The Influence of War on Civil Infrastructures, Immigrants, and Local Residents in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

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ABSTRACT

The novel, Exit West, by Mohsin Hamid offers a thought-provoking reflection on the impact of infrastructures during times of unavoidable wars and mass immigration. This paper aims to analyse how the novel portrays civil infrastructures and their significance to both immigrants themselves and native residents. As living standards continue to improve, the concept of life infrastructure becomes increasingly diverse and complex. In such circumstances, civil infrastructures play a crucial role in literary works, especially when a city faces significant events. Infrastructures have a profound influence on various literary works that revolve around themes such as inevitable violence and immigration. Therefore, this study takes an in-depth look at the different aspects of civil infrastructures exposed to war.

Keywords: Exit West; Infrastructures; Mohsin Hamid; Nadia; Saeed

INTRODUCTION

Exit West is a poignant story that generally resonates with the Middle East and Europe. It follows the journey of Saeed and Nadia, who escape the extreme violence in their hometown, only to realise that there is no other place for them. Written by Mohsin Hamid, a Pakistani-American author, the novel investigates the complexities of love and human connection amidst a societal back drop consumed by civil war, violence, and ethnic conflicts. Saeed and Nadia come from different backgrounds, one religious, the other modern and free-thinking, yet, fate brings them together and they fall in love. Tragically, the religious violence in their unnamed city in the Middle East compels them to embark on a perilous journey to the West in search for a peaceful life; To some, Middle East resembles a promising place but terrifying future. In modern conflicts, infrastructures have become primary targets, as war strategies and methods revolve around attacking and undermining these vital structures. If left unprotected, critical infrastructures such as bridges, roads, water and sewage tanks, and power transmission lines could be exploited by enemies as targets or even used as intermediaries to strike at other crucial assets. Consequently, an offensive strategy involving the safeguarding and reinforcing infrastructures has become crucial in new approaches to warfare and demands attention.

In the novel, *Exit West*, a telescope is used to observe war-torn city at night. In the distance, both Saeed and Nadia hear the echoes of gunfire, while helicopters and drones ominously hover in the sky. As the story progresses, militants seize control of the stock market, leading to violent clashes with the government, resulting in a significant loss of life. The city becomes a battleground

as militants unexpectedly infiltrate and occupy the territory; airstrikes, bombings, and the disruption of basic services were resultants of these chaos and atrocities. Cell phone signals suddenly vanish, and the internet goes offline. The city is left without running electricity or water, and people of specific names or sects face persecution and purging. In a heartbreaking moment, Saeed's father reflects on the past while watching a group of young people playing what appears to be football, only to realise in horror that they are using a human head instead of a ball. Finally, as the relationship between Saeed and Nadia evolves, their city undergoes incremental changes that, when seen individually, appear manageable but collectively become catastrophic. The book begins as a beloved tale of a city grappling with an influx of displaced individuals, still overall in a state of relative peace, yet not entirely free from the growing threat of conflict. However, the situation quickly deteriorates into savagery, prompting the couple to escape through magical doorways to the Greek islands, then to Britain, and eventually to the United States (Sehgal, 2013, p. 42).

This essay examines the profound impact of civil war on a city's infrastructure. As cell phones, electricity, and water systems malfunction, the underlying truth about the fragility and vulnerability of urban infrastructure emerges. The disrupted infrastructure becomes a metaphorical reflection of the hidden realities and truths of the conflict, as Boyer suggests in his statement, "infrastructure talk indexes a certain conceptual topology in which consequential epistemic or material substrata of experience are posited and mined for hidden truths" (2016, p. 1). Hamid's novel does not only captivate article authors and renowned writers, but it has also prompted them to analyse the text within historical and cultural contexts, which is inextricably linked to contemporary events as depicted in the novel. After all, the author of *Exit West* lived through the civil war; as such, he was profoundly influenced by the war-torn world in which he resided. The novel serves as a platform for the reactions and feedback of readers and audience who are generally furnished with invaluable insights that may influence the form and content of his future works. This essay, therefore, aims at examining this issue by using Sheila Hones's (2022) notion of critical geography and recontextualises it to analyse the depictions of civil infrastructures and their importance for both immigrants and native residents. Critical geography, which incorporates the varied facets of geography such as physical features, human settlements, and mapping technologies, is described as the processes of reading and interpreting literary texts by making reference to geographical concepts such as space and place. This study presents insights into the impact of infrastructures during war and mass immigration, shedding light on their significance for both immigrants and native residents. By examining the novel using critical geography, how the infrastructure in the novel shapes the characters' sense of place and belonging, as well as how they influence their movement and mobility might be presented. By examining how the novel, *Exit West*, portrays civil infrastructures and their roles in shaping the experiences of the characters, this study can provide valuable insights into the broader themes of cities and literary studies. By approaching the text this way, an interdisciplinary dialogue within literary works which enables intellectuals and authors to explore interconnected fields might be facilitated. Like Hamid, these scholars and writers aim to depict the living conditions and experiences that unfold amidst chaos and violence by investigating the subtle connections between humanities and the infrastructures that shape cities.

DISCUSSIONS

The following sections highlight the ways in which the novel depicts civil infrastructures and their importance to individuals who are immigrants or native residents.

THE DEPICTION OF THE CITY'S SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE

One remarkable aspect of *Exit West* is its illustration of the unique spatial perspective of individual cities. The distinctiveness of each city's energy landscape is highlighted with its success or failure being influenced by a combination of factors such as topography, culture, and politics. Even in the midst of civil war, the author showcases this perspective:

> The progression of the conflict resulted in the rapid capture of neighbourhoods by militants, causing Saeed's mother to witness the transformation of the familiar place she had known her whole life into a fragmented patchwork. Her mental map now resembled an old quilt, with patches representing government-controlled areas and patches marking militant-held territories. The dangerous spaces that existed between these fraying patches were to be avoided at all costs. Tragically, individuals like her butcher and the cloth merchant who provided fabrics for her festive clothes disappeared into these gaps, their establishments reduced to rubble and debris.
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> (Hamid, 2017, p. 44)

This excerpt from the novel vividly illustrates the impact of the conflict on the city's physical landscape. It captures the fragmentation and destruction of the urban environment, forcing individuals to navigate a perilous and uncertain reality. The author skillfully depicts the profound changes occurring within the spatial perspective of the city, reflecting the impact of war on its infrastructure and the lives of its inhabitants.

In another section of the novel, the land of the local residents is described as being affected by the actions of the militants. The landscape is bears a resemblance with an old quilt, with patches of government-controlled land juxtaposed with patches of land under militant control. This division of land has been orchestrated by the militants themselves. Throughout the novel, a prevailing sense of detachment is woven into the narrative. However, there is a notable exception when the protagonist, Saeed, encounters a house on Vicarage Gate that becomes a place where he feels at home. Drawn by the familiar languages, accents, and the comforting aroma of the cooking, Saeed begins to spend more time there. In a poignant moment, his thoughts briefly turn to his father and a bearded man with distinctive facial markings (Hamid, 2017, p, 88). This passage, therefore, beautifully captures the transformative power of finding solace and connection within a community, even amidst challenging circumstances. It illustrates how a sense of belonging and shared experiences can provide comfort and companionship during times of upheaval. There is a conviction in *Exit West,* which chronicles the journey of Nadia and Saeed, two young individuals who begin a relationship in an unnamed eastern nation on the brink of civil war and eventually escape in the hope of seeking asylum in the West. The novel explores the underlying geography and the challenges they face which centralises the protagonists' journey and the recurring themes in the fictional worlds.

Despite these challenges, they persevere and navigate their way through different environments. Nadia hikes down, first through other un-piped and unwired districts like their own, then through those where grid electricity has been installed, and then through those where roads and running water has reached, and from there she catches a ride on a bus or pickup truck to her place of employment, a food cooperative in a hastily built commercial zone outside Sausalito

(Hamid, 2017, p. 112). In London, they are working on "clearing the land and building infrastructure" in exchange for the promise of "forty meters and a pipe: a house on forty square meters of land and connection to all the possibilities of modernity" (Hamid, 2017, p. 113). Additionally, the mention of London highlights their efforts in clearing land and building infrastructure, exchanging their work for the promise of a home and connection to the possibilities of modern life. It emphasises the importance of urban water infrastructure in meeting the vital needs of citizens and industries, and the need to protect it from potential disruptions. The aforementioned pages also touch upon the concept of an "anti-anthropocentric turn" in the human sciences, challenging traditional perspectives and emphasising the significance of infrastructure within broader societal movements.

Water is indeed a vital factor for human life, and its availability and proper management are crucial for sustaining our well-being. The various stages of water production and supply, from sourcing water to pumping stations and distribution networks, form a complex infrastructure that needs careful attention and protection. Any damage or malfunction in this infrastructure can swiftly escalate into a social and security crisis, reflecting how crucial it is to ensure its stability. The concept of the "anti-anthropocentric turn" in the human sciences, for example, suggests a shift in perspective, acknowledging the significance of infrastructure in our understanding of human society. This, in turn, challenges previous trends that are more focused on semiotics, psychology, and ideas, and it aligns with the changing dynamics of our modern world (Boyer, 2015, p. 20).

Water infrastructure plays an integral role in our daily lives, and its importance is recognised and prioritised. The excerpt from the novel highlights how the presence of war can deeply impact the infrastructure of a city and disrupt the daily lives of its residents. Specifically, the description of the trenches dug in the courtyard, where residents had to relieve themselves under challenging circumstances, is a poignant reminder of the sacrifices and adjustments people make during times of crisis. The fact that they remained resilient and continued with their daily routines, despite the difficulties, reflects the strength of the human spirit (Hamid, 2017, p. 57).

From the perspective of critical geography, the gravity of war and its detrimental effects on infrastructure and human lives are specifically brought to the centre of discussions. As these stories continue to unfold, a greater appreciation for the peace and stability one experiences in their own lives might better be developed. Cities often serve as important hubs of human habitation, and as a result, they tend to have a high population density, however, the lack of cities' development might highlight the concentration of people, capital, and infrastructure which can make cities strategic targets in times of war or military conflict. The excerpt from the novel highlights the detrimental impact of war on the infrastructure of a city and the lives of its residents as Hamid (2017) says, "The decision made by the army to national security over the risk to hostages underscores the difficult choices that are often faced during wartime. The storming of the building with maximum force and the subsequent elimination of militants demonstrates the harsh reality of war and its consequences" (p. 30). As such, cities, concentration of key resources and facilities, as well as the power they hold have been threatened due to their geographical significance. In urban areas, the impact of war can involve not just physical damage, but also disruption and dysfunction of various elements that contribute to the cities' functions.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE LIFE OF IMMIGRANTS

Urban infrastructures play a crucial role in the lives of individuals, including immigrants. They encompass various aspects such as transportation, utilities, and social amenities. Transport infrastructure such as roads, rail networks, and airports enables the movement of people and goods, making commuting and travel easier. Regulated infrastructure, like water, electricity, and gas distribution networks, provides essential services to residents, ensuring their daily needs are met. Social infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, contribute to the well-being and development of communities:

> However, in certain circumstances, infrastructure can be adversely affected, as seen in the example which mentioned the complexities of London's electricity network. During times of conflict or unrest, some areas may experience power outages or limited access to basic services. In such situations, people may resort to alternative methods, like enterprising migrants rigging connections to active high-voltage lines despite the inherent dangers involved.
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> (Torrance, 2009, p. 81)

It is important to note that infrastructure plays a significant role in the lives of immigrants and all city residents. Access to reliable and efficient infrastructure which improves the quality of life and enables individuals to pursue their goals and aspirations may be exemplified by the following excerpt: "It is heartbreaking to witness the darkness and destruction faced by Saeed and Nadia in their city. The contrast between the bright parts of London and the significant darkness elsewhere paints a vivid picture of the challenges they encountered. The symbolism of the darkness, like the depth of the ocean, suggests a sudden drop-off in hope and safety" (Hamid, 2017, p. 56). The militant attack on the city has exposed the vulnerabilities of various aspects of city infrastructure. No part seems to be untouched by the violence and upheaval. The operation to clear the migrant ghetto where Saeed and Nadia found themselves started with a tragic incident, with a police officer being injured within seconds. The sounds of gunfire and chaos grew louder, echoing from different directions and creating a sense of danger and fear.

In Hamid's novel, the infrastructure of energy and water plays a significant role, reflecting the political culture and power dynamics of the region. The scarcity of resources and the control over them shape the lives of the characters and influence the global political imagination. Hamid's exploration of these themes shows a shift in perspective, moving from the local to the global, as the struggles faced by the characters become emblematic of larger issues. In the midst of this turmoil, Saeed desperately sought shelter but faced a locked door. Thankfully, Nadia was there to pull him in and secure their safety. As Hamid (2017) writes: "It is in these moments of uncertainty and danger that their resilience and love for each other shine through" (p. 94) and "It is heartbreaking to see Saeed and Nadia separated in such challenging circumstances. Forced to live in a crowded camp, they, like many others, had to endure the difficult conditions of their living situation. Saeed's understanding of the situation highlights the necessity of accommodating as many people as possible in the limited space available, even if it meant separating couples. It's a testament to their resilience that they find ways to stay connected despite the challenges they face" (Hamid, 2017, p. 89).

From the lens of critical geography, the novel raises important questions about the interplay between infrastructure, power, and identity, presenting a thought-provoking exploration of these themes in the context of the characters' experiences. It is important to note the careful intertwining between the challenges of daily lives and the impact of infrastructure on the protagonists' experiences, as written by Hamid (2017), "the presence of a pirate radio station operated by the

militants adds a layer of tension to the story. The smooth-voiced announcer, with his captivating voice and dramatic claims, creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and imminent danger. This highlights the risks associated with being out and about in such conditions and adds to the need for Saeed and Nadia to typically meet at Nadia's place, where it is presumably safer" (Hamid, 2017, p. 47).

Moreover, the novel centralises the significance of infrastructure in shaping the characters' lives. For instance, Hamid (2017) explains: "The accessibility of piped water before the civil war contrasts with the crude reality they face later on. The breakdown of the plumbing system in their building forces them to adapt to new and challenging circumstances. The description of the trenches dug in the courtyard, segregated by gender and hidden by a sheet, portrays the loss of privacy and the necessity to perform even the most basic bodily functions in public. It's a testament to the resilience and adaptability of the characters as they try to maintain a sense of dignity and normalcy amidst the hardships they face" (Hamid, 2017, p. 98). These details, from the lens of critical geography, highlight the interplay between infrastructure and everyday lives, exploring how something as essential as water and sanitation can profoundly affect the characters' experiences. By focusing on Hamid's exploration of these themes which adds depth and realism to the novel, the provisions of a powerful reflection on human conditions in the face of challenging circumstances might be presented.

Modern societies and economies generally demonstrate the robustness of infrastructure. Specifically, enabling infrastructures related to economics might encompass various functions and services such as "transportation, production, government services, investment, energy, electricity, information, and communications" (Williams, 2012, p. 46). The development of infrastructure has been significant for two periods: the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century and the second half of the twentieth century (Edwards, 2008, p. 23). The industrial revolution brought about by accelerated transportation through the introduction of machines typically leads to increased production especially in industries like printing. Infrastructure can be seen as a network of systems and independent streams that enable the production and distribution of goods and services. Contemporary societies, particularly urban communities, rely on these infrastructures for their survival. In the novel, *Exit West*, infrastructure is prominently depicted through the network of communications, specifically through the depictions of water infrastructures.

In the novel, Saeed and Nadia find themselves in a worker camp, contributing their labour to clear the train tracks and build infrastructure, including assembling dwellings from prefabricated blocks. In exchange for their work, migrants are promised a home on forty square meters of land, complete with connections to all the modern utilities. This illustrates the significance of infrastructure, especially in metropolitan areas, particularly during times of crisis. According to Robbins, the concept of the "worldly" or global novel encourages us to examine superstructures, infrastructures, and the shaping influences of the world capitalist system. Infrastructure, therefore, holds a vital role in facilitating societal functioning and development. (2013, p. 1). Here, the significance of water infrastructure is demonstrated as a symbol of modernity. As Hamid (2017) writes: "Even Nadia, who works for a pipe company, becomes a representation of this vital progress. It seems that these pipes connect everything that would otherwise remain disconnected. Nadia is part of a predominantly female crew that lays pipes of various colours, such as orange, yellow, black, and green. Through these pipes, the lifeblood and thoughts of the new city will soon flow, connecting people without the need for physical movement" (p.106). Also pertinent is Hamid's (2017) list of infrastructure details: "digging machine, resembling a wolf spider or praying mantis, with a wide stance and dangerous-looking appendages at its front. These

appendages merge into a crenelated scraper resembling a mouth. This digging machine carves trenches in the earth, creating pathways for the pipe layers to unfurl, unstuck, lower, and connect the pipes" (p.106).

Other technologies that bear a striking contrast to being human is seen as civil modalities. As Hamid (2017) elaborates, "the network of communication is established by these pipes, and it has even resulted in the marriage of a native man and a non-native wife. This is because the pipe company has employed many workers within the same interconnected network" (p. 99), including the following excerpt: "during her lunch break, she would occasionally visit Nadia's work site when her husband was present. However, his presence was not constant as he was often tasked with digging trenches for multiple pipe laying crews. On such occasions, the woman and her husband would unwrap their sandwiches, unscrew their thermoses, and enjoy their meal while engaging in conversation and laughter" (p. 106).

The novel acknowledges the unsettling nature of migration, particularly the militarised management of marginalised individuals by wealthy countries. These countries monitor the inhabitants of refugee camps, who often come from diverse backgrounds, primarily falling within various shades of brown. This omnipresent oversight is why the novel *Exit West* places significant emphasis on border control and surveillance infrastructure. Because of these locations, "it has been said that the number of labourer camps around London increased each month. Saeed and Nadia observed the constant influx of newcomers into their own camp. Some arrived on foot, while others came in buses or vans. During their days off, the labourers were encouraged to assist in various tasks around the camp, and Saeed often volunteered to help with the preparation and settling of the camp's new expansions" (Hamid, 2017, p. 100).

While other Hamid's novels examine the fascination with public utilities, *Exit West* is less concerned with Pakistan's national energy infrastructure, and it instead emphasises the broader global scale of borders. This global scale appears to be both powerful and dangerous, shaping the identities of the characters in the novel. The story brings attention to the use of "surveillance feeds, communications satellites" (Mohsen Hamid, 2017, p.100) and "overhead drones" (Hamid, 2017, p. 151) in the high-tech "cognitive assemblages" that monitor irregular migrants. This notion, coined by Hayles, highlights the increasing intertwining of human decision-making with the unconscious cognitions of technological devices (2016, p. 45).

Furthermore, the depth of vicarious experiences associated with hazardous substances is captured by the novel. Specifically, this time, it explores the theme of failing gas infrastructure, which is depicted vividly in the following excerpt: "Nadia, feeling restless and unable to sleep, decided to take a shower. However, the water was chilly due to the intermittent gas supply to her boiler. She stood there, completely naked, like she was born, and then dressed herself in jeans, a T-shirt, and a sweater, her usual attire when she was alone at home. Finally, she put on her robe, ready to resist the demands and expectations of the world. Stepping outside, she headed towards a nearby park that was gradually emptying of the early-morning joggers and the couples who had left their homes with plenty of time for their alleged errands" (Hamid, 2017, p. 67).

The novel highlights the correlation between people's interest in refurbished houses and their potential interest in refurbished novels. This draws attention to the failure in the infrastructure itself. As the French scholar Tocqueville once observed:

An American will build a house in which to spend his old age and sell it before the roof is even complete; he will start a garden and rent it out just as the trees are beginning to bear fruit; he will clear a field and leave others to reap the harvest; he will take up a profession and then abandon it, settle in one place only to soon move elsewhere, driven by changing desires.

(Tocqueville, 1962, p. 536)

The destruction of infrastructure, such as buildings, road networks, and essential facilities like fuel tanks, power plants, and communication lines, these centres and facilities, including population centres, telecommunication centres, and energy supply facilities, are often targeted in attacks and sabotage operations due to their significance and vulnerability. Water infrastructure, specifically the water supply system in cities, plays a crucial role in sustaining human life. It is indeed vulnerable to military attacks, and disruptions to its operation can have far-reaching consequences on the economy, society, and overall security. To prevent such attacks on water infrastructure and other vital facilities, there is a need to establish special defense and security principles and considerations during the process of locating, constructing, and managing these centres.

Protecting and ensuring the security of these infrastructure facilities, including water supply systems, is paramount. Implementing robust defense measures and continually assessing vulnerabilities can help safeguard against military attacks. With proper planning and implementation of security protocols, we can work towards maintaining the stability and functioning of these critical infrastructure networks.

The significance of water infrastructure in urban life is the essential, it plays in sustaining human life. The security of water infrastructure centres, equipment, and facilities across all sectors of supply, transfer, purification, and distribution is indeed crucial, especially in the face of potential military attacks. Water is irreplaceable and holds immense importance for human existence. Therefore, it is necessary to prioritise the security and protection of these centres and facilities to ensure the continuous and safe access to clean water for the population.

In the context of literature, the concept of infrastructuralism, as described by Levine, emphasises the careful examination of the social, cultural, and technological aspects that interact and shape the infrastructure. It entails paying attention to energy infrastructures within the setting of a story, treating them with the same level of importance as character development and plot (Malcolm, 2009, p. 365). This approach helps to create a more immersive and detailed narrative experience. By recognizing the criticality of water infrastructure and implementing appropriate defense and security measures, we can work towards better safeguarding these vital resources and ensuring the well-being and stability of our communities. The impact of war on water infrastructure is depicted in the excerpt from Hamid's novel, where the characters collect rainwater as part of their emergency water supply. This showcases how the conflict has disrupted the normal water supply, leading to a reliance on alternative sources.

The destruction or damage to critical infrastructure can have severe consequences for the survival and security of a country, posing political, economic, and defensive risks. The protection of critical infrastructure is a challenging task due to its extensive scope, scale, and complexity. It is crucial to study and have accurate knowledge of different types of infrastructure to effectively safeguard them. Research centres worldwide have undertaken the classification and analysis of infrastructure types, focusing on vital and sensitive centres. This classification helps in identifying and prioritizing the protection of key infrastructure elements. In the context of war, one of the damaging effects is the disruption or even blocking of internet and cell phone services. This can severely impact communication and connectivity. However, even in challenging circumstances, individuals may find ways to access the internet, albeit with limited and regulated browsing time,

as depicted in the passage of Hamid's novel. The controlled nature of internet access reflects the constraints and limitations imposed during times of conflict.

Saeed and Nadia faced challenges in reconnecting with each other due to the absence of mobile phones and internet access. They had not been to each other's office before, making it difficult to reach out during the day. Without the means to communicate, it felt as though they were bats flying in the dark without the use of their ears. Just like bats rely on their echolocation to navigate, Saeed and Nadia felt lost without the ability to find each other. In an attempt to meet up, Saeed went to their usual burger joint during lunchtime, but Nadia did not show up. The following day, when he went once again, he discovered the restaurant had been closed, leaving him uncertain about Nadia's whereabouts and the fate of their meeting place. "This passage highlights the challenges and uncertainties faced by Saeed and Nadia as they try to reestablish contact and maintain their connection amidst the absence of communication channels. It underscores the impact of technology and communication disruptions on their relationship and their ability to find each other in a changing and uncertain world (Hamid, 2017, p. 40).

In the novel, *Exit West*, some of the infrastructure in London is compared to the destroyed infrastructure in the war. The complex electricity network in London allowed for a few pockets of nighttime brightness to remain in Saeed and Nadia's vicinity. These areas were typically located on the edges, near barricades and checkpoints manned by armed government forces, or in scattered pockets that were challenging to disconnect. In rare cases, enterprising migrants had managed to create connections to still-active high-voltage lines, risking electrocution. "However, the overall ambiance paints a picture of darkness surrounding Saeed and Nadia. This passage highlights the contrast between the relatively intact infrastructure in London and the war-affected region where the main characters are located (Hamid, 2017, p. 85). The mention of policy proposals by Scheer, such as the destabilisation of trans-local high-voltage grids and the creation of public municipal energy corporations, adds an intriguing layer to the discussion. It suggests alternative approaches to infrastructure management and highlights the potential for policy intervention to shape and influence the stability and resilience of critical infrastructure (2004, p. 269–273). Overall, these passages draw attention to the impact of infrastructure conditions on the lives and experiences of individuals, reflecting the broader themes of conflict, resilience, and the significance of infrastructure in societal functioning.

The quotes provide insights into the topic of localized energy production and its impact on different communities. According to Boyer, localized energy systems can be more responsive to local needs and interests, reducing the reliance on long-distance power cables. This approach is seen as beneficial for society, with only a few power lines needed to connect large dams and wind farms (Boyer, 2016, p. 237). In the novel, *Exit West*, the contrast between immigrant communities and native residents is depicted through the availability of electricity. In Mykonos, electricity was not widespread, but wherever there were wires, it had reached. However, in their own city, when the electricity was gone, it affected everyone (Scheer, 2004, 269).

In London, the stark contrast between brightly lit areas and dark swaths is described. Saeed and Nadia are amazed by the brightness of some parts of the city, reflecting from the sky and clouds. This contrast makes "the darker areas seem even more significant, reminiscent of a sudden drop-off in the depths of an ocean" (Hamid, 2017, p. 85) and that "the mention of working in London, specifically "clearing terrain and building infrastructure," in exchange for a smaller living space and access to modern utilities highlights the trade-offs that individuals may make for a better quality of life and connection to essential services" (Hamid, 2017, p. 170).

The aforementioned passages from the novel shed light on the role of energy infrastructure in shaping communities and the disparities that may arise, an important framework of critical geography. Specifically, these passages highlight the disparities in infrastructure and access to electricity within a city like London. Firstly, they emphasise the significance of electricity access and its influence on people's daily lives, as well as the broader themes of migration, inequality, and the impact of infrastructure on social dynamics. These characteristics governing cities might exemplify the significance of "the vast electrified industrial machine" which is a "significant undertaking of the twentieth century and has continued to expand globally in the twenty-first century under the guise of 'development.' This project transcends ideological boundaries and reflects the multi-faceted efforts to foster progress and growth on a global scale" (Boyer, 2015, p. 65). Secondly, the novel raises questions about the impact of electrification on social and economic development, as well as the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities. The descriptions from the novel so far portray the striking contrast between light and darkness, revealing the significance of electrification and its role in shaping daily life and societal dynamics. The impact of military invasion and the targeting of urban infrastructure might have profound consequences concerning water and electricity supplies, as a way to undermine a country and spread discontent among its people. Despite the challenges, there is a glimpse of beauty in her surroundings, with a rooftop terrace overlooking a market and a vibrant neon sign advertising a zero-calorie carbonated beverage.

The descriptions shed light on the vital role that water and electricity play in the everyday lives of people, acting as the circulatory system that sustains their well-being and comfort. It emphasises the vulnerability of urban infrastructure during times of conflict and the potential impact on the overall functioning of society. However, it is important to note that this is a fictional scenario by Hamid. An understanding of the complexities of war and its consequences requires a broader perspective; as Hamid (2017) cogently argues, "while targeting infrastructure can have significant effects, it's crucial to consider the broader context and the lives and well-being of the people affected by such conflicts" (Hamid, 2017, p. 21).

The depiction of poor infrastructures in immigrant fields and the consequences they have on the environment and the well-being of individuals in a story are hitherto demonstrated. The novel highlights a massive infrastructure project undertaken to accommodate many refugees, which is described as if they are restructuring the entire Earth, emphasising the physical deficiencies experienced by individuals in such environments. By providing images that bear a resemblance with "broken windows in the cold winter nights, where gas and electricity are increasingly scarce" and the lack of "the logical course of action being to remove the remaining broken windows…to offer some relief from the chill" (Hamid, 2017, p. 46), these depictions illustrate the challenges faced by individuals living in areas with poor infrastructure, specifically in immigrant fields and battle zones. It sheds light on the complex dynamics and consequences that arise from these circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Exit West is a story that centralises the role of geography in shaping the destinies of young lovers, Saeed and Nadia, who are forced to leave their homes due to their geographical circumstances. The author, Hamid, introduces a fantastical element to the narrative by using magical doors through which the refugees in the story travel. These doors add a sense of urgency and focus to the story, emphasising the emotional aspects rather than the geopolitical aspects. The central struggle in the story, however, revolves around Nadia and Saeed's journey alongside other refugees as they search for a place that offers a new kind of strangeness in the world.

       Exit West delves into the experiences of individuals and their interactions with their surroundings. Through the lens of critical geography, the novel presents refugee-related experiences and suggests that, ultimately, all humans may become refugees. Specifically, we catch a glimpse of a migration apocalypse, accelerated by war and the destruction of infrastructure in cities. Alongside the inevitable mass migration, the novel vividly portrays the physical and emotional suffering from the people, as reflected in the ruined infrastructure. Hamid challenges our perception of nations and borders, offering a unique perspective on mass migration and encouraging us to reevaluate our understanding of the world. The novel reminds us that cities, as vital hubs of populations and resources, are susceptible to a range of internal and external threats.

       The concentration of population, capital, and various facilities in cities, particularly metropolitan areas, has greatly influenced urban infrastructure. Among the challenges and threats that have received less attention is the military attack on crucial urban infrastructure centres and facilities, including water, electricity, fuel, and transportation. Hamid's novel artfully explores these types of attack. Throughout history, wars and military invasions have consistently targeted the vital centres and infrastructures of a country. Various factors such as insufficient protection and easy access for attackers, have made these centres attractive targets for military operations. Infrastructure systems, for instance, water infrastructure, are so integral to the daily lives of citizens and various economic and industrial sectors that any disruptions might result in significant economic, social, and political consequences. Effective crisis management and attention to infrastructure integrity are crucial for preventing military threats, particularly from attackers. The situation and compliance of these centres and facilities with established principles and considerations does not only hold importance in and of themselves but these are also prioritized in *Exit West*.

       Successful European experiences have shown that attention to uniform density and balanced distribution of residential units, along with the safe design of spaces and prevention of vertical development, have a significant impact on strengthening urban security. From the lens of critical geography, the onset of civil wars leads to the disintegration of families, communities, and the unity of the country. Civil wars spare no one from their devastating effects, resulting in loss of lives, destruction of homes, and harm to civilians. The novel explores several fundamental themes, primarily concerning immigration and asylum. It aims to criticise the asylum conundrums and its increasing prevalence in developed countries, viewing it as a consequence of domination, capitalism, and modern colonialism. Hamid challenges prevailing government structures and demonstrates the power of literature once again. The novel, by utilising aspects of author's daily life as a pretext, reflects the internal contradictions present in liberal democratic structures that claim to uphold individual freedom serving as a form of protest against the existing societal conditions.

Therefore, *Exit West* depicts the painful journey of refugees. The characters, Saeed and Nadia, have earlier meet one another in a city engulfed in the turmoil of war. Nadia is an independent and adventurous woman, while Saeed is deeply in love with her. Their relationship begins clandestinely, as their city is filled with restlessness and checkpoints. Under the mounting pressure, they make the decision to escape. However, as they move farther away from their home, the distance between them grows. In *Exit West*, the author portrays the devastating effects of war on thousands of lives. Amidst this backdrop, we witness the transformation of lovers due to their migration. Their utmost desire becomes finding a place with four walls, a window, and a lock, a space they can call their own. However, they cannot fully settle or unpack their belongings, as they must always remain prepared to leave at a moment's notice. Saeed always carries a photo of his parents as a reminder of his roots, longing for a stable settlement. By using critical geography as a perspective, the novel explores the harsh reality faced by refugees, capturing both the challenges of displacement and the fragile nature of interpersonal relationships in such circumstances.

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