



ISSUE OF MULTIPLE IDENTITY AND HYBRIDITY IN THE NOVEL *EXIT WEST* AND *A LAND OF PERMANENT GOODBYES*

Rahul Soni S.

Ph.D Research Scholar, Kuvempu University, Shivamogga, Karnataka, India

Abstract

*The work examines the concepts of multiple identity and hybridity in the context of forced displacement and diaspora, with specific reference to the novels *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* by Atia Abawi. It argues that identity is not fixed but dynamic, constantly reshaped by migration, mobility, and socio-political conditions. Refugees and migrants, due to enforced movement, occupy what Homi K. Bhabha terms an “in-between space,” where identities become hybrid and unstable. The text highlights how displacement disrupts traditional notions of home, belonging, language, nationality, and culture. As refugees move across borders, they are compelled to negotiate multiple identities imposed by host nations, political agencies, and social structures. Language, clothing, religion, and cultural practices become key markers through which identity is both lost and reconstructed. The experience of assimilation and accommodation further complicates the refugee’s sense of self, leading to a fragmented yet composite identity. Ultimately, the document emphasizes that multiple identity and hybridity are inevitable outcomes of diasporic life. Refugees oscillate between de-territorialization and re-territorialization, resulting in a fluid, transnational identity that prioritizes survival and humanity over fixed national or cultural affiliations. Identity is simply a specialty or identification of something or someone. It implies the individual hood as well as the selfhood of that particular person and special stuff. Identity is always flexible or dynamic. It does not remain at the same stage. It has a changing nature. Now, this paper is fully devoted to exploring various stages and influential factors of identity in terms of forced displacement. Multiple-identity is a kind of conflicted issue of state-imposed identity and the personal or individual identity of an individual. *Exit West* and *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* are infused with the discourse of Diasporic dimensions. The homeless wandering characters meet the notion of Homi K. Bhabha which is termed as ‘in-between space’, ‘hybrid identity’. The characters are never settled and transformed anywhere. Identity is created according to the space. Hence, identity and space are substantial to each other. The refugees have a peculiarity of not staying in a single space. As a result, the identity of that particular group of people keeps changing. According to Brah, ‘Diaspora space is the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, between native and the immigrants, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are contested’ (Brah, 205). Diaspora spaces are some of the concepts that talk of the enforced displaced people like a migrant, a refugee. They are forced to operate many identities due to the political upheaval, migration, and global market of labor and income.*

Keywords

Multiple Identity, Hybridity, Diaspora, Forced Displacement, Mobility, etc.



Full Article

Identity suggests one's home, sense of belongingness, own space. But the term multiple-identity violates the essence of the first statement. Multiple-identity employs multiple spaces as well as multiple relationships. Identity works in a social set-up. Socio-cultural formation shapes, reshapes, and shatter the identity of a person. In the time of global migration and mass-displacement, the idea of identity has undergone several changes. This sort of people's movement may of two types; willful and forceful. As a consequence, the term identity has lost its fixity. Instead, it has given birth to new concepts like a global citizen or global identity. But multiple-identity enhances the socio-cultural formation going outside the nation of origin. The characters of both novels struggle to locate their original identity throughout the novel but they end up with a hybrid identity which connotes that they have multiple identities rather than one single identity. Diaspora and the issue of identity are interrelated. Diaspora's study assists in knowing the fact that how the identity of a migrant or refugee is being formulated depending on the physical and mental spaces. The physical and mental presence of a person is a justified reason for defining the identity. Initially, though Tareg and Saeed shifted to a new place but physically and mentally they are rooted in their original identity. But later on, they lost their single space as well as single identity. Identity, in another way, can be said as the construction of a political project. It is political because it keeps a personal motif within. This kind of politics of identity may be done either by the political agency or any nation.

Identity and mobility go parallel. Mobility brings changes to the nature of one's identity. The cross-border characters gain a new identity leaving their original specialty. According to Babcock & Faist, 'From a transnational perspective, however, these identity changes are regarded as being derived from cross-border mobility of persons, which is in itself always embedded in other flows of ideas and goods' (Babcock & Faist, 22). In both of the text, the characters embarked on many journeys for saving their life and family love. They got separated in different places. They lost their nearest and dearest ones due to political riots. This separation brings mobility into their life. Subsequently, they started journeying from one place to another to save their body only.

In this shifting time, they experience the company of lots of people who attribute a new identity to this group calling them refugees. But most importantly in this mobility paradigm, refugees don't have only one national identity rather they hang upon multiple national identities which have given them hybrid identity. The novel *Exit West*'s introduction is set in a nameless city. The characters Saeed and Nadia travel from that city to Mykonos, London, and finally Marin, California due to the fear of the war. In their enforced travel history, they have a simultaneous history of identity formulation. National Identity has enforced so far refugee issues are concerned. For the refugee, acceptance and rejection of the identity is done by the host nation according to the wish of the refugee. Sometimes, Tareg of the novel *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* deprived of getting a legal national identity though he and his sister lived there for many years. In this way, multiple-identity and mobility have an established relationship. People's mobility generates a mobile identity among the refugee.

The identity of a refugee has been put into question through language. As it can be correctly pointed out that language is always political. Identity is hidden under the umbrella of language that one speaks. A place like Syria is an amalgamation of different language speaking people because it is a melting pot of migrants. People after leaving their original land headed towards a common destination where they feel secured and safe. Tareg and his cousin Musa fell in a dilemma when they look at the identity of the Syrian people. They met people from various nations whose identity is in the fragile state. Since the moment they have left their homeland, it



becomes difficult for a homeless person like a refugee to maintain that original state of identity. It leads them to embrace the transient identity at different times at different places. Therefore, it is not always the land that identifies itself; rather it is the language that gives the identity of a person and land. It can be seen in Musa's words, 'they come from France, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, America, Kuwait, Britain, and Libya- everywhere. I swear them speaking more French and English than Arabic, wallah!!' (Abawi, 55). The articulations of pronunciations are different person to person according to the land he/she belongs to. Musa noticed that though the people are acquainted with the French and English language, but they don't sound proper as the language is supposed to be pronounced. This linguistic complexity defines the identical complexity of the refugees.

Diaspora study says, 'Identity is a human phenomenon- lived and experienced' (Braziel and Mannur, 8). The living experience of a person defines their identity. As a refugee, he/she loses the fixity of identifying the state. They befriend people of different nationalities. In that time of the refugee crisis, living life becomes a priority instead of maintaining one identity. Refugees fall in unprecedented circumstances where they get acquainted with multi-identity leaving apart their own original identity. At that juncture of time, all the migrants live life with one identity; that is human only. In *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, the narrative voice justifies this argument in 'in this case, they were no longer Israeli or Syrian, Jewish or Muslim, they were what they were intended to be- human (Abawi, 206). It clearly implies that identity has to be fostered. If there is a break in taking care of the identity, there would a high chance of losing the same identity. Taking care of identity is but the maintenance of the mother tongue, religion, nationality, and the concerned areas. That is how; they embrace multiples identities in this moving process. Multiple-identity generates a hybrid social formation. This hybrid socio-cultural formation is germinated from the composite intermingling of different cultures. Hybridity is embedded in the process of rooting and uprooting.

This notion of multiple-identity can be highlighted best through the tri- the relationship among the homelands (ancestral/original home), host lands (changing foreign lands), and the particular group of people in the undertaking journey. Though all these three poles remain static the result gets changing, which is a blended entity of these multiple changing experiences. Similarly, in *Exit West*, Saeed's beloved Nadia stayed in a tent where people from different corners of the globe thronged. Once she followed the conversation among them. It was difficult for her to identify one single community personally as well as nationally from the context of language and religion. It suggests the chaos prevailing over the identity of the refugee. In this way, multiple-identity is being formulated. It is depicted as 'she understood also that all Nigerians were not all Nigerians, some were half-Nigerians, or from places that bordered Nigeria, from families that spanned both sides of a border and further that there was perhaps no such thing as a Nigerian, or certainly no one common thing, for different Nigerians spoke different tongue among themselves, and belonged to different religions (Hamid, 144). So, identity can be procured through assimilation. Along with the changing status of the refugee, they keep assimilating with the value of another land. In this way, they crossed the boundary of their original identity. Assimilation helps the migrants to accustom to the essence of the socio-cultural as well as political doctrines of the host land and foreign agency.

Assimilation and acculturation are two defining factors of identity. One gets identity by undergoing a process through which he/she acquires the culture of that society or region. The sense of belongingness answers to the questions of identity. People like refugee lose their national origin in their movement. The double consciousness of the displaced people between the ancestral land and the foreign land complicates the mindset of them. As a result of which they undergo a multi-dimensional identity. This sort of hybrid identity can be found in the clothing of the refugee.



It is a fact that clothing is one of the basic needs of human beings. But every single individual maintains uniqueness in their dressing presentation. It is very difficult for the migrants to maintain their sense of original belongingness in wearing sense. They embraced a new assimilated identity which is a mixed entity. In the novel, *Exit West*, the depiction of the Filipina girls held correctly this point-of-view. It is described as ‘the girls were dressed strangely, in clothing that was too thin, tropical, not the kind of clothing you normally saw Filipinas wear in Tokyo, or anyone else at this time of the year (Hamid, 27)’. It highlights the process of acculturation. An isolated group of people is destined to cope up with the prevailing traditions and values of that foreign land. Consequently, the losses of the essence of the particular culture as far as the language, religion, clothing style are concerned. It implies that Hybridity is not only a change in personal or in national identity but also a greater change in the way of living of the refugee people.

Time and place along with the social existing construction formulate the identity. Time and place are two ever-changing notions. Therefore, identity can be said as a personal and social state where flexibility is the main concern. The social phenomena and the geographical setting shape the identity of the being. As a person, refugee crosses the boundary repeatedly which evokes the question of his identity. Since he involves many experiences from many foreign cultures, there comes the flexibility in his identity. It results like he is the byproduct of multiple societies of myriad cultures. This multi-dimensional state of identity is reflected in *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, while Tareg was shocked at the assimilating quality of his cousin. Tareg understands the shifting nature of identity while he listened to his cousin Musa.

Musa said, ‘We are not Turkish, and we will never be Turkish (Abawi, 110)’. For the refugee, attaining to learn the language of the locals is the tenet of surviving strategy in a foreign land. This multilingual aspect of their personality is most of the time enforced. It indicated how they come apart from the oneness of their identity.

As Sameer Ahmed Shah has rightly said, diasporic space is created by both psychological and physical things. That is, Diaspora is not just a physical activity; rather the implication of it like identity, nostalgia is more psychological. The refugees every time question into their present existence and the lived experience. Time is the best teacher for the refugee. Every action of refugee life stands as a lesson for them. The moment they lose the nearest and dearest one and befriend intimately with the strangers, it is a moment of losing other inheriting stuff as well. Identity is one of those psychological losses. The nature of loss is important to them. One gets over the belongings when they are compelled enough to abandon their essence of existence. In *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, the old man discloses his take on life saying ‘we have no lives there. What’s the risk in dying if we are already dead?’ The loss he is about here is nothing but the loss of identity. In that situation of crisis, he realized the need to have an individual identity and its murder in the hands of this escaping movement.

Multiple-identity and Hybridity are two certain results of the cross-national movement. The trans-national process undertakes two impactful actions. These two are reterritorializing and deterritorialize. Therefore, it is a kind of complex existence for the migrant people. This existence is most of the time of multi- identities. Refugees are forced to confront and accept the hegemonic constructions of identity. As it is mentioned above, there are social agencies that hold the authority to shape one’s identity. They feel de-territorialization while they move from their place of origins so far their identity, family love, childhood memories are concerned. In this psychological gyre of losing and gaining they are attributed to a new hybrid identity, as it is given to Tareg, Nadia, and Saeed in the novels. Refugees attempt to reconstruct their selfhood, trying to re-territorialize their identity establishing the social, economic, and political relations between the homeland and the host land(s). Hence, several mixed behaviors are transparent in this particular group of society. The identity is a geographically given state. While the staying land of the people changes (de-



territorialize), there comes an anew change in their identity as well (re-territorialize). This bond creates a transient and hybrid identity. Throughout the journey, from Afghanistan to Turkey via Iran, the displaced people are known not only with the one identity rather they have given their identification as Israeli, Syrian, Jewish, and so on.

Multiple-identity takes birth as a result of the identity crisis. Identity denotes one's social position. But the migrants and their societal attachment are very crucial. They don't ever remain at the same stage. This crucial side helps to lose their fixity. The identity crisis implies here the social position that a refugee holds in a particular social setting. The authoritative social agency does not consider them as same as the people of mainstream society. The people of different land in a foreign land are never taken into consideration so far, the identity is considered. Identity is such a state which is valued as self. But here, for the displaced people the case is always the opposite. The people in power keep this minority community of displacement in the periphery. The original people become the center treating the refugee as the marginal. Migrants or the refugees are the victims of this process of 'othering'. The loss sense of identity also makes them 'other' in a foreign land. This multiple-identity can be viewed as a conversation of them.

In their introduction scene, everybody presents a travel history that is trans-national in a geographical sense. In *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, Siddiqa gives her intro to Tareg as 'I'm Siddiqa from New York, by way of Afghanistan thirty-five years ago' (Abawi, 236). Her mention of two-nation suggests simply the multiple-identity of a refugee.

Identity and subjectivity are two sides of the same coin. Both of these terms function as a mirror to each other. That is, one's identity is lying over his/her attitude. That's why; the subjective notion is inseparable in shaping one's identity. People of multiple identity loss the voices for undergoing the process of othering. The identity of the migrants is oppressed, marginalized, and mixed. Refugees live their lives with a hybrid identity of hybrid thought. This Hybridity is nothing but unconsciously going away from their identical point-of-view. Nadia and Saeed, in *Exit West*, celebrated their subjectivity until they were in Mykonos. Till that time, they are in their original land with their family members. Similarly, in *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* also, Tareg is seen as a man of own thought until he is with his cousin Musa. He promises, He fulfills them as well. But towards the end of the journey of these characters, they wear a multiple-identity which makes them deprived of their subjective view in life. It happens while they fail to find their self in front of the other. It may be due to pressure to save their life first and stay safe. Their fore most priority to go back to their original place or homeland acts as a factor of embracing this multiple-identity. Therefore, being a product of hybrid identity is mostly a process rather than a sudden change in one's identical state.

Hybridity involves multiple-identity and cultural clashes. People from different cultural origin gather in ghetto where migrants meet thousands of people from various countries. These different cultural values provide a global identity. This global sense of identity is nothing but the multiple senses of identity. Alexia, in *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* is such a hybrid foreign volunteer who helped the needy people in the refugee tent. Her identity is mingling of two nations. Alexia's father was a Jewish refugee to the United States from Russia, and her mother a descendant of immigrants from Greece (Abawi, 110). As a child, she also expresses her identical suffering. Her suffering began with his birth. She undergoes mental turmoil because of her identical crisis. Along with the passes of time, she starts working for the refugee in a foreign land leaving apart her own place. It complicates her identity once again. It can be seen in the conversation with her friend Annis. She realized that she has no identity of her own. She is not of one place just like Tareg. Tareg is also neither an Asian nor a European. Rather, he is hanging between a number of places. In this way, these characters wear a masked identity. But there can be found a little difference in accepting the Hybridity. Unlike Tareg, Alexia happily embraces her



transnational identity. In her life as a volunteer, she did not feel any problems; so far sense of belonging is concerned. Tareg is forcefully made to surrender for the hybrid identity. Living with a multiple-identity for somebody like Alexia is to be celebrated and at the same time for somebody like Tareg, it is violent and pain giving factor. Humans have an intentional tendency to find their place in the universe and to establish their distinct identity. To individualize means to identify self. The process of finding identity happens with every person, every family, tribes and nation. The identity defines oneself. The complex state of identity is well represented through Abawi's words in conversation.

Conclusion

To conclude, the study concludes that forced displacement inevitably transforms identity into a fluid, hybrid, and multi-layered construct. Through *Exit West* and *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, it becomes evident that refugees inhabit Bhabha's "in-between space," where belonging is constantly negotiated rather than secured. Migration dismantles fixed notions of home, nation, and self, compelling individuals to adopt multiple identities shaped by language, culture, mobility, and survival. While hybridity may offer empowerment for some, it remains a source of trauma and loss for others. Ultimately, these narratives foreground humanity over nationality, revealing identity as a dynamic process rather than a stable essence.

References

- Abawi, Atia. *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*. Philomel Books, 2018.
- Ahmad, Paiman. "The Middle East Refugee Crisis: Syria and Iraq Case." *Migration and Crime*, 2018, pp. 15–43. Springer, doi:10.1007/978-3-319-95813-2_2.
- Annan, Kofi. "Secretary-General Addressing Headquarters Seminar on Confronting Global Challenges." *United Nations Press Release*, SG/SM/9637, HR/4802.
- Bağlama, Sercan Hamza. "Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*: Co-Opting Refugees into Global Capitalism." *New Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, Feb. 2019, doi:10.29311/nmes.v9i2.3244.
- Bartlett, N. "War, and Literature." *The Australian Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1941, p. 77, doi:10.2307/20630959.
- Bauböck, Rainer, and Thomas Faist. *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories, and Methods*. Amsterdam University Press, 2010.
- Betts, Alexander. *Forced Migration and Global Politics*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge, 1996.
- Braziel, Jana Evans, and Anita Mannur, editors. *Theorizing Diaspora*. Blackwell, 2003.
- Cohen, Robin. *Global Diaspora*. Routledge, 2008.
- Gheorghiu, Oana Celia. "As If by Magical Realism: A Refugee Crisis in Fiction." *Cultural Intertexts*, Academia.edu, www.academia.edu/38041291.
- Hamid, Mohsin. *Exit West*. Penguin Random House, 2017.
- Harrison, Faye V. "Xenophobia." *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, SAGE Publications, doi:10.4135/9781452218557.n583.
- *High School Teacher's Guide: Exit West*. Penguin Random House, 2018, www.penguin.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Exit-West-HS-013018a-online.pdf.
- Kalra, Virinder, et al. *Diaspora and Hybridity*. SAGE Publications, 2005, doi:10.4135/9781446221372.
- Kenny, Kevin. *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Khalil, Sally. "Exit West: A Vision of Reality." *Academia.edu*, www.academia.edu/34074668.



- Lannamann, Taylor. “Exit West.” *LitCharts*, LitCharts LLC, 23 Apr. 2018, www.litcharts.com.
- NewsHour, PBS. “Mohsin Hamid Answers Reader Questions About His Book, *Exit West*.” *YouTube*, 30 Mar. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScrNvkJtZyk.
- “A Land of Permanent Goodbyes.” *NPR*, 1 Jan. 2018, www.npr.org/books/titles/580230041/a-land-of-permanent-goodbyes.
- “Home Territories: Media, Mobility, and Identity.” *Choice Reviews Online*, vol. 39, no. 1, Jan. 2001, doi:10.5860/choice.39-0380.
- *International Migration Report 2017*. United Nations, 2017, www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport.
- “Refugeedom: Its Effects on People’s Lives with Special Reference to the Present Syrian Refugee Crisis.” *Refugeedom and Its Effects on People’s Lives*, www.creweandnantwich-u3a.org.uk/Groups/Philosophy/12-13T3/W3/Refugeedom.html.

Article Received:15/12/2025

Article Accepted:22/12/2025

Published Online: 26/12/2025

To Cite the Article: *Soni, Rahul*. “Issue of Multiple Identity and Hybridity in the Novel *Exit West* and *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*.” *Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol.-VI, Issue-3, December, 2025, 260-266. www.literarycognizance.com

This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

