Unveiling ‘Reality’ behind ‘Social Reality’: Breaking Gender Stereotypes and Reconstructing Identities in Hamid’s Exit West

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Abstract
The present paper is aimed at uncovering the fact that people’s gender identities which appear as ‘real’ turn out to be society’s predefined notions about men and women. Therefore, this study is intended at unveiling the existence of diverse gender realities hidden behind the socially constructed realities with reference to Hamid’s novel Exit West (2017). In order to analyze this perspective on gender in the said novel, Butler’s (1999) concept of ‘performativity’ serves as a valuable lens. Her concept of ‘performativity’ revolves around the importance of ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’ in defining one’s gender identity. By putting an emphasis on this notion of ‘doing’, the present research focuses on the analysis of the central characters namely Saeed and Nadia in Hamid’s novel. Maintaining Butler’s (1999) view, this study explores that Saeed and Nadia’s gender identities depend on what they ‘do’ in different contexts, rather than on what they ‘are’. It exposes how the protagonists have to assume certain roles under the compulsion of social norms in order to fit in the society they live in. In this sense, this research paper determines that Hamid’s novel not only unmasks certain gender stereotypes, but also breaks them by depicting its protagonists’ performance of alternative gender roles in different contexts. In the light of analysis done with the implication of Butler’s (1999) concept of ‘performativity’, the paper also suggests that Exit West (2017) can be regarded as an important initiative to redefine and reconstruct the notion of gender identities through text.

Keywords: Reality, Social Reality, Gender, Stereotypes, Performativity, Identity.
Introduction

Over the past few decades, the matter of defining one’s gender identity has become quite a debatable topic in gender studies. Notions about gender identities have no longer remained limited to only binary opposites. The present paper also attempts to unravel such gender issues in the novel Exit West (2017) by a leading young Muslim novelist Hamid who is a Pakistani-British English author writing in English language. He has recently been conferred with ‘Sitara-e-Imtiaz’ — the third highest civilian award of Pakistan — for his literary services. Apart from that, he has won numerous awards including Betty Trask Award, Asian American Literary Award for his novels Moth Smoke (2000) and The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) respectively. His recently published novel Exit West (2017) has won the Aspen Words Literary Prize (2018). This novel has been widely acknowledged as a true depiction of global refugee crisis. However, the present study is aimed at analyzing the issue of gender by unraveling the influence of social norms or stereotypes in the construction of gender identities in the said novel. It revolves around the story of two lovers Saeed and Nadia living in an unnamed city of an unnamed country. As the civil war breaks out in their city, they have to leave their homeland. After that, their journey of migration from one place to another never comes to a standstill as they keep on exploring different parts of the world. Their journey commences from their unnamed homeland to Greece but their growing discomfort in Mykonos (Greece) leads them to move to London and later on, from London to Marin. However, the present research does not intend to describe their migratory experiences. Instead, it is intended to explicate the protagonists’ gender identities in different contexts. By taking insights from Butler’s (1999) concept of “performativity”, the present study offers a critique of Exit West by exposing the reality about one’s gender which remains hidden behind the socially constructed stereotypical notions of gender roles. Apart from disclosing how certain stereotypes tend to define the protagonists’ identity, it examines the ways in which both male and female characters in the target novel break those stereotypes by performing alternative roles at various places.

Research Questions:

The present research is aimed at answering the following questions:

1. How does Hamid present the notion of ‘reality’/ ‘social reality’ in his novel Exit West (2017)?
2. In what ways does the target novel reinforce Butler’s (1999) idea of ‘performativity’?
Literature Review

Beauvoir’s statement that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 281) which she gave in her influential work The Second Sex (1997/1949) set the grounds for revolutionary ideas regarding one’s gender identity. Beauvoir’s notion directed a shift in gender studies from “biological essentialism” to the influence of society on an individual’s gender identity. Biological essentialism maintains that differences between the two sexes (men and women) result from biology and therefore these differences are considered unchangeable. Often, this notion tends to promote generalizations about men and women, such as “women are innately inferior to men” (Tyson, 2006, p. 85). Particularly by pointing out the difference between ‘gender’ and ‘sex’, it raised important questions about one’s gender identity and provided useful insights for further research in the field of gender studies (Siddiqui, 2014, p. 29). Giddens (2006) aptly delineates the difference between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. In his account, sociology refers to ‘sex’ as the physiological and anatomical differences on the basis of which female and male bodies are defined. On the other hand, ‘gender’ is concerned with social, cultural and psychological differences between females and males. Therefore, he is of the opinion that ‘gender’ is associated with socially constructed notions of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ which are not necessarily the result of one’s biological sex (p. 458). Moreover, Butler (1999) emphasizes on the role of ‘discourse’ in the construction as well as in the perpetuation of certain stereotypes regarding one’s gender. Therefore, the novel/text under analysis has been used synonymously with discourse. Besides, a significant number of scholars have also explicated the importance of ‘discourse’ in the construction as well as in the reconstruction of gender identities. In order to understand how discourse plays a significant role in the construction of gender identities, it seems pertinent to first explain that what is discourse and what is its relation with society? In Fairclough’s (2001) view, discourse means a language used as a social practice which is determined by societal structures (p. 14). According to him, discourse refers to different ways through which different aspects of world are represented such as “the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the “mental world” of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and the social world” (as cited in Atanga, 2010, p. 26). Likewise, by stating that “discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned”, Wodak (1997) points out the importance of different forms of discourses in the construction and perpetuation of various stereotypes about gendered views of society (p. 6). Commenting on how such gender discourses actually help in performance of one’s gender, Echert and McConnel-Ginet (2003) highlight the
unfixed notion of gender in the following words:

Being a girl or being a boy is not a stable state but an ongoing accomplishment, something that is actively done both by the individual so categorized and by those who interact with it in the various communities to which it belongs. (p. 17)

Such acquired knowledge which is based on certain societal notions or ‘stereotypes’ becomes imposing over the course of the time because of their excessive use in daily life. The notion of stereotypes or “stereotyping” refers to “the process of applying a simplified model to a real, complex individual, often to negative and derogatory effect” (Goddard & Patterson, 2000). According to Godard and Patterson, the continuous use of these ‘stereotypes’ makes them appear as ‘natural’ and we begin to accept such social knowledge without any logic (p. 57). For instance, society assigns certain roles according to the sex of an individual (man/woman). A common division which has been made is between the public and private roles assigned to men and women respectively. According to such a division, women are held responsible for home while men are given the responsibility of earning bread for the whole family (Siddique, 2014, p. 35).

Consequently, such roles for men and women which are determined by society lead to certain expectations to be met by both genders (male and female). Hence, society begins to view and judge the individuals based on their categorization in binary oppositions. However, such an approach to define complex human beings on the basis of certain stereotypes has been challenged by Bergvall et. al. (1996). In their view, whatever we experience in life cannot be described in terms of binary categories. Instead, we will be able to describe it in a better way if we consider our experience as “a continuum with indistinct boundaries” (p. 1).

In addition, Canagarajah (1999) argues that “discourse is the linguistic realization of the socially constructed ideology” (p. 30). In this sense, if we want to break certain stereotypes created by discourse, there is need for a “reversal of discourse”. Siddiqui (2014) argues that along with challenging the created ideologies, facts/truths and common sense, the “reversal of discourse” offers alternative facts and truths as well. Therefore, he holds the opinion that if we intend to use language for freedom, emancipation and development, we need to challenge the existing stereotypes, commonsense ideologies and social practices. And this can be made possible only through a critical approach taken towards the significant role language plays in “creating, maintaining and challenging hegemonic practices” (Siddiqui, 2014, p. 15). Furthermore, the reason behind choosing the text of Exit West (2017) for the present study is that not much work has been
done on it from the perspective of gender yet. For example, Bağlama’s (2019) research explores such issues as displacement, loss and “unbelonging” experienced by the refugee/migrant protagonists as well as their victimization in the foreign lands (p. 149). Likewise, Kaur (2017) also points out the plight of refugees everywhere as it has been depicted by Hamid in Exit West. Another research work which has been carried out by Mir (2018) highlights the significance of “magical doors” in the novel under study. In his opinion, the magical doors in Exit West predict a near future in which the concept of borders or nationhood will disappear and everybody will be able to migrate freely (Mir, 2018, p. 15). In a latest research on Exit West, Kayani, Mubarak and Butt (2020) have explicated the ways in which Hamid subverts the “traditional feminine stereotypes” in this novel. Likewise, Walid (2021) has also explored the “sexual fluidity” in the character of Nadia. However, amid the research carried out on Exit West (2017) so far, there seems enough room to analyze the perspective of gender reality which we aim to explore in the present paper

Methodology/Theoretical Framework

The present research is qualitative and follows the method of textual analysis. For an in-depth study, certain words, phrases and sentences have been selected from the text. Besides, Judith Butler’s concept of ‘performativity’ serves as the theoretical framework for the critique of Exit West (2017) in the current research. Butler states that “gender proves to be performative –that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (Butler, 1999, p. 25). Here it is pertinent to mention that Butler’s concept of performativity should not be confused with performance. In an interview which she gave in 1993, Butler herself puts an emphasis on maintaining a difference between the two concepts aforementioned. She argues that whereas ‘performance’ conveys the idea of the pre-existence of the individual, performativity puts an emphasis on the very act of ‘doing’ rather than on the ‘doer’. In simple words, Butler’s point is that it is during the very act of ‘doing’ something in a given or specific context that an individual’s identity comes into being. To put it in Salih’s (2002) words: “Gender is an act that brings into being what it names: in this context, a ‘masculine’ man or a ‘feminine’ woman” (p. 64). Moreover, in order to emphasize the importance of ‘doing’ in one’s gender identity, Butler also quotes the following words from Nietzsche’s claim that “the ‘doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything” (as cited in Butler, 1999, p. 33). In this sense, Butler is of the opinion that gender is not something an individual is, rather it is something an individual does. In simple words, gender is not a noun
(being), rather it is a verb (doing) (Butler, 1999). Furthermore, while proposing her idea of performativity, Butler has refuted the distinction made between sex and gender. Instead, she argues that every sex is already gender. She goes on to say that there is no existence that would not be social. Therefore, every ‘body’ is gendered from the time it comes into existence. She defines gender in the following words: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 1999, pp. 43-43).

What she means in the above-mentioned quotation is that what we call ‘natural body’ does not exist at all because it is already influenced by the culture or social system from the moment it comes into existence (Salih, 2002, p. 47). In her account, it is the constant practice of those repeated acts in a social or cultural system which makes it appear as ‘natural’. In this context, she also points out the role which language or discourse plays in defining one’s identity and perpetuating it thereby. She connects “linguistic performativity” to gender by stating that “discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 1993, p. xii). Her argument is that it is language or discourse which ‘does’ gender not the other way around. It so happens because it is this discourse or language which is passed on to the person from the time he/she is born according to which his/her identity is defined and then that person is expected to act accordingly. Most importantly, Butler’s argument is that since one’s gender identity is independent of one’s sex, “gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice”. Consequently, she maintains that such a notion about constructed gender identity as ‘male / female’ can also create the possibility of a masculine man in a female body and a feminine woman in a male body (Butler, 1999, p. 10). Hence, apart from exposing the reality of socially constructed gender identities, her notion of performativity creates the possibility of reconstruction of alternative identities / realities as well.

Analysis and Discussion

The most fascinating thing we have found about Hamid’s novel is that although his characters have been depicted living in an ‘unnamed city’ in an ‘unnamed country’, yet the effect of an ‘unnamed social/ cultural system’ remains quite apparent on their identities. What follows is an in-depth study of Exit West (2017) with ample textual proofs to support the arguments Judith Butler has put forwarded about how a person’s identity or reality is socially constructed. Our view is that by not revealing the name of any specific social system, city or country, Exit West further strengthens Butler’s point of view and helps in unveiling how the social construction of gender identities and
then the maintenance of those socially constructed gender realities (in the form of gender stereotypes) has become a worldwide phenomenon. In this sense, Saeed and Nadia become the representative of every man and every woman who are under compulsion or are affected by the social norms as well as who are striving to recreate their identities. It further aids in unveiling the fact that how socially constructed realities tend to put a mask on a person’s true and complex nature of reality/identity in an attempt to make him/her appear as ‘natural’/ ‘real’ human being. The protagonists in Exit West have been reduced to gender categories by whichever the social system they are part of. There are certain do’s and don’ts according to which Saeed and Nadia are expected to act in that social system. Hence, their identity is not something which is ‘real’ but is being imposed on them as a condition for living in that society. Therefore, this research paper is intended to unveil that reality which remains hidden behind the so called stereotypes or ‘socially constructed reality’. The prevailed stereotypes are so much imbedded in their minds that Saeed and Nadia have to hide their reality either consciously or unconsciously in order to fit in the social reality. As Butler maintains that gender is a “set of repeated acts within highly rigid regulatory frame”, Saeed and Nadia also make it sure to perform those ‘repeated acts’ according to their gender whenever they are outside their homes or are in the presence of other people. In other words, they have to put a mask of so-called ‘social reality’ for survival among other members of their society. This becomes quite apparent in the novel when Saeed and Nadia set off to leave their city of birth, Hamid states:

They were dressed in accordance with the rules on dress and he was bearded in accordance with the rules on beards and her hair was hidden in accordance with the rules on hair, trying not to be seen while trying not to look like they were trying not to be seen.” (Hamid, 2017, p. 83)

Thus the above-quoted lines from Hamid’s novel undoubtedly reveal how Saeed and Nadia have to pretend to be in public what they are not in reality just to be socially compatible with other members of their community. Furthermore, Nadia’s pre-plan to present a “forgery that was supposedly their marriage certificate” (Hamid, 2017, p. 84) in case they are inquired about their relationship with each other, further unmasks the reality of so-called socially constructed realities. Hence, they are not ill at ease for having an illegal relationship (disguising themselves as husband and wife). At the same time, they do not want this ‘reality’ to be unmasked in front of the society as they intend to hide it behind their forged marriage certificate. Even for the married couple also,
there are certain restrictions which the couple is supposed to take care of in public. For instance, Hamid (2017) states that “as they walked Saeed and Nadia did not hold hands, for that was forbidden in public between genders, even for an ostensibly married couple” (p. 96). However, the reality of how ‘unreal’ the socially constructed identities is unravelling itself here. Both Saeed and Nadia have worn a mask of socially constructed identity so skillfully that their fake identities begin to appear as ‘real’, sometimes even to themselves as well. For instance, in the beginning of their love affair, Saeed hesitates while making quick advancements towards Nadia just because of her “conservative attire”. Hence, Nadia’s customary way of covering herself with a ‘black robe’ gives Saeed an impression of her being a girl strictly following the religious or social norms. However, just as commenting on Muslim women wearing headscarves, Hametner et al. (2020) claim that “consciously wearing the headscarf is also a form of resistance” (p. 3), Nadia’s reality also is totally different from what she appears to be. It becomes evident over the course of the novel that she too puts on that black robe just “to resist the claims and expectations of the world” (p. 45). Likewise, Saeed’s beard gives Nadia an impression of him being a religious man who might be regular in offering his prayers. But his false religious identity is revealed when Nadia asks him: “you don’t say your evening prayer?” and he replies: “Not always. Sadly” (p. 2). Whereupon, Nadia also discloses her reality by saying that she does not pray either. Hametner et al. (2020) assert that “when individuals experience being confronted with stereotypes, they develop specific coping strategies with being labeled” (p. 3). Hence Nadia’s way of covering herself in a black robe and Saeed’s beard can be regarded as their coping strategies to survive in a stereotypical society. Moreover, how unreal the religious mask of Saeed is also evident from the way he refuses to have sex with Nadia by saying that “they should not have sex before they were married, that doing otherwise was against his beliefs” (p. 61). Nevertheless, when Nadia moves to his house, Hamid states that “Saeed entered Nadia’s room and they were unchaste there for the first time” (p. 80). Thus the same man who was reluctant to have sex before marriage, does not hesitate at all now. He forgets his earlier resolutions and goes against his own beliefs. In our view, Saeed and Nadia keep doing so (act in accordance with social norms) because doing otherwise could result in punishment or severe verbal attack as it happens in Nadia’s case. She is called a “whore” by a man in street (society in general) for riding a bike. She is verbally attacked by the man because he finds her going against the social norms according to which a girl is supposed to stay inside the four walls of a house. Siddique (2014) also states it that in patriarchal set up, women are held
responsible for home while men are given the responsibility of earning bread for the whole family. For this reason, her act of riding a bike is termed as “obscene” by the man because of his narrow thinking which is apparent in these words: “Had she ever seen anyone else doing it?” (Hamid, 2017, p. 39). In a recent research, Ali et al. (2020) argue that there are certain constraints which a culture imposes upon women as it does not allow them to indulge in activities except in limited areas of work (p. 94). Therefore, Nadia is abused by the society for merely doing something (riding a bike for the case in point) which any other girl has not done yet. In this regard, Hamid’s novel does not only expose the stereotypes about gender identities and their impact on the protagonists’ minds, it also explicates how the protagonists (Nadia in particular) subvert those gender stereotypes.

In a chapter entitled “Subversive Bodily Acts” in her groundbreaking work Gender Trouble (1999), Butler terms both gender and sex as “enactments” operating performatively “to establish the appearance of bodily fixity”. Commenting on this notion of Butler, Salih (2002) argues that if both sex and gender are to be considered as “enactments” rather than taken as givens, then there is possibility of enacting them “in unexpected, potentially subversive ways” (p. 58). And this is what Hamid does in Exit West by depicting his character’s alternative ‘enactments’. In particular, the character of Nadia subverts the socially constructed gender roles in potentially unexpected ways. Moreover, since Butler has emphasized the importance of ‘doing’ in a given ‘context’ which determines one’s identity, Nadia subverts the social norms which tend to define one’s gender identity as being a ‘masculine man’ or a ‘feminine woman’. Instead, there are number of instances in the novel where in our view, Nadia emerges as a ‘masculine woman’ and Saeed rather appears as a ‘feminine man’. For instance, Nadia leaves her family home, does a job, rides a bike and lives alone in the midst of civil war going on in her city which in Hamid’s (2017) view was unusual for “an unmarried” girl in the city where she lived. For doing so, Nadia has been regarded a rebellious girl by her family and society in general, as Hamid states it, “the break involved hard words on all sides” (p. 18). Hence by leaving her home, Nadia challenges the stereotype which says that girls ought to stay inside the four walls of house. Instead, she breaks this stereotype in order to reconstruct her sense of identity. She has been portrayed as a courageous, vivacious, adventurous and forward-looking girl by Hamid, as it has been mentioned in the novel that “Nadia had long been, and would afterwards continue to be, more comfortable with all varieties of movement in her life” (Hamid, 2017, p. 90). On the other hand, Saeed behaves rather like a ‘feminine man’ on
various occasions in the novel. In contrast to Nadia, Saeed lives with his family who is reluctant to bring any change in his life owing to a strong “impulse of nostalgia” (p. 90). What is more, Saeed performs the role of a female by hiding himself as ‘Nadia’s sister’ as he wears a black robe every time he goes to Nadia’s place to meet her. Here, his wearing of black robe utterly subverts the social norms about gender roles. Not only this, when both Saeed and Nadia are about to leave their city of birth, Saeed’s father takes promise from Nadia (a woman) to take care of his son (a man), rather than asking his son (a man) to take care of Nadia (a woman). This fact subverts the notion of gender roles assigned by patriarchal society in which men are considered as the protector of women. Moreover, even after their migration, it is Nadia who sits in the driving seat to keep their relationship going on. For instance, it is Nadia who does the “negotiating” to buy necessary things soon after they find themselves “on the Greek island of Mykonos”. While Saeed feels uncomfortable at a new place, Nadia suggests to “explore the island as if they were tourists” (p. 108). In London also, when Saeed feels nervous among so many strangers, Nadia feels relieved considering it an achievement to be among different kinds of people. She takes it an opportunity to be at new places to reinvent herself. She wants to break those stereotypes that kept her restricted in many ways in her city of birth, as she thinks that “she had been stifled in the place of her birth for virtually her entire life, that it’s time for her has passed, and a new time was here” (p. 156). Nadia has been depicted as a strong-headed girl with aspirations to advance socially. Even at new places where Saeed (a man) has been observed as ‘overwhelmed’, Nadia (a woman) takes control even in such difficult circumstances as well.

Additionally, Nadia breaks every shackle that comes her way in order to recreate her sense of identity as per her wishes. Before migration, it is Nadia who takes first step in urging Saeed to satisfy her sexual impulses. Even before Saeed, she had a secret relationship with a musician. Besides, her relationship with Saeed is also out of wedlock. What is more astonishing is that when she feels growing discomfort in her relationship with Saeed, she decides to live on her own once again. Her uneasiness with him eventually leads her to separate herself from him. Nadia begins to think more and more about a girl whom she met in Mykonos who had also helped them to move to London. There is strong evidence of this fact in the text as well: “And sometimes when Saeed was out or asleep, she pleasured herself, and when she pleasured herself she thought increasingly of that girl, the girl from Mykonos” (Hamid, 2017, p. 199). Not only that, she begins to spend more and more time with a female cook in Marin whose presence makes Nadia thrilled because of “being
seen by her, and seeing her in return” (p. 217). In this way, a sudden shift in Nadia’s sense of sexuality from a male towards a female can be observed which further exposes the pointlessness of what Butler terms as “compulsory heterosexuality”. She has taken this idea of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ from Monique Witting and Adrienne Rich. Through this concept, she points out the hegemonic practices of society in which a “stable gender” is required to have a “stable sex”. In other words, a feminine should express female and a masculine should express male (Butler, 1999, p. 194). However, what is more noticeable is that Nadia’s homosexual advancements have not been criticized by anyone in Marin. Since in Butler’s view, one’s gender identity is context-dependent, we are of the view that it is perhaps because of her current context that no one disapproves her homosexuality. For this reason, she does not have to face criticism here.

Conversely, the situation could have been different in her city of birth where she had been called a “whore” merely for riding a bike. However, Nadia is not ready to conform to that stereotype which presumes sexuality to be only “heterosexual” (Butler, 1999, p. 63). Therefore, the heterosexual matrix set by the society in which Nadia grows up becomes quite unsettling for her in a new context which eventually forces her to shift her erotic senses towards a female. This once again reinforces Butler’s point that one’s identity depends on what he/she “does” in a given context. Butler argues that one’s gender identity or one’s body is not an accomplished fact and it is not static either. Rather, it is a gradual and continuous process, “a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone” (Butler, 2004, p. 29). This is exactly what happens with Saeed and Nadia throughout the story of the novel under analysis. As they move from one place to another, they find their realities “changed in each other’s eyes in this new place” (Hamid, 2017, p. 186). Therefore, it is not only Nadia who shifts her erotic senses from Saeed to someone else while being in Marin, Saeed also begins to take interest in a preacher’s daughter there. Hence, the reason behind separation between Saeed and Nadia in Hamid’s words is “the pull of the cook on Nadia, of the preacher’s daughter on Saeed, and of new acquaintances” (p. 221). Therefore, this study maintains that Saeed and Nadia’s characters cannot be analyzed in terms of what either of them is, rather what both of them ‘become’ and keep becoming in different contexts is what determines their identity or gender identity. This fact is perceptible in Hamid’s (2017) own words as well when he points out the contextual nature of one’s identity by stating that “personalities are not a single immutable color, like white or blue, but rather illuminated screens,
and the shades we reflect depend much on what is around us” (p. 186). In this sense, the roles that Saeed and Nadia perform throughout the course of the novel exceed and rework the existing norms.

Findings and Conclusion
An in-depth analysis of Hamid’s novel *Exit West (2017)* in the light of research questions mentioned above clearly revealed how the reality of one’s gender remains hidden behind certain predefined notions about individuals’ gender identities. By analyzing the protagonists’ performance of alternative gender roles, the present paper exposed different aspects of gender reality or identity. Besides, this paper also investigated the ways by which the novel’s protagonists break the existing stereotypes about gender and try to reconstruct their identities by performing atypical roles. In contrast to the traditional female roles, the character of Nadia emerges as a dynamic subject who is not willing to submit herself to society’s expectations from girls which confine them within the four walls of house. Instead of letting herself caught in the web of stereotypical notions about men and women, she urges for recognition by fiercely resisting the social norms and asserting her own individuality. On the other hand, Saeed’s character defies this rigid concept that men are always supposed to be strong-headed with ability to take the decision at any moment. As an alternative, Hamid’s novel captures the true picture of Saeed and Nadia as real human beings by revealing the inconsistencies in their emotions and roles in different circumstances. Thus, this novel reinforces Butler’s view that an individual’s identity depends not on what he or she *is* but on what he or she *does*. In this regard, this novel simultaneously exposes and breaks the prevailed socially constructed gender stereotypes. Keeping in mind Butler’s claim that “discourse produces the effects that it names”, this research holds this view that with its depiction of unconventional gender roles, Hamid’s novel *Exit West (2017)* can be regarded as an initiative to create the possibilities for recreation or reconstruction of gender identities through text/discourse. In the light of these arguments, it may not be wrong to term Hamid’s novel as a “reversal of discourse”.

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