotation reflects a moment in the narrative where the characters discuss the Islamic view on drinking. This moment offers insights into the everyday practices and interpretations of Islam among ordinary Afghans. This quotation emphasizes the disparity between religious principles and personal implementation, illustrating the intricate connection that many Muslims have with their religious beliefs. The portrayal of Muslims in the novel does not present them as a uniform population rigidly following religious regulations, but rather as individuals who navigate their beliefs within their social environment. This depiction has great importance when

examining Edward Said's notion of Orientalism.

Said defined Orientalism as a perspective that conjures up, highlights, magnifies, and warps the differences between Eastern and European people and civilizations. Frequently, Arab culture is seen as foreign, primitive, uncivilized, and sometimes dangerous (1978, p. 207). The nuanced representation of Islamic traditions in *The Kite Runner* challenges Orientalism. Hosseini's portrayal of Muslims diverges from the conventional depiction of them as universally extremist or fundamentalist in their religious practices, offering a more equitable and authentic perspective.

In his book *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (2004), Bernard Lewis, a well-known Middle Eastern scholar who has written several books about Islam, asserts on his negative view of Islam as a religion that leads its followers to violence and his book is regarded as an iconic example of the Orientalist Mindset:

Islam, like other religions, has also known periods when it inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence. It is our misfortune that we have to confront part of the Muslim world while it is going through such a period, and when most—though by no means all—of that hatred is directed against us (Lewis, 2004, p. 21).

The quotation shows that the author, from an orientalist perspective, sees Islam as the root or source of the violence and enmity toward the West. According to this viewpoint, the generalization among all Muslims is clear evidence of the orientalist attitude and the western perspective of Muslims, whether refugees or not.

As mentioned before, Amir is a Muslim man of eastern culture and Islamic faith, but he acts as if he is not constrained or obligated by restricted Islamic practices. Amir considers the Islamic religion as one of peace rather than violence, and he, like his father, despises extremism and extremist actions in his country and elsewhere. It appears in the novel that Amir despises prejudice and violence. For example, he despises Pashtun fanaticism against Hazaras, Afghanistan's two major ethnic groupings. In the story, Amir depicts how the Pashtuns brutally oppressed the Hazara. The Hazaras were not only forced to flee their homeland, but they were also slaughtered, treated as slaves, and had their homes burned down. This appears in the

second chapter of the book, where Amir describes the moment he found a book in his mother's old history books and began reading, discovering the reality of Hazaras' historical misery and the crimes committed by Pashtuns against them:

In it [the book], I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had "quelled them with unspeakable violence." The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a (Hosseini, 2003, p. 7).

Analyzing Amir's words in this quotation reveals his inner conflict and refusal of the violence on this issue. When he adds (my people), it is apparent from his shock that he is ashamed of the great amount of hatred and violence his ethnic group has against others simply because they do not share the same religious orientation since Hazaras are Shia while Pashtuns are Sunni. While describing the situation, he admits that his own ethnicity is criminal, and the crimes they have perpetrated cannot be ignored.

In another scene from the novel's last part, when Amir travels to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab, he encounters Assef, who is now a Taliban commander. During their conversation, Assef describes butchering and executing Hazaras in Afghanistan with pride and satisfaction. Amir tells him that in the Western world, this behavior is referred to as ethnic cleansing, "In the west, they have an expression for that, I said. They call it ethnic cleansing. Do they? Assef's face brightened. Ethnic cleansing. I like it. I like the sound of it" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 244). This indicates Amir's attempt to convey that what the Taliban is doing is incompatible with Islamic religion; it is a form of wars crimes known as ethnic cleansing, and Islam is guilt-free of such brutal crimes against humanity. Hosseini attempts to convey through Amir's comments that Islam is a religion of peace and mercy. Committing such crimes in the name of Islam is not part of the Islamic soul; rather, it is part of the devil, and what is being done by some fundamentalists or extremists who call themselves Muslims and claim to be following God's orders is considered crimes against all of humanity and may also be classified as genocide. The previous instance exemplifies how many Muslims are

definitely against what is happening in some countries under the name of their religion. Murdering, raping, and property destruction is something nasty and this is what Amir told Assef in the same conversation when he said “ "That's disgusting," I said” ( Hosseini, 2003, p. 245). They use religion to justify their violent actions of beating, killing, raping and destroying people’s lives.

Religion in particular, Islam, can be interpreted as a form of extremism or a source of fanaticism through the characters Assef and the Taliban, which portray Islam as a brutal and uncivilized faith. On the other hand, Amir’s presence serves as a strong contrast to fundamentalism, which is the main part of oriental representation and generalizes all Muslims under one umbrella. To take more examples, when we delve deeply into the character of Amir, a Muslim immigrant who lives in the United States, we could find that Amir’s religious views are heavily affected by his father, Baba, as he (Amir) is not religious himself. Amir only engages in religious practices when needed. He was also influenced by Baba's beliefs about the real existence of Allah; those secular beliefs and values have already been brought about by colonialism. Amir views religion as a source of relief in difficult times. He returns to Allah only when he feels desperate and lost. For example, when Amir learned about Sohrab's suicide, he prayed to Allah and swore to fast, perform salah, and perform zakat. In the following excerpt, Amir describes his feelings toward his religion as a pure Muslim, emphasizing the true essence and value of Islam as a religion of peace and forgiveness:

I throw my makeshift \_jai-namaz\_, my prayer rug, on the floor and I get on my knees, lower my forehead to the ground, my tears soaking through the sheet. I bow to the west. Then I remember I haven't prayed for over fifteen years. I have long forgotten the words. But it doesn't matter, I will utter those few words I still remember: La ilaha ii\*\* Allah, Muhammad u rasul ullah. There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. I see now that Baba was wrong, there is a God, there always had been. I see Him here, in the eyes of the people in this corridor of desperation. This is the real house of God, this is where those who have lost God will find Him, not the white masjid with its bright diamond lights and towering minarets. There is a God, there has to be, and now I will pray, I will pray that He forgive that I have neglected Him all of these years, forgive that I have betrayed, lied, and sinned

with impunity only to turn to Him now in my hour of need, I pray that He is as merciful, benevolent, and gracious as His book says He is (Hosseini, 2003, p. 306).

The quotation above summarizes the core of Islam, and the right relationship should be between Muslims and their God (Allah). This is the real essence of Islam; it is not in mosques or on prayer rugs; it is found where peace is found, mercy is found, and forgiveness is found. Through Amir's words, Hosseini wants to present the right image of Islam. It is concluded that the more you commit sins and ask forgiveness, the more you will be pure and accepted by Allah. It is not a religion of punishment; on the contrary, it is a religion of forgiveness, anywhere and anytime. In this scene, Amir is making self-healing by reminding himself of Allah's real existence, who is merciful, benevolent, and gracious, implying that even if you do not get close to Allah for a long time, he will accept you when you come back, and this is the right image that Hosseini tries to present to the whole world, which contradicts the oriental discourse that sees Islam as a religion of punishment and fundamentalism.

In this context, it is worth noting what Edward Said pointed to about how the western media dissimilates the image of Islam. In his book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981), Edward Said claims that Western media has frequently misrepresented Islam, resulting in unfavorable perceptions and hostility. In this book, he expands on the basic themes presented in his most famous work, *Orientalism* (1978). According to Said, Islam is defined as the West's mirror opposite, or its Other, resulting in an overview that drastically limits the comprehension of Islam. According to Said, Islam as a 'vital lived experience cannot be known' as long as this framework is in effect:

All in all, present coverage of Islam and of non-Western societies in effect canonizes certain notions, texts, and authorities. The idea that Islam is medieval and dangerous, for example, has acquired a place both in the culture and in the polity that is very well defined: authorities can be cited for it readily, references can be made to it, arguments about particular instances of Islam can be adduced from it—by anyone, not just by experts or by journalists (Said, 1981, p. 149).

Said explains that Western media and cultural institutions have propagated negative stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims showing the complex

relation between the West and Islam, so according to Said's observation, Islam has been distorted through an oriental discourse which is already planned and constructed since colonialism, and this perpetuated discourse, must be followed by anyone who wants to write about Muslims and Islam without grasping its true essence.

The last part of analysis is allocated to show how *The Kite Runner* skillfully depicts Afghan immigrants' complex social and political diversity in views of religion. And this leads us to a more focus on the character of Baba, this is especially apparent in the exchanges between the main character's father, Baba, and other individuals from Afghanistan residing in Fremont, California. Baba's views on Israel, which are seen as pro-Jewish and thus perceived as anti-Islam by some Afghans in Fremont, spark intense debates. Despite the accusations, Baba engages with his critics over tea and rowt cake in the park, unafraid to confront and challenge the prevailing sentiments with his own political beliefs. This scenario highlights the tensions within the Afghan community, exacerbated by broader global issues of religious and political identity, as indicated in the following quote:

The bit about Israel used to draw the ire of Afghans in Fremont who accused him of being pro-Jewish and de facto anti-Islam. Baba would meet them for tea and rowt cake at the park drive them crazy with his politics (Hosseini, 2003, p.68).

From the quotation above we see how the novel offers a unique portrayal of Baba's conversations, shedding light on the intricate politics of identity among Afghan immigrants. These themes are closely aligned with the findings of Andrews' (2010) research, which delved into representation and identity exploration in post-9/11 literature, including *The Kite Runner*. Andrews' study accentuated the challenges faced by Muslim characters in navigating their identities, particularly within the context of religious discourse and societal interactions following the tragic events of 9/11. Baba's character exemplifies this complexity through his stance on Israel, which led some members of the Afghan community in Fremont to perceive him as pro-Jewish and, consequently, anti-Islam. This serves as a prime example of the intricate negotiation and representation of identity that Andrews explores. Baba's unwavering confidence during social gatherings not only reflects his personal convictions but also embodies the broader dynamics of how Afghan immigrants,

amidst their displacement, strive to assert and redefine their identities in a new cultural landscape.

Linking this to Edward Said's theory of Orientalism sheds further light on the situation. Said's concept critiques the West's portrayal of Eastern societies as monolithic and inferior (1978, p. 300). The Afghans' internal conflict over Baba's views mirrors this. They grapple with the dual challenge of resisting western stereotypes while managing diverse perspectives within their own community. Baba's unusual stance defies both external orientalist viewpoints and internal pressures to conform, revealing a deeper struggle for personal and communal identity under cultural and political instability.

Baba as a central character of the novel serves as a speaker to comment on those who disrupt the authentic image of Islam and to criticize those who practice religion superficially without grasping its true essence. In the following quote Baba sums up this complex web of ideas by expressing how much he despises religious fundamentalism: "Piss on the beards of all those self-righteous monkeys. They do nothing but thumb their rosaries and recite a book written in a tongue they don't even understand" (Hosseini, 2003, p.147). Baba's criticism is primarily directed at a certain group within Afghan culture, highlighting his worry over the incorrect understanding or improper use of Islamic beliefs. Baba's viewpoint in the novel illuminates the internal variations within Islamic societies.

The quote can be linked to Edward Said's Orientalism theory, providing an intriguing viewpoint. Said's theory suggests that the West frequently creates a stereotypical and exotic portrayal of the East (or the Orient). This portrayal exhibits a lack of understanding and a bias toward perceiving Eastern societies as being static, unchanging, and prone to fanaticism and tyranny. Said adds that this western perspective frequently fails to acknowledge the intricacy and variety within these societies (1978, p. 300).

In accordance with Said's theory, Baba's statement could be interpreted as a repudiation of the reductionist and homogeneous depiction of Islamic societies. It contests the orientalist discourse by providing an internal perspective from Afghan society that is critical of its own extremes. Baba, a secular and progressive Afghan protagonist, personifies a perspective that opposes the stereotype of the East as innately devout and zealous. This differentiation is of paramount importance in

comprehending the heterogeneity within Eastern societies and the peril of oversimplifying intricate socio-political dynamics.

In conclusion, Hosseini gives a model of refugees who, despite being from the oriental world and Islamic countries, challenge the West's preconceived views of the Orient either men or women. In addition to that, the main character Amir demonstrates his ability to create a new identity through a progressive and ongoing development process. Khaled Hosseini's vivid narratives and appealing voice, with a focus on Afghanistan's cultural, political, and social issues, aims to make his readers or audience aware of the plights of the Afghan population and create empathy for what is going on there through his works.



#### **IV. THE ORIENTAL REPRESENTATION CRACKED IN *EXIT WEST***

Mohsin Hamid's fourth novel, *Exit West* (2017), depicts the story of a young couple fleeing their war-torn country through a series of magical doors that lead to remote places. It highlights topics of love, the refugee crisis, religion, and terrorism in a perfectly convincing style that merges magic and realism. *Exit West* depicts the experiences of the refugees in the camps and sets in different parts of the world, starting from an unnamed city to the Greek island of Mykonos, to London, to California, and ending in the same unnamed city of the homeland of both protagonists, Saeed and Nadia. Mohsin Hamid in this novel investigates the oriental discourse and the misrepresentation of refugees as he presents both the protagonists, Saed and Nadia, in a powerful authentic way to disrupt the oriental representation against refugees in general and the Muslim ones in particular. What makes his novel so highly regarded is that it was published at a critical juncture in time, when the world was and still is dealing with a massive refugee crisis. This book's timeliness adds to its popularity, which could be attributed to the fact that the refugee crisis is ongoing, not over, and will continue. Aside from highlighting the positive image of refugees as powerful and modern, it also gives them a humanized value that contradicts the prevalent negative image portrayed by Western media.

Vesna Lazovic's study, *Dehumanization Revisited Media Reports on the Refugee Crisis in British Online Newspapers* (2021), provides an example of the negative representation of immigrants in western media. The researcher gathered a number of media reports containing information about the way western media deals with the topic of refugees and the way they are described to the public. It is stated that "Cisneros (2008) focused on an appalling metaphor IMMIGRANT AS A POLLUTANT in news media discourse on immigration, emphasizing the discriminatory nature of such discourse, in which immigrants are constructed as threatening substances and a mobile, toxic threat" (Lazović, 2021, p. 120). In the

study, the researcher provides certain data based on observations she got from western media that portray migrants as toxic, threatening, or even a disease. The researcher examines the vocabulary and metaphors used to describe immigrants or refugees. Furthermore, she displays the harsh language used to criticize refugees not only in the media but also in discussion forums:

Two more recent research studies have found other instances of metaphor use. Musolff (2017) tracked so-called parasite metaphors in weblogs and discussion forums, where immigrants were depicted as parasites, leeches, or bloodsuckers, whilst Marder (2018) readdressed the implications of the metaphor which links refugees to weapons of mass destruction (Lazovic, 2021, p. 120).

It can be concluded from the previous study that the use of abusive language in the media to depict refugees can have a detrimental impact on public perception. It has the potential to reinforce preconceptions and prejudice, causing people to see refugees as a threat or a burden rather than people with legitimate demands for assistance and safety. This may result in negative views towards refugees as well as support for undesirable or unfair laws. Therefore, Hamid's narrative fosters empathy and humanizes refugee stories by providing a vivid and authentic image of them as active and able to speak, demonstrating the real-life experiences they face, and emphasizing their value as human beings rather than objects, diseases, or threats.

Hamid presents a model of modern refugees who are able to challenge the oriental portrayal of them to support the process of modifying this dominant discourse, which has a long history against the Orient and Muslims in particular. Here the word Muslims should be taken into consideration, since the protagonists of this novel are models of Muslim oriental refugees. The first part of the analysis focuses on Nadia, the female protagonist, in order to deconstruct the stereotypical image of the Muslim eastern female. The second part will focus on Saeed as a Muslim oriental male and refugee. Nadia and Saeed are also investigated together in order to highlight their active role as refugees and shed insight on Mohsin Hamid's humanized attitude toward refugees and the humanized value given by him to refugees.

First, it is important to revisit and remember Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Said studies Eastern-Western relations.

Orientalism, as defined by him, is an ideology that espouses a dichotomy between western culture and Islam and the notion that individuals who differ from these norms are deficient in humanity. According to Said, it is a method of thinking predicated on a division between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident," which only exists in Western minds (p. 10).

Said observed that Orientalism, as a mode of thinking, frequently generated grand concepts about the Orient from specific, distinct details, which may lead to broad conclusions about how people thought and believed in the oriental world (1978, p. 96). This demonstrates how those who study orientalist ideology tend to move from specific occurrences in a people's culture or history to general, usually incorrect, assumptions about the East. However, the oriental representation, with its overgeneralization of the East by the West, can be disrupted by presenting the real image of orientals in particular those who were forced to migrate from their original lands to the western lands.

#### **A. Deconstructing the Stereotyped Image of The Muslim Oriental Female**

According to Said's theory (1978, p. 300), Western views frequently depict 'Eastern' cultures, including Islamic ones, as strange, old-fashioned, and steeped in traditions that never change. This idea often ignores the depth and intricacy of these communities. In *Exit West*, Nadia's special way of showing her Islamic and oriental identity questions the usual idea of oriental and Muslim women seeing her as unfree or too religious. Hamid shows Nadia as a character that goes beyond simple labels. This makes readers understand that women in the oriental world are complicated and different, moving away from the single-sided views found in stories about other places. Oriental culture has frequently been portrayed as a culture that views women as downtrodden, subservient, oppressed and silent. According to the mainstream western perception, patriarchal systems continue to exert rigorous control over oriental women. Social customs, conventions, cultural values, and religion serve as means of control that are used in patriarchal societies. Deconstructing the oriental representation of women means challenging, disrupting, and modifying the widespread stereotyped and frequently unfavorable picture of oriental women. This includes deconstructing social and gender prejudices and encouraging more varied and good role models. By challenging these stereotypes, we can progress toward a

more realistic and nuanced knowledge of oriental women and their lives.

As an example of such misconceptions about Muslim societies' views of women as the western media dissimilates, it is good to look at the following quotation from an article titled *Islamophobia and Media Portrayals of Muslim Women: A Computational Text Analysis of US News Coverage* (2017), in which the researcher examines the portrayals of Muslim women in US news media, demonstrating how the confirmation bias dominates US news coverage of women living in other countries:

Drawing on the theory of gendered orientalism, I identify an important aspect of media coverage that perpetuates the stereotype of Muslims as a cultural threat: representations of women and gender inequality. According to the theory, US media outlets cast Muslim societies as distinctly misogynistic. In doing so, they reinforce general stereotypes of Muslims as uncivilized, barbaric, and a threat to Western values (Terman, 2017, p. 489).

The quotation above demonstrates how Muslim women are represented as weak individuals, and unable to have the same rights as men. In other words, their rights are violated due to gender inequalities. This bias in the US media is a continuation of orientalist discourse, which portrays oriental and Muslim countries as discriminating against women, patriarchal, and tyrannical.

Western views of Muslim oriental women can be seen in a variety of ways, such as in the media and public discourse. Therefore, before moving on to the examination of Nadia's character as an oriental Muslim female, and because we live in a modern era, it is vital to mention some of these perspectives, which have been documented through a number of publications or media reports. One of the most frequently discussed topics about the image of oriental Muslim women in the western media is the issue of terrorism and its connection to Muslim women, in addition to other negative stereotypes. Some studies have been conducted to investigate this issue and shed light on the portrayal of Muslim women in the western media, such as the study titled *The Portrayal of Muslim Women in Western Media. A Content Analysis of the New York Times and The Guardian* (2021). The study aims to analyze how the New York Times and Guardian portray Muslim women in their news coverage, as well as the framing they employ when addressing their issues:

Terrorism was represented the most by far as compared to the other remaining themes. In fact, if contrasted with the Guardian of the United Kingdom, the situation almost remains the same because they also majorly represent Muslim women as terrorists in their news coverage[.]Other images of the Muslim women that are portrayed in the New York Times news stories include, Muslim women being uneducated, sexual objects for men, house wives and financially unstable (Kasirye, 2021, p. 14).

According to the prior remark, public conceptions of Muslim women are generally different from the actual image, particularly in most Western countries. Most of them believe that every woman who wears an Islamic veil (Hijab) in public has some connection to terrorism, violence, or Muslim radicals, which frequently leads to the entire topic devolving into islamophobia. This lack of objectivity can also be noticeable in other topics, such as education, male-female relationships, and home issues. Women are portrayed as inferior to men, not equal to them, and their primary roles are at home as wives and mothers.

However, Hamid's image of oriental women challenges negative stereotypes about immigrant Muslim women struggling to live in the West, who eliminates the common stereotypical images. Nadia, who is fiercely independent in a way that is not common in her country, wears a full body covering despite not being religious. The first evidence of Nadia disrupting the oriental representation of women was when she decided to leave her family's home and live alone without any consideration of the oriental cultural norms. Hamid describes her decision and the consequences following it:

When after finishing university Nadia announced, 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 her sister and perhaps most of all from Nadia herself, such that Nadia and her family both considered her thereafter to be without a family ( Hamid, 2017, p. 16).

The previous quotation describes Nadia's lifestyle that led to a breakdown of oriental female depiction. Nadia's mentality, behavioral traits, and activities challenge stereotypes of women in patriarchal society. She is an independent woman with a sense of not belonging to a single community; from the beginning of the story, even

when this single group is her family. When she chose to reside on her own, apart from her family and relatives, she wanted to be free of the customs and conventions of her conservative society centered on patriarchal authority, which pushes women to act more than men within cultural and religious standards, which is consistent with what Edward Said mentioned in his book *Orientalism* (1978), referring to western perceptions about the oriental woman. "Women are usually the creatures of a male power fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality; they are more or less stupid; and above all, they are willing" (Said, 1978, p. 207). Nadia not only challenges the eastern female stereotype, but she also represents a woman who does not identify with any particular culture or set of beliefs. Even if it occurs in a confined context, as in the case of Nadia, she does what she is convinced with and bears complete responsibility for all the consequences of whatever action she takes.

Another characteristic that Hamid uses in his portrayal of Nadia is her physical appearance. Nadia's character as an oriental woman confronts eastern society from within, and this can be seen in the way she looks, which contradicts the way she behaves. From her physical appearance, she gives the impression of a conservative and pious type of oriental Muslim woman, which indicates the paradox in her character, throughout the novel. Nadia's insistence on wearing the black robe despite not being religious could be because she wants to control how people see and interact with her. Therefore, by wearing the black robe, Nadia asserts her individuality and independence. Her insistence on wearing the black long robe confirms the western misconception about oriental women in many countries in the Middle East. However, Nadia's strong, rebellious personality, independence, and awareness distinguish her from the stereotype of Muslim oriental women in western culture. Despite wearing the black robe, Nadia rides a motorcycle, lives alone, works with men, invites a man to her flat, has a sexual affair with a man without a marriage, like the musician she knew before Saeed, and engages in other actions that may appear strange to westerners due to their preconceived notions about oriental Muslim women.

It is always believed that a woman needs a man to protect her and depend on him physically and financially and her role is often marginalized. However, Hamid offers this type of woman to disrupt that old-fashioned oriental representation of women. Nadia is this type of person who does not want to live in a struggle with her community; on the contrary, she acts according to her free will no more than.

In the second half of the novel, when she became a refugee with Saeed in different parts of the world, Nadia presents a more powerful model of an oriental woman refugee. For example, when the couple decides to go to their first destination, the Greek island of Mykonos, Nadia and Saeed flee the country and pass through the first magical door. In this moment, we could see how Nadia was the one to take the initiative to enter through the mysterious black door, calming down the frightened Saeed. This scene demonstrates how much Nadia broke the false image of the weak oriental woman as expected by the West.

Nadia is a strong woman who has the eagerness to interact with other refugees; she wishes to embrace and find new experiences, as well as assimilate into new multicultural societies. She feels a sense of obligation to others who do not share the same language, religion, or culture. A notable example of this is when both Nadia and Saeed move to London and live with other migrants in a mansion populated primarily by Nigerians. At that time Nadia started attending Nigerian council meetings which was held regularly in the backyard of the mansion by a group of Nigerians who hold frequent deliberations on day-to-day issues and problems, including judgments on refugee affairs inside this house. Nadia wanted to participate in that community despite the fact that she is the only person who is not part of this society (non-Nigerian) she has a sense of responsibility to other refugees' issues. This indicates to what extent she wanted to have an effective role as an oriental woman through participating in solving others' problems even when they are beyond her nation or culture or language. "Nadia gave voice to an idea or opinion among them, she did not need to fear that her views could not be comprehended, for her English was like theirs, one among many" (Hamid, 2017, p. 80). The following excerpt indicates Nadia's willingness to be a powerful member of any community she is part of and the effective role she wants to have:

They represented something new in her mind, the birth of something new, and she found these people who were both like and unlike those she had known in her city, familiar and unfamiliar, she found them interesting, and she found their seeming acceptance of her, or at least tolerance of her, rewarding, an achievement in a way (Hamid, 2017, p. 80).

The previous example was Nadia's position in London's house, where she has good relations with groups of Nigerians. Her sense of responsibility reflects her positive,

extroverted personality, which allows her to quickly connect with new individuals, and this forms a contradiction with the stereotypical image of the oriental woman in the perception of some Westerners. Nadia did not choose to be protected by Saed, the male character; on the contrary, she has chosen to create her own new multicultural space, neglecting her close relationship with Saed. She feels it is an accomplishment to have established a space that allows her to discover new concepts and methods of thinking. Furthermore, she wanted to have a powerful role not only as an oriental woman but also as a refugee woman, because it is maybe expected by the reader that the horrible experiences refugees have already faced have led to psychological traumas, especially for children and women. In this point, Hamid highlights Nadia's strength as she is a man, not a woman, which destroys the image of a marginalized, weak, male-dependent oriental woman.

When the council discussed the nativist attack on refugee groups, council members believed that the best way to deal with the situation was to avoid violent reactions and not be easily inflamed by nativist groups who wanted to slaughter refugee groups in London. Nadia, on the other hand, strongly disagrees, arguing that refugees should be brave and not give up on nativist violent actions and xenophobia practices, because if they do not resist, their fate will be similar to that of the nations they have fled from, which were destroyed by militaristic rule. Nadia, on the other hand, accepts the opposing viewpoint even if she is not completely convinced, thus she respects it:

All agreed that the most important thing was to manage the impetuosity of the youngsters, for armed resistance would likely lead to a slaughter, and nonviolence was surely their most potent response, shaming their attackers into civility. All agreed on this except Nadia, who was unsure what she thought, who had seen what happens to people who surrender, as her former city surrendered to the militants (Hamid, 2017, p. 83).

In this situation, Nadia thinks that she holds a part of the universal view of the world which is based on respecting all values and perspectives, and it is necessary to acknowledge other parts of universal values. This way of thinking disrupts what Said refers to in his book about the Orientals, who have rigid minds that are static, unchangeable, and restricted to their views and perspectives.

## **B. Saeed's and Nadia's Journeys to London then Marin-San Francisco**

Both Saeed and Nadia represent a model of refugees, that helps in disrupting the oriental representation. They refused to be dependent on others to obtain their necessities, like food, and this appears from their first arrival on Mykonos Island, where they found a refugee camp of multiple nationalities. Even though their money was nearly spent, they chose to get the food by hand by going to the sea and fishing “Saeed bought a simple fishing rod, available for a less exorbitant price. He and Nadia journeyed to the sea, and stood on a rock, and put bread on the hook, and tried to fish, alone, two people by themselves” (Hamid, 2017, p. 63).

They also started their journey of discovering the island; “Nadia had the idea that they should explore the island as if they were tourists” (Hamid, 2017, p. 62). They like the idea of discovering the world around them by themselves, which indicates their willingness to discover the world outside of specific boundaries, locations, or communities, so they decided not to stay in the refugee camp; they prefer to make their own journey of discovering as cosmopolitan travelers rather than as refugees who are put inside a refugee camp surrounded by man-made borders (fences) like an animal put inside a cage. “So, they carried their loads like trekkers in the wilderness and walked along the beaches and up the hills and right to the edges of the cliffs, and they decided that Mykonos was indeed a beautiful place” (Hamid, 2017, p. 62). This part challenges the stereotypical image of the Orient, which views them as idle, passive, and inactive. Edward Said describes this image which is constructed by the West in his 1978 book *Orientalism*: “The very possibility of development, transformation, human movement in the deepest sense of the word-is denied the Orient and the Oriental. As a known and ultimately an immobilized or unproductive quality” (Said, 1978, p. 208). Therefore, Hamid tries to present a powerful image of refugees that disrupts the oriental one.

Another vivid image that supports Hamid's representation is that when they moved to London through one of the magical doors, they decided to have a productive role by working with hundreds of other refugees, and this new image of a refugee as a productive person contradicts the oriental image of a refugee as a weak and dependent individual waiting to take, not to give. They were forced to leave the mansion where they lived with a majority group of Nigerians and move to a camp with their own space within a new world full of multicultural communities. Both

found work in their worker camp, and in this stage, a gradual shift in their identity and relationship as lovers has been created. Hamid says about this, “It was with Saeed and Nadia, who found themselves changed in each other’s eyes in this new place” (Hamid, 2017, p. 101).

Mohsin Hamid, confronts and challenges the stereotyped image of the Muslim oriental man in the character Saeed, exactly as he does in the character of Nadia, and this can be observed in a variety of situations. This part of the analysis focuses on showing how Saeed is portrayed in a way that challenges the stereotyped portrayal of the oriental man generated by the West, as well as highlighting identity transformation in Saeed's character, as he has undergone greater identity transformation than Nadia. The first example is Saeed's attempt to overcome his inferiority feeling and exotism by trying to integrate into the new community, particularly in the field of work by working with locals and other refugees he encounters in the places to which he has migrated. For example, Saeed has developed a friendly or good relationship with his native foreman, who worked with in the camp with other refugees, indicating his willingness to live within a coexisting community and his desire to avoid feeling like an outsider or exotic. He wants to be part of this community, at least in the field of work, so he has a good position in between the foreman and the other members of the team, and this provides him an active role and grants him a type of power because of his dedication to work and the ability to speak English. In this stage, we see Saeed struggling to create a balance between his nostalgic feelings and his need to play a good role as a refugee. In the second half of the novel, he becomes a refugee, and as a result, a new hybrid identity appears in which he lives within a multicultural community that includes hundreds of refugees from various backgrounds as well as natives. This flexibility of change contradicts the orientalist discourse, which depicts the Orient as unchanging, static, and unwilling to accept diversity, ““the Oriental” as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction” (Said, 1978, p. 17). In the following quotation, the author describes the privileged status Saeed gained in his work and in his relationship with the native foreman:

This foreman was fair and strong and had a stark, afflicted countenance. He did not make small talk but unlike many of the natives he ate his lunch among the migrants who labored under him, and he seemed to like Saeed, or if like

was too strong a word, he seemed at least to value Saeed's dedication, and often he sat next to Saeed as he ate. Saeed also had the added advantage of being among those workers who spoke English and so occupied a status midway between the foreman and the others on the team (Hamid, 2017, p. 96).

The above quotation includes an implicit message about how the relationship between refugees and native people in host countries should be and the importance of being founded on mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. Refugees should be given respect and dignity so that both groups can benefit from knowing about each other's cultures, languages, and traditions, as well as collaboratively addressing common obstacles and contributing to the community. Saeed's good position at work reflects the power and influence that he desires to have as a modern man who can communicate in the most widely spoken language. Another point that should be emphasized here is the gradual change in Saeed's character regarding his religious practices. Saeed starts out as a non-religious person, but after a long period as an immigrant, he finds himself praying many times a day and becoming increasingly religious. Hamid describes that:

Saeed too prayed more often in this period, at the very least once a day, and he valued the discipline of it, the fact that it was a code, a promise he had made, and that he stood by. 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. When he prayed he touched his parents, who could not otherwise be touched, and he touched a feeling that we are all children who lose our parents (Hamid, 2017, p. 104).

This quotation brings us to Stuart Hall's theory of *Cultural Identity*, which distinguishes between stable and unstable identity. Stable or essentialist identity linked to race and origin, while unstable identity, is in a constant state of change as a result of moving from one place to another with exposure to a different cultural context, or it can be changed as a possible result of traumas following displacement, as in the case of forced migration and the change which has been described in the above quotation of Saeed's character is a result of the refugee crisis he experienced. This shift serves as a key to opening the gate to identity transformation, resulting in a

type of human being capable of making continual change, accepting new habits, and creating new values, which is also linked to a desire to learn about different cultures and develop new perspectives.

Identity transformation also revisits Orientalism by Edward Said, in particular what mentioned about the oriental male character “Moreover the male conception of the world in its effect upon the practicing Orientalist, tends to be static, frozen, fixed eternally” (Said, 1978, p. 208). Therefore, Saeed’s character contradicts with the orientalist perspective of the oriental male.

Saeed's personality gradually changes particularly in the last three chapters of the novel. Despite his desire to return to his homeland and culture, he provided a fine image of a powerful refugee. This powerful role involves working for the good of others, and being a person who wants to assist others, and to participate in providing services when they are in need. In the novel, Hamid describes Saeed doing volunteer work by supporting new arrivals of refugees who want to reside in the camp, and this form of activity contributes to a shift in Saeed's character, giving him some power. Aside from his work with hundreds of other refugees, he decided to participate in humanitarian and volunteer activities in some locations, including London and Marin. In this part of the story, it is worthwhile to ask why does Mohsin Hamid choose his male protagonist to indulge in such activities? Does this give him any type of strength as a refugee and oriental character? The answer reminds us of what Edward Said stated about western perceptions of the Orient, which saw them as weak, unmotivated, passive, and prone to violence, particularly among males. In the following quotation, Edward Said describes what has been said by one of the western scholars who traveled to the oriental world in particular the Middle East region, according to scholar’s view he states “Orientals, and Muslims in particular, are lazy, their politics are capricious, passionate, and futureless” ( Said, 1978, p. 178). Saeed, as an oriental character, opposes the stereotypes set by the West. He is presented as an energetic man seeking to put himself out of a closed group or a constrained environment. He wants to rid himself of the feeling of dependence on others by being responsible and open to diversity. The following lines describe Saeed’s first voluntary work:

It was said that with every month there were more worker camps around London, but even if this were true Saeed and Nadia noticed an almost daily

swelling of their own camp with new arrivals. Some came on foot, others in buses or vans. On their days off workers were encouraged to help out around the camp, and Saeed often volunteered to help process and settle the camp's latest additions (Hamid,2017, p. 99).

In the above quotation, Saeed's activity and productive role can be interpreted as a response to the misery that he, like many other immigrants, endures. Hamid wants to demonstrate to his readers that hardship breeds strength, and that the person who fled his homeland is a strong individual capable of assisting and providing for those in need, rather than a weak person who takes advantage of his crisis and waits for sympathy from others.

Saeed has also engaged in a different form of voluntary activity since moving to Marin with Nadia, which has led to a more significant change in his personality. This occurred when he met a black preacher in Marin who leads a nonprofit organization that supports refugees. This charity offers a shelter, feeds the hungry homeless, and teaches English to newcomers. At this point, Saeed begins working and volunteering with the preacher and his daughter. Here we can see the powerful role in the voluntary work, which provides an opportunity to discover other cultures, acquire practical knowledge with global concerns, and make a good difference So, Saeed's time and efforts to help others who are in need is remarkable proof of the transformation in his character as he became more powerful.

To wrap up the previous analysis, Mohsin Hamid attempts to eliminate the generally negative portrayal of refugees by providing several examples of both protagonists attempting to play a powerful role in the new communities they have become part of. For example, Saeed strives to build a powerful role and engage with others in the workplace, but Nadia seeks to create an identical role in the social domain rather than the professional domain. Saeed has undergone more identity changes than Nadia. Finally, the more their identities shift, the farther apart they get.

### **C. The Oriental Representation of the Muslim Refugees Redefined**

Before moving into a detailed analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* by showing how he disrupts the misrepresentation of Muslims, it is necessary to provide some examples of Western media perceptions of Muslims and Islam. For example, in

an article titled *Portrayal of the Muslim World in the Western Print Media Post-9/11: Editorial Treatment in "The New York Times" and "The Daily Telegraph"* (2014), the researcher explores the portrayal of the Muslim world in the editorial pages of The New York Times and The Daily, demonstrating how the world has changed since September 11th:

It is claimed that the mainstream media in the West - and especially in the US - has been disseminating false information about the Islamic world for several decades. Due to the distorted images developed and manipulated by the media, Islam is the name of negativity in the West. It is generally believed that the western and US mainstream media often misrepresent and inaccurately interpret and portray Islam and the Islamic world. Since 9/11, Islam has been portrayed in the media as a religion that needs to be changed for its survival. In the present world, neither Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, nor Buddhism have ever been exposed to such harsh criticism, even when the members of these communities have been involved in violent acts directly against America or the western world in general (Shahwar, 2014, p. 134).

In addition to what was mentioned by the researcher in the quotation above, it is obvious that there are a variety of reasons that contribute to Westerners' poor and negative perceptions of Islam. Historical events such as the Crusades and colonialism have left a legacy of hostility and misunderstanding. The 9/11 attacks and subsequent terrorist actions increased anti-Muslim sentiments. Media depiction and political rhetoric have both significantly contributed to the perpetuation of negative preconceptions about Muslims and Islam. Furthermore, cultural and religious distinctions or differences, like the hijab and the Islamic law of Sharia, can be misinterpreted or distorted, instilling fear and prejudice. Therefore, education and religious conversation are critical to fighting these myths and promoting understanding.

*Exit West* explores the worldwide refugee crisis; at the same time, Mohsin Hamid investigates how Islam is misrepresented under the concepts of 'Islamophobia' and 'fundamentalism'. The novel's main character, Saeed, helps to show the big problems and inner battles faced by those who are stuck between the wrong portrayal of their religion in violence and their own calm thoughts. Saeed's personal loss and the scary issues that happen to him make his inner turmoil even

worse. This fight is clearly shown in a special quote where Saeed feels pulled between the words of a man in London with a white-marked beard, which he finds powerful and uplifting, and his scary memories of combatants from his own country. These fighters are accused of his mother's death. The duality of his feelings is evident as he draws an unwilling parallel between the gathering around the man with the white-marked beard and the militants, stirring a sense of decay within himself, as indicated in the following quote:

Saeed was torn because he was moved by these words, strengthened by them, and they were not the barbarous words of the militants back home, the militants because of whom his mother was dead and possibly by now his father as well, but at the same time the gathering of men drawn to the words of the man with the white-marked beard sporadically did remind him of the militants, and when he thought this he felt something rancid in himself, like he was rotting from within (Hamid, 2017, p.84).

Edward Said's theory of Orientalism can provide a valuable framework for interpreting this quotation. Orientalism refers to the Western portrayal of Eastern societies as exotic, primitive, uncivilized, and often perilous (Said, 1978, p.60). In the context of this quotation, Saeed's experiences can be viewed as a manifestation of orientalist perspectives, whereby the intricate realities of Islamic societies are simplified into a binary of peace and violence. The words of the man with the white-marked beard represent the peaceful and genuine essence of Islam, while the militants symbolize the orientalist stereotype of innate violence and barbarism in Eastern cultures. Saeed's inner turmoil and feeling of decay from within represent the detrimental impact of these misrepresentations on individuals who find their identity caught between these contrasting depictions. Consequently, Hamid's narrative challenges the orientalist lens and advocates for a more nuanced understanding of Islamic societies and the individuals within them. So, in this quotation we could find the portrayal of Saeed's inner turmoil in Mohsin Hamid's work as he grapples with the distorted portrayal of Islam.

In *Exit West*, Hamid skillfully addresses themes of self-identity, cultural traditions, and personal religious beliefs under the broad umbrella of Islam. The novel probes into the varied, often complex, ways people relate to their faith, particularly in a contemporary setting that sometimes distorts or misrepresents

Islamic practices. It showcases the diversity within the Muslim community through its characters' interactions, effectively challenging prevailing stereotypes and emphasizing that faith is a deeply personal matter. This theme is clearly depicted in an exchange between Nadia and Saeed, the main characters. Their conversation reveals contrasting attitudes towards practices like prayer, with Nadia candidly admitting she does not pray, and Saeed expressing a more layered view. This interaction highlights the broad range of beliefs and practices in Islam, as illustrated in the following quote:

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.' Her expression did not change. So he persevered, clinging to his grin with the mounting desperation of a doomed rock climber: 'I think it's personal. Each of us has his own way. Or ... her own way. Nobody's perfect. And in any case—' She interrupted him. 'I don't pray,' she said (Hamid, 2017, p.7).

The aforementioned quotation delineates a dialogue transpiring between Nadia and Saeed, which can be interpreted through Edward Said's Orientalism theory. The misperceptions of a uniform restricted commitment to religious rituals often distort the image of Islam and its followers, which this discourse delicately addresses and shows an authentic image.

Hamid's story shows that Muslims are diverse, dispelling the notion of extremists and pious Muslims. Saeed's deep comprehension of his religion and Nadia's confession of not praying. This indicates the influential role of literature in challenging the orientalist representation of Muslims as a uniform collective. Through its exploration of the diverse and unique manifestations of religious devotion within the Muslim community, the novel challenges the oversimplified and reductionist narratives prevalent in mainstream discourse, thereby promoting a more comprehensive comprehension and deconstruction of Muslim stereotypes.

Therefore, the theory of Orientalism by Said is so relevant in this context since Said's (1978, p. 104) argument was that the West often perceives Eastern societies, particularly Islamic ones, through a lens of exoticism and otherness, which leads to a distortion and oversimplification of these cultures. In *Exit West*, the conversation presented counters this narrative by portraying Muslims as individuals with diverse beliefs and practices. This depiction demonstrates that there is no single

way to be Muslim, challenging the stereotypes propagated by Orientalism, which often associate Muslims with extremism or fundamentalism in a uniform manner.

Hamid's narrative in *Exit West* masterfully explores the intricate themes of identity, choice, and the personal expression of faith, particularly within the Islamic context. The novel delves into how individual experiences and decisions shape one's relationship with religion, often challenging the stereotypes and misconceptions associated with Islam. Through the character interactions, Hamid illustrates that Islamic practices and expressions of faith are not homogenous but rather deeply personal and diverse. A touching exchange between Nadia and Saeed illustrates this. Their conversation illuminates the intricacy of Muslim identities, particularly in a culture that misrepresents Islam. Nadia's strict black robe, although not praying, raises problems regarding personal liberty and the complexity of religious expression, as seen in the following quote:

When Saeed and Nadia finally had coffee together in the cafeteria, which happened the following week after the very next session of their class, Saeed asked her about her conservative and virtually all-concealing black robe. 'If you don't pray,' he said, lowering his voice, 'why do you wear it?' (Hamid, 2017, p.13)

The quote where Saeed asks why Nadia wears a modest black robe even though she does not pray traditionally can be seen as about disliking Muslims, scary acts of fundamentalism, and how it relates to Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. This shows how people create fearful pictures and ideas about Eastern cultures like Arab and Islamic communities, making them inferiors and threat. This shows the hidden prejudices and ideas behind these opinions, which create fear of Muslims and wrongly represent their cultures (Said, 1978, p. 108). The talk between Nadia and Saeed gives a different point of view on what it means to be Muslim. It fights against the one-sided ideas created by fear of Muslims and discussions about terrorism around the world.

The depiction of Nadia's decision to wear a black robe in Mohsin Hamid's work, even though she does not participate in conventional religious rituals, aligns with the topics explored in Zaidi and Sahibzada's (2018) research. Their study looks at how Islam is portrayed in H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* as terrorism and Islamophobia in the post-9/11 United States. Similarly, Hamid's narrative highlights the intricacies

of Muslim identities, as seen in Nadia's clothing. Her choice to wear the robe, regardless of her religious practices, confronts the simplistic Islamophobic generalizations that associate outward appearance with religious fanaticism or political views. Nadia's persona supports Zaidi and Sahibzada's conclusions that Muslim communities have various experiences and that exterior appearances don't always represent religious or political ideas. Hamid's novel explores Nadia's intricate connection to her identity, adding to a broader discussion that underscores the significance of comprehending the multifarious aspects of Muslim identities. It also challenges the oversimplified and frequently distorted perspectives that prevail in societies impacted by Islamophobia.

According to Said, western views frequently depict 'Eastern' cultures, including Islamic ones, as strange, old-fashioned, and steeped in traditions that never change. This idea often ignores the depth and intricacy of these communities. In *Exit West*, Nadia's special way of showing her Muslim identity questions the usual idea of Muslim women being unfree or too religious. Hamid shows Nadia as a character that goes beyond simple labels. This makes readers understand that Muslims are complicated and different, moving away from the single-sided views found in stories about other places.

The perception of immigrants and Muslims in general as violent or aggressive can also be found in many other examples of western perspectives that associate Muslims with extremism. One of these perspectives is offered in an article by a scholar named Mohammad Samiei under the title *Neo-Orientalism? The relationship between the West and Islam in our globalised world* (2010). In his study, the researcher examines some of the western beliefs regarding Islam and Muslims in general, as stated by Bernard Lewis, a renowned orientalist and Middle Eastern scholar and author of several books on the subject of Islam:

Regarding acts of terror in the name of Islam he [Bernard Lewis] asserts: “Meanwhile, significant numbers of Muslims are ready to approve, and a few of them to apply, this [extremist] interpretation of their religion. Terrorism requires only a few. Obviously the West must defend itself by whatever means will be effective” (Samiei, 2010, p. 1153).

From the previous quotation, it is clear to what extent part of the western views have negative perceptions with an emphasis on a religious threat by Muslims in the

European or western communities, and eventually this perception plays a vital role in shaping attitudes toward Muslims in Europe and the United States, leading to more xenophobia practices and hate crimes against Muslim immigrants in the western countries. As a result of that, in some countries, a number of governmental actions have been taken to limit the religious freedom of Muslim groups living there. To summarize, they consider Islam equal to the word threat.

The portrayal of Muslims as extremists or fundamentalists in Western culture is a complex topic with historical and contemporary roots. One significant reason is the media's depiction of Islamic religion as a source of fundamentalism, which frequently focuses on Muslim-majority countries combining them with Muslim refugees. This can result in a biased narrative that reinforces stereotypes and biases against Muslims in general and Muslim refugees in particular. Furthermore, cultural and religious differences may contribute to increasing this negative perception for some Westerners.

In this regard, to emphasize this point, an article titled *Terrorists Are Always Muslim but Never White: At the Intersection of Critical Race Theory and Propaganda* (2017), the researcher presents the common false narratives about Muslims, which usually link them with the reason for terrorism in the United States. The researcher examines the depiction through a critical race theory lens and through a propaganda lens, which includes television, movies, news, and currently, government policy:

The idea that terrorists are Muslim is pervasive in the United States. Even before 9/11, a commentator could write that “the perception of Arabs as terrorists has come to dominate the public imagination.” There is a long history of “Orientalism,” which positions Arab and Muslims as exotic, uncivilized, dangerous “others [...] Nonetheless, terrorists are regularly linked to a racialized group now termed “Muslim,” which includes Muslims as well as those who appear Arab or Middle Eastern. Islam itself is presumed to be “inherently violent, alien, and inassimilable (Corbin, 2017, p. 458).

The researcher here shows the depiction of Muslims, particularly those who live in the United States, and how Muslims, in particular men, are usually represented in media and political discourse as extremists, attackers, and sources of threat. According to the researcher, these misleading narratives play a significant role in

government propaganda that depends on previously existing false ideologies, resulting in racial prejudices. The researcher concludes that propaganda is based on particular principles and myths. In this case, the notion of Western white innocence and superiority, as opposed to the Orient's inferiority and violence, is further reinforced, which is a sort of orientalist discourse.

Returning to *Exit West*, we see Saeed, although he is not entirely assimilated into the new community, he does not represent an offensive stereotype of a refugee or radical Muslim man willing to use violence for protection or to compete with the natives. His refusal to carry a weapon demonstrates how much he prefers peace to violence, he seeks to build peaceful relations among all humankind, viewing them as brothers and sisters sharing the same earth regardless of their nationalities, origins, ethnicities, or other factors that distinguish and divide people. According to Hamid, Saeed's perspective on carrying the firearm is as follows:

There were guns in the house of his fellow countryfolk, more arriving each day through the doors. Saeed accepted a pistol but not a rifle, since he could conceal it, and in his heart he would not have been able to say if he took the pistol because it would make him safer from the nativists or from the Nigerians, his own neighbor. He realized he was being ridiculous, and must return it the very next day (Hamid,2017, p. 84).

The previous quotation contradicts the misrepresentation of Muslim refugees who settled in the western world, including the United States. The misrepresentation of oriental refugees, especially those who are Muslims, has the impact of implicit biases, which contribute to the imposition of unreal identities of people, leading to the belief that all immigrants who came from the East are terrorists and a threat. Saeed's reaction in the quotation above indicates how he refused to keep any kind of weapons with him as a message by the author to the western world to not generalize and depict all Orients and Muslims as extremists or fundamentalists.

In conclusion, Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* succeeds in portraying the protagonists as powerful citizens capable of eliminating the false images of the orientals and refugees. Furthermore, Hamid presents a model of refugees who, despite coming from the oriental world and Islamic countries, challenge the West's preconceived assumptions about the oriental man and woman. Identity transformation was also notable especially in the character of Saeed.

## V. CONCLUSION

The refugee crisis and how refugees were represented in two selected masterpieces of modern literature has served as the study's central focus. The main argument of this study is based on the idea of showing how the protagonists of both novels, as refugees have succeeded in breaking the conventional oriental representation of them, which always portrays them negatively, in particular those who are Muslims and came from the Middle East. Furthermore, the study has aimed to demonstrate to what extent they had succeeded in forming and developing their identities as a natural result of displacement and exposure to cultural, social, and other types of diversity during and after their migration. Throughout the analysis, it has become clear that refugees play a productive role and are positively portrayed in the current era, also contribute to the community in which they have settled. To summarize, this study has examined how the protagonists in both novels have succeeded in disrupting the oriental representation of refugees, and how their identities have changed due to displacement.

The characters of both novels have succeeded in breaking the conventional oriental portrayal of refugees within the context of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. Orientalism bases its argument on western perceptions of Eastern people as foreign, backward, weak, exotic, religious, fundamentalists, and a threat to the host countries in which they migrated, and other undesirable features have been attributed to them.

Portraying Muslim refugees as people with diverse experiences and perspectives has been added to this study's discussion to provide a realistic portrayal of refugees, particularly those from the Middle East. The study has challenged the western tendency to oversimplify Eastern people, especially Islamic ones, as static and strictly religious or violent, which forms the basic argument of Said's theory of Orientalism. This study has also aimed to explore the identity formation journeys of the key characters in both works, specifically the extent to which Saeed and Nadia's identities in *Exit West* have changed and whether they have undergone the same level

of identity change. Amir's character also has been examined to show how his identity has been reshaped in *The Kite Runner* to a better level or form. To summarize, this thesis has investigated the issue of oriental representations of refugees in order to counter the dominant orientalist stereotyped preconceived notions about the refugees.

*The Kite Runner* (2003) and *Exit West* (2017), give a tale that challenges oriental preconceptions and prejudices, which results in contradicting the popular assumption about the image of immigrants in general and Muslim refugees in particular. For example, they represent complex personalities and social interactions, emphasizing the cultural diversity and perspectives of various refugees and Muslim communities in order to promote understanding, empathy and eliminate stereotypes.

Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Hamid's *Exit West* are depictions of unstable situations in various Middle Eastern countries. Both texts focus on the difficulties and hardships that refugees face. They emphasize the transformative journey that a refugee may face when transferring from one cultural and social environment to another. In both works we find the changes occurring in the personalities of the main characters leading to the forming of new identities as a result of forced displacement. Both texts deal with the plight of refugees, particularly those from the Middle East, and shed light on themes such as wars, loss, fundamentalism, prejudice, and cultural identity. Khalid Hosseini and Mohsin Hamid share a common purpose in their masterpieces: to provoke sympathy for everyone who has lost his or her home and been forced to escape their homelands as a result of the violence and conflicts in their respective nations. Furthermore, the authors were successful in conveying a vivid image of migrants outside of western biases.

The authors of both novels have involved their protagonists in volunteer work. In this regard, a key question should be highlighted: why did both authors decide to involve the characters in such activities? The response to this question might be taken from the author's personal experiences. Khalid Hosseini, for example, was named Goodwill Ambassador to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2006. He founded his own non-profit organization, the Khaled Hosseini Foundation, so this spirit of helping others is mirrored in his works. It could also indicate his intention to highlight the brightest part of his own culture and whiten the image of refugees, which is similar to Mohsin Hamid's purpose in *Exit West*. Mohsin Hamid, despite not participating in international volunteer work, wants to put

empathy into action through his work; as he stated in one of his interviews, "Empathy is about finding echoes of another person in yourself." This implies that revealing the daily hardships that refugees encounter does not promote empathy. Empathy can be associated with strength by showing how refugees support others and empathize with people who struggle in the same way they do. Furthermore, via voluntary actions, a pleasant atmosphere is formed among individuals from diverse nations, races, and religions

A further point to take into consideration here is that both writers would like to put a light on the positive aspects of Islamic religion. Both protagonists are Muslims and involving them in volunteer work could demonstrate some of the real essence of Islam, which is a religion of peace kindness, compassion, selflessness, and equality. It is not a religion of violence or fundamentalism, so the Voluntary work represents Muslim diversity as in both works, the authors present two opposing types of Muslims: militants like the Taliban in *The Kite Runner* and the militants in the home country of Saeed and Nadia in *Exit West*, while the other type of moderate Muslims like Amir in *The Kite Runner* and Saeed in *Exit West*.

Volunteering signifies a sense of duty, responsibility, and community involvement. It is considered as a way for individuals to contribute to society and create a positive impact on the world around them. It allows the characters to connect and create bonds. It can also help characters learn about themselves and their function in the world, interact with others, and form meaningful connections, all of which contribute to identity reconstruction and improvement, as seen in both works. In other words, these acts of caring and selflessness are frequently shown as vital and meaningful, and can have a good impact on the characters and the communities they live in. So, it could be a message that both novelists aim to convey to their audiences.

Regarding the key differences between the two works, we discover that *The Kite Runner's* plot is structured into three parts in two settings: Amir's childhood in Afghanistan and Amir as a refugee in the United States while *Exit West's* settings are separated across four regions, beginning with the protagonists' nameless home city and ending in the same unnamed city.

*The Kite Runner* depicts Afghanistan's catastrophic events from a personal and historical standpoint, whereas *Exit West* depicts human experiences with a larger emphasis on the global refugee crisis than in *The Kite Runner*. The key distinction

between the two works is Hamid's use of magical realism, which allows for vast refugee movements from one region of the world to another via magical doors. Magical realism frequently combines and integrates supernatural elements and objects into narratives. These components, such as the magical doors in Hamid's novel, are not presented as something extraordinary or unusual, but rather as everyday objects that no one gets surprised by while reading the story because they are presented as part of daily life.

*The Kite Runner* depicts in detail the misery of migrants as they move from their home country to foreign regions across physical borders, as well as their detailed journey, whereas in *Exit West*, there are no long journeys to get from one place to another; instead, it happens in minutes because of the existence of magical doors. Another significant difference between the two works is that in *Exit West* Hamid gives the reader no information regarding the time span or the name of the protagonists' hometown. Hamid's goal here could be to instill a sense of global belonging in the readers, making them believe that this unknown metropolis is theirs'. The story is also timeless to prove that the plight of refugees is not limited to one era or generation. The refugee crisis has a long history and is currently unresolved, and will continue in the future, thus Hamid sought to stress this fact. Hosseini, on the other hand, detailed the times and years in *The Kite Runner* to highlight the historical context of the Afghan refugee issue.

Regarding the study's main argument of how the characters succeed in disrupting the oriental representation of refugees and how their identities are reconstructed, we can see that according to the findings of *The Kite Runner*, through the analysis of the main characters like Amir, his father (Baba) and Soraya. Amir's identity has evolved gradually, becoming more active, powerful, free of cultural and ethnic prejudices, more developed, and more responsible. He breaks the image of the oriental man through various situations, such as his decision to marry Soraya, his creativity in his work as a migrant novelist, and the way he lives his life in the United States as a moderate Muslim immigrant. This stresses that not all Muslims or Orientals represent a threat to the host country. Soraya, as an oriental female character, also succeeds in presenting a real image of the strong, independent eastern woman who breaks the rules of patriarchal society, and who has a free will to do what she is truly convinced with, not what is imposed on her, and this appears in many situations,

such as the collage she attended, the type of work she likes, and the man she chose to love.

In *Exit West*, the same study's question or argument has been answered through the analysis as we find how Nadia is able to change the perception of Eastern women through a variety of means, including her independence. She does not need a man to protect her, and she is also able to form her own society with other refugees without Saeed. Despite her insistence on wearing the black robe, Nadia gets more liberal. The closer she travels to the West, the more liberal she becomes. Her appearance as Muslim or oriental woman does not reflect her actual identity.

It is evident that Saeed, despite his nostalgic feelings and great love for his nation, is able to enjoy the diversity of multiple cultures. However, Saeed's character development is complicated. Saeed is less religious at the beginning of the novel, and his relationship with Nadia is stronger, but as the story progresses, he becomes more devout, prays daily, and becomes more dedicated to his country. The change in his character is bigger than Nadia's, and it takes the opposing side of her. As a result, and at the end of the story, they ended their relationship because they do not share the same love for each other as before. Furthermore, as an oriental man, Saeed promotes a positive image of refugees and the Orient. For example, his refusal to carry a weapon, his relationship with Nadia, and the positive relations with his local supervisor and other refugees from different backgrounds, eventually disrupts the western perception of the oriental man as rigid, backward, violent, and static.

The overall findings of the previous analysis of this study lead us to the conclusion that in both works, the protagonists as refugees have succeeded in cracking the oriental representation by offering a decent model of that. The identity transformation they have undergone, despite not occurring at the same level for all characters, is regarded as a critical achievement in reshaping their identities. These findings will be helpful in the analysis of oriental Muslim refugees in modern literature, as well as in comprehending the process of identity formation for those who lost everything, and are forcibly removed from their homelands, and forced to reside in new alien areas. Furthermore, adopting Orientalism in the literature of diaspora or refugees provides greater insights into the suffering and raises the appreciation and empathy of such people as human beings rather than cases or objects of study. Since refugees are viewed as inferiors in their host countries, they

must be properly represented.

This study raises awareness of how literature influences and reflects society's perceptions regarding the issue of the refugee crisis and how they are represented in modern literature for the readers from different backgrounds, which helps in creating a sense of empathy and understanding the displaced suffering. It encourages readers to critically examine such works because literature shapes cultural and societal perspectives. The research may affect how global literature and cultural studies write, analyze, and understand the real image of refugees, especially those who are Muslims and immigrated from the Middle East, because the protagonists of both works are Muslim refugees.

As an academic work, this thesis contributes to the existing body of knowledge. For example, it urges other scholars to conduct additional studies, articles, and research on the refugee crisis through the lens of Orientalism. It also promotes critical thinking and empathy among students, teachers, and academics. Therefore, encouraging academicians to critically analyze literature on refugees who are Muslims that goes beyond surface-level interpretations will provide a positive and authentic portrayal in the current global narratives which would enrich the knowledge of oriental Muslim refugees. This research adds to the literature of Orientalism, notably Edward Said's thesis, by analyzing how these narratives are formed in modern literature. The research reveals Orientalist motifs in modern tales and questions the monolithic representation of Muslim characters, underscoring the need for more nuanced literary critique.

Finally, the plight of refugee invites us to revisit Said's theory of orientalism since the representation of refugees is the main focus not the displacement process itself and this links us with the fact that a decade after decade, it has become clear that the West has stereotypical representations of the East, and has been spreading an unclear and false perception of the Middle East on a worldwide basis which promotes the "Us-Them" belief. Therefore, disrupting the oriental portrayal of the Orient is not an easy mission but necessary since it requires confronting long-held assumptions and biases that have been propagated in literature, art, media, education, and other cultural productions. To disrupt oriental representation, it is necessary to challenge prejudiced discourse by incorporating in all aspects of cultural production such as literature, arts, and education. Furthermore, we are responsible for educating

ourselves and others on the diversity and richness of many cultures, as well as acknowledge and appreciate their distinct qualities. Therefore, as scholars or authors, it is our responsibility to disprove those preconceptions and offer a different perspective. We could achieve this by creating more art, literature, critical studies, research, and content that actually depicts and analyzes the intricacies of what they refer to as "the Orient" and its diversity, rather than its homogeneity. So, conducting studies about the refugee problems and the way they are represented is a significant means of eliminating these misconceptions.



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