

The Ethical Re(turn) in Postcolonial Fiction: Narrating the Precariat in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Mohammad Hanif's *Red Birds*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the literary representation of the a category precariat, pigrants and refugees in Middle Eastern and Muslim countries and the ethical response they elicit. Migrants and refugees, who are assigned a place and a status on the margins of states or who are forcibly displaced by war, famine or natural disasters, are at the heart of two novels by Pakistani writers Mohsin Hamid and Mohammed Hanif, *Exit West* (2017) and *Red Birds* (2018). Both novels propose singular responses to the refugee and migrant crisis by combining political commentary and engagement with the norms of realistic representation. *Exit West* and *Red Birds* represent attempts to apprehend the migrant crisis and the consequences of the war on terror on the civilian population through the prism of highly aesthetic fictional forms, and not by relying on actual legal definitions and population data. In fact, while *Exit West* and *Red Birds* are politically and ethically committed novels about the socio-economic category of the precariat, narrating precariousness draws attention both on the representation of the precariat as a category, and also on the self-reflexive nature of language. As we shall see, the figure of the migrant is the founding metaphor of the novel, and Thomas Nail's theories provide a useful tool of interpretation for *Exit West*, while Butler's reflections on grievability and precariousness will find connections with *Red Birds*.

Keywords: Precariat, refugee, Pakistani fiction, grievability, kinopolitics.