ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

POSTCOLONIAL TRANSNATIONAL DISPLACEMENT AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN EXIT WEST AND BY THE SEA

Zain ul abdin
Zaingulzar252@gmail.com
Researcher, Department of English Literature, The Islamia university, Bahawalpur
Rahma Afzal
rahmaafzal99@gmail.com
Mphil English Literature, The Islamia university, Bahawalpur
Iqra Arshad
iqraarshad754@gmail.com
Mphil English Literature, The Islamia university, Bahawalpur
Sayyed Muhammad Huzaifa Hasan
huzaifahasan38@gmail.com
Mphil English Literature,Department of English Literature
The islamia University of Bahawalpur

Abstract
This study explores the complex dynamics of transnational displacement and identity reconstruction in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West *and Abdulrazak Gurnah's* By the Sea, *situating both novels within a postcolonial framework. Through a comparative analysis, it examines how forced migration acts as both a physical and psychological rupture, reshaping individual identities amid cultural dissonance, trauma, and the legacies of colonialism. Hamid's use of magical realism dismantles traditional notions of borders and nationhood, presenting migration as a fluid and transformative experience, while Gurnah's realist narrative foregrounds the silenced voices of refugees and asylum seekers navigating postcolonial power structures. Drawing on postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, the study reveals how these texts challenge dominant discourses on migration by portraying the multifaceted processes of identity negotiation, hybridity, and belonging. Ultimately, this paper highlights the vital role of literature in humanizing refugee experiences and advancing scholarly conversations about displacement and identity in the contemporary postcolonial world.*

Keywords:
Transnational displacement, forced migration, identity reconstruction, hybridity, exile, refugee narratives, cultural trauma.

Introduction
In an age marked by increasing global mobility, civil conflict, and socioeconomic inequality, forced migration has become a defining crisis of the 21st century. The refugee experience, however, is not merely one of geographical displacement but also of psychological rupture, identity loss, and cultural dislocation (Malkki, 1995; Said, 2000). In postcolonial literature, migration is more than a background condition—it is a profound force that shapes narrative structure, character development, and thematic direction. Literature, in this sense, becomes a potent space for representing and negotiating the traumas and complexities of exile, displacement, and identity reconstruction (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2013).

This study explores how Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2001) portray the lived realities of transnational displacement and the multifaceted processes of identity formation. Both texts highlight the challenges faced by displaced individuals who must navigate new cultural, political, and psychological terrains after being uprooted from their native homelands. Hamid's narrative, characterized by elements of magical realism, reimagines global borders through the metaphor of "doors" that open to other lands, bypassing traditional immigration structures. This fantastical device speaks to the simultaneous ease and alienation of contemporary displacement (González, 2018). In

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

contrast, Gurnah adopts a realist approach that emphasizes silenced voices and asylum procedures, foregrounding the inner lives of refugees struggling to reconcile past traumas with present uncertainties (Cheesman, 2011).

Postcolonial theory offers a valuable framework for unpacking the psychological and cultural consequences of displacement. Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space" or hybridity illustrates how diasporic identities are constantly negotiated in-between cultures. Similarly, Edward Said (1978, 2013) has emphasized how the colonial legacy continues to shape East–West power dynamics and perceptions of the "Other," which resonate strongly in refugee narratives. Gayatri Spivak's (1988) interrogation of the subaltern's voice becomes particularly relevant in analyzing how displaced characters struggle to articulate their narratives within dominant ideological systems. These critical perspectives allow us to view migration not just as a physical movement, but as an existential state fraught with marginalization, redefinition, and resilience.

Exit West and *By the Sea* present different yet intersecting pathways of displacement. While Hamid's characters experience migration as a surreal, immediate shift that tests their emotional and romantic bonds, Gurnah's protagonist experiences a slower, bureaucratic struggle in seeking asylum, haunted by memory and loss. Both narratives ultimately interrogate how individuals reconstruct identity when national belonging, cultural rootedness, and even language itself become unstable (McLeod, 2000; Brah, 1996).

By examining these two novels through a postcolonial lens, this paper seeks to illuminate the emotional, cultural, and political dimensions of forced migration. It argues that postcolonial literature not only provides nuanced representations of the refugee experience but also critiques dominant narratives surrounding migration, borders, and belonging in an increasingly fractured global order. In doing so, it contributes to the growing field of literary studies that engages with migration and displacement as central concerns in the postcolonial world (Ramadan, 2012; Gikandi, 2011).

Literature Review

Postcolonial literary studies frequently engage with identity in the context of forced displacement. Scholars such as Edward Said (1978) and Homi Bhabha (1994) argue that colonial legacies persist through cultural and psychological structures, making exile a site of fragmented identity. Displacement in postcolonial fiction is thus not just physical relocation, but a profound disruption of self, home, and nation (Ashcroft et al., 2013). Bhabha's notion of the "third space" and hybridity (1994) offers a vital lens for understanding migrant identities as fluid and negotiated across cultures. James Clifford's (1997) idea of "dwelling-in-travel" reinforces this view, suggesting identity forms through mobility rather than fixed geographies. These frameworks emphasize that identity under displacement is relational, not absolute.

Recent migration literature responds to ongoing global crises, with scholars like Brah (2005) and Ramadan (2012) highlighting how diaspora represents "multi-locationality"—simultaneous longing for the past and negotiation of new selves. Such perspectives are central to both *Exit West* and *By the Sea*, where characters navigate exile by balancing memory with reinvention. *By the Sea* has attracted critical attention for its focus on asylum, trauma, and memory. Cheesman (2011) notes how Gurnah challenges legalistic refugee narratives by centering the inner life of Saleh Omar. Boehmer (2009) highlights the novel's fragmented structure as a reflection of psychological dislocation, while Rooney (2007) sees it as a counter to Western humanitarian discourse that often portrays refugees as passive.

In contrast, Hamid's *Exit West* uses magical realism to universalize displacement. Critics such as González (2018) and Hartnell (2019) argue that the novel's magical doors critique rigid borders, though some like Tazzioli (2019) caution that this device may oversimplify the

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

real struggles of refugees. Still, Hamid emphasizes emotional truths—fear, love, and transformation in migration.

Despite rich scholarship on each novel, comparative studies are rare. While Hamid explores abstract mobility and Gurnah roots his narrative in realism, both depict migration as an ongoing process that reshapes identity. This study addresses that gap by reading the novels together through a postcolonial lens, exploring how displacement challenges fixed identities and exposes global inequities. Spivak's (1988) question of subaltern speech is relevant here, as both novels explore how migrant voices are shaped—or silenced—by dominant systems. Omar's asylum testimony and Nadia's evolving selfhood exemplify the tension between visibility and marginality in exile. McLeod (2013) reinforces that post-migration identity must be reimagined, not restored.

Finally, the colonial histories behind these texts—Zanzibar's layered past in Gurnah, and the anonymous war-torn setting in Hamid—highlight how imperial legacies persist in shaping migration. Both authors use personal stories to critique global systems of control and representation. In sum, this study builds on postcolonial theories of hybridity, diaspora, and subalternity to explore how *Exit West* and *By the Sea* represent displacement. Through distinct literary styles, both novels interrogate how forced migration destabilizes identity and challenges national, cultural, and political boundaries.

Theoretical Background

This study is grounded in postcolonial theory, examining how displacement, identity, diaspora, hybridity, and subalternity intersect in *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. Drawing on Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, and Avtar Brah, the analysis explores how forced migration reshapes selfhood in political, cultural, and psychological terms. Edward Said (2000) views exile as a state of estrangement and cultural rupture—a "discontinuous state of being" marked by loss and alienation. This is evident in both novels: Saeed and Nadia's continual border-crossings unsettle their sense of belonging, while Saleh Omar's migration renders him a fragmented subject, haunted by memory and silence. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) also informs this study's critique of how Western frameworks shape migrant identities through stereotyped representations.

Homi Bhabha's (1994) concepts of hybridity and the "third space" are central to understanding identity as fluid and negotiated. In *Exit West*, characters adapt across shifting cultural terrains, and Nadia embodies hybridity by resisting gender norms. In *By the Sea*, Omar navigates memory and displacement within a third space between Zanzibar and England. Bhabha's ideas of mimicry and ambivalence further highlight the characters' tensions between assimilation and resistance. Gayatri Spivak's (1988) question—"Can the subaltern speak?"—shapes this analysis of voice and agency. Saleh Omar's silences reflect structural exclusion, echoing Spivak's notion of "epistemic violence" under neocolonial power. In *Exit West*, refugee identities are similarly mediated through global narratives that often reduce them to passive subjects within humanitarian discourse.

Stuart Hall (1990) offers a view of identity as historically contingent and discursively formed. His claim that identity is "not an essence but a positioning" applies to both Saeed's retreat into tradition and Nadia's assertion of autonomy—each a response to transnational displacement and cultural negotiation. Avtar Brah's (1996) idea of "diaspora space" adds a feminist, intersectional lens. Brah emphasizes that diaspora is not only geographic but also emotional and ideological—a condition of "in-betweenness." This helps frame Nadia's gendered experience of exile and Omar's layered recollections of colonial Zanzibar within British multiculturalism.

Together, these theorists provide an interdisciplinary lens through which the novels are read. They reveal how migration is not merely movement across borders but a complex reworking

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

of memory, identity, power, and visibility. This framework situates *Exit West* and *By the Sea* within broader postcolonial and transnational debates about identity in motion.

For the objective of this current study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do *Exit West* and *By the Sea* depict the psychological and existential impact of transnational displacement on their protagonists?
2. In what ways do both novels construct hybrid identities through interactions in Bhabha's 'third space'?
3. To what extent do digital spaces, globalization, and modern migration methods affect the formation and negotiation of identity in *Exit West*?
4. How do colonial histories continue to shape the present experiences of asylum, exclusion, and belonging in *By the Sea*?

Discussion and Analysis

1. Displacement as Psychological and Spatial Fragmentation

In the landscape of postcolonial literature, displacement is not merely a physical act of relocation but a deeply embedded psychological trauma that disrupts notions of selfhood, belonging, and cultural continuity. The duality of psychological and spatial fragmentation manifests prominently in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2001), where characters experience layered forms of disintegration due to forced migration. As Edward Said (2000) argues, exile is "a condition of terminal loss," a severing from one's past, homeland, and identity. This state of exile results not only in geographic displacement but in a shattered sense of self, caught between memory and survival.

In *Exit West*, Hamid uses magical realism to depict the surreal movement of migrants across continents through mysterious black doors, but beneath this device lies the reality of deep psychological fragmentation. Saeed and Nadia begin their journey in a war-torn city, but as they cross into Greece, London, and San Francisco, their emotional cohesion unravels. Saeed clings to his religious rituals and memories of his father— "He prayed more regularly, every morning and evening... and he was drawn to people from their country" (Hamid, 2017, p. 142). In contrast, Nadia detaches from tradition and adapts quickly— "She moved into a cooperative and found work in a kitchen... she liked this life" (Hamid, 2017, p. 143). Their emotional divergence reflects the broader psychological impact of displacement: nostalgia and cultural continuity versus reinvention and detachment.

The metaphorical use of "doors" symbolizes nonlinear dislocation. Instead of offering a progressive migration narrative, the doors illustrate Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space," a place of identity negotiation. Each transition through a door leads to a new site of cultural dissonance rather than security. By the novel's end, Saeed finds comfort in religiosity and reconnects with a community reminiscent of home: "Now, though, in Marin, Saeed prayed even more... as a gesture of love for what had gone and would go and could be loved in no other way" (Hamid, 2017, p. 209). Nadia, on the other hand, pursues autonomy and forward momentum, illustrating how spatial movement results in psychological bifurcation.

In contrast, Gurnah's *By the Sea* provides an introspective, melancholic portrait of exile through Saleh Omar. Upon arrival in England, Omar chooses silence at the immigration desk: "I sat mute, like an old man who had lost everything" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 3). His refusal to speak is both a coping mechanism and a resistance to bureaucratic erasure. This echoes Fanon's (1967) view that the colonized subject internalizes alienation and often withdraws from speech to reclaim agency.

Omar's spatial displacement is amplified by the psychic dislocation from Zanzibar, which persists through sensory memory. His incense box, the only item he carries, becomes a symbol of continuity and rupture. His lodging in a refugee center is described not as home, but as a threshold—what Foucault (1986) calls a "heterotopia," a real place that represents

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

the collapse of meaning and order. In Omar's room, memories are constantly triggered by smell and sound— "the musty scent of wood, the gleam of incense" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 25)—reminding him of a home that exists now only in fragments.

Latif Mahmud, another exiled character, similarly reveals the psychological fracturing caused by displacement. Although Latif is academically successful, his return to confront Omar forces him to reckon with a past he has tried to intellectualize and forget. As he states, "Exile is not just being without a home, but being unable to dream of a home" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 213). Memory becomes a double-edged sword—simultaneously grounding and dislocating.

Both novels portray home not as a fixed geography but as a psychological construct. Saeed's longing for the past and Nadia's forward movement show that "home" is reconstituted differently across genders and personalities. Similarly, Omar and Latif reconstruct identity not through belonging, but through narration. For Omar, storytelling becomes survival: "I need to tell someone my story. That is why I have come to you" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 36).

Finally, displacement renders characters both hyper-visible and invisible. Nadia's dress and independence are tactics for navigating hostile societies; Omar's silence makes him unreadable to border agents. This aligns with Judith Butler's (2004) claim that certain lives are deemed ungrievable in the Western imaginary. Both Hamid and Gurnah depict the refugee not merely as a body crossing borders but as a fragmented self—negotiating survival, voice, and memory in hostile or indifferent environments.

In sum, *Exit West* and *By the Sea* expose the psychological and spatial fragmentation inherent in transnational displacement. Through magical realism and psychological realism, both authors articulate the traumas of migration and the arduous process of reconstructing identity in exile.

2. Cultural Hybridity and Identity Reconstruction

The concept of cultural hybridity occupies a central role in contemporary postcolonial discourse and offers a rich interpretive lens through which to analyze character development in both *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. Cultural hybridity, as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha (1994), is not merely the coexistence of different cultural elements but the generative process of negotiating identity in the 'Third Space'—a site of enunciation where fixed identities dissolve and new possibilities emerge.

In *Exit West*, Nadia's identity exemplifies cultural hybridity. She defies traditional gender expectations by wearing a black robe—not for religious piety but to avoid harassment: "She had taken to wearing a black robe... not out of religious conviction... but so that she would be left alone" (Hamid, 2017, p. 17). This paradoxical act of outward conformity and inner rebellion demonstrates how she uses the cultural code to resist patriarchal norms. As she migrates westward, Nadia becomes more flexible, adopting new values and lifestyles. She eventually joins a cooperative in Marin, where she works and later lives: "She felt she was beginning to belong... the possibility struck Nadia with a shock of recognition, as though a door was opening up, a door in this case shaped like a room" (Hamid, 2017, p. 193).

Saeed's transformation is more gradual. Despite traveling the same routes as Nadia, he seeks comfort in religion and cultural community: "He joined his fellow countrymen in prayer... drawn by the familiar languages and accents and the familiar smell of the cooking" (Hamid, 2017, p. 144). Saeed's rootedness exemplifies the uneven development of hybrid identities. While both characters inhabit new spaces, their responses diverge: Nadia embraces multiplicity, while Saeed gravitates toward preservation.

In *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar also illustrates hybrid subjectivity. Upon arrival in England, he strategically remains silent, masking his knowledge of English as a form of resistance. Later, his mastery of language becomes a tool for reclaiming narrative authority. He recalls how he used incense to evoke the past: "I had bought this incense in Zanzibar... and brought it with

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

me here... I burn it to remember" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 4). His silence and speech reflect Spivak's (1988) notion of the subaltern's contested ability to speak.

Latif Mahmud, Omar's narrative counterpart, represents another mode of hybrid identity. Having assimilated into European academic life, he reflects with ambivalence on both his past and present. He acknowledges his "estrangement from everything I once knew," but also affirms his need to remember and interpret (Gurnah, 2001, p. 78). The alternation of voices in the novel symbolically enacts hybridity—a dialogue between memory and translation, displacement and expression.

Stuart Hall's (1990) notion of identity as "positioning" rather than essence becomes especially relevant here. Both Nadia and Omar navigate contexts—refugee camps, food co-ops, immigration interviews—where identity must be strategically performed. Nadia's clothing, Omar's silence, and Latif's linguistic mediations exemplify these negotiations.

Both novels portray hybridity as a condition shaped by larger geopolitical forces. In *Exit West*, the metaphorical doors do not erase the politics of migration. Nadia's acceptance into the food cooperative is fraught with suspicion, and only after confronting a gunman is she accepted: "Whether it was because they were impressed by her mettle... or recalibrated their sense of who was threat and who was threatened... several people on her shifts began chatting with her" (Hamid, 2017, p. 192).

In *By the Sea*, hybridity intersects with the colonial legacy. English—the language of bureaucracy and betrayal—is also the language of storytelling and survival. Latif reflects, "I am writing in the language of the empire... a language I hated once" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 104). This ambivalence underscores Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's (2003) view that postcolonial language is "a place of struggle."

Ultimately, hybridity in these novels is not seamless synthesis but a continual process of reinvention. Both texts show how characters, through love, work, silence, and storytelling, reconstruct identity amid displacement. Hamid and Gurnah reveal that hybrid identities, while fractured, are dynamic and adaptive—capable of generating meaning in spaces of uncertainty and flux.

3. Diaspora, Home, and Memory

The themes of diaspora, home, and memory are deeply woven into postcolonial narratives, reflecting the fragmented identities and psychological dislocations of individuals caught between multiple cultural geographies. Both *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah explore these interlinked concepts, portraying how diasporic experiences reshape conceptions of home and invoke memory as both a refuge and a burden. In postcolonial theory, diaspora is not merely a demographic term, but a condition of unsettled belonging—a perpetual negotiation between the past and the present, the native and the foreign. As Stuart Hall (1990) asserts, diasporic identity is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (p. 225).

In *Exit West*, the diasporic experience is central to the protagonists' journeys. Saeed and Nadia flee their war-torn homeland through magical doors into Mykonos, London, and San Francisco—displacements that metaphorically erase borders but leave emotional and cultural alienation intact. Despite the magical realism of their movement, neither character finds a lasting sense of home. Nadia adapts more fluidly, while Saeed remains emotionally tethered to his origins. For example, Nadia expresses a dream of returning to Mykonos, reflecting her desire to revisit a past point of relative calm, while Saeed remains spiritually connected to his father and his cultural roots through prayer (Hamid, 2017, pp. 137–139).

Home in Hamid's narrative is mutable—shaped not by geography, but by emotion and memory. Saeed prays daily in Marin to connect with his parents, particularly his deceased mother, suggesting that his sense of home is constructed through spiritual ritual and

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

remembrance: "When he prayed he touched his parents... and this loss unites humanity" (Hamid, 2017, p. 137). In contrast, Nadia gradually withdraws, refusing to return even for a visit, embodying Avtar Brah's (2005) notion of diaspora as a contested "space of inclusion and exclusion."

In *By the Sea*, the concept of home is intricately tied to memory, loss, and exile. Saleh Omar arrives in England with incense and fabricated documents—symbolic remnants of a disrupted identity. His sense of home remains anchored in Zanzibar, but filtered through the betrayals and traumas of colonial and familial histories. His recollections of incense and storytelling evoke a deeply sensory connection to the past: "This incense… its scent is not for the living only, but for the memory of the dead" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 3).

Latif Mahmud's migration is equally haunted by memory and guilt. He acknowledges abandoning a woman he loved, saying, "I left her to the decisions of men. I could not help her" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 178). His exile is not just geographic but moral and psychological. The alternating narrative structure of the novel mirrors this fractured diasporic identity, where storytelling becomes a mode of stitching together fragmented selves.

Memory in *By the Sea* functions as both resistance and survival. Omar's detailed recollections contrast sharply with the bureaucratic impassivity of asylum systems. His narrative voice asserts subjectivity in a world that demands linear, simplified refugee testimonies. This aligns with Marianne Hirsch's (1997) concept of "postmemory," in which past traumas are inherited and relived through affect and storytelling. Latif and Omar remember Zanzibar differently—not only in content, but in emotional tone—demonstrating how home is never a singular or stable construct.

The emotional dissonance in diaspora—being physically present in one land while emotionally rooted in another—creates what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls "unhomeliness." Saeed's yearning for familiarity and Omar's silence are emblematic of this condition. Nadia and Latif, on the other hand, offer more adaptive models of diasporic identity: they engage their host cultures while carrying with them the residues of their pasts.

Importantly, storytelling in both novels becomes a symbolic construction of home. For Omar, "telling his story" is not just cathartic but an act of political agency. He says, "It is my right to tell someone, I need to speak" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 92). Similarly, *Exit West* closes with Saeed and Nadia parting peacefully—each having redefined "home" through memory, relationships, and interior transformation rather than physical return.

In sum, *Exit West* and *By the Sea* portray diaspora, home, and memory as fluid and interdependent experiences. These novels reject simplistic binaries of assimilation versus return, presenting instead a rich tapestry of identities forged in migration, loss, and reinvention.

4. Gendered Dimensions of Displacement

Displacement in *Exit West* and *By the Sea* is experienced through gendered subjectivities, as the characters' responses to exile and dislocation are shaped by the cultural expectations tied to their gender roles. Both novels reveal that migration does not impact men and women equally; rather, it transforms identity in gender-specific ways.

In *Exit West*, Nadia immediately establishes herself as a woman rejecting patriarchal expectations. She wears a black robe, but "not for religious reasons; she did so because it made her invisible, less likely to be harassed" (Hamid, 2017, p. 16). This act highlights her use of gendered presentation as a tool of agency rather than submission. Her choice to live alone, ride a motorbike, and engage in premarital intimacy illustrates how migration enables her to expand her freedoms. As she and Saeed cross magical doors into other countries, Nadia adapts with ease and independence: "She moved into a cooperative and found work in a kitchen that served communal meals... she liked this life" (Hamid, 2017, p. 214).

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

Her increasing autonomy contrasts sharply with Saeed, who clings to religious rituals and familial bonds: "He prayed more regularly... and kept photos of his parents beside his bed" (Hamid, 2017, p. 210). Their diverging paths reveal how displacement can upend or reinforce gender roles. Saeed's identity becomes increasingly dependent on traditional values, while Nadia's identity flourishes through breaking them. By the time they part ways, Saeed emotionally returns to his roots, while Nadia moves forward, having "no desire to return, even to visit" (Hamid, 2017, p. 228). This gendered contrast in their response to exile underscores how migration reshapes individuals unevenly.

In *By the Sea*, gender operates more subtly, but no less significantly. The narrative is filtered primarily through Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud, whose stories dominate the text. Female characters such as Zaynab, Rehana, and Latif's mother are portrayed largely through male memory. Zaynab, for instance, is a silent casualty in the property conflict. When Omar recounts her abandonment, he acknowledges, "She was left with nothing, not even her name" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 195). Her dispossession is a consequence of both colonial legal manipulation and patriarchal betrayal.

Rehana, whom Latif loved and left behind, remains an unresolved emotional presence. Latif's memories of her are tinged with guilt and longing: "I left her to the decisions of men. I could not help her" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 178). Yet Rehana is never given a voice of her own. Like Zaynab, she exists only within male recollections, symbolizing how women's experiences in exile are often effaced or absorbed into male narratives.

Gurnah also explores how migration affects male identity and authority. Saleh Omar, once a respected businessman, is reduced to silence and dependency. At the airport, he pretends not to speak English and submits to bureaucratic processes without protest: "I sat mute, like an old man who had lost everything" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 3). His emasculation is not just physical or economic but symbolic; exile strips him of voice, power, and dignity.

In contrast to Nadia's proactive stance in *Exit West*, the men in *By the Sea* are haunted by nostalgia and loss. Latif reflects, "Exile is not just being without a home, but being unable to dream of a home" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 213). This melancholic attachment to the past contrasts with Nadia's forward-looking independence. In both novels, male characters often equate identity with rootedness, while female characters either adapt silently (as in *By the Sea*) or defy tradition (as in *Exit West*).

In conclusion, *Exit West* and *By the Sea* offer a gendered analysis of displacement through narrative and character development. Nadia's increasing independence, Zaynab's erasure, and Omar's loss of masculinity reflect the diverse ways gender informs the migrant experience. These stories illuminate the asymmetrical effects of migration—not merely geographically or politically, but emotionally and culturally through gendered identity.

5. Postcoloniality and Neoliberal Globalism

The intersection of postcoloniality and neoliberal globalism provides a vital lens through which *Exit West* and *By the Sea* critique contemporary displacement. Both novels expose how global capitalism and colonial legacies jointly regulate migrant mobility—not just through war and persecution, but through economic hierarchies, securitized borders, and the commodification of culture. As Appadurai (1996), Ong (2006), and Mbembe (2001) argue, globalization produces differential mobility, reinforcing neo-imperial control.

In *Exit West*, the magical doors appear to collapse physical borders, but neoliberal structures persist beyond them. Nadia and Saeed's relocation to London reveals a harsh urban logic: "All over London houses and parks and disused lots were being peopled in this way… between Westminster and Hammersmith legal residents were in a minority" (Hamid, 2017, p. 131). The surge in migrants provokes surveillance, segregation, and militarization—a

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

dramatization of Ong's (2006) concept of "graduated sovereignty," where migrant inclusion is conditional upon economic productivity.

The novel critiques the illusion of liberal hospitality. In California, Nadia finds refuge working in a cooperative, yet her belonging is tied to labor: "She felt she was beginning to belong… the possibility struck Nadia with a shock of recognition, as though a door was opening up" (Hamid, 2017, p. 147). This reflects Harvey's (2005) notion of "accumulation by dispossession," where refugees are incorporated not as citizens but as economically useful subjects. The magical realism of movement masks the realities of capitalist inclusion—one must still earn one's place.

By the Sea presents a more grounded critique of neoliberal bureaucracy. Saleh Omar's asylum process is laden with suspicion and surveillance. His silence, far from passive, is a political act: "I sat mute, like an old man who had lost everything" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 3). His identity is reduced to an administrative case, reflecting Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics—the state's power to decide who is granted personhood and who remains disposable.

Moreover, Omar's asylum narrative is filtered through the neoliberal demand for a coherent, palatable story. He struggles with "how much to tell and what to omit," revealing the commodification of refugee testimony under multiculturalism (Gurnah, 2001, p. 25). As Agier (2011) notes, such humanitarian logic often turns displaced individuals into objects of management rather than subjects of justice.

Neoliberalism also reshapes relationships. Nadia and Saeed's bond erodes under the pressure of individual adaptation: "Their relationship did… come to resemble that of siblings, in that friendship was its strongest element" (Hamid, 2017, p. 152). While Nadia embraces self-reliance, Saeed retreats into nostalgic religiosity, suggesting that neoliberalism fragments emotional and cultural continuity in the diaspora.

Likewise, in *By the Sea*, Omar and Latif's estranged relationship, born of colonial betrayal and diaspora, reflects the corrosion of kinship under global capitalism. Latif confesses: "I had fled, abandoning my father and Zaynab, fleeing from the mess I had made" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 192). Their shared trauma is refracted through a neoliberal system that isolates rather than heals.

Importantly, both novels resist portraying refugees as passive victims. Nadia and Omar exhibit agency and adaptation, but their choices are constrained by structural forces. Displacement here is not merely a result of violence but of an unequal global system that rewards some mobilities while punishing others.

In sum, *Exit West* and *By the Sea* critique the complicity of neoliberalism in perpetuating postcolonial displacement. Through layered narratives and symbolic devices, Hamid and Gurnah illuminate how migrants are rendered visible only when economically legible—and remain vulnerable to dispossession when they are not.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined how *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah portray postcolonial transnational displacement and the reconstruction of identity in the context of contemporary global realities. Through the lenses of cultural hybridity, diaspora, memory, gender, and neoliberal globalism, the narratives reveal how displaced individuals navigate fragmented geographies and shifting cultural landscapes while contending with both personal trauma and systemic exclusion.

Both novels demonstrate that displacement is not merely a physical relocation but a complex psychological, cultural, and political experience. The characters are shaped by their histories, cultural inheritances, and encounters with Western modernity. Their identities are in constant flux—formed, deformed, and reformed through interactions with the unfamiliar, the foreign,

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

and the remembered past. This fluidity underscores Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space," where cultural identity is always negotiated and contingent.

Exit West reflects the paradox of global mobility, presenting magical doors that symbolically erase borders, yet leading to spaces still governed by neoliberal exclusions and anxieties. Hamid critiques the myth of a borderless world and exposes how economic value determines the treatment of migrants. Similarly, *By the Sea* exposes the bureaucratic violence and cultural alienation that characterize the refugee experience in postcolonial Britain. Through the story of Saleh Omar, Gurnah highlights the psychic scars of colonial disruption and the subtle racism embedded in asylum systems.

Crucially, both texts reject portrayals of refugees as passive victims. Instead, they center their voices, memories, and resistances. Despite systemic violence, the protagonists assert their agency through storytelling, silence, cultural preservation, and interpersonal connection. Their journeys are not just about survival, but about the ongoing negotiation of selfhood in a world that persistently marginalizes the displaced.

Theoretically anchored in postcolonial studies, the analysis also engages with scholars like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and David Harvey to interrogate how power operates within and across borders. The findings suggest that postcolonial displacement is increasingly shaped by neoliberal logics that commodify migrant bodies, regulate mobility, and re-inscribe hierarchies established during colonial rule. However, it is in the everyday strategies of resilience and reimagined belonging that these characters challenge and subvert these structures.

In sum, *Exit West* and *By the Sea* provide valuable literary interventions into contemporary debates on forced migration, cultural identity, and global inequality. By attending to their nuanced portrayals of transnational lives, this study affirms the relevance of postcolonial literature in understanding the human consequences of displacement in our interconnected but uneven world.

References

Agier, M. (2011). *Managing the undesirables: Refugee camps and humanitarian government* (D. Fernbach, Trans.). Polity.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization* (Vol. 1). University of Minnesota Press.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2003). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. Routledge.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2013). *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts*. Routledge.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). The postcolonial and the postmodern: The question of agency. In *The location of culture* (pp. 171–197). Routledge.

Boehmer, E. (2009). *Stories of women: Gender and narrative in the postcolonial nation*. Manchester University Press.

Brah, A. (2005). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. Verso.

Cheesman, T. (2011). Refugee writing, Gurnah's fiction, and the ethics of representation. *Wasafiri*, 26(3), 21–26.

Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Harvard University Press.

Fanon, F. (1967). Excerpt from *Black Skin, White Masks* (C. L. Markmann, Trans.).

Foucault, M., & Miskowiec, J. (1986). Of other spaces. *Diacritics*, 16(1), 22–27.

Gikandi, S. (2011). *Slavery and the culture of taste*. Princeton University Press.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

González, C. (2018). Magical realism and global mobility in Hamid's *Exit West*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 54(6), 697–708.

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.

Hartnell, A. (2019). Futures of catastrophe: Migrant aesthetics in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 65(3), 488–509.

Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Hirsch, M. (1997). *Family frames: Photography, narrative, and postmemory*. Harvard University Press.

Malkki, L. H. (1995). *Purity and exile: Violence, memory, and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*. University of Chicago Press.

Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the postcolony*. University of California Press.

Mbembe, A. (2003). Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1), 11–40. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11

McLeod, J. (2013). *Beginning postcolonialism*. Manchester University Press.

Ong, A. (2006). *Neoliberalism as exception: Mutations in citizenship and sovereignty*. Duke University Press.

Ramadan, T. (2012). *The Arab awakening: Islam and the new Middle East*. Penguin UK.

Rooney, C. (2007). *Decolonising gender: Literature and a poetics of the real*. Routledge.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Said, E. W. (2013). *Reflections on exile: And other literary and cultural essays*. Granta Books.

Said, E. W. (2000). *Reflections on exile and other essays*. Harvard University Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.

Tazzioli, M. (2019). *The making of migration: The biopolitics of mobility at Europe's borders*.