

Narrative Techniques and Perspectives in Depicting Nationalism and Transnationalism in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, *And the Mountains Echoed*, *Sea Prayer* and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

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Abstract

This comparative study explores how narrative techniques and perspectives are employed by Khaled Hosseini in *The Kite Runner*, *And the Mountains Echoed*, *Sea Prayer* and Mohsin Hamid in *Exit West* to depict nationalism and transnationalism. Hosseini's intimate storytelling, rooted in Afghan contexts, contrasts with Hamid's global perspective and magical realism. Examining characters' journeys, familial ties and the impact of geopolitical events reveal the authors' distinct approaches. The analysis underscores the influence of narrative choices on conveying the universal themes of identity, belonging and the interconnectedness of human experiences within the realms of nationalism and transnationalism.

Keywords

Narrative techniques, nationalism, transnationalism, identity, migration, geopolitical events, storytelling, cultural context, global perspectives, familial ties, interconnectedness.

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The works of Muslim diaspora writers Khaled Hosseini and Mohsin Hamid often engage with the themes of nationalism and transnationalism. Their novels explore the complexities of identity, belonging and the impact of global events on individuals and communities. Through the lens of narrative techniques and diverse perspectives, these authors delve into the complexities of identity, belonging and the profound impact of political and social upheavals on individuals and communities. In the novels *The Kite Runner*, *And the Mountains Echoed* and *Sea Prayer* Khaled Hosseini crafts intimate narratives that navigate the Afghan context, unravelling personal stories against the backdrop of historical turmoil. In contrast, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* embraces a global canvas, employing magical realism and a panoramic viewpoint to illustrate the fluidity of borders and the interconnected nature of human experiences.

Khaled Hosseini, in his novels *The Kite Runner*, *And the Mountains Echoed* and *Sea Prayer* explores the themes of nationalism and transnationalism, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of the impact of historical and political events on individuals and communities.

The Kite Runner is set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's tumultuous political history, spanning the Soviet invasion, the rise of the Taliban and the aftermath of 9/11. The protagonist, Amir, grapples with his sense of national identity as his homeland undergoes profound changes. The novel depicts the effects of nationalism on personal relationships and the diasporic experiences of Afghan characters living abroad. The

narrative also explores transnational experiences, particularly Amir's life in the United States. The novel highlights the challenges of navigating multiple cultural identities and the ways in which individuals carry the weight of their homeland with them, even when physically distant. "For you, a thousand times over." (TKR 371) This recurring line in the novel reflects a deep sense of loyalty and commitment to one's homeland. It encapsulates the protagonist's feelings of attachment to Afghanistan, even as he lives in the United States. "I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded; not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night." (TKR 329) This quote speaks to the personal and national healing process after periods of conflict and turmoil. "In the end, the world always wins. That's just the way of things." (TKR 92) It suggests a resignation to the larger forces at play in the world, transcending national boundaries and underscoring the transnational aspects of the characters' lives.

The novel *And the Mountains Echoed* spans multiple generations and locations, from Afghanistan to Greece, France, and the United States. It examines the impact of geopolitical events on the lives of characters, emphasizing the consequences of war and political upheavals. Nationalism is portrayed through the lens of personal stories, showing how individuals are shaped by their national context. The novel underscores the interconnectedness of lives across borders. Characters move between countries and their stories are interwoven, illustrating the transnational nature of human experiences.

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The novel reflects on the fluidity of identity and the lasting effects of historical events on individuals and families. "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there." (AME 56) This quote, borrowed from the Persian poet Rumi, suggests the possibility of finding common ground beyond national or cultural differences, emphasizing the universal aspects of human experience. "Beauty is an enormous, unmerited gift given randomly, stupidly." (AME 112) This line reflects on the arbitrariness of fate and the notion that beauty, whether in the form of personal attributes or the circumstances of one's birth, is often beyond individual control and tied to national and global circumstances.

Sea Prayer is a short-illustrated book that addresses the Syrian refugee crisis. Though it's not a full-length novel, it powerfully captures the impact of nationalism, specifically the Syrian Civil War, on a father and his son. The narrative reflects the devastation caused by conflict and displacement, emphasizing the profound connection between individuals and their homeland. While the story is rooted in the Syrian context, the experiences of the characters transcend national borders. The sea journey undertaken by refugees becomes a symbol of the transnational quest for safety and hope. The visual and narrative elements combine to convey the universal nature of the refugee experience.

"I have heard it said that we are the uninvited. We are the unwelcome. We should take our misfortune elsewhere."

These lines from *Sea Prayer* capture the harsh reality faced by refugees, highlighting the rejection they may encounter in their quest for safety and belonging. "You have to understand that no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land." (Wilson). It is a powerful statement that speaks to the transnational plight of refugees, emphasizing the universal human desire for safety and a better life.

Khaled Hosseini's novels explore the intricate interplay between nationalism and transnationalism. Through rich characterizations and storytelling, he portrays the impact of historical and political events on personal identities, emphasizing the transnational connections that persist even in the face of displacement and cultural adaptation.

Exit West by Mohsin Hamid is a novel that intricately explores the themes of nationalism and transnationalism through the lens of migration and the refugee experience. The novel follows the journey of two characters, Nadia and Saeed, as they navigate a world in the grip of political and social upheaval. The novel explores the profound impact of political upheavals, migration, and the interconnectedness of people across borders.

The story is set against the backdrop of a city undergoing political unrest, with tensions between different religious and ethnic groups. This mirrors the real-world challenges faced by many nations dealing with internal strife and the implications of nationalism on communal identities. "In a city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war, a young man met a young woman in a classroom and did not speak to her." (Hamid 1) This opening line sets

the stage for the novel, emphasizing the backdrop of a city on the brink of conflict, where the presence of refugees and the tension between national and migrant identities become central themes. The city was a lattice of subcultures, each with its own customs and terrains, and within each neighbourhood and almost each building, each floor and each apartment, there were further divisions, so that it was very difficult, in practice impossible, to be free from influence. There is a diversity within the city, highlighting the complex interplay of cultures and identities that coexist within national borders.

As the conflict escalates, the city becomes divided, and borders become more rigid. The physical and metaphorical barriers symbolize the nationalism that separates people based on their origin, religion, or ethnicity. The closing of borders reflects the isolationist tendencies of nationalist ideologies. The characters, Nadia and Saeed, choose to escape the confines of their nation, seeking refuge from the escalating nationalist tensions. Their journey through the magical doors serves as a metaphor for the challenges faced by those who seek to transcend the limitations imposed by national borders. "We are all migrants through time." (Hamid 209) This reflects the novel's exploration of the universal nature of migration and displacement, emphasizing that the concept of being a migrant is not limited to a specific place or period in history.

"When we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind." (Hamid 94) This poignant line captures the emotional cost of migration and how it involves leaving parts of one's identity and relationships behind. It emphasizes the transnational aspect of the characters' journeys as they carry the weight of their past with them. The novel suggests that migration is not confined to specific regions or communities. Instead, it is a universal theme that transcends time and place. The characters' experiences resonate with the broader human story of movement, adaptation, and the search for a better life beyond national boundaries. *Exit West* masterfully weaves together these themes, portraying the characters' struggle with national identity, the impact of geopolitical events on their lives, and the transnational nature of their journey through magical doors. Hamid's prose invites readers to reflect on the fluidity of borders and the interconnectedness of human experiences across the globe.

While Hosseini often focuses on individual characters and their personal struggles within the Afghan context, Hamid adopts a more expansive approach, exploring global settings and the broader implications of transnational experiences.

In the exploration of narrative techniques and perspectives in Khaled Hosseini's novels, including *The Kite Runner*, *And the Mountains Echoed* and *Sea Prayer* alongside Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, a nuanced understanding of nationalism and transnationalism emerges. Hosseini's intimate storytelling, often rooted in individual characters and their personal journeys within the Afghan context, showcases the impact of political upheavals on personal identities. His use of various narrative structures, such as multigenerational storytelling and first-person perspectives, enhances the emotional

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connection between readers and characters. On the other hand, Hamid's *Exit West* employs a more expansive narrative, utilizing magical realism and a global perspective to underscore the interconnectedness of human experiences. Collectively, these narrative techniques deepen the portrayal of nationalism and transnationalism, inviting readers to contemplate the individual and universal aspects of these complex themes within the intricate tapestry of storytelling.

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