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**Cinema and Literature as Tools for
Representing Migration**

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ABSTRACT

The following dissertation addresses migration as one of the challenges facing English society. Through a historical-social study, the dissertation examines the main stages of migration that the United Kingdom has undergone from the Industrial Revolution to Brexit. However, the study goes further by exploring the way how cinema and literature represent migration by analysing the novel *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and the film *Dirty Pretty Things* by Stephen Frears. The dissertation analyses the way both works address migration through illegal migration, the identity of their characters, solidarity among peers, and the invisibility of the migrant, allowing us to understand migration as a multidimensional phenomenon that involves physical displacement, personal transformation, and the search for belonging.

Key words: migration, United Kingdom, cinema, literature, identity

RESUMEN

El siguiente trabajo aborda la migración como uno de los retos a los que se enfrenta la sociedad inglesa. A través de un estudio histórico-social, el trabajo examina las principales etapas de la migración que ha experimentado el Reino Unido desde la Revolución Industrial hasta el Brexit. Sin embargo, el estudio va más allá al explorar la forma en que el cine y la literatura representan la migración mediante el análisis de la novela *Exit West* de Mohsin Hamid y la película *Dirty Pretty Things* de Stephen Frears. El trabajo analiza la forma en que ambas obras abordan la migración a través de la migración ilegal, la identidad de sus personajes, la solidaridad entre pares y la invisibilidad del migrante, lo que nos permite comprender la migración como un fenómeno multidimensional que implica el desplazamiento físico, la transformación personal y la búsqueda de pertenencia.

Palabras clave: migración, Reino Unido, cine, literatura, identidad

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INTRODUCTION

Migration is a global phenomenon that has become increasingly important in recent years, transforming the social, economic and cultural reality of receiving countries. As Manuel F. Martínez (2018) points out, migration is not only a demographic or economic process, but also a psychosocial phenomenon that affects the lives of thousands of people and is present in all regions and periods of history. According to data collected by the IOM, the number of migrants has grown exponentially in recent years, especially forced migration. Martínez warns that migration must be analysed from a comprehensive perspective, taking into account labour, economic, community and political factors, and that we must reject the reductionist view that addresses migration from the perspective of figures or negative impacts on our society. However, he emphasises the capacity of migrants for entrepreneurship, adaptation and identity enrichment, as well as their contribution to the receiving countries. In addition to giving meaning to the word migration, the following dissertation will focus on analysing in detail the different stages of migration that have marked the history of the United Kingdom. First, we will study the impact of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, a period marked by economic expansion and technological development that attracted many migrants who left the countryside to settle in the city. These groups not only provided labour, but also contributed to the design of new communities and economic diversification. Secondly, the United Kingdom underwent transformations as a result of the two world wars that ravaged the world. During this period, there was a massive influx of refugees from the former British colonies. However, the massive arrival of migrants generated social and political tensions in the country, leading to the passage of increasingly restrictive laws such as the Aliens Act signed in 1905, the Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 and, in particular, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act signed in 1962. These laws implemented restrictions on the entry and rights of migrants, marking an era of immigration control and regulation. Finally, the 21st century is characterised by great human mobility and a migration revolution, marking the demographic diversity of all cities. In 2016, the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union led to a reconfiguration of migration policies for all countries, affecting not only those coming from non-EU countries, but also European citizens.

However, having studied migration from a historical and social perspective, the main focus of this work is to examine this phenomenon through cinema and literature. In this

sense, literature and cinema play a fundamental role in representing the migratory experience; both are two of the most influential art forms in human history. Although both media differ in their language and technique, they share the ability to narrate and represent the human experience. Since its invention, cinema has undergone various processes in its evolution to become a global means of expression with a significant cultural and social impact. On the other hand, literature represents a form of expression that uses language as the sole element to connect human beings through different genres with the experiences of others. Literature allows readers to experience other lives, broadening their perception of the world and their understanding of human complexity. Over time, both disciplines have been able to convey ideas, emotions, values and stories; they have the power to generate empathy and encourage critical reflection on issues such as identity and social justice. To make sense of all this, two key works have been chosen in the representation of the figure of the migrant character: the first work is a film directed by Stephen Frears in 2002, whose main theme is illegal migration in London and how its characters have to reconfigure themselves in a society that excludes them and makes them invisible. The second is a novel written by Mohsin Hamid in 2017, which recounts the lives of two migrants from the Middle East who travel through mysterious doors to countries such as Greece and the United States.

The analysis focuses on studying the way the authors of the works present the migration process through their main characters. After watching the film and reading the book, it was observed that both, in addition to presenting two main characters respectively, dealt with the same main themes: illegal migration and forced displacement, identity and belonging, solidarity among peers and, finally, the invisibility suffered by migrants. The first theme is presented in different ways in both works. In *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), the director deals with this theme in a realistic way, presenting his characters as undocumented migrants who suffer the constant threat of deportation. In contrast, *Exit West* (2017) addresses this theme by presenting its two main characters as migrants fleeing their homeland due to armed conflict, crossing 'invisible' borders through magical doors. In both works, forced displacement is a latent theme. Secondly, identity is a strong theme in both works, as the characters have to adapt to the conditions imposed on them in their host countries. Although in *Dirty Pretty Things* we only have one setting, the city of London, and in *Exit West* we are presented with multiple settings, the characters struggle to identify with their surroundings and to feel that these spaces are their own,

even if they do not succeed. It is a constant struggle not to lose the roots that bind them to their origins and to find a place in their destination. The third theme, solidarity among equals, emerges as a response to adversity. In both works, the characters offer each other mutual support and sustain each other both physically and emotionally; it is a resource among those who have to share social rejection and precariousness. Finally, the invisibility of the migrant is treated equally in both works; in both, the characters are ignored, excluded and treated as a threat to the local population, denying them recognition and belonging to the place. In both works, exclusion is used as a political weapon, depriving the characters of rights and a sense of human value.

Although cinema and literature have moved towards more inclusive and complex approaches, authors and directors continue to portray the cruelty faced by those who must flee their countries in search of a better life, even though many do not find it. Both forms of representation not only reflect the social and political reality surrounding migration but also construct and legitimise it by influencing public perception. Cinema and literature are privileged spaces for understanding migration as a multidimensional phenomenon that involves physical displacement, personal transformation, the construction of support networks, and the relentless search for a place to call home.

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

According to Martínez in his work *Procesos migratorios e intervención psicosocial* (2018), international migration is a complex phenomenon that involves a multiplicity of social and economic aspects that affect the daily lives of all human beings in an increasingly interconnected world. As a demographic phenomenon, it is not alien to any region of the planet, to any era or to human beings themselves since their origins, and there is no people or nation that is not heir to or the result of a large-scale migration. He states that according to the Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of migrants has been growing progressively and more prominently in recent years; forced migration is taking on a dramatic role in international migratory flows. We understand this phenomenon as any migratory movement in which there is an element of coercion, including threats to life and livelihood, whether natural or man-made: movements of refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as persons displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine or development projects, etc. (p.96). Continuing with the author's work, he states that when analysing the phenomenon of migration from the perspective of the individual, the existence of factors

such as labour, economic, community and political factors must be noted (p.98). In contrast to the pessimistic literature on this issue and the political language that reduces this process to numbers, it is worth highlighting the positive side of the person who emigrates, reflected in their capacity for entrepreneurship, adaptation, learning, enrichment and restructuring of their own identity in a new land.

To continue, it is important to review the most important migratory phases throughout British history: the 19th century with the Industrial Revolution where economic expansion attracted a wave of migrants from the countryside to the city and from other European countries; the 20th century, when as a consequence of the First and Second World Wars the country suffered massive arrivals from countries such as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh; the second half of the 20th century and the signing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962, which imposed strict restrictions on the entry of Commonwealth citizens into the United Kingdom; the 21st century, where we can observe a growing and crude migratory revolution and a great diversity of population in all cities of the world; and finally, the political process of the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union: the Brexit

1.1. NINETEENTH CENTURY: INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The Industrial Revolution was a process not free of tensions that consolidated over the years and had England as its center. In order to properly understand the Industrial Revolution, I rely on David S. Landes's thesis: "The term industrial revolution usually refers to the complex of technological innovations which, by replacing human skill with machinery and human and animal power with mechanical energy, brings about the transition from artisan to factory production, thus giving rise to the birth of the modern economy" (1979, p. 15). Accordingly, industrialisation was due to an interrelated succession of technological changes that replaced human capacity with mechanical instruments, and human and animal power with inanimate energy. Changes in equipment and methods brought about new forms of industrial organisation and life; the use of machines, which went from the initial production of yarn and fabrics to their use in coal and iron mines and continued in the 19th century with their application to steamships and railways, brought about a substantial change in the size of the productive unit. The family work unit was replaced by the industrial building and the factory became a production

system in its own right, based on a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of its main members: the bourgeoisie and the workers.

Jeffrey G. Williamson, in *Irish Immigration, Elastic Labor Supplies and Crowding-Out during the British Industrial Revolution, 1821- 1861* (1984), studies how Irish migration provided an abundant source of cheap labour. The population, driven into poverty, settled mainly in industrial towns and played a key role in the growth of industrial sectors. However, the author warns that this abundant labour force also led to a "crowding-out" of local British workers by pushing down wages and increasing competition for low-skilled jobs (p. 15). On the other hand, immigration from Eastern Europe in the late 19th century was equally significant. Alysa Levene, in *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Charity, Community and Religion, 1830-1880* (2000), argues that large numbers of Jewish immigrants settled in industrial centres such as London, Leeds and Manchester. These groups not only reinforced the urban workforce, but also organised complex community and philanthropic networks, contributing both to economic dynamism and to the consolidation of stable and cohesive communities (p. 45). Italian immigration also left its mark on the urban environment. Historian Roger Swift (1989) notes that Italian immigrants brought valuable craft and trade skills, integrating themselves into trades such as catering, street trading and construction. These communities settled in specific neighbourhoods played an important role in the economic and cultural life of the city. Foreign immigration during the Industrial Revolution in the UK was a multifaceted phenomenon that, far from being a marginal element, was one of the pillars on which industrial and urban growth was built.

1.2. TWENTIETH CENTURY: PERIOD OF WARS

The 20th century, characterised by decolonisation, two world wars (World War I and World War II), the Great Depression, the rise of totalitarian ideologies, the Cold War, technological advances and movements for social equality, was witness to dramatic changes. At the beginning of the 20th century, the movement of citizens from European countries to the American continent, as well as to colonised countries, developed; these migrations were mainly economically motivated. However, the war conflicts, political persecutions and the enormous economic and social inequality between countries would change the rates of migration during the course of this century.

Due to the decolonising processes that took place in English colonies during the first half of the century, the UK underwent significant transformations in its migration policies and population composition due to factors such as labour needs and political persecution. Louise London in *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933- 1948* (1989) discusses how the British government adopted an ambiguous stance towards Jews fleeing the Nazi regime, indicating that the destination country adopted restrictive policies towards asylum seekers even as the government expressed concern for German citizens. However, the fear was that the expected large number of refugees would disrupt the British social fabric (p. 26-43). On the other hand, the first restrictions on immigration came about in 1905, and were a result of the anti-immigrant sentiment that had prevailed among the population and Conservative politicians since the end of the 19th century. Criticism of immigrants at that time focused mainly on the Russian and Polish Jews who began to settle in East London from the 1880s. They were blamed for common problems of the time, such as poverty, unemployment, informal work, overcrowding and criminality. In response, the government passed the Aliens Act in 1905 which focused on excluding the entry of undesirable aliens such as those without sufficient means to live, the mentally ill, prostitutes, and convicts, in order to lighten the public relief systems for the poor.

Another law passed by the government against immigration was the Aliens Restriction Act, signed in 1914, which tightened immigration controls by allowing the deportation of aliens and establishing that anyone seeking admission had to present an identity document and be interrogated by an immigration officer. According to Kay Saunders (2003) in *The Stranger in our Gates': Internment Policies in the United Kingdom and Australia during the Two World Wars, 1914-39*, "during the First World War, aliens considered to be "enemies" were confined, guarded and deported. Immigration officials were empowered to detain and expel aliens without any prior legal procedure, and about 32,000 and 20,000 "enemy aliens" were interned and deported, respectively. The movement of aliens to certain areas was also prohibited and those declared as "enemy" were forbidden to move beyond five miles from their domicile without special permission. And, in order to control the foreign population in the country, the National Register of Foreigners was created with data on all foreigners in the country, both friend and foe" (p.38). The same author states that, to impose further restrictions, the law was strengthened in 1919 which reinforced the powers of immigration officers over the admission of foreigners and placed restrictions on foreigners taking up employment in the public service. Passports and visas

were made compulsory, and, in response to protectionist fears that immigration would increase unemployment, foreigners admitted were required to obtain a work permit. (p. 39)

During this period, the irregular entry, stay and employment of foreigners were criminalised, conduct labelled from this time onwards as "irregular" or "illegal". From 1918 onwards, the use of deportation as a means of controlling migration and sanctioning any migratory non-compliance stands out; this shows a notorious change in British migration policy: until before 1920, the main grounds for deportation were the commission of crimes; from this date onwards, it was irregular entry, stay and employment, either for not having a valid identity document, not having registered on arrival with the police, or not having the corresponding work permit.

1.3. FROM 1950 ONWARDS: COMMONWEALTH IMMIGRANTS ACT

According to Geddes in *Migration and the Welfare State in Europe* (2003), in the second half of the 20th century, international migration emerged as one of the main factors of social transformation and development in all regions of the world. However, migration in the UK in the second half of the 20th century was profoundly marked by a series of laws that reflected a growing concern about the racial origin of immigrants. After the Second World War, the country suffered labour shortages that led to an influx of immigrants from former British colonies, especially from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent. However, as the presence of 'non-white' communities increased, fears about social and cultural cohesion arose, prompting restrictive policies. After World War II, a series of migration policies were introduced. Firstly, to encourage migration to the UK to help with reconstruction, and then to work in the growing fields of the NHS and the car industry. In the 1970s, policies began to tighten the rules on who was eligible to migrate to the UK and who was not. Citizens of the UK and colonies who were born in the UK or had a parent or grandparent born, adopted, registered or naturalised in the UK were entitled to live in the UK, while citizens of independent Commonwealth countries no longer had that right. This essentially meant that all non-EU citizens of the Commonwealth would be treated the same as any other foreign immigrant (p. 150-162).

One of the most important pieces of immigration legislation passed in the second half of the 20th century was the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, enacted in 1962. Anne Morris wrote for the BBC History section (2025) that this Act was enacted amid growing concern

over levels of migration from Commonwealth nations to the UK; it was the first piece of legislation to impose restrictions on Commonwealth citizens' right of entry into the country, marking a new era of immigration control that contrasted sharply with the more open policies of previous decades, when Commonwealth citizens could enter, live and work freely in Britain. It was the result of cumulative pressures arising from post-war migration, economic challenges and public and political reactions to demographic changes, heralding a new and more regulated era of immigration policy in the UK. As noted above, one of the main concerns was the pressure that the growing number of migrants placed on public services and resources. Policy makers argued that the influx, if left unchecked, could exacerbate competition for jobs and housing, which could fuel social unrest. Another motivation was the need to respond to growing racial tensions and maintain law and order; the late 1950s saw episodes of violence that highlighted the challenges of integration and exposed deepseated prejudices in some sections of British society. Demands followed from conservative political figures and segments of public opinion for measures to curb the influx of immigrants (Anne Morris, 2025).

As this policy shift gathered momentum, the government sought to reshape the immigration narrative by establishing a highly differentiated system of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' immigration; establishing a system that prioritised skilled labour over unrestricted entry. The Act sought to impose controlled entry without breaking the ties that the UK had established with Commonwealth countries, reflecting a strategic attempt to balance international relations with domestic political concerns. However, the impact of the law was acutely felt by those who previously had access to the UK. For many Commonwealth citizens, particularly countries such as Jamaica, India and Pakistan, the new restrictions posed a sudden obstacle to their relocation.

1.4. TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Alfonso Ruiz in his paper for *Revista internacional de estudios Migratorios* (2023) argues that in the 21st century, migration has become a global phenomenon that has been significantly shaping contemporary societies around the world. From mass displacement motivated by conflict and humanitarian crises to labour migration and increased transnational mobility, migration has become undeniably relevant on the international stage. In recent years we have witnessed an increase in the scale of migration, with an estimated 281 million international migrants worldwide (IOM, 2021). According to King

et al. in *Eurocity London: A Qualitative Comparison of Graduate Migration from Germany, Italy and Latvia* (2016), it is in the 2000s that we see a distinctly different migration cycle, as with the free movement of people within the Schengen area, migration levels in the UK increase dramatically, especially from Eastern Europe, and later from Southern Europe, following the economic crisis of 2008. This, together with the growing climate of social, political and media tension surrounding the migration phenomenon in the United Kingdom, especially since the last quarter of the last century, has made it a recurrent discussion in Parliament and British public opinion, which has increased with the flows following the 2008 crisis, culminating in Brexit. During the first decades of the 21st century, immigration in the United Kingdom increased notably, bringing with it discussions that promoted changes in migration management, since in addition to increasing the volume of these flows and the "stock" of foreign population, its composition became more heterogeneous than in previous times.

The United Kingdom, in its contradictory migration policies, began a period of "selective openness" that can be attributed to the years 1997-2007. This period represents a change of trend in British migration policy; it no longer prevails the restriction of immigration but seeks to generate a "selective" migration policy. This corresponds to the intention to reactivate the reception of 'economic migrants', so that the criteria of selectivity become the key factor in attracting 'mobile workers' who will represent a skilled workforce that will contribute to the development, mainly, of London and its positioning as a global city (King et al., 2016). In 2002, there was a change in migration, establishing a points system that sought to encourage the arrival of high-skilled economic migrants. An example of this is that of Spaniards, who suffered a 'forced expulsion' by the economic, political and social system in Spain in the years of the 2008 crisis and before, and whose main destination was the UK.

1.5. THE BREXIT

One of the main arguments of the Brexit campaign was the recovery of national sovereignty, i.e. control over laws, borders and migration policies, as the country saw this control eroded by the mandated policies of the EU bloc (Geddes, 2021). The issue of migration was one of the recurring themes that nurtured the position that promoted the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), which is why this political process attracted media and political discussion that the free movement of foreigners was becoming an

unwanted challenge for the native European population. Accordingly, Luca Chao et al. (2024) state that the impact of Brexit on migration flows identifies three main lines: the economic and employment impact, the social and cultural impact on communities and, finally, migrants and the generation of post-Brexit migration policies.

Kaufmann (2018) points out that Brexit should be seen as a response to a tradition in the United Kingdom that has always been characterised by its scepticism towards the European Union project. Under this premise, British society shows little affection for the continental European project. As part of this British view of its territory and history, immigration has been unpopular among white ethnic British majorities (p.138). Historically, the Aliens Act (1905) and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) represent key moments in observing how the UK has limited the entry of non-British people into the country. Considering that one of the characteristics of Brexit was the nationalist anti-immigration campaign, Mitra in her work *Immigration, Identity and Security in the Context of Brexit: Examining Linkages Through the Lens of the Copenhagen School* (2002) argues that Brexit is perceived as a general climate of discontent towards immigration from a large part of the population. According to this author, this discontent was capitalised on by the campaign through the anti-immigration rhetoric that ended up resonating in a broad sector of society. On the one hand, it was directed towards the working classes, who had been harmed by immigration and were characterised by a strong conservative sentiment. On the other hand, the discourse also appealed to liberal elites through the idealisation of a time past migration, a time when the supposed claim of the ethnically white population on the nation remained undisputed. Furthermore, the author mentions that the European migration crisis of 2015 played an important role in the way this issue was put on the agenda, to the extent that during the Brexit campaign populist rhetoric not only juxtaposed the common white man against the liberal elite, but also presented immigration as the lynchpin of all perceived social and economic ills in the country. (p. 43-61).

2. CINEMA AND LITERATURE: TOOLS OF REPRESENTATION

Film and literature are two of the most influential art forms in the history of humanity, which have served as a means of transmitting ideas, emotions, values and stories that shape identity and collective memory. Both media have in common the ability to narrate and represent the human experience, exploring reality, fiction and imagination from

different perspectives. According to David Bordwell and K. Thompson in their work *Film Art: An Introduction* (2003), "film, as an audiovisual art, combines moving images, sound and montage to create sensory and narrative worlds that impact the viewer immediately and visually" (p. 4). On the other hand, the literary critic M.H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953) argues that "The function of literature is to provide a mirror of the human condition, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of human experience." (p.5). Therefore, defining what is film and what is literature involves understanding not only their formal and technical characteristics, but also their cultural, social and aesthetic functions.

Cinema is an artistic manifestation and a means of audiovisual communication that combines moving image, sound, narrative and technique to tell stories or transmit ideas. Since its invention at the end of the 19th century by the Lumière brothers, cinema has undergone different processes in its evolution to become a global form of expression with a profound cultural and social impact. According to British theorist David Bordwell et al. in their work *Film Art: An Introduction* (2013), "cinema is not only a technology for recording moving images, but also a representational system that organises time and space in a particular way, allowing the viewer to experience reality or fiction from multiple perspectives." (p. 4). Among its essential characteristics are visual narrative, montage, the use of sound and acting, elements that are articulated to construct meanings and emotions. Cinematic narrative allows for the representation of realities or imaginary worlds in a unique way, differentiating it from other media such as literature. British director Raymond Durgnat argues that film is situated between art and industry, being a cultural artefact shaped by both creativity and the material conditions of production, which underlines its dual artistic and commercial nature (p. 135). In short, film is a complex and multifaceted art form that integrates diverse technical and expressive elements to generate a unique aesthetic and communicative experience, capable of influencing the perception and thinking of the spectator.

Literature is a form of artistic expression that uses language as the principal means of representation, reflection and connection with the human experience. Through various genres such as narrative or poetry, literature has played a central role in the construction of cultures and in the transmission of values, beliefs and identities. Beyond its aesthetic function, it plays a fundamental role as a form of knowledge, a critical tool and a vehicle of collective memory. Following Terry Eagleton (2008), he underlines that there is no

simple answer to define "literature", that literature is characterised as an ideological and historical construction, a subjective assessment and even a cultural, political and discursive phenomenon. Following Eagleton's ideological approach, Raymond Williams argues in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) that literature is part of a living cultural tradition, shaped by power relations, material conditions and ideologies that cut across the production and reception of works. From this point of view, literary study cannot be reduced to the internal analysis of the text, but must consider the historical, political and social context in which it is embedded (p. 45- 46). Complementarily, A. S. Byatt in *Old Tales, New Forms included in On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* (2000) argues that literature allows the reader to experience other lives, broadening his or her perception of the world and understanding of human complexity, which reinforces its ethical and humanistic dimension; this capacity of literature to generate empathy and explore subjective and intersubjective dimensions makes it a powerful tool for critical thinking and existential reflection. Thus, literature is not only an art form, but also a field of signification where meanings are negotiated, discourses are confronted, and worldviews are constructed.(p. 123-140).

After explaining what film and literature are through a theoretical approach, it is essential to focus on the main theme of the paper: the role of film and literature as tools for the representation of migration. Both disciplines, considered among the most influential artistic and cultural forms in the history of humanity, have conveyed over time ideas, feelings, emotions, values and stories that shape both identity and collective memory. To better understand the importance of our topic, we must emphasise that film and literature are media that have a great power to generate empathy and encourage critical reflection on issues such as identity or social justice. Through the stories they tell, they invite the consumer into the emotional, cultural and existential world of migrants. By giving a face and a voice to the "other", they create symbolic spaces where the figure of the migrant ceases to be felt as a threat and becomes a legitimate and necessary presence in our society. Within the framework of cultural studies, art is recognised as a fundamental resource for making visible groups that have historically been marginalised, including migrants. Unlike political discourses that frequently reduce migration to mere numbers, film and literature open the door to the subjective and symbolic dimensions of these experiences.

In this context, cinema, as a narrative and visual art, has a unique capacity to represent the invisible and build empathy with social subjects that are often excluded from the dominant public discourse. In turn, in the case of migration, the cinema has become a crucial tool to represent the life trajectories of migrants, their struggles, their affections and their identities in transit. Film humanises the migrants, makes them the protagonist and allows the spectator a sensorial and emotional immersion experience. Laura U. Marks argues in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000), that film possesses a "corporeal" dimension, capable of generating a form of affective knowledge that complements, and sometimes challenges, rational discourses about others. Intercultural cinema is characterized by experimental styles that attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge or living as a minority in the still majority white, Euro-American West. The violent disjunctions in space and time that characterize diasporan experience-the physical effects of exile, immigration, and displacement-also, I will argue, cause a disjunction in notions of truth. Intercultural films and videos offer a variety of ways of knowing and representing the world". (p. 3)

Films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette*, directed by Stephen Frears in 1985 provides a significant representation of Pakistani migration to the UK, illustrating the complex social, cultural and economic realities faced by these communities. Another example is *Mediterráneo* (2021) directed by Marcel Barrena shows the reality of those who risk their lives every day crossing the sea in precarious boats. As 5W magazine journalist Agus Morales says in *No somos refugiados* (2016) "Why are they fleeing? And then the question seems to have made sense: the origins. Everything has exploded in slow motion. The displaced population is growing in the 21st century because the exoduses generated by new wars [...] Rather than a world where war triumphs, it is a world where peace fails" (p. 31). Finally, the film *Dirty Pretty Things*, directed by Stephen Frears in 2002, has contributed to making visible the multiple forms of structural violence faced by migrants: persecution, labour exploitation, racism, institutional exclusion, emotional uprooting and legal precariousness.

Hamid Naficy in his work *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001) points out that film allows for the crisis of dominant imaginaries of migration. Instead of reinforcing the stereotype of the migrant as a threat, passive victim or social problem, many productions show migrants as complex subjects, with agency, affect,

knowledge and networks of solidarity. In this sense, film can function as a tool for social pedagogy, capable of generating empathy and criticism. The author adds that "the cinema of exile and diaspora not only represents migration, but is migrant in its own way: hybrid, multilingual, displaced from traditional genres, transnational in its production and circulation" (p. 31).

Following the thread of our main theme, it is time to talk about literature as a tool of representation and how it explores themes such as identity, culture shock and belonging. Historically, literature has been a privileged space for the exploration of identity tensions and the dilemmas of belonging that cross-migrant subjects or those situated in contexts of intercultural contact. Unlike institutional discourses, which tend to represent migration and otherness from rigid categories, literature offers a more nuanced, introspective and human gaze, capable of capturing the emotional, linguistic and cultural nuances that define life in transit. To quote Bhabha (1994), "the identity of the migrant is neither fixed nor homogenous but is constituted in a liminal space - what he calls the "*third-space*" - where multiple cultural influences converge and are negotiated. This in-between space, though often painful, is also a place of creation, resistance and reconfiguration of the self (p. 22). John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2000) makes a major contribution to the term "displacement"; according to him, migration is not only a physical phenomenon, but also a symbolic and epistemological one: it implies a change of territory, but also an identity transit in which individuals are forced to reconfigure their place in the world, their relationship to language and their sense of belonging. (p. 207). Besides, an important feature of the author's study is how migrant literature is not limited to denunciation or nostalgic lament, but can also be a site of creativity, linguistic play and cultural invention.

In order to better understand how the concept of migration is represented in literary works, it is important to provide some examples. Firstly, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) by Hanif Kureishi, constructs a critical social satire of post-colonial England, portraying through its main character the tensions that arise from living between cultures, races and social classes. Another example is *The Lonely Londoners* written by Sam Selvon in 1956, who offers a humanised representation of the Caribbean migrant experience in post-war England, tackling issues such as race and multiculturalism with unrelenting acuity. The last and most important for this work is *Exit West* published in 2017 and written by Mohsin Hamid who approaches migration as a deeply human and transformative experience, using elements of magical realism to explore its emotional and social

complexities. Furthermore, the novel highlights how migration affects identity and personal relationships, reflecting the profound emotional loss that comes with displacement.

Film and literature prove to be two of the most powerful and sensitive ways to represent and reflect on the migration experience in its multiple dimensions: emotional, political, historical and cultural. Both allow us not only to tell stories of physical displacement, but also to explore the processes of identity transformation faced by those who migrate. Through literary language, the novel has offered voices to migrants who, historically, have been silenced or marginalised. For its part, film has become an effective medium for visually reflecting the precariousness, violence and the dream of belonging that migrants experience. Both literature and film enable the migrant experience to be expressed not only as a peripheral condition, but as a valid perspective from which to question and rethink concepts such as nation, citizenship, identity and culture. In this way, both disciplines transcend their representational function to become acts of resistance, cultural affirmation and political intervention. The aesthetics of migration challenge hegemonic discourses and open the door to imagining a more inclusive future attentive to transnational realities.

3. ANALISYS

After studying the historical context in which the five most relevant migratory phases in history have been explained and the role played by cinema and literature as means of representation, it is important for our analysis to explain what migration is. To this end, I will provide different definitions taken from different works, as well as the context in which *Dirty Pretty Things* and *Exit West* were created. To better understand where we stand, I will provide a brief summary of the two works and explain in depth the main themes of each and the relationship between them, even though they belong to different artistic representations. To get a head start on the subject, it is worth noting that the main themes of both works do not differ greatly from the reality that many migrants experience in their destination. After watching the film and reading the book, **four main themes** have been extracted from both: “illegal” migration and forced displacement, identity and belonging, solidarity among peers, and, finally, the invisibility of migrants.

According to UN Migration (IOM), migration is the movement of people from their place of residence, either across an international border or within a country. The organization

highlights two types of migration: international and internal. It refers to international migration when people cross the border of one state to reside in another country for more than a specified minimum period. Conversely, it refers to internal migration when people move within the territorial limits of the same country. According to the IOM, in a study conducted in 2024, the organization states that there are 281 million international migrants in the world, which is equivalent to 3.6% of the world's population. Gutiérrez Silva et. al. in their work *Migración: Contexto, impacto y desafío. Una reflexión teórica* (2020) for the scientific journal *Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, Gutiérrez Silva et al. state that the history of humanity has made it possible to compile different migratory events, since there have been signs of migration since the human species came into existence (p. 299). They also add that migration is classified as a phenomenon that has always been present in human life and that, since ancient times, people have had to emigrate from their place of origin to destinations in search of food, housing, and clothing. On the other hand, political and social conflicts such as wars, persecution, and natural disasters have been triggered the decision of thousands of people to leave their places of origin. (p. 300). They add that currently, this phenomenon has contributed to improving the quality of life of many people's lives, but that not all movements occur under favourable circumstances. According to the IOM (2018), in recent years, migration and displacement caused by conflicts, persecution, situations of degradation and climate change, as well as the lack of opportunities and human security, have increased considerably. In this regard, Valente (2012) points out that migration is a right exercised by individuals, although not everyone sees that right exercised, with the prospect of improving their situation or facing adverse circumstances that can produce slight or sudden changes in the migrant. He adds that everyone is exposed to migration at some point in their lives and that, although it may not happen, there is a latent expectation of migration at any given time. (p. 302). In the aforementioned article, the authors refer to the work of S. R. Aruj (2008), who asserts that migratory flows produce a series of consequences, both positive and negative, in both the place of origin and the place of destination, since the act of migrating does not only involve crossing a border, but also involves the partial or permanent settlement of the person in the country chosen to reside in, where they will have to integrate (p. 307).

In order to address our subject matter more precisely, and having defined the term “migration,” it is important to introduce the works that will be analyzed later. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, our subject of study is to analyze the film *Dirty*

Pretty Things (2002) and the novel *Exit West* (2017) from a migratory perspective through their main characters. However, before delving into the analysis and to better understand the reasoning behind these two works, it is important to discuss the context in which they were produced and their authors.

Born in Leicester, England, in 1941, Stephen Frears is a British director and producer who has devoted his entire life to the audiovisual phenomenon and is also considered one of the most distinguished and provocative directors in the United Kingdom for his versatility and his realistic and social stories. Ernesto Garratt Viñes, who gave an interview in 2004 for the online film magazine *MABUSE*, says that the English director "is a nonconformist, a sharp critic of his country and even of himself." (Viñes, 2004). An all-round filmmaker, he is equally adept at tackling any type of narrative art. Seasoned in television, he opted for an intimate cinema that portrayed both the vital conflicts of his characters and those of the society of the time. With films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Sammy and Rodie Get Laid* (1987) and *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), Frears has earned his reputation as a great director of human dramas thanks to the great emotion and feelings he imparts to his characters. F. José García Lozano, in his work *La mirada del perdón* (2014), states that in his films, Frears always opts for the strategy of constructing antagonistic characters based on details; antagonistic characters who, however, are immersed in the same quixotic mission. (p. 506). On the other hand, the author of the book, Mohsin Hamid, who was born in Lahore, Pakistan, in 1971, moved to California when he was only three years old, and from there returned to his hometown until, at the age of the age of eighteen he set out once again on the journey back to America. At the age of thirty, he landed in London, only to decide eight years later to return to his country of origin: Pakistan. His biography alone qualifies him to write about migration, miscegenation, and multiculturalism. Author of books such as *Exit West* (2017), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), he is known for exploring themes of immigration, identity, displacement, and globalization. In an interview with *Revista Pijao*, Hamid states, "I am a mestizo, a pure mixture [...] For a long time I thought I was different, but one day I realized that everyone is different. We are all foreigners. We are all refugees from our childhood. We are all migrants through time. And that is why we have enormous potential for empathy with others."

3.1. *DIRTY PRETTY THINGS* (2002)

Dirty Pretty Things is a film about illegal immigration, the solidarity between its characters, and the search for a better life in London. The story depicts the harsh reality experienced by thousands of people who have been displaced from their countries to Europe. Written and directed in 2002, the United Kingdom in the late 1990s and early 2000s marked a turning point in migration history. This period was marked by a notable increase in migratory flows. According to David Robinson in his article *United Kingdom, Migration 1990s to Present* (2013), more than six million people emigrated to the United Kingdom between 1997 and 2010, reaching some 150,000 people per year (p. 4). The same author, in another article entitled *Migration in the UK: Moving Beyond Numbers* (2010), states that during the same period, public perception hardened around the view that society is paying a heavy price for the increased inflow of migrants. The government was portrayed as “losing control of the country's borders”, a perception reinforced by press reports, ranging from rolling coverage of the efforts of residents of the Red Cross camp at Sangatte, Calais to enter the UK, through to the furore about foreign prisoners. The country was depicted as awash with “bogus” asylum seekers and illegal workers, and stories abounded about foreign nationals exploiting the generosity of the British welfare state and securing access to resources (health care, housing, employment) at the expense of British citizens. (p.14)

Continuing with the author's work, he asserts that if political parties speak harshly about migration figures, it is simply to offer the British population a sense of security, but that they deny the reality that international migration is an established process in an interconnected and globalised world. A large number of migrants will continue to arrive in the United Kingdom, some will stay for a short time, but others will have arrived there to build a new home, and no government, regardless of its political persuasion, will change this reality. The author points out three reasons why it will not change. First, governments have no control over one of the largest migratory flows to the United Kingdom. More than 40% of the six million international migrants were citizens of the UK itself or of EU countries who had a legal right to enter. Secondly, the UK ratified the UN Convention on Refugees in 1954 and accepted the moral and legal obligation to protect all those who had fled persecution on grounds of race, religion or membership of a particular social or political group. No major political party in the UK suggested breaking this commitment. The sad reality is that wars, conflicts and persecution will

continue to force people to flee their countries of origin. Some of these people will exercise their right to seek asylum, and those who do so will be entitled to full protection under the law while their application is being examined. Thirdly, the author points out that no government can do without foreign labour, as the country's economy is dependent on labour migration. (p. 14-18). And this is what Frears portrays in *Dirty Pretty Things* in a realistic way. The search for a home and a livelihood that allows the characters to live as decently as possible, even if they do not succeed. Cheap labour that ultimately feeds a country's economy.

3.1.1. ILLEGAL MIGRATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Stephen Frears' film addresses illegal migration and forced displacement from a realistic point of view, focusing on the lives of 'illegal' migrants in London. The plot of the film follows its main characters, Okwe and Senay, the former of Nigerian origin and the latter of Turkish origin. Both are undocumented and live under the constant threat of being discovered and deported:

"You are illegal, Okwee. You don't have a position here. You have nothing. You are nothing" (16: 22)

-Senay Gelik? Turkish national? Do you have your SAL handy?

-Standard Acknowledgement. Letter. Your ID.

-Oh, yeah, yeah. I carry it always. (min 27 sec 38) [...]

There are people living in London without any papers.

- They prey on people like you.

- Pray?

- There is someone here.

- There is no-one here.

-You are aware your ELR status means you are unable to accept rent. You are seeking asylum. (29: 08)

In line with the theme, the film shows us how the lack of documentation and the need to hide forces them to accept precarious jobs that lead to labour exploitation and abuse, illustrating the vulnerability of undocumented migrants. What Frears shows us in his film is something we see constantly in our society. On the other hand, after watching the film, we can highlight how it explores how forced displacement implies the loss of home and

how difficult it is to build another one; the characters are forced to adapt to a society that marginalises denying them their rights and opportunities for integration.

3.1.2. IDENTITY AND BELONGING

“You never told me where you are from or even how come you here in this beautiful country” (11:42)

Identity and belonging are two central themes explored through the main characters. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the identity of both characters is marked by their status as undocumented immigrants who must hide who they really are in order to survive in London society, which excludes them and denies them their basic rights. Throughout the film, we see how they must remain invisible and adapt to imposed state rules that force them to partially renounce their original identity, adapting to behaviours that allow them to go completely unnoticed and thus avoid being deported. On the other hand, their belonging to British society is precarious; both live in a social limbo: they do not belong to the society in which they live, but neither do they want to return to their countries of origin. Despite this, the protagonists find a way to resist and rebuild a sense of belonging through friendship, solidarity (which we will explain in the next point) and the struggle for their dignity.

3.1.3. SOLIDARITY AMONG EQUALS

Solidarity among equals is a fundamental element in the lives of migrants, which we also see reflected in Okwe and Senay, who show mutual support in order to survive in a hostile environment such as London. Despite their cultural and personal differences, they develop a relationship of mutual help and protection:

This is a recipe from Nigeria. In Nigeria they do many interesting things with pork. But of course, I used lamb. (20:55)

Senay lets Okwe sleep in her flat, and they also cover each other's backs in the face of Senay's persecution by the immigration authorities and labour exploitation. Their bond grows stronger throughout the film, going from simple companionship to complicity and finally to great affection:

-Okwe, you must not tell them at the hotel that you have a key.

- I tell them only the truth.

- Even so. Show them that your back hurts, so they know you sleep on the floor.

-But that is not true. I sleep on the couch.

-The couch is not as real as the floor, Okwe. Believe me, I am a woman. And some of those bitches won't know what is a couch. But they know floor. They clean floors.

(26:50)

However, we do not only see this theme in our two characters; it also extends to other characters who work at the hotel, where the characters protect each other and share information so as not to be discovered. This contrasts with the abuse of power exercised by those who want to control their lives, such as the hotel manager.

3.1.4. THE INVISIBILITY OF MIGRANTS

Frears addresses the invisibility of migrants from two perspectives: social and legal. Throughout the film, the main characters live in a constant state of concealment to avoid persecution and deportation:

Neighbours, Senay. They see things. In the last few days they've seen someone come and go. A man. (28:12)

-Police! Police!

-Can I help you, gentlemen?

-We're looking for someone called Senay Gelik. She might be working here.

- Do you see anybody here?

-If you see her, give us a call. (46:42)

However, this invisibility is also reflected in how they have to work clandestinely in the hotel. London society ignores them, and they both go about their lives as voiceless 'ghosts.' Furthermore, social invisibility is shown when the characters, despite being physically present in the city of London, are hidden from most citizens, relegated to marginal jobs and spaces where their very existence is ignored.

-Where's Senor Juan?

-He's drunk.

-How come I've never seen you people before?

-Because we are the people you do not see. We are the ones who drive your cabs. We clean your rooms, and suck your cocks. (1:26:15)

3.2. EXIT WEST (2017)

Exit West is a novel about love, migration, and hope amid chaos. The story blends harsh social reality—the refugee crisis—with magical elements such as “mysterious doors” that instantly connect different parts of the world. Written in 2017, Europe had been plunged into a major migration crisis two years earlier, one that had not reached such magnitude since World War II. According to William Spindler (2015) in his article for UNHCR, UN Refugee Agency, *2015: The Year of the Refugee Crisis in Europe*, the arrival of refugees and migrants reached staggering levels that year (2015), dominating headlines and sparking turbulent political debates. In this context, the European Union faced two types of migration demands: one structural (economic migrants) and the other circumstantial (asylum seekers). The first group is fleeing poverty in non-EU countries, while the second group is fleeing civil war. Gabriele Vestri writes in his article *An approach to the current immigration crisis in the European Union* (2017) that the 21st century is the century of the most challenging political and economic difficulties of the last fifty years. Although immigration is not a new phenomenon, the European Union's response is insufficient and disjointed. The lack of unity in migration policy among EU member states creates chaos, and the consequence is the violation of the most basic human rights (p.106). The author goes on to add that Europe has faced displacement from the Middle East, which represents the greatest political challenge in terms of immigration in recent years. She adds that this type of immigration goes beyond European borders; much of this population movement has been characterized by forced migration of victims of armed conflict, persecution, poverty, climate change, as mentioned above, human rights violations, and the actions of illegal transnational networks involved in the illicit trafficking of migrants and human beings (p. 112). And this is what Mohsin Hamid portrays in his work, which, without being at all bloody, tells a devastating story in which hope guides the reader from one place to another, from East to West, through mysterious doors that emerge from everyday life. Through its main characters, the four points mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter will be analysed: illegal migration and displacement; identity and belonging; solidarity among equals; and the invisibility of migrants.

3.2.1. ILLEGAL MIGRATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Mohsin Hamid explores and nuances the experience of illegal immigration and forced displacement through situations that reflect violence and human resilience. From the

beginning of the novel, the author points out how geography and the randomness of one's place of birth determine people's destinies, especially in places where conflict is rife and destruction forces his characters to flee. This is evident in the urban space, which is occupied by refugees trying to rebuild a new life under makeshift structures. The author also addresses the issue of borders and inequality by showing the reader routes to other countries. Below are some excerpts from the novel that reflect the theme of illegal migration and forced displacement:

Location, location, location, the realtors say. Geography is destiny, respond the historians. War would soon erode the facade of their building as though it had accelerated time itself, a day's toll outpacing that of a decade. (p. 15)

Refugees had occupied many of the open places in the city, pitching tents in the greenbelts between roads, erecting lean-tos next to the boundary walls of houses, sleeping rough on sidewalks and in the margins of streets.[...]. Possibly dying. Saeed and Nadia had to be careful when making turns not to run over an outstretched arm or leg. (p. 23)

In this group, everyone was foreign, and so, in a sense, no one was. Nadia and Saeed quickly located a cluster of fellow countrywomen and -men and learned that they were on the Greek island of Mykonos, a great draw for tourists in the summer; and, it seemed, a great draw for migrants this winter, and that the doors out, which is to say the doors to richer destinations, were heavily guarded, but the doors in, the doors from poorer places, were mostly left unsecured, perhaps in the hope that people would go back to where they came from—although almost no one ever did—or perhaps because there were simply too many doors from too many poorer places to guard them all. (p. 72)

That night he asked her what the life of her dreams would look like, whether it would be in a metropolis or in the countryside, and she asked him whether he could see them settling in London and not leaving, and they discussed how houses such as the one they were occupying might be divided into proper apartments, and also how they might start over someplace else, elsewhere in this city, or in a city far away. (p. 91)

3.2.2. IDENTITY AND BELONGING

The following two excerpts express the relationship between identity and belonging in the context of migration. The intimacy between Saeed and Nadia is strengthened when they plan their future amid uprooting; the identity of both characters is seen to be in

constant negotiation and redefinition in the face of the challenge presented by migration. The fact that they remind each other of their essence in the midst of crisis warns us that belonging is not only territorial but also emotional and relational; roots are sought in the other. In the second excerpt, we see how Nadia returns to her hometown half a century later, transforming her identity over time. She recognises the city, but it has changed just as she has; her sense of belonging is marked by distance. In the novel, the author warns that the identity of migrants is changeable and that the sense of belonging is not absolute; home is redefined by displacement.

They felt closer on nights when they were making these plans, as though major events distracted them from the more mundane realities of life, and sometimes as they debated their options in their bedroom they would stop and look at each other, as if remembering, each of them, who the other was. (p. 91)

HALF A CENTURY LATER Nadia returned for the first time to the city of her birth, where the fires she had witnessed in her youth had burned themselves out long ago, the lives of cities being far more persistent and more gently cyclical than those of people, and the city she found herself in was not a heaven but it was not a hell, and it was familiar but also unfamiliar, and as she wandered about slowly, exploring, [...] (p.147)

3.2.3. SOLIDARITY AMONG EQUALS

We will address this issue from the perspective of people who share the status of migrants or displaced persons. In *Exit West*, this is expressed in a subtle but significant way because, although our focus is on the two main characters, the author also explores how migrants support each other in contexts of precariousness and exclusion. An example of this is when Saeed and Nadia experience what it is like to live with other migrants in refugee camps; here, the need to survive and find a safe place encourages the creation of new communities and support networks, even if these are fragile and scattered over time. These spaces become habitats for coexistence where identity and belonging are constantly renegotiated and where mutual aid flourishes in response to uprooting and adversity.

The camp was in some ways like a trading post in an oldtime gold rush, and much was for sale or barter; from sweaters to mobile phones to antibiotics to, quietly, sex and drugs, and there were families with an eye on the future and gangs of young men with an eye on the vulnerable and upright folks and swindlers and those who had risked their lives to

save their children and those who knew how to choke a man in the dark so he never made a sound. (p .72)

What Hamid (2017) is trying to tell us with this is that no matter what culture the migrant comes from or what their context is, the shared experience of displacement and the relentless search to form a new home unites and drives people to collaborate with each other.

[...] and if that had been their hope then they had succeeded, for the young woman had learned of a mob that was intending to attack the migrants gathered near the zoo, everyone was talking and messaging about it, and she planned to join a human cordon to separate the two sides, or rather to shield the migrants from the antimigrants, and she was wearing a peace badge on her overcoat, and a rainbow pride badge, and a migrant compassion badge, the black door within a red heart, and she could see as she waited to board her train that the crowd at the station [...] (p. 73)

3.2.4. INVISIBILITY OF THE MIGRANT

This last theme has been proven to be addressed by Hamid (2017) through the experiences of the protagonists and the way the novel is narrated. He metaphorically uses magical doors to represent the migratory processes that both characters undergo, allowing them to cross borders instantly and without leaving a physical trace. I interpret this as meaning that the author does not expose his characters to dangerous journeys, unbreakable walls, or bodies in the sea or desert. The author renders invisible the suffering that so many people endure in reality and that we are accustomed to seeing day after day in the news. Hamid allows the reader to draw parallels between his fiction and the current world.

Their funds were growing thinner, more than half the money with which they had left their city now gone. They better understood the desperation they saw in the camps, the fear in people's eyes that they would be trapped here forever, or until hunger forced them back through one of the doors that led to undesirable places, the doors that were left unguarded, what people in the camps referred to as mousetraps, but which, in resignation, some people were nonetheless trying, especially those who had exhausted their resources, venturing through them to the same place from which they had come, or to another unknown place when they thought anything would be better than where they had been. (p. 73)

4. CONCLUSION

Migration is a complex phenomenon involving a multitude of social and economic aspects that affect the daily lives of all human beings in an increasingly interconnected world. To understand these migratory processes, it was important to explain five key moments in history. The first of these is the 19th century and its Industrial Revolution, when economic expansion attracted a mass of migrants to Great Britain; the second is the 20th century and the two wars that ravaged it, with Pakistanis and Indians fleeing their countries and heading for the United Kingdom; the second half of the 20th century was marked by restrictive anti-immigration policies such as the Commonwealth Act signed in 1962, which imposed harsh restrictions on the entry of migrants into the United Kingdom; next, we have our century, the 21st century, marked by a growing migratory revolution and the refugee crisis of 2015; and finally, Brexit, the political process that led to the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union in 2016.

Contemporary migration, far from being the result of a circumstantial phenomenon, is a complex and defining reality of our era. Both *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *Dirty Pretty Things* by Stephen Frears highlight the challenges that migrants face in various contexts, such as forced displacement, exclusion, and precariousness. Firstly, the study of both works allows us to understand that the migration process involves not only a geographical change, but also a change in the characters' identities. The main characters in *Dirty Pretty Things* and *Exit West* are forced to renegotiate their identity and sense of belonging, facing hostility and discrimination in their destination countries. Their migratory experience forces them to reinvent themselves and seek new forms of integration and recognition, even when society denies them the right to their own existence. Secondly, social invisibility emerges as a central theme in both works. So-called “illegal” migrants are those who are relegated to the margins of society, forced to hide and survive in conditions of exploitation and vulnerability. This invisibility forces them into exclusion and to wander through life as “ghosts” within the host country, which means that their rights and opportunities are relegated to the background. Both in the London of *Dirty Pretty Things* and in the various settings explored in *Exit West*, lack of recognition and marginalization make it impossible for the characters to create a sense of belonging. However, the analysis has also identified the importance of solidarity among peers as a strategy for resistance and survival. In both cases, the protagonists find in their peers a space of support where empathy and collaboration allow them to face adversity and preserve their dignity.

Solidarity thus becomes an act of resistance against exclusion and demonstrates that unity among peers generates alternatives for survival and hope.

A secondary aim of this dissertation has been to encourage readers to reflect on the need to transform the legal, social, and cultural frameworks that govern migration in our era. Migration is a reality shared by millions of people around the world, and we, from our perspective, must treat it with ethics, inclusivity, and humanity. Recognizing diversity, promoting fairer migration policies, and building spaces of belonging are important steps toward overcoming exclusion and moving toward much fairer and more cohesive societies. In conclusion, *Dirty Pretty Things* and *Exit West* portray how difficult it is to be a migrant and what this entails in an increasingly individualized and unjust society, but they also offer the viewer/reader a hopeful view of the capacity for resilience. Both works call for empathy and action and remind us that in our increasingly interconnected world, the dignity and rights of all people who inhabit this world must be protected and respected, regardless of their origin.

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