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POETHICAL PEDAGOGY OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP IMAGINARIES IN CONTEMPORARY TRANSNATIONAL FICTION: THE CASE OF MOHSIN HAMID'S *EXIT WEST*

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Abstract: This paper performs a multidisciplinary reading of contemporary transnational fiction by investigating how Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) fashions educational imaginaries of global citizenship through a distinctive 'poethical' sensibility. It argues that Hamid's narrative form, with its portals, suspended geographies, and tonal dissonances, generates a poethical pedagogy of unlearning attentive to the pressures of displacement and the instability of global life. It rests on the premise that inherited pedagogical ideals, particularly those undergirded by assumptions of clarity and edification, tumble when confronted with the volatile landscapes shaping the contemporary world. It aims to demonstrate how Hamid's narrative forges a readerly apprenticeship grounded in perceptual recalibration, ethical vigilance, and decolonial unlearning. It further seeks to delineate how the novel assumes the function of an instructional medium that rethinks global citizenship beyond abstract cosmopolitan norms. The analysis draws on decolonial thought, poethical theory, narrative-formal studies, and global ethical critiques to inform a close reading of *Exit West*. This multidisciplinary framework probes how the novel's poethical strategies problematize habitual interpretive certainties and lay bare the inequities embedded in discourses of openness, hospitality, and integration. The interpretation reveals that the novel kindles an instructional space in which the reader is compelled to dwell within uncertainty, opacity, and the uneven dynamics of mobility. These narrative pressures polish forms of discernment attuned to vulnerability, asymmetrical risk, and the complex textures of transnational precarity, hence casting fiction as a site of perceptual and ethical formation. *Exit West* stands as a paradigmatic model of contemporary transnational fiction that opens onto a pedagogical horizon, for it consubstantiates the pedagogical possibilities inherent in narrative form and re-envisions global citizenship as a practice shaped through scrupulous, critically responsive reading. Accentuating how Hamid's narrative strategies compel readers to navigate instability and the ethical demands of transnational mobility, the paper contends that such fiction furnishes an analytically and pedagogically generative model whose relevance extends well beyond the realm of fiction, offering internationally transferable insights for scholars and educators seeking to cultivate critically resilient forms of global citizenship in diverse educational and cultural contexts.

Keywords: Decolonial unlearning; global citizenship imaginary; narrative form; poethical pedagogy; transnational fiction

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the shifting topologies of global mobility have disclosed the inadequacy of customary conceptual vocabularies for grasping how subjects navigate a world characterized by fracture, unequal permeability, and a ubiquitous sense of precarity. While policy discourse often narrates migration through statistics, spectacle, or crisis, contemporary fiction increasingly turns toward the dense interior landscapes of lived experience, the nuanced layers of experiential consciousness through which individuals encounter and are reshaped by, the volatile pressures of the global present. Mohsin Hamid's Exit West stands out within this landscape not merely because it adopts migration as its narrative catalyst, but because it weaves a textual environment that compels readers to inhabit the disquieting rhythms of dislocation. The novel's enigmatic doors, suspended temporalities, and scenes of provisional community forge a narrative atmosphere in which ordinary interpretive habits falter. Rather than stabilizing the world it depicts, Exit West continually troubles the perceptual ground upon which meaning rests, prompting its readers to confront the limits of the epistemic frames that have long informed, if not organized their understanding of global life. Accordingly, the paper's principal contention commences from the premise that the novel's literary fabric does more than project contemporary upheaval. It, in fact, generates conditions under which the reader encounters the global not as a distanced, estranging representation, but as a demanding, intimate, and often discomforting mode of experience. Such narrative demands inevitably raise pedagogical questions about how contemporary readers are equipped, or unequipped, to approach literary works that entail heightened sensitivity to instability and affective nuance. Empirical research in Algerian EFL settings offers corroborative evidence. Mellit and Idri's (2019) survey of 150 second-year students at Sétif 2 University documents broadly low motivation for reading English literary texts and attributes this demotivation primarily to linguistic difficulty and limited emotional engagement. Although their study is classroom-based rather than theoretical, it still exemplifies a pedagogical mismatch: instructional modes that privilege examination-driven reading, surface comprehension, and canon-centered syllabi may be poorly calibrated to cultivate the perceptual and ethical sensibilities transnational fiction now demands.

Therefore, this convergence of formal demand and pedagogical limitation marks a critical threshold at which Exit West discloses the need for a different critical orientation in how it should be approached as a narrative that does not simply represent forced movement, border regimes, or the dissolution of national belonging, but as a novel that brings about a rigorous form of decolonial unlearning. Drawing on key insights from decolonial thought, particularly the insistence by Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh that knowledge must be wrested from the gravitational pull of inherited certainties, the analysis traces how Hamid's novel invites a form of reading that is at once perceptually alert and ethically strenuous. The novel's atmospheric estrangements, conveyed through its eschewal of geographic specificity, its emphasis on sensory disarray, and its constant redrawing of spatial orientation, undertake narrative exercises that polish the reader's interpretive capacities. They generate a pedagogical pressure that necessitates heightened attentiveness to vulnerability, to the asymmetries that govern movement, and to the fragile solidarities that arise at the edges of survival. By treating the novel as a site in which literary form acts upon the reader, this paper advances the claim that Hamid's Exit West offers an education in global citizenship irreducible to doctrinal universals or cosmopolitan idealisms. That being said, the novel fosters in its readers a mode of ethical responsiveness rooted in uncertainty, in listening to what the narrative withholds as much as what it reveals, and confronting the global world as a condition in which one must continually relearn how to perceive. From this standpoint, Exit West appears as an intricately crafted invitation to contemplate the precarious facets of global interdependence with a

cunningly honed imaginative responsibility. To speak of imaginative responsibility in this register is already to have crossed into territory that existing criticism of Exit West has scarcely mapped. 'Poethical,' as Ferreira da Silva (2014) theorizes it, designates the indissoluble entanglement of aesthetic experimentation and ethical provocation, a narrative condition in which form enacts ethical difficulty upon the reader's own perceptual and interpretive bearings. Existing scholarship on Exit West, however searching, has largely domesticated this force by orienting itself toward what the novel represents rather than what it performs upon its reader, attending to what the text figures, what it mourns, and what it contests. Veyret (2020), Guignery (2022), and Jeanniard du Dot (2023) each bring considerable critical acuity to the novel's ethical provocations and its poethical reconstitution of place, yet their readings remain oriented toward signification rather than formation. How Hamid's narrative architecture shapes, in the reader, an education in attentiveness and decolonial unlearning has gone largely unasked, and it is toward that silence that this paper directs its critical attention.

2. A Critical Review of *Exit West* Scholarship: Transnational Readings, Poethical Imagination, and the Missing Pedagogical Dimension

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) has become a central text in discussions of twenty-first-century transnational fiction, drawing attention from critics concerned with contemporary forms of mobility, precarious belonging, and the reconfiguration of global imaginaries. Within a recently expanding corpus of scholarship, interpretations often converge around two interlinked concerns: the novel's reimagining of displacement and its aesthetic experimentation with narrative forms capable of representing global precarity. Works such as Veyret's "The Ethical Re(turn) in Postcolonial Fiction: Narrating the Precariat in *Exit West* and *Red Birds*" (2020) focus on the novel's ethical provocations, reading Hamid's narrative as a meditation on obligation and vulnerability across shifting geopolitical terrains. Vanessa Guignery's "The Precarious Balance of Refugees: Rupture and Connectivity in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West (2017) and Helon Habila's Travelers (2019)" (2022), however, emphasizes the novel's poignant reflection on dislocation and connective practices, arguing that *Exit West* imagines new modes of refugee relationality that are neither bound to national frameworks nor reducible to cosmopolitan idealism. Consonant perspectives are discernible in studies such as Waheed and Iqbal Ahmed's "Dialogic Failure of Displaced Lifeworlds: An Analysis of Exit West by Mohsin Hamid" (2023), which highlight the novel's refusal of communicative transparency, and Yadav's "Poetics of the (un)named City in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*" (2022), where the abstraction of place is read as a narrative method that destabilizes hegemonic cartographies. In this sense, we can safely assume that these studies underscore the extent to which Hamid's novel destabilizes inherited understandings of territory, identity, and mobility, revealing the contradictions and accumulated violences within global movement.

Alongside these postcolonial and migration-studies approaches, a strand of recent criticism has investigated *Exit West* through a diversity of viewpoints attentive to cultural identity and sociopolitical transformation. Kuğu Tekin and Zeynep Rana Turgut's "Reconstruction of Cliché Image of Oriental Woman in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*" (2021) interprets the novel's portrayal of ambivalent female subjectivity via the reconstruction of gendered and Orientalist stereotypes through the novel's hybridized narrative strategies. Further analyses such as Muzaffar Qadar, Snobra Rizwan, and Zia Ahmad's "The Concept of Postcolonial Othering in The Reluctant Fundamentalist and *Exit West*" (2023); Akeel Ahmed, Muhammad Ashraf, and Viacheslav D. Chevchenko's "Symbolic Representation in Mohsin Hamid's Novel *Exit West*" (2024); and Humaira Yousaf, Noreen Shah, Muhammad Hussain Damsaz, and Sahar Sher's "Traversing Borders: The Role of Vignettes in Depicting

Globalization in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*" (2025) seem to reinforce a recurring scholarly consensus that the novel is delivered through a system of narrative vignettes, symbolic compressions, and suspended temporalities that dramatize the lived contradictions of contemporary migratory life. This growing body of work illuminates the thematic, cultural, and political concerns of *Exit West* while also suggesting a recurring tendency: the novel is frequently read as representing displacement rather than as teaching through it, which is, in fact, an important distinction that remains insufficiently discussed.

Accordingly, it is in response to this critical gap that Maëlle Jeanniard du Dot's "Places in the Making: the Po/ethics of Place in the Fictions of Mohsin Hamid and Hari Kunzru" (2023) becomes indispensable. Her thesis offers a sophisticated account of po/ethics as a conceptual hybrid that brings aesthetic experimentation into conversation with ethical responsibility, showing how Hamid's fiction reimagines 'place' as a dynamic and contested process. Yet her analysis remains concentrated on the spatial and textual dimensions of poethical place-making, leaving unexplored the pedagogical possibilities embedded in these narrative forms and their potential to hone readers' capacities for judgment and ethical perception. A similar emphasis on literature's ability to subvert dominant frameworks appears in Bootheina Majoul's "The Power of Literature: Can the Dead Speak?" (2024), which argues that narrative revives reminiscences and renders muted histories speakable. While her reading underscores literature's critical potential, it remains oriented toward historical recovery rather than toward the pedagogical capacities that this study brings into focus. That being said, while du Dot's contribution is foundational in establishing a poethical basis for reading Hamid, her work simultaneously clarifies the gap in existing scholarship that the current paper aims to address: the need to read *Exit West* as a site of learning, where fiction is capable of conveying ethical difficulty while also equipping readers with habits and skills of discernment essential to global citizenship.

This gap becomes even more discernible when set against broader transnational literary theory. Foundational studies such as Paul Jay's *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (2010) and Claire Chambers's *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (2011) have delineated how twenty-first-century fiction unsettles national paradigms and carves a peculiarly privileged niche for narrative to reimagine globally entangled lifeworlds. Jay underscores the magnitude of this shift when he argues that "since the rise of critical theory in the 1970s, nothing has reshaped literary and cultural studies more than its embrace of transnationalism" (2010, p. 1). Considered alongside this critical reorientation, the absence of pedagogical investigation in Hamid scholarship appears not incidental but symptomatic. That is to say, the very intellectual endeavours that have elevated the transnational as a critical category have yet to discern how fiction's transnational imagination might also harbour a mode of learning, fostering modes of attention that override descriptive or political accounts. As a matter of fact, this significant absence persists even within seminal studies of Mohsin Hamid. David F. Waterman's *Where Worlds Collide: Pakistani Fiction in the New Millennium* (2010) and Cara N. Cilano's *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State* (2013) situate the British Pakistani novelist within evolving South Asian literary genealogies, emphasizing hybridity, global circulation, and the aesthetics of border consciousness. Kristian Shaw's *Brexlit: British Literature and the European Project* (2021) further situates Hamid's British reception context, revealing how the novel participates in contemporary debates on nationalism, sovereignty, and European futurity. Elleke Boehmer's *Postcolonial Poetics: 21st-Century Critical Readings* (2018) examines how narrative form adapts to global conditions. Nonetheless, neither extends these formal analyses into questions of pedagogy. Even Kathryn Lachman's *Borrowed Forms: The Music and Ethics of Transnational Fiction* (2009), with its influential theorization of transnational

chronotopes, remains primarily concerned with narrative structure rather than with the educational potential of that structure. So, we can safely contend that these works offer robust theoretical grounding for reading *Exit West* as a paradigmatic text of transnational fiction; however, they converge in assuming that the value of transnational narrative resides primarily in its representational or political potency, not in its capacity to cultivate dispositions of critical perception in readers themselves.

Therefore, the major contribution of this paper lies quintessentially in arguing that *Exit West* should be approached as a poethical pedagogy, in other words, a narrative form that both embodies and enacts learning. Drawing on Ferreira da Silva's (2014) theorization of poethics as a mode of thinking-feeling that disrupts inherited conceptual orders, we seek to elaborate on this insight and push it further toward an educational horizon in which Hamid's magical doors, shifting geographies, and destabilized temporalities represent not only metaphors for global entanglement but deft mechanisms for training readers in attentiveness, interpretive humility, and ethical responsiveness. Quijano's (2000) account of '*desprendimiento*' also helps clarify how these mechanisms, especially crossings, are imagined to dramatize a rupture from colonial matrices of power. Walsh's (2018) conceptualization of '*pedagogías decoloniales*' further illuminates how this rupture becomes a site of unlearning, a zone in which inherited epistemic approaches are problematized. Ahmed's (2006) reflections on spatial embodiment then sharpen this trajectory by demonstrating how subjects, and, by implication, readers, are shaped through their orientation toward space. Gilroy's (1993) planetary humanism and Santos's (2007) 'radical co-presence' further situate *Exit West* within a paradigm of learning through co-presence, risk, and difference rather than abstraction or universalism. Synthesizing these different perspectives allows us to articulate what existing scholarship has not yet explored: *Exit West* as a potent literary space that generates educational imaginaries of global citizenship. Our idiosyncratic reading of the novel aims primarily to posit it as a formative narrative through which readers may cultivate habits of vigilance, moral discernment, and imaginative responsibility. In this respect, our contribution both departs from and reconfigures Jeanniard du Dot's po/ethical reading of place by shifting attention from questions of what the novel signifies to questions of what it teaches. Put differently, the novel's pedagogical agency rests on how it shapes readers' sense of global entanglement, tutors them in inhabiting uncertainty, and composes an aesthetic experience that promotes their perceptual and ethical capacities. Hence, within a field saturated with examinations of mobility, identity, and postcolonial representation, this pedagogical reconsideration constitutes a substantive and original critical advance.

3. A Multidisciplinary Methodology for Reading *Exit West* as a Paradigm of Poethical Pedagogy

Building on the recognition that Exit West's educational imaginaries remain underexplored in existing scholarship, this paper undertakes a deliberately multidisciplinary methodology to approach Mohsin Hamid's novel as a fictional space of pedagogy where literary form, poethics, and imaginaries of global citizenship intersect. While close reading constitutes the primary analytic procedure, its interpretive effectiveness is bolstered through an integrated framework that draws upon decolonial theory, educational thought, and critical strands of political philosophy and sociology, reflecting and attending to the novel's intricate negotiation of displacement, vulnerability, and shared precarity. Within this framework, decolonial thought provides the structural backbone of the reading, elucidating the novel's reconfiguration of perception, knowledge, and global hierarchies through concepts such as epistemic disobedience, desprendimiento, decolonial pedagogy, ecologies of knowledge, and poethical rupture, while narrative-formal, phenomenological, and global ethical perspectives refine and widen the interpretive gesture. Close reading, in this context, represents an

interpretive prism that aims to map tonal inflections, spatial arrangements, and narrative gestures through which the narrative cultivates experiential and ethical sensibilities. Ferreira da Silva's (2014) conceptualization of poethics guides attention toward moments in which the novel destabilizes inherited conceptual structures, treated here as provocations to reading practice rather than as prefabricated interpretive schema. Complementarily, Quijano's (2000) notion of desprendimiento and Walsh's (2018) elaboration of decolonial pedagogies sharpen the focus on narrative disruptions that trouble habitual judgment, while Ahmed's (2006) reflections on bodily orientation and Santos's (2007) theory of radical copresence illuminate how narrative space structures perception and impacts the reader's interpretive positioning. The analytic procedure emphasizes sequences marked by thresholds, ruptures, and altered vantage points: such as the portals, provisional solidarities, and precarious transits that seem to communicate deft textual strategies designed for the sake of precipitating attentiveness, ethical responsiveness, and recalibration of perspective among readers. Hence, by situating these methodological vectors in conversation, the study performs a multidisciplinary interpretation capable of apprehending how fiction, educational imaginaries, and cognitive unsettlement coalesce, inviting us to approach Exit West simultaneously as an aesthetic composition, a pedagogical encounter, and a site for kindling habits of vigilance, imaginative responsibility, and ethical discernment.

Situated in conversation, these methodological vectors trace a reading that moves, as the novel itself does, from disorientation toward a harder-won form of discernment. The analysis proceeds first through the novel's enactment of epistemic rupture, attending to how the portal crossings, the unnamed city, and the bodies navigating unfamiliar terrains dramatize, at the level of syntax and focalization, the arduous labour of decolonial unlearning that desprendimiento, epistemic disobedience, and Walsh's decolonial pedagogies illuminate. It then follows the novel into the territory that unlearning opens, examining how scenes of provisional solidarity, planetary vignettes, and poethical spatial imagination cultivate in the reader dispositions of global citizenship that no cosmopolitan abstraction can fully account for, and where Ferreira da Silva's poethics, Gilroy's planetary humanism, and Santos's radical copresence find their most telling literary instantiation. The educational implications of these formal operations are not confined to either movement but accumulate across both, gathering their fullest weight in the conclusion. Throughout, decolonial reading is privileged not because it forecloses other approaches, but because the novel's dismantling of epistemic hierarchies, its refusal of geographic certainty, and its insistence on the unequal distribution of mobility most fully discloses itself to a critical framework that takes colonial power relations as its point of departure.

4. Decolonial Unlearning

Mohsin Hamid's Exit West (2017) begins in an anonymous Middle Eastern city on the brink of civil war, where the young Nadia and Saeed navigate both a fledgling relationship and an imploding world. Their story agonizingly transpires amid bombings, blackouts, and the slow dissolution of civic order. Into this landscape of fear and confinement, Hamid introduces a surreal device: a series of mysterious black doors that transport people instantaneously from one part of the world to another (Mykonos, London, San Francisco). These doors, rumour has it, open "without warning, to any door at all," transforming the architecture of the ordinary into a portal of escape and rebirth. Their very implausibility becomes the ground upon which the novel instigates a cognitive estrangement from inherited spatial orders. The portals begin by unsettling the perceptual certainties that structure the city, a disturbance that crystallizes what Mignolo (2009) names epistemic disobedience, a deliberate severance from what he refers to as "the magic of the Western idea of modernity" and "ideals of humanity" (p. 3) that have long scripted the normative grids of modernity. In the wake of this estrangement,

cognition is urged to relinquish the spatial and moral hierarchies through which Western modernity legitimates its borders and sanctifies its universals. Hamid's intriguing fictional doors epitomize this condition of epistemic disobedience very keenly, via unhousing perception from the logics of colonial intelligibility. They actually compel both character and reader to traverse what the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) conceptualizes as desprendimiento, or the arduous travail of 'de-linking' from "colonial domination and […] the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism" (p. 533). This rationality, Quijano contends, permeates colonial schemas of knowing that have long adjudicated the terms of movement, the right to speak, and, more gravely still, who may count as human. So, in the novel, each passage through a portal tears at those hierarchies, making visible the epistemic borders that subtend the political, that is, those fortressed demarcations that, as Hamid narrates, rich countries have built to strengthen their borders and consolidate control (p. 73). In Hamid's dark London, these boundaries are enforced through human patrols, drones, troops, and robotic machines that move with an uncanny, animal-like precision. These devices disarm explosives, transport burdens, or execute purposes withheld from civilian knowledge, and each one projects a mechanized efficiency that summons the dread a small mammal confronts before a predator of a wholly different order (p. 154). In these enclosures of fear and privilege, the narrative discloses how mobility is parcelled along lines that structure space and assign value to life, cementing what Hamid crisply identifies as the division "between those who sought the right of passage and those who would deny them passage" (p. 155).

Movement in this sense constitutes a delicate recalibration of perception, a practice of dwelling in thresholds where the jurisdictional fictions of the modern border are stripped of their normalized authority. This recalibration arises as the psychic vestige of crossing itself, the moment in which characters experience what Achille Mbembe (2003) apprehends as the confrontation of life to another's sovereign gatekeeping (p. 12). The novel converts this threshold-state into a disciplined mode of unlearning, an endeavour that reorients vision from the edges of the world toward its presumed centers. What the educationalist Catherine Walsh (2018) designates as pedagogías decoloniales (decolonial pedagogies) finds here a scrupulous dramatization, for these pedagogies, as she insists, emerge within "the fissures of the dominant order," ("The Decolonial For", p. 24) enabling subjects "to look at the world with new eyes, use competing systems of knowledge, and rewrite identities" ("On Decolonial Dangers", p. 83). This pedagogical effort acquires a sensory dimension when the novel turns from conceptual unlearning to bodily attunement. In the turbulence of this early learning, Nadia and Saeed begin to move; their bodies register the strain of new terrains before cognition can assemble a coherent response. Each crossing ushers them into an insinuation that teaches through minute adjustments (how to sleep amid unfamiliar sounds, how to read the intentions of strangers, how to stand on ground that trembles with political uncertainty). Their relation to one another adapts in the wake of these demands; the texture of companionship stretches, contracts, and recalibrates with each environmental shift. Sara Ahmed's claim that "bodies take shape through how they inhabit space" (2006, p. 10) assumes a discreet pertinence here, a pertinence made palpable in the ways Hamid's characters find themselves in spaces that never quite stabilize: environments whose volatility imprints itself upon posture, gesture, and affect. Their silences, their tentative movements, and their instinctive recalculations all bear the imprint of conditions that continually redraw the perimeter of what can be sensed or trusted—a volatility Hamid elegantly captures when the narrator observes that they faced London "with a resignation shot through with moments of tension, with tension ebbing and flowing," compelled at times "to pause and not act but be" (p. 138). For the reader, these moments mark an initiation into a sharpened mode of attention, one that discerns how perception strains against inherited comforts and how meaning falters

before recomposing itself. A close attention to Hamid's sentence-level choices clarifies how this pedagogical pressure is made at the level of form. Consider the novel's description of Nadia's passage through the door in the dentist's office: "she was struck by its darkness, its opacity, the way that it did not reveal what was on the other side, and also did not reflect what was on this side, and so felt equally like a beginning and an end" (Hamid, 2017, p. 70). The syntax here enacts the very epistemological crisis the passage describes. The sentence proceeds through accumulating negations ("did not reveal," "did not reflect") before arriving, through paradox ("equally like a beginning and an end"), not at resolution but at doubled indeterminacy. The reader, tracking this grammatical movement, is trained to inhabit negation without the comfort of a compensating positive. This is syntax as decolonial exercise, dissolving the binary logics (before/after, here/there, safety/danger) through which modernity has organized spatial experience. Similarly, the novel's characteristic use of free indirect discourse in its global vignettes, where an unnamed woman in Sydney, or a man in Tokyo, is momentarily focalized without introduction or explanation, denies the reader the interpretive scaffolding of established character. The prose simply inhabits a consciousness, then withdraws, leaving the reader responsible for generating connection and significance. This narrative strategy pedagogically models the work of global citizenship: the effort to attend to lives that arrive without context, without explanation, and without the luxury of clarification. In so doing, the novel cultivates a vision capable of lingering at thresholds and remaining alert to what resides there, the suppressed knowledge that political and epistemic regimes keep occluded. By virtue of this exacting demand, Exit West imagines and fashions an education that takes shape through the very effort of learning to see what modernity has long submerged into invisibility.

5. Poethical Worldmaking

As the narrative plays out beyond the material and psychic thresholds of migration, the novel enters a second, distinct phase of its pedagogical work. Where Section 4 traced the process of decolonial unlearning, the dismantling of inherited perceptual and epistemic certainties through the crossing of thresholds, Section 5 turns to what that unlearning makes possible: a poethical re-worldmaking in which new modes of imagining global coexistence begin to take shape. The crossings, once marked by danger and perceptual unease, begin to disclose a different apprenticeship: a tutelage in imagining global life through forms that exceed the nation and its partitions. Denise Ferreira da Silva's (2014) account of the 'poethical' proves illuminating here, for she outlines it as a practice that destabilizes the conceptual architecture through which the modern world secures its limits. Although her perspective draws quintessentially from the context of Blackness, she identifies within the poethical a broader challenge to the very conditions that organize the global present. In her words, the poethical marks "the end of the world as we know it" (p. 84) to signal a decisive breach in the conceptual regimes through which modernity has arranged value, separability, and global rule. She further maintains that the poethical calls for "a moment of radical praxis" (p. 85) directed at troubling the inherited organization of the world, which presents an insistence that resonates with Hamid's invitation to imagine modes of collective existence no longer circumscribed by the national frame or its classificatory demands. Her emphasis falls on a way of thinking that loosens the inherited discursive system that orders the world. It permits other modes of relation and possibility to take subtle shape with a subdued yet unmistakable authority. In this regard, Hamid's narrative structure (its drifting focalization, its montage of dispersed scenes, its disinclination to bind the reader to a single territorial center) potently conveys this poethical undertaking. Instead of imparting knowledge through direct exposition, the novel educates by crafting forms of copresence that are tenuous yet meaningful, inviting readers to step into what Édouard Glissant (1997) would call the 'density

of relation,' where understanding does not depend on transparency but on a willingness to remain with the opacity of others, a position Glissant renders explicit when he claims, "We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone" (p. 194). It is through these intricacies of narrative handling, not simply within the experience of displacement, that Exit West moulds the outlines of an ethical worldliness. From this vantage, Paul Gilroy's elaboration of a planetary humanism proves indispensable, for the relational aperture opened by Hamid's poethical imaginaries finds its most vivid illustrations in the novel's scenes of provisional solidarity. When Nadia and Saeed arrive on Mykonos and encounter people of varied national backgrounds, all camped together cooking in clusters and keeping watch in shifts, the novel brings into view affiliations that cohere through the exigencies of survival in lieu of cultural affinity. In London, they work alongside an ever-changing cast: first a cluster of Nigerians, then a handful of Somalis, followed eventually by a family from the Myanmar–Thailand border, and later still by many more (Hamid, 2017, p. 123). Assembled by nothing more than the contingencies of movement, they form a group of strangers who have slept in fear beside one another, a tenuous collectivity upheld only by the pressures that have converged upon their paths and produced a proximity shaped by shared precarity. Even the novel's interspersed vignettes, whether the elderly woman in the American Midwest who gradually senses her domestic sphere acquiring an alien aura; or the man in Tokyo poised at the threshold of departure, held in a moment where decision and hesitation become indistinguishable; or the Australian woman who wakes to find an unanticipated traveler standing in the hush of her bedroom, extend this fragile world-connection beyond the migrant camp to the diffuse simultaneity of global life, allowing the faint impulses of global movement to graze lives that scarcely register one another's presence yet persist within a dispersed global milieu that no localized experience can fully contain.

These scenes transmit with quiet acuity what may be fathomed as an ethic of planetary affiliation. In The Black Atlantic (1993), the sociologist and cultural theorist Paul Gilroy surveys this ethical stance through a historical and cultural matrix that destabilizes national frontiers, asserting that "the history of the black Atlantic since then, continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people—not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship—provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory" (p. 16). The novel builds upon this reexamination by extending it into the present, fictionalizing the conditions Gilroy negotiates into a narrative pedagogy that brings into focus how contemporary mobilities demand new approaches to attentiveness, responsibility, and historical literacy. One glimpses this pedagogy when, on Mykonos, Nadia and Saeed find themselves among others such that "everyone was foreign, and so, in a sense, no one was," an insight that suspends belonging in order to reconfigure it. As the novel broadens its cartographies, this recalibration acquires a heightened authority. When London begins to metamorphose into what the narrator pictures as "the London Halo… one of innumerable human halos and satellites and constellations springing up in the country and in the world," the novel intimates that global life is already reorganizing itself into planetary patterns of cohabitation that exceed the nation-state. The imagery here is formally deliberate: Hamid reaches for the vocabulary of astronomy, the same vocabulary that runs through the novel in the father's telescope, in Saeed's childhood stargazing, in his dream of lying on his back in the Atacama Desert watching the Milky Way. This constellation of images weaves an alternative spatial imagination that is organized not around the territorial fixity of the nation and its borders but around the fluid geometries of celestial motion, wherein bodies perpetually orbit, drift, and reconfigure without ceasing to relate. The reader who has accompanied Saeed and Nadia through their successive displacements arrives at this image having been trained, through the novel's formal insistence, to receive it not as metaphor but as a revised perceptual grammar: a way of seeing collective

life on a planetary rather than national scale. And in California, where "the fog was a living thing… it revealed the invisible," the natural world itself participates in this instruction, teaching characters to dwell on a planet whose mechanisms cannot be domesticated by the modern gaze. Here, too, the syntax enacts the pedagogical lesson: the subject of the sentence ("the fog") is grammatically active, an agent, while the human characters become receivers of its instruction. This syntactic inversion subtly repositions the reader: it is the world that teaches, and the properly educated subject is one who has learned to receive that teaching with humility and attentiveness. This ethical and instructional preoccupation embraces the view that "there is an urgent need…to decolonise the imagination and to pluralise the possibilities for the future by pluralising knowledge in the present", and with the call to develop capacities for engaging with global conditions understood as "complex, interdependent and reflect the effects and failure of the Enlightenment ideals which have been violently imposed and universalised" (p. 9). It also carves a space in which pedagogical work must attend to the demand that learners "learn to unlearn, to see different choices and possibilities and to imagine and to think 'otherwise'" (Andreotti, 2010, p. 10), a demand the novel subtly actualizes through its formal commitments. In this mode of poethics, Exit West goes beyond merely depicting migration; it generates a pedagogy of global citizenship, inviting readers to apprehend, through the very fabric of its storytelling, a world that surpasses the epistemic rationalities modernity has long authorized.

As Nadia and Saeed begin to move through new settings, Exit West shifts from tracing hesitant bonds formed in motion to bringing to light how power determines the conditions under which they must live. The narrator's wistful musing that "when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (Hamid, 2017, p. 94) communicates a subtle, though unequivocally severe, detachment from earlier frames of meaning, a waning of what once secured their bearings. The emotional heft of this line accrues when placed alongside Saeed's father's declination to leave the city and his plea that Nadia promise to stay with Saeed "until he was out of danger," a request the novel presents as so grave that she feels she is "in a sense killing him" (p. 94), rendering departure inextricable from the burden of a loss she neither chooses nor can avert. Hamid's doors, initially imagined as escape routes, bring this dilemma into sharper relief. Each new place impresses upon the protagonists the fact that movement is never neutral; it is shaped by systems that govern through uncertainty, watchfulness, and permissions granted or withheld. Nonetheless, in "Postcolonial Literature and the World, 2017–2019: Contemporary Complexities" (2022), Ulla Rahbek believes that the novel entwines this external precarity with an inward effort to consolidate ties with those left behind, most saliently through Saeed's later supplications, which evolve into a way "to touch his parents, who could not otherwise be touched," transforming the earlier notion of "murdering" them into a ritualized attempt to preserve contact across irrevocable separation (p. 535). At this interpretive hinge, De Genova's ideas on the performative force of border enforcement become unmistakably apposite. Hamid's fictional migrants move through what he dubs 'the Border Spectacle,' a deliberately arranged mise-en-scène in which enforcement pronounces "a scene of ostensible 'exclusion'," while synchronously maintaining what he refers to as "the obscene of inclusion" (p. 1185). The result is an epistemic structure in which migrant status is never simply given but actively produced, so much so that, as De Genova affirms, "if there were no border patrols or inspections, no border policing or passport controls whatsoever, there would still be migrant 'illegality'" (p. 1190).

This accumulation of moments demonstrates Hamid's experiment with a traversal through space that concurrently lays bare the powers circumscribing its possibilities. At the same time, the narrator observes that Mykonos seemed like a completely different world, marking not just a geographical displacement but also a disruption of the assumptions that

once influenced and guided Nadia and Saeed's understanding of reality. Their arrival into a space where "everyone was foreign, and so, in a sense, no one was" (p. 106) problematizes familiar landmarks, forcing Nadia and Saeed to navigate a landscape marked by unpredictable powers and a plurality of knowledges that defy stable interpretation. In this vein, this disorientation resonates with Boaventura de Sousa Santos's insistence that in an ecology of knowledges "there is no unity of knowledge, there is no unity of ignorance either" (2007, p. 12). Mykonos epitomizes this epistemic heterogeneity, as it exhibits a dense copresence of languages, survival economies, and intersecting lifeworlds that exceed any single interpretive grid. Particularly, Hamid's description of the camp, "a cacophony… the languages of the world, what one might hear if one were a communications satellite" (Hamid, 2017, p. 120), seems uncannily akin to what Santos conceives as "radical copresence" (2007, p. 11). Furthermore, the camp's gold-rush economy of bartering: "from sweaters to mobile phones to antibiotics to, quietly […] drugs" (Hamid, 2017, p. 121), entails the improvisatory reasoning Santos describes as "knowledge-as-intervention-in-reality" (2007, p. 13). Likewise, when Saeed and Nadia attempt to fish on the rocks and encounter a quietly predatory band of men before stumbling into the security perimeter of a guarded door, they come to realize, and, in fact, learn, that survival depends on reading the landscape not as a neutral geography but as a fluctuating terrain shaped by visible and invisible powers. Their uncertainty, whether the men sought "the rod" or something else (Hamid, 2017, p. 132), displays, in this sense, an instance of what Santos calls a "destabilizing epistemology," one that spurns the deduction of "the potential from the actual" (2007, p. 17) and instead requires situational judgments made under conditions of duress.

The Mykonos chapters repeatedly underscore that meaning arises through improvisation. The sudden rushes toward rumored doors, the constant recalibration of trust, the navigation of a space where "the island was pretty safe […] except when it was not" (Hamid, 2017, p. 121). These scenes enunciate the pressures of a world in which conventional epistemic assurances fail to supply orientation. For Santos, such conditions expose "the politics of the possible" to scrutiny (2007, p. 17). For Hamid's characters, they are deliberately crafted to voice the stark unevenness of planetary habitation: the beach clubs and tourist infrastructures sit beside tents and oil-drum fires, producing a visibility of structural inequality that no inherited worldview can domesticate. In this regard, the rupture Nadia and Saeed face in Mykonos is not merely thematic but phenomenological at its core. Their entry into a space where the island's leisure-driven histories collide with the legacies of war and displacement, where European border sovereignty tightens alongside the informal sovereignties that shape life within the camp, and where knowledge must be improvised from the ground up, enunciates Santos's ecology of knowledges as a lived condition. In the milieu of Mykonos, epistemic humility is compelled rather than chosen, and what once felt knowable gives way to new, frequently disturbing, ways of sensing and interpreting their world.

The cognitive disarray that Mykonos precipitates prepares the ground for a further complication: the bequest of cosmopolitanism itself. Once the novel unveils the fragility of any unified epistemic horizon, the ideal of global openness can no longer appear as morally self-evident. From this vantage, Exit West negotiates the legacy of cosmopolitanism through the uneven terrains that Santos would describe as radical copresences. The proximity of strangers, which might evoke what Martha Nussbaum (1997) considers as the effort to "recognize the worth of human life wherever it occurs and see ourselves as bound by common human abilities and problems to people who lie at a great distance from us" (p. 9), is rendered here as a condition shaped by asymmetrical exposures rather than shared universals. Cosmopolitanism, in this context, relinquishes the claim to a stable philosophical disposition and takes shape instead as a precarious practice of orientation amid hierarchies of safety,

visibility, and risk. A statement such as Saeed's reflection, "We are all migrants through time" (Hamid, 2017, p. 237), widens the scope of displacement while leaving intact the unequal intensities with which precarity is lived. In this sense, the novel recasts cosmopolitanism as a situated responsiveness forged amid instability, no longer a moral abstraction but a practice tempered by uneven exposure. Catherine Walsh and Walter Mignolo's insistence that decolonial pedagogy teaches through wounds that are indispensable to any project of "decolonial liberation" (2018, p. 11) acquires a concentrated resonance at this point. The bodily and affective pressures that dictate Saeed and Nadia's movements (cold, exhaustion, hunger, the constant negotiation of insecurity) amount to an education whose significance rests in the lived knowledge of staying alive, far from any sanctioned system of instruction. Didier Fassin's analysis of humanitarian reason sharpens this insight, particularly his observation that humanitarian governance brings into view only those rendered legible as precarious; as he writes, "humanitarian reason governs precarious lives […] threatened and forgotten lives that humanitarian government brings into existence by protecting and revealing them" (p. 4). Hamid's depictions of spaces such as camps, derelict buildings, and makeshift shelters bear out this selective economy of attention. This precarious geography also elucidates how political presence becomes thinkable within the novel's landscape of displacement, makeshift dwelling, and provisional shelters, recalling Engin F. Isin's notion of "acts of citizenship" through which political emergence takes place outside the stable categories of the nation-state. These acts, in Isin's sense, are acts through which "subjects constitute themselves as citizens—or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due," and they are acts that rupture social and political habitus by bringing into being the citizen as a political subject (2008, p. 18). Nadia and Saeed, by crossing borders, enduring uncertainty, and forging bonds with strangers under improvised conditions, perform just such acts: moments through which subjects constitute themselves as those who may claim the right to have rights. Their presence in zones designed to exclude them can be interpreted as a muted declaration of political existence; a mode of appearance that exceeds the limited recognitions afforded by legal designation. Each adaptation, from navigating rumor-laden passages in Mykonos to negotiating the shadowed dwellings of London, marks a shift in perception that distances them from the comfortable frameworks that modernity has long worked to stabilize.

Through these cumulative displacements and perceptual reorientations, the novel reveals decolonial learning as a sustained discipline of recalibration: a continual reorientation through which characters, and readers alike, acquire the capacity to perceive the world otherwise. Yet Hamid's pedagogical approach precludes a resolution into harmony. When the narrative turns to London, the fragile solidarities cultivated in transit meet the entrenched antagonisms of a city struggling to contain its own fractures. The narrator's observation that Nadia felt that the houses of London were on the verge of unmooring from the earth and sailing off (p. 96) fuses physical instability with a deeper ontological vertigo. Here, Exit West punctures the illusion of seamless global integration celebrated in neoliberal cosmopolitan discourse. The doors that once promised escape come to expose the asymmetry of mobility, disclosing who may cross freely, who is detained, and who disappears at the threshold. This unequal permeability evokes Mbembe's description of modern borders as necropolitical frontiers, sites where sovereignty determines whose movement preserves life and whose movement ends in obliteration (2003, p. 24). The moment also echoes Mignolo's delineation of the "rhetoric of modernity" that "works through the imposition of 'salvation'" (p. 463) while masking "the irrational myth that it conceals" (p. 454), which he identifies as the logic of coloniality, and his assertion that "there is no modernity without coloniality" (p. 466). Confronted with these layered revelations of power's concealed operations, the narrative opens onto a pedagogical horizon where vigilance becomes the precondition for any ethical encounter. The novel, in this movement, offers an invitation to critical alertness, a narrative

training in recognizing how systems of authority insinuate themselves into the very vocabularies of freedom and belonging. By the time Nadia and Saeed meet again near the novel's close, sharing coffee, speaking with the ease of former intimates, and finally parting with a gentle embrace, Hamid provides what may be read as the culmination of this long schooling in ethical discernment. Their farewell, rendered in the quiet cadence of the line, "they rose and embraced and parted and did not know, then, if that evening would ever come" (p. 261), carries the weight of a hard-earned maturity. A careful attention to Hamid's sentence-level choices here reveals that the pedagogical work of the novel is accomplished through formal restraint rather than thematic resolution. The verb sequence "rose and embraced and parted" is strikingly paratactic: three actions joined by simple coordination, without subordination, without hierarchy, without the causal connectives that would impose narrative logic upon emotional experience. The prose refuses to tell the reader how to feel about this parting; it performs the action and withdraws, leaving the reader to inhabit the gap between gesture and meaning. The phrase "did not know, then, if that evening would ever come" underscores this indeterminacy: the subjunctive of the conditional ("would ever come"), the adverb "then" lodged in the clause like a small concession to the passage of time, together produce a narrative posture of suspended knowing that is entirely consistent with the epistemological discipline the novel has been developing since its opening pages. This is the prose of Glissant's right to opacity made syntactically manifest. Indeed, the novel does not deliver its characters to the reader in a final gesture of transparent resolution but allows them to remain, in the end, partial and open. Their parting, in fact, should be understood as neither loss nor defeat, but as a form of ethical adulthood in which each acknowledges the other's path without claim or demand. In this understated gesture, the narrative communicates an acceptance of difference that the novel has been patiently teaching all along. It also brings to light Glissant's discussion of the right to opacity, which he regards as foundational to any non-dominating relation. According to Glissant, to grant opacity is to renounce the impulse to subsume the other under a single interpretive horizon (1997, p. 103). This refusal also reflects Santos's call for non-extractive globality, a worldly orientation that privileges reciprocity over mastery. Read through this prism, Exit West epitomizes an experiment in decolonial pedagogy. Its doors teach readers to inhabit thresholds; its protagonists model an ethic of care shaped by precarity rather than certainty; its shifting narrative architecture demonstrates how fiction can be read as an epistemic borderland—a zone of unsettled knowledge. Eventually, the novel reimagines migration as a transformative form of learning, dismantling the Eurocentric chronotope of linear progress and opening onto what Walsh and Mignolo (2018) term a practice of re-existence. Through Saeed and Nadia's fragile perseverance, Exit West invites its readers into this re-existence: a globality forged through humility, relational responsibility, and the difficult art of unlearning.

6. Conclusion

The multidisciplinary reading pursued in this paper yields four interrelated findings that constitute its principal contribution to the scholarship on *Exit West* and on transnational fiction more broadly. First, at the level of narrative form, our reading of the novel demonstrates that the author generates what this paper terms a poethical pedagogy: a narrative practice in which formal choices, including the unnamed city, the unexplained portals, the paratactic syntax of the closing reunion, the drifting global vignettes, and the novel's systematic refusal of geographic and temporal certainty, serve as instruments of readerly recalibration. The form teaches; the reader is the site of instruction. Second, at the level of decolonial theory, the analysis shows that the novel's narrative pressure enacts a rigorous process of epistemic unlearning. Each portal crossing, read through Quijano's *desprendimiento* and Walsh's decolonial pedagogies, dramatizes the arduous effort of de-

linking from colonial matrices of knowing that have long organized Western understandings of mobility, belonging, and the right to exist in space. Third, at the level of global citizenship, it has been contended that *Exit West* models a form of global citizenship irreducible to liberal-cosmopolitan universalism. The novel's provisional solidarities, its insistence on asymmetrical risk and unequal permeability, and its poethical spatial imagination, read through Gilroy's planetary humanism and Santos's radical copresence, forge a vision of transnational affiliation grounded in situated responsiveness and interpretive humility rather than in abstract moral consensus. Fourth, at the level of pedagogy, the paper identifies *Exit West* as a formative narrative whose value for global citizenship education lies exactly in its formal difficulty, since it cultivates dispositions of attentiveness, ethical vigilance, and imaginative resilience that outcome-driven, canon-centered reading practices are structurally unable to produce. *Exit West* crafts an apprenticeship in readerly attention by making its formal disturbances, including shifting spatialities, discordant tonal pivots, and strategically unresolved narrative intervals, motivate continuous recalibration of the reader's perceptual and ethical bearings.

For literary studies, these insights carry specific implications. They trigger a mode of transnational literary criticism that takes the reader's formative experience seriously as an object of analysis, complementing representational and political approaches with a formal-pedagogical one. They also establish poethical pedagogy as a productive analytic category for reading other contemporary transnational works whose formal experimentalism resists assimilation to normative aesthetic or political frameworks. In this respect, the paper's argument has implications beyond *Exit West*, as it proposes a critical vocabulary that may be extended to other writers whose narrative forms engender pedagogical pressure without resolving into doctrinal positions. For global citizenship education, the implications are equally substantive. Where policy-oriented or competency-based approaches tend to privilege transferable skills and measurable outcomes, the poethical pedagogy of transnational fiction cultivates something more foundational: a perceptual orientation, a willingness to dwell in uncertainty, and an ethical attentiveness to asymmetry and opacity that are preconditions for any genuine engagement with global interdependence. In practical terms, these insights call for pedagogical approaches that foreground the novel's formal texture rather than reducing it to thematic content. Dialogic frameworks that encourage students to articulate how their interpretive assumptions shift when confronted with scenes of displacement, precarious intimacy, or fragile solidarity are well-suited to activating the decolonial unlearning the novel performs. Integrating decolonial critical perspectives adds a further layer of reflexivity, enabling students to recognize how inherited epistemic habits shape their reading and how narrative estrangement opens pathways toward more historically attuned forms of understanding. These proposals acquire particular salience in the Algerian EFL context documented by Mellit and Idri (2019), where surface comprehension practices signal a mismatch between existing instructional modes and the demands of transnational fiction. A turn toward formal attentiveness and decolonial critical practice offers one productive response to that mismatch. Several limitations, however, must be acknowledged. Narrative estrangement does not guarantee ethical transformation: readers may experience the novel's formal disorientation as alienating rather than educative, particularly across diverse reader positions shaped by different cultural, linguistic, and institutional contexts. The poethical pedagogy described here is a potentiality latent in the novel's form, not a predetermined reading outcome. There is also the further question of whether such readerly recalibration endures beyond the encounter with the text or dissolves in the face of institutional and social pressures that reinforce the very certainties the novel works to unsettle. Future research should address these limitations by attending systematically to the reader-response dimensions of the poethical pedagogy theorized here, investigating how actual readers in

specific institutional and cultural contexts engage with the novel's formal demands. Furthermore, empirical studies of classroom engagement with *Exit West* in diverse EFL and postcolonial settings would provide an invaluable complement to the formal-theoretical reading this paper performs. Future work might also extend the concept of poethical pedagogy to other contemporary transnational writers, assessing its analytic purchase across a broader corpus and refining its methodological contours. Such counter-habitual literacy, grounded in decolonial attentiveness and formal vigilance, constitutes *Exit West*'s most enduring pedagogical gift.

Ultimately, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* stands as a paradigmatic model of contemporary transnational fiction that opens onto a pedagogical horizon: it consubstantiates the possibilities inherent in narrative form and re-envisions global citizenship as a practice shaped through scrupulous, critically responsive reading. Its doors teach readers to inhabit thresholds; its protagonists model an ethic of care shaped by precarity rather than certainty; its shifting narrative architecture demonstrates how fiction can dwell in an epistemic borderland, a zone of unsettled knowledge where the difficult art of unlearning becomes, at last, the condition for a more just and attentive inhabitation of the world.

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