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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the representation of the migrant woman in Moshin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) by focusing on the text's engagement with the diasporic concepts of home and identity. In essence, this study explores the ways in which the migrant heroine engages with and represents these concepts and on how her representations destabilize the dominant and traditional meaning of home and identity. Such a reading of the novel illustrates how the migrant woman's narrative indicates that home and identity can no longer be considered as generalized, definite, or as fixed concepts. Instead, these concepts must be accorded multiple representations as they are experienced by the migrant woman in multifarious ways. For the migrant heroine in *Exit West*, the notions of home and identity are not strictly or unilaterally defined in relation to her place of origin or to any affiliation with a particular place. In other words, the narrative in the text is centered on the fact that although the migrant heroine initially defines her home and identity in strict association to her homeland or place of origin, this subsequently changes as she moves out of her city of birth and encounters various places and cultures. With these findings, this study enters into dialogue with emerging studies in literary diasporic literature on the multifarious themes of home and identity for the migrant woman.

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And lastly, I wish to dedicate this work to my family back home in the Philippines and Sweden. They have always unconditionally supported me and believed in me through time and distance. I am especially dedicating this work to my father and my mother who are my love and my life. Words are not enough to express how blessed and grateful I am to my parents. Everything that I have achieved in my life, since then and up to now, is all due to their hard work and sacrifices. And thus, everything that I do, I also whole-heartedly dedicate it to my Daddy and Mama.

To God and the Universe be all the glory!

I. Introduction

Migration is one of the crucial global issues of the present century. This is evident in the existence of studies, representations, and discussions of this theme across a wide range of disciplines. However, we might argue that there still exists a lack of research on this theme in the field of arts and literature. As such, there is evidently an urgent necessity to give attention to representations of migration in literature. With regard to migration more generally, the attempt to come to terms with the meaning of home and identity, both in its literal and metaphoric sense, has become one of the defining matters. In this study, I analyze the various representations of home and identity from the point of view of the migrant woman. However, contrary to the frequent analytical and journalistic portrayal of the migrant woman through images or sets of data, this thesis changes focus by studying her novelistic depiction as an active, dynamic, and unconventional subject.

To achieve such an aim, this study will provide a close reading of the novel, *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid. As a migrant Pakistani writer who had previously lived in the United States and the United Kingdom, one of Hamid's main preoccupations is the issue of migration, and the struggles faced by the migrant in the diaspora. This recent novel by him is chosen from a diverse selection of migrant novels because it timely depicts contemporary migration stories that foreground the concepts of home and identity which are often problematized in migration studies. The novel is a counter-narrative that challenges traditional and dominant discourses on home and identity and thus is effective in giving a much deeper understanding of the position of the migrant in the contemporary era. Most specifically, in contrast to the traditional diasporic studies that focus on the migrant man, this study takes an unusual shift by focusing on the migrant woman. Amal Zaman in his review writes that through the portrayal of the migrant characters in the novel, Hamid is able to satisfactorily look into the dynamics of femininity and masculinity in times of critical situations and the effect of migration, displacement, religion, and oppressive society to their respective genders (Zaman). Indeed, what is interesting about the portrayal of the migrant woman in the novel is that she is portrayed very unconventionally as opposed to the traditional way that the migrant woman is depicted especially by the media.

The topic for this thesis arose from an awareness of the inadequacy of studies that specifically highlight the migrant woman both in the field of social sciences and literature.

Although there are a number of related studies that shed light on the novelistic representations of home and identity by the migrant woman, these studies do not sufficiently discuss the specific ways by which the migrant woman multifariously experiences home and identity (Daiya 2008; Fitts 2012; Krummel 2015; Ladele and Omotayo 2017). Therefore, this thesis is motivated by a desire to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of how the migrant woman evokes the meaning of home and constructs her identity from the setting of migration.

Essentially, in the chapters to come, I will explore these diasporic concepts of home and identity and their application in my reading of *Exit West*. In the first chapter, I begin my discussion by situating my study within the framework of migration studies in literature which underline the migrant woman. The first chapter will thus provide a short background on the involvement of women in migration, a discussion of the function of literature in diasporic studies, and a comprehensive review of related studies on the representations of migrant women in recent literature. From my review, it is clear that the notions of home and identity can no longer be thought of as a fixed or generalized concept. Instead, the migrant woman experiences the meaning of home and her construction of identity as a multiple, hybrid, and dynamic concept. Taking from these studies as its starting point, this thesis seeks to contribute to this work by exploring the multifarious ways by which the migrant woman represents the notion of home and identity in the novel.

In the second chapter, the discussion turns to the complex notion of home. My analysis is primordially guided by these questions: What are the different representations of home in *Exit West*? How are these representations depicted by the migrant heroine in the novel? How do her representations of home destabilize the dominant and traditional meaning of this concept? For a much clearer discussion, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines the symbolism of the migrant heroine's homes as an expression of the self or her identity. In this section, a deeper analysis of the surface and physical structures of the spaces that she has occupied throughout the novel is conducted. This is followed by an analysis of the home as a dynamic process of emplacing objects and practices and as a construction of nostalgia. For the migrant woman, home takes shape as a continuous performance of habits and as an interaction between the past and the present. The last section will then look into the relationship between the migrant woman's notion of home and its closely related concept of belonging. Since this study aims to look into the multiple representations of home, my literary analysis employs theoretical

tools in literature as well as in other fields such as in psychology and social sciences in order to support my ideas. This study, therefore, embeds the theories of Carl Jung, Clare Cooper, Magdalena Nowicka, J. Macgregor Wise, Svetlana Boym, Ghassan Hage, and Pierre Bourdieu to examine the various representations of home by the migrant woman in the novel.

The third chapter will then focus on the notion of identity as another recurrent and dominant theme in the diaspora. The discussion basically attempts to answer the following questions: How is the identity of the migrant woman represented in the novel? How do the various places, cultures, and circumstances encountered by the migrant woman inevitably shape her identity transformation in the novel? How does the migrant woman evoke her hybrid identity? To answer these questions, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will explore her character as a migrant woman whose identity transformation is influenced as she moves through different nations and cultures. The second section looks into the literary trope of the migrant heroine's black robe as a representation of her hybrid identity. And finally, the third section analyzes the relationships that the female protagonist develops with the male protagonist as well as with the major foreign women in the novel as symbolic of her hybrid personality. This analysis is framed by the theories of literary scholars such as Consuela Wagner, Iain Chambers, Melody Yunzi Li, and Camilla Skalle to explore the novel's different stances on the concept of identity transformation and hybridity.

This study will then conclude with a brief afterword that gathers all the threads analyzed in the previous chapters. I conclude that this literary depiction of the migrant woman in *Exit West* illustrates how the developing concepts of home and identity are central to her own developing identity. Of course, this study is not making the claim that the novel completely captures the very essence of the experience of all migrant women. Such an encompassing objective view is not possible. A migrant woman who decides to leave her homeland may experience migration in a different way as compared to one who does not have the choice and is forced to leave her country as an exile. However, in *Exit West*, we might argue that the narrative of the migrant heroine is a contemporary narrative that represents the experiences of a wide range of women who are forced to leave their homes and homelands due to economic, political, or social factors. What this study mainly argues is that the migrant heroine in *Exit West* experiences home and constructs her identity in a multitude of ways. And notably, she embraces such multiplicity and

complexity in order to gain a greater sense of herself, or perhaps her “self” across various cultures and locations.

1.1 INTRODUCING *EXIT WEST*

Exit West (2017) is a novel written by Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid. As a prominent author in contemporary migrant literature and as a migrant himself who has lived in Pakistan, England, and the United States, one of the main preoccupations of Hamid in his works is the contemporary global issue of migration. *Exit West* has enjoyed critical and commercial attention, with Hamid receiving several literary awards such as the first ever 2018 Aspen Words Literary Prize (Travers) and the 2018 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction (Zahniser et al.). *Exit West*, therefore, has emerged as an important work of fiction that deals with the contemporary realities of migration. And yet, despite the fact that the novel has been a recipient of numerous literary awards, markedly little research has been done on the significance of this novel in the study of migration. Thus, by choosing this novel to be the subject of this study, this work also addresses a gap in the field of literary research.

In *Exit West*, Hamid tells the story of two migrant lovers, Nadia and Saeed, who leave their unnamed country of birth in the midst of a civil war between the government and the militants. By incorporating elements of magical realism into the narrative, the characters are instantly transported from one place to another through a system of magical black doors. With the aid of these doors, the novel follows Nadia and Saeed’s journey from their city of birth to Mykonos, London and eventually, to Marin as they relentlessly attempt to build a new life in their new place of destinations. As the protagonists migrate through these doors, the novel reflects on the diasporic concepts of home and identity through the representations of its main characters. As some reviewers have noted, Hamid tries to depict “a world where there are no strict borders and where people move across places with relative ease” (Mir 15). More significantly, added to this ease of movement in *Exit West* is the characters’ constant process of reconstituting their meaning of home and a renegotiation of their identity.

Several reviews have been written by literary critics that touch upon this notion of *Exit West* as a migrant novel. In his analysis, Manzoor Ahmad Mir describes *Exit West* as “a modern take on the inevitable migration of people across countries, even across continents, when

societies descend into chaos and conflict” (15). Through its depictions of a theme that has been recently making the headlines, the representations of migration in the novel mirror the events of the contemporary world “where everyone seems to be on the move” (Mir 15). Muhammed Salahudheen likewise refers to the novel as a story “in which the current global migrant crisis along with expatriation- immigration dichotomy is best dealt with an optimistic approach” (380). In its application to the existing migrant crisis, Salahudheen points out that the novel positively provides an insight into the similarities of humankind despite our differences in cultures and origins. With this, Salahudheen notes that the readers of the novel are encouraged to rethink about their negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the migrant and in effect are also taught on how to empathize more with their situation (382). Echoing the review by Mir, Salahudheen also believes that the novel is a timely reflection of the existing global migrant crisis as reported by the media (Salahudheen 380).

Amal Zaman, however, notes that the novel cannot be solely read as a novel about the migrant crisis but more specifically can also be examined as a novel about migration and gender. Zaman argues persuasively that *Exit West* probes the concept of “masculinity and femininity in moments of crisis, showing how religion, a stifling society, migration, and loss manifest through one’s learned gender, and asking how we may reimagine such realities” (Zaman). Through the novel’s depiction of how Nadia and Saeed contrastingly handle their situations both in their country of birth and foreign destinations, Zaman avers that the novel successfully crafts “a nuanced depiction of how gender can be both suffocating and a source of meaning and comfort” (Zaman).

Drawing from these approaches to reading *Exit West* as not only a migrant novel but a gendered migrant novel, this study aims to contribute to the existing works in migrant literature and most specifically on the representations of the migrant woman in fiction as previously discussed. To illustrate the significance of *Exit West* in further understanding the experience of migration on the migrant woman, it is now necessary to turn to representations of women and migration in literature.

2. Chapter One

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 WOMEN AND MIGRATION

In recent years, narratives of migration are slowly turning away from the traditional presumption that it is a distinctively male experience and more emphasis is now given on the importance of understanding this theme from the point of view of women. Writing at the end of the 20th century, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo notes that the rise of both feminism and migration have caused inefaceable changes in the general affairs of the world. However, she avers that these themes are seldom explored simultaneously together “in popular discussion, social movements, or academic research” (107). Within the field of migration studies, women's individual experiences in the diaspora are not viewed significantly as those of the dominant studies about migrant men which are still purported to be representative of all the migrants (Sotelo 119). In other words, the role and participation of the migrant woman are generally disregarded in the early studies of migration as compared to men.

Three years after Hondagneu-Sotelo's research, Jennifer Cavounidis posits that it is only recently that women have been given primary focus in the migration picture despite the significant role that they have played in migration processes throughout history. She argues that this may be due to the traditional presumption that first, most migrants are male and, second, that most of the women who migrate are doing so as mere companions of men who were on the move (Cavounidis 221). Historically, migrant women are viewed to be merely dependent on men and thus, are not capable of crossing borders and cultures.

Recent global estimates in the United Nations International Migration Report as conducted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2017 reveals that women encompass “slightly less than half of all international migrants” and that the proportion of migrant women have considerably increased in Europe, Northern America, Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean (15). Anjali Fleury finds that with the objective of further enhancing their economic situation through jobs or education, women are now increasingly migrating on their own, a common trend which she refers to as the “feminization of

migration” (4). However, despite this trend towards an increasing proportion of women amongst international migrants, there still exists an inadequacy of attention and emphasis given to studies and issues that specifically attend to the migrant woman (Fleury 2). This insufficiency seems to be prevalent not only in the field of social sciences but more so in humanities, and most notably, within the field of literature.

2.2 THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN MIGRATION STUDIES

Studies that take a literary route are necessary for a deeper understanding of the complexities of migration and gender. With the migration of women regarded as a “highly sexualized and gendered” (52) phenomenon as posited by Ladele and Omotayo, the need to highlight and centralize the particular experiences of women in the migration context becomes a matter of urgency. Traditionally, migration is usually studied from the lens of economics, politics, and sociology which however often insufficiently provide a complete picture of gender-specific migration experiences (52). Thus, as Krummel puts it, the employment of literary writings which creatively explore the themes of migration can contribute more to the theoretical contributions on the experiences of migration (723). This argument is seconded by Skalle:

The humanistic disciplines have a different, but crucial role in the interpretation and analysis of the societal phenomena of migration: by examining the aesthetic and cultural expressions which present and discuss the migrant’s position, the Humanities have the ability to shift attention away from the apparently anonymous masses and the raw number of migrants onto the individual expressions of the migrant experience (74).

In other words, unlike in other fields which tend to emphasize on the aggregate experiences of migration, the Humanities places more emphasis on the migrant’s individual or personal experience of migration. Through the Humanities, the migrant’s peculiar and specific experiences are studied in a more detailed and deeper way as opposed in other fields that provide a mere generalization of the recent trends and patterns in global migration such as through the employment of numbers or statistics.

In line with these arguments calling for more approaches that studies migration from the perspective of humanities, Russell King et al. specifically argues that the fictional representation of migrants in literature aids in filling the gaps from the field of social sciences. The employment

of literature as a representation of the migration experience does not only provide new evidence on existing relevant topics about the theme, but it likewise poses new issues and questions which are also similarly relevant in understanding the migrant's position. Compared to the various artifacts employed in other academic fields, the world of creative literature has the power to illustrate the complexity and ambiguity of the migrant experience. Hence, literature provides a clearer and more credible representation of the migrant's feelings and individual circumstances (14-15). From these studies, we can surmise that literature unquestionably contributes to a more positive and nuanced understanding of the migrant's position in migration studies. Moreover, we might argue that there are some aspects of this issue that can only be addressed or analyzed through the works of literary fiction thus further highlighting the role of literature in migration.

2.3 REPRESENTATIONS OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN LITERATURE

In an effort to rectify this invisibility of the migrant woman in migration studies, particularly from a humanistic perspective as posited by Skalle, literary narratives about the migrant woman have been emerging. Research thus far on literary representations of the female migrant experience centers around two main themes: the multiple meanings accorded by the migrant woman to the notion of home and the migrant woman's identity. This theme on identity specifically focuses on the transformation of her identity and her hybrid personality. More interesting is the fact that although these literary narratives encompass migrant women from different parts of the world still, they share similar themes on the representations of the migrant woman.

2.3.1 Multiple Meanings of Home

One of the dominant themes in migration studies from a literary perspective is the migrant's desire to find a sense of home. Rosemary Marangoly George, in her highly influential work, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (1996), provocatively claims that "all fiction is homesickness" (1). Interpreting George's contention, Rosemarie Buikema writes that "twentieth-century fiction, the great literary works of the human quest, embodies the desire to come home, to be at home, to be recognized and to be protected by

boundaries and a sense of sameness” (2). Traditionally, this desire for a sense of home is always understood in relation to the migrant’s homeland or place of origin. Within the literary diaspora, “any discussion of the ideal home generally focuses on the nostalgic, or the romantic, marked with pangs of separation and regret” and this is due to the fact that “for the migrants, loss of home is a permanently traumatic condition, a lifelong mourning deeply saturated with nostalgic memory, where the past continues to live in the present” (Singh 57-58). Simply put, the migrant’s separation from his place of origin is traditionally depicted in a way whereby the migrant fails to adapt to his present society due to an incessant longing for the past and for his homeland.

This nostalgic desire for the migrant’s place of origin holds true in the case of the migrant woman. In her analysis of the distinct notion of home in Arab Anglophone women narratives, Dalal Sarnou finds that the women writers’ conceptualization of home generally moves along two axes and that includes first, “the axe of the home they have willingly or unwillingly been displaced from, and then seek to change and see differently” and second, the axe of the home to which they are supposed to originally belong to, and then imaginarily represent with nostalgia” (56). For the migrant woman, the concept of home is basically constituted in relation to her place of origin. This is in fact depicted in a number of literary works that highlight the migrant woman’s constant desire to be connected to her homeland and her sense of nostalgia or incessant longing for home. In Willa Cather’s highly acclaimed novel, *My Antonia* (1918), the European migrant women in the novel always find themselves in a situation wherein they “have to fight with nostalgic feelings for their native lands, with depression and feeling of estrangement” such as with the mere sight of a flower or its smell (Stefanovici 111). The same feeling of longing for home is depicted in literary narratives of the present century such as in Ha Jin’s more recent novel *A Free Life* (2007). Melody Yunzi Li contends that the migrant heroine together with the other immigrants in Ha Jin’s novel is in the constant process of finding their sense of home. The characters’ incessant longing for their Chinese home has made it difficult for them to adjust to the new American culture. In the case of the female protagonist, her yearning for home centers on landscape and family. In consonance with Singh who posits that the migrant’s loss of home results in a life where her past life continues to occupy her present, her past life in China continues to live with her in America so much so that being greatly proud of her place of origin; she vigorously defends it in conversation and would not allow any offense to China to be

pronounced in America (Li 210). These portrayals of the wistful migrant woman show that her nostalgic feelings of a desire to return home can easily be triggered by ordinary circumstances or in situations where her mythologized picture of her homeland is being put into question.

Closely linked to this theme of nostalgia and longing for the homeland is the migrant woman's act of returning home. Sharon Krummel examines the nuance and complexities of the migrant heroine's relationship with her place of origin in Dionne Brand's poems, one that is centered upon a complicated sense of nostalgia. Krummel finds that through the poems' language, the feminine speaker in Brand's poems evokes a profound meaning of love and reconnection with specific places in Trinidad which she experiences upon her return. In *No Language is Neutral* (1990), the migrant heroine's return to her home in a Caribbean island is communicated with apparent nostalgia as she surmises that little has changed on the island. However, along with this nostalgic feeling is the speaker's underlying memory of violence and slavery that she feels has already been embedded in the place (Krummel 734). But this desire "to return home" manifests in different ways. In contrast to Brand's works, the feeling of returning home in Igiaba Scego's texts does not necessarily pertain to the physical act of returning home. Camilla Erichsen Skalle claims that the female migrant protagonists in Scego's works perform the act of returning home "through memories, dreams, scents, and traditions" (Skalle 85). In *Dismatiria* (2005), the female narrator who is an Italian-Somali woman recounts that Somalia, her home and motherland, only survives in their daydreams of "the women's nightly chatter, in the smell of our food, in the exotic scents of our hair" (Scego 11). On the other hand, in *My Home Is Where I Am* (2005), the Italian-Somali heroine feels a strong connection to their home in Mogadishu though a mere sketch map of the place (Skalle 84). According to Skalle, the depiction of the notion of home by the female migrants in Scego's works exemplify Sarah Ahmed's proposition regarding the concept of home as "being something internalized or like a second skin. The feeling of home is created in a physical relationship with the place you live in: the smells, colours, streets and such" (Skalle 84). Thus, we might argue that from the literary narratives of the migrant woman, the act of returning home does not only pertain to the physical act of returning itself. In some ways, it can be psychological or symbolical such as by reliving their experiences in their homeland in their new places of destination.

From these works, we might say that the meaning of home is strictly linked to the nation or the homeland. However, recent research also shows that this traditional concept of home no

longer applies in all instances. Various novelistic representations of home for the migrant woman especially in recent years have already depicted its multifarious meanings. In other words, the meaning of home is no longer merely considered as a fixed or as a nationalistic concept.

One of these multifarious meanings is the notion of home that is also linked to the concept of belonging. From this perspective, the migrant woman's sense of home is achieved when she is able to secure a place in a community where she feels that she belongs. Examples of these are the literary analysis by Kavita Daiya on Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986) and Nadine Gordimer's short story, *The Ultimate Safari* (1992). According to her, these literary narratives problematize the dominant modern narratives that unequivocally relate the concept of home and belonging as synonymous to the migrant woman's country of origin and citizenship. Daiya observes that most diasporic stories tend to depict an account for the migrant's wish and desire "to return home" which according to Daiya pertains to the migrant's "original physical location of their huts/ houses, and the national territory in which those huts/houses were located" (391). However, Daiya asserts that this nationalistic concept of home proves to be problematic as it fails to critique the violence and challenge embedded with it especially in transnational migrations (391). In *The Circle of Reason*, one of the illegal migrant passengers on board a rickety boat is a pregnant Indian woman who stubbornly refuses to give birth to her child while on board the boat to Al-Ghazira "without signing the right forms" (qtd. in Daiya 394) even though it is already her due. According to her fellow travelers, she is probably referring to a birth certificate which the woman believes would accord her child some rights such as the right to be given a house or a car and to acquire a Ghaziri citizenship (394). Thus, to convince her, one of the passengers pretends to be a government official with a form for her to sign but which is just actually a torn page from a religious book (396). Daiya extrapolates that the woman's desire for a house or car for her child may be literally interpreted as the human being's natural desire for material comfort. However, Daiya contends that if taken deeply and figuratively, "they also mark a desire for "home" as a sense of belonging, as a future-time of a secure life, as a place where she and her unborn child can stay and not be sent back to India" (395). Thus, for her, "a "home" refers not just to a house and the everyday life that it symbolizes but also to a community (national or otherwise) in which one has a place" (395). In consonance with this desire to find a sense of belonging is the meaning of home that also associates it with the feelings of security and domesticity. In Gordimer's *The Ultimate Safari*, Daiya contends that in comparison with *The*

Circle of Reason, the story is likewise a criticism and denunciation of the dominant discourse that equates nation as “home”. In an interview scene in the novel between a white female journalist and a Mozambican refugee-grandmother in a refugee camp in South Africa, the journalist asks the grandmother as to whether she still hopes to go back to her own country of Mozambique. However, the grandmother plainly replies, “I will not go back” (qtd. in Daiya 399). The journalist insists further: “But when the war is over – you won’t be allowed to stay here? Don’t you want to go home?” (qtd. in 399). In response, the grandmother looked away from her and answers, “There is nothing. No home” (qtd. in 399). In her analysis, Daiya posits that the journalist represents the postcolonial patriotic ideology of a return to one’s homeland. On the other hand, the grandmother’s replies are a rejection of nationalism and ideologies of citizenship which according to Daiya is due to her historical awareness of the “violence and reterritorialization” (399) brought about by colonization in her community. Thus, through the depiction of one of the migrant heroines in Gordimer’s story, Daiya concludes that “the meaning and reality of “home” are displaced and missing in a migrant everyday life irrevocably transformed by a history of racist colonial exploitation, of poverty, and of violent neo-colonial nationalisms” (399-400).

In further defying the nationalistic concept of home, some literary works also underline the concept of home which is not defined in relation to a certain geographical location but is rather a concept that can be created by the migrant woman herself. This is the case in Colm Tóibín’s *Brooklyn* (2009), whereby Marisol Ladron contends that the migrant woman’s concept of home is illustrated as a positive conscious act of creation. Citing a quote from Dermot Bolger’s novel *The Journey Home* (1990), Ladron argues that Tóibín seeks to give a new meaning to the notion of home as “not the place where you were born but the place you created for yourself, where you did not need to explain, where you finally became what you were” (qtd. in Ladron 182). She contends that the novel is Tóibín’s attempt of demystifying the traditional stereotypes of the Irish migrant young woman such as by deconstructing her notion of home and belonging. Though young and inexperienced, the female protagonist in the novel is strongly determined to achieve independence and establish a career of her own even in a place different from her country of origin. These two aspirations, according to Ladron, are unusual for women of her time as the novel is set in the early 1950s (173). Ladron contends that the ending of the novel, in which the protagonist chooses to return to America, is her journey to a new homeland,

for it is the only place where she will have the opportunity to reinvent herself, and in doing so, she defies family duties and communal responsibilities that are pressured upon her in Ireland (182). With this idea that the migrant woman can create a sense of home for herself, literary narratives also highlight the idea that the migrant woman can actually find a sense of home in whatever kind of culture or place that she finds herself in. In his highly influential work, *Liquid Modernity* (2000), Zygmunt Bauman states that “rather than homelessness, the trick is to be at home in many homes” and “to build a home of one's own on the crossroads between cultures” (207). This assertion by Bauman is portrayed in a wide range of literary narratives that show how the migrant woman is able to find a home for herself despite the discrimination, violence, and dislocation that she initially experiences in a new place. The breadth of literary writings on this theme is evident as it encompasses migrant women from different backgrounds. This includes Juanita Heredia’s analysis of the novel, *Lima Nights* (2008), by the Peruvian-American writer Marie Aranas and on how the novel reclaims the image of the indigenous Amazonian migrant woman as she settles in the diverse and bustling city of Lima. By portraying a migrant woman who has suffered abuse and misfortune at a young age and has to face racial and gender discrimination even in the country of her own as an adult, Heredia argues that Aranas is able to demonstrate how the migrant woman who comes from an indigenous background successfully negotiates her racial and gender identity in order to establish a home for herself in a metropolitan city (464). The migrant woman’s ability to find a home even in a new country is reiterated by Feruza Shermatova in her critical analysis of Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup* (2001). The female protagonist in this novel comes from another background as she is a white woman from South Africa who decides to join her husband in his return to his homeland in an unidentified Arab country. Although Gordimer depicts the initial culture shock and discomfort experienced by the migrant woman upon arrival in a foreign country, Shermatova argues that the development of Gordimer’s protagonist highlights the flexibility of the migrant woman and her tolerance for other people and culture. Gordimer depicts the migrant woman as unbiased, optimistic, and is conformant to the rules and duties that are expected of her (2-4). Her choice of ending the novel with the female migrant protagonist choosing to stay in an unknown desert country which has nothing in common with her native country, instead of following her husband in America, could be interpreted as her resolution of finding satisfaction in the new identity and home that she finds for herself (5). These findings by Shermatova and the previous studies aforementioned

unequivocally challenge and change the traditional concept of home in strict connection to the nation particularly to the migrant's country of origin and the concept of belonging in connection to citizenship.

Discussing migration in relation to the meaning of home, Salman Rushdie in his widely acclaimed work, *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), writes that to migrate is “to lose language and home, to be defined by others, to become invisible, or, even worse, a target; it is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul” (210). However, he further elaborates that, “the migrant is not simply transformed by [this] act; he [or she] transforms his [her] new world” (210). Therefore, this duality of transformation brought about by migration does not only result to a change in the migrant’s identity but as well as a change in the migrant’s perception of “home”. Portraying stories of migrant women who have succeeded in their quest for home and a sense of belonging reflects Rushdie's words that “a migrant is not only transformed in a new world but also transforms his or her new world” (210). With this, we can say that the migrant woman creates a transformation in her new world by finding in it a new sense of home. Thus, in consonance with the transformation identified by Rushdie, we can see that the concept of home among contemporary literary representations of women migrants is no longer similar to the mythological hero Ulysses who strictly equates home to the act of returning to his wife and homeland. On one hand, literary works portray home in relation to the migrant woman’s homeland. But on the other hand, recent studies have also shown that this traditional concept no longer applies. A multifarious meaning of home in literature from the migrant woman’s perspective evince the proposition that it can no longer be solely associated to a particular place but is a concept that the migrant woman can create or find for herself. From these, we can conclude that the concept of home can no longer be considered as a unified, definite, or fixed notion but one that can have various representations in the field of literature.

2.3.2 The Transformation of the Migrant Woman’s Identity

A look into different literary narratives of migration can illuminate the ambiguity of the effects of migration on the transformation of the migrant woman’s identity. Relying on the narratives that develop through the reading of the effects of migration on the migrant woman in several

novels, it is clear that such effects go beyond the simple binary as to whether migration can be strictly considered as either constructive or destructive to the migrant woman's identity.

As migrants embark on a physical change in their environment, they undergo a great change in their identities as well. Janelle Martin contends that as migrants leave their native country and try to assimilate themselves into their new country, they are left with no choice but to exchange their identity for another. She argues that this is due to the fact that as migrants move into new places or locations, their identities "may have to undergo new processes of transmutations as people may have to individually or collectively negotiate social, economic and psychological transformations" (35). In other words, their identities are inevitably renegotiated as they try to integrate themselves into the political, social, and cultural norms in their new place of destination.

This renegotiation of identity that characterizes the migrant woman's experience is taken further by scholars like Maria Caterina La Barbera who make the point that little attention has been devoted to understanding the concept of identity through the lens of diasporic discourse, that is by examining the influence of migration in identity construction and transformation (1). Just like Martin, she avers that as people move across time and space, they acquire different roles and behaviors which result for them to likewise have a changing perception and definition of identity. This shift is most explicitly present in the case of migration as migrants perceive their identity as multiple and fluid (3).

The idea that female migrants consider their identity as multiple or fluid is a key theme in literary representations of the female migrant experience. The key point to consider is that such representations of the experience of the migrant woman underline how this shift in identity does not only come in the form of a physical alteration of her body and geographical crossing of borders but, more so, in her symbolical and psychological being.

In such literary representations of this shift in identity, there is a positive and a negative narrative. Beginning with the negative, Omolola Ladele and Adesunmbo Omotayo argue that such identity alteration can be destructive for migrant women as they lose their genuine identity and become "faceless, voiceless and as mere commodities to be traded in" (56) in the process. In their analysis of the female migrant protagonists in two novels by Chika Unigwe, the characters' lack of authentic face and voice is explicitly illustrated by the forced and sometimes illegal act of

changing their original names as soon as they land in the new country¹. Thus, by using false names, they are also strained to live under false identities and are deprived of their legal rights (Ladele and Omotayo 55). As their identities become viciously altered, they are objectified and become treated as mere commodities to be traded in. This, according to Ladele and Omotayo is rivetingly illustrated in *The Black Sisters* (2007), with the bodies of the four young female African migrants being shamelessly displayed behind windows in Antwerp's red light district by their Belgian pimps for the lustful pleasure and delight of their male clients. This objectification becomes more tragic when one of them is brutally murdered as she tries to escape from sexual slavery. Having been objectified and dispossessed of her identity, her atrocious murder is not even made the subject of an investigation by the authorities and thus, depriving her of justice even under the law (Ladele and Omotayo 54-55).

This identity alteration is not only illustrated in such fictions in a brutal or murderous manner. It also emerges in simpler or more subtle ways. One such example is the loss of status and power that the migrant woman originally enjoyed in her native country. In Unigwe's novel, *The Phoenix* (2007), Ladele and Omotayo point out that the educational qualifications attained by the female protagonist in Nigeria become disregarded when she moves to Belgium. Despite finishing a degree in the university, much to her dismay, her education only attracts the job of that of a cleaner (4). This reality is also reflected in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990), whereby the female protagonist who is a Black Caribbean woman (assumed to be from Antigua) is constrained to work as a domestic labor specifically that of an au pair in America even though she is also studying Nursing (Martin 37). However, these identity alterations though may only appear to negatively affect the migrant woman's educational and economic status can still be considered as an act of objectification as posited by Ladele and Omotayo. Janelle Martin contends that in *Lucy*, the body of the female protagonist also becomes a mere object or tool as she is persistently subjugated to domestic labor, restricted to the role of an obedient servant or slave, and demeaned as a mere girl (44).

From this, we might argue that the migrant woman's heroic experience of crossing geographical spaces is not merely depicted as border crossing but becomes an identity crossing (Inan 97). For Dilek Inan, such an identity transformation posed by Ladele and Omotayo can also be in a form where the migrant woman considers herself transforming from a "somebody"

¹*The Black Sisters* (2007) and *The Phoenix* (2007)

to a “nobody” as she finds herself not having any single person to connect to, whether a friend or a family. This is very much the case for the Irish female protagonist in Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn*. Just like the faceless and voiceless woman heroines in Unigwe's novels, the female protagonist in Tóibín's *Brooklyn* compares herself to a ghost where she does not mean anything to anyone in America, her place of exile (Inan 99). This novel, therefore, also depicts the migrant woman's lack of face and voice as she migrates to a foreign country. This transformation from a “somebody” to a “nobody” is resonated by Ugwanyi Dele Maxwell in her analysis of literary texts about Nigerians who decide to stay overseas. She describes their diasporic plight as one with “alienation of vision and the crisis in self- image” (Maxwell 252). One of the literary texts cited by Maxwell is Chimamanda Adichie's novel, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2008). Similar to the female protagonist in Tóibín's *Brooklyn*, Maxwell points out that the migrant heroine in Adichie's novel also suffers from extreme loneliness and alienation upon moving to the United States. At the beginning of the novel, the heroine believes that migrating to America will transform her into a greater “somebody”, with a big car and a big house in just a month. However, her expectations prove to be a failure as she actually turns into a “nobody” in America. Instead of being the successful migrant woman that she expects to be, she finds herself accepting menial work even up to the point of accepting a job with a salary which is much less than her co-workers and renting a tiny and untidy room (Maxwell 252). Thus, both Tóibín and Adichie's protagonists exemplify the fact that for the migrant woman, the grass is not always greener on the other side.

As the migrant woman's identity transforms from “somebody” to “nobody”, she furthermore hopelessly agonizes as she also turns from a former member of a society to someone who is just “the Other”. This predicament of otherness is a universal reality among migrant women as they do not only experience it from people whose nationality is different from them but also from people with whom they share similar race or background. This is illustrated in *Brooklyn* whereby the female protagonist finds it difficult to identify even with her fellow Irish lodgers and oftentimes finds herself doubtful of the actions and intentions of her countrymen (Ladron 181). On the other hand, the migrant heroine in *The Phoenix* fully realizes her otherness when she notices that even her fellow Blacks ignore her or acts with hostility towards her every time she attempts to fraternize with them (Ladele and Omotayo 55). This act of belligerence is likewise experienced by the female protagonist in *Lucy*, as when the Black maid in the house

where she works as an au pair unpleasantly welcomes her with sinister words during her first day of arrival (Martin 37).

There is another narrative that emerges in literary representations of the migrant woman's experience and that is the concept of "inter-group othering". Robyn Wilkinson explores the issue of "inter-group othering" among the Black migrants in Africa in Meg Vandermerwe's novel, *Zebra Crossing* (2013) through the eyes of its female protagonist. Wilkinson asserts that even within an immigrant community, the constant discursive practice of "othering" remains wherein one group regards its identity as separate and distinct while constructing the other group's identity as different and inferior (Wilkinson 36). This identity construction of the female migrant into someone who is "the other" is reflected in the story of the migrant heroine, a Zimbabwean albino who illegally crosses the border to South Africa during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. In the novel, the heroine realizes upon their arrival that a great divide exists even among fellow Africans in terms of social relations and even with the division of certain types of work. She learns that Zimbabwean immigrants in South Africa can only oftentimes work as waiters and chefs while other African nationalities can also only acquire certain jobs. The heroine becomes more aware of her otherness during her applications for a permanent residence in South Africa's Home Office. She observes that South Africans put up a figurative huge wall that separates them from the people whom they consider as inferior and unworthy immigrants. This state of otherness is even exploited to the point that the immigrants are asked to give bribes with the belief that their permits will be processed but only to find out in the end that they have actually been deceived by the government officials themselves (Wilkinson 38). In the final act of the novel, the destructive effect of "othering" is depicted in its most bleak and tragic sense when the female heroine is killed by a group of Tanzanians with the objective of using her body parts for *muti* (Wilkinson 43)². Drawing on this analysis by Wilkinson brings us to the conclusion that the migrant woman's identity transformation into "the other" can also result in her objectification. Similar to the characters in Unigwe and Kincaid's novels, Vandewerme's heroine likewise becomes a mere tool or object when her body is murdered for the purpose of being utilized as medicine or magical charm.

Juanita Heredia agrees with Wilkinson in her analysis of the migrant heroine in Marie Arana's novel *Lima Nights* (2008). Just like Wilkinson's analysis on "inter-group othering," she

²Traditional African medicine or magical charms

critiques the ongoing socio-economic situation in the Peruvian society whereby racial discrimination and physical violence are rampant among Peruvian national citizens in the city of Lima. In *Lima Nights*, the heroine is depicted as an indigenous Amazonian migrant from the Andean province who is constantly subjected to discrimination and violence by her fellow Peruvians who come from the *criollo* or creole class (Heredia 460). Being an indigenous migrant woman, she also becomes a victim of objectification at a very young age when she is sexually exploited in their own home by one of the lovers of her mother (Heredia 462). Later on, at a young age of fifteen, she becomes the secret mistress of a Peruvian creole. Coming from different racial and social backgrounds, she also suffers from ostracism and derogatory remarks even from her lover and his group of friends. Heredia posits that through this exemplification of the heroine, the novel draws attention to the harsh reality in the city of Lima where fellow Peruvians who come from an indigenous background are treated like foreigners (Heredia 463).

Despite the number of negative experiences for migrant women in these narratives, these novels do likewise underline the positive impact of such migration experiences. In *Brooklyn*, migration is also depicted as an opportunity that opens doors for the migrant woman to be exposed to a multicultural life and to improve her professional life. Upon migrating in America, the novel's heroine enrolls in a night class on bookkeeping and accountancy which is composed of students from different places and cultures. Eventually, this single step becomes her salvation as she passes the course and becomes a qualified bookkeeper (Inan 99-100). Sharon Krummel likewise identifies this positive transformation in Tsitsi Dangaremba's novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), whereby the African female protagonist who is originally from Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) benefits from her stay in England by gaining political understanding and exposure to alternative gender roles and identities (728). Hence, these narratives also confirm the positive potential of migration, giving the woman a chance to broaden her cultural views and improve her career prospects.

This narrative development of living in a new place not only contributes to the migrant woman's cultural awareness and economic independence but also leads the road to her self-discovery and maturity. As certain novels explore, once the migrant woman moves from one place to another, she develops from an inexperienced to an experienced woman who is more mature, confident, and who has the ability to handle different kinds of relationships. This positive transformation in her identity becomes even more acknowledged and appreciated once

the migrant woman returns to her country of origin. In Tóibín's *Brooklyn*, Inan points out that this is clearly pictured in the novel when the female protagonist returns to her Irish hometown. Upon her return, she is baffled by the several proposals that are offered to her even by the people who have previously rejected her. These include a marriage proposal by a man who has previously ignored her at a dance before she goes to America and a job offer from a shop owner who has previously rejected her job application. According to her friend, it is all due to the fact that she has somehow been already "Americanised", not only with the way she dresses up herself but as well as with her mature and serious bearing (Inan 101).

In consonance with this idea that migration can also be the road to self-discovery for the migrant woman, the opportunity to fully embrace one's sexuality is another positive aspect of identity formation that is identified as the migrant woman occupies a new space. Martin contends that in Kincaid's novel, *Lucy*, the female protagonist's act of embracing her sexuality and sexual desires is an essential component of her identity formation. In comparison to other aspects of her identity such as her race, class, and gender, it is only her sexuality to which she can gain full control even in a foreign environment (Martin 41). Thus, as she blatantly refuses to commit herself to one man in a physical or emotional way, Martin contends that the female protagonist gradually acquires the stereotypical image of a Black promiscuous woman in America. However, despite this stereotype label that she decides to live by, her promiscuity also symbolically represents her acquisition of power and freedom as she finally frees herself from the controlling patriarchal teachings imposed to her by her mother and by the institutions in the country where she comes from (Martin 42-43). In here, Martin's analysis gives us a picture on how the migrant woman's identity transformation results in an adherence to the stereotype or traditional in one place, while, at the same time, challenges the conventional or patriarchal in another place. In the same vein, Heredia comments that in *Lima Nights*, the migrant heroine, who works as a tango instructor in a night dance club, likewise makes use of her body to attract men and gain agency in society. Thus, she is utilizing her sexuality as a "powerful instrument for seduction and economic survival" (463). This power gained by the heroine is explicitly shown through her creole customer turned lover who, despite their discrepancy in age, class, and racial backgrounds, develops an obsession with her (Heredia 463).

With regards to the capability of the migrant woman to contest stereotypes and acquisition of agency once she migrates to a new place, Ali Rezaie contends that the main

character in Monica Ali's *Bricklane* (2003) "shatters many stereotypes about the oppressed Muslim women" (62). Rezaie argues that the novel testifies to the fact wherein a migrant woman's dislocation from her homeland and traditional culture positively transforms her identity as she acquires freedom and empowerment. The novel tells the story of a Muslim Bangladeshi woman who at the age of eighteen was forced to submit to an arranged marriage with an older Bangladeshi man and was thereafter brought to England. Unhappy with her marriage, she drifts into an illicit relationship with another man. And once her husband decides to return to Bangladesh, she decides to stay in London. At the later part of the story, the heroine also ends her unsatisfactory love affair realizing that her lover, just like her husband, "was attracted to her only because she embodied the Bengali cultural identity for which he yearned in exile" (68). Thus, the novel ends up with the protagonist becoming a partner in a clothing business together with her best friend. Rezaie points out that these acts of the heroine illustrate that it is only during her stay in England that she finally "gains her voice and comes to celebrate her freedom and agency" (66). Likewise, she avers that the heroine contests the stereotype that non-Western immigrants are always invested in preserving their traditional and ethical cultures. Rezaie puts forward that through the migrant heroine in Ali's novel, it is shown that there are also non-Western immigrant women who "may see the survival of their traditional culture as the perpetuation of their oppression and subordination" (68). And thus, it is only through the act of moving outside of her traditional culture that she transforms her identity and frees herself from its restrictions and injustices.

Compared to the studies cited earlier in this paper that focus on the destructive effects of migration to the identity of the migrant woman, the previous analyses of literary narratives by Martin, Rezaie, and Heredia unanimously testify to cases where the transformation of the migrant woman's identity can also become a tool to deconstruct stereotypes and patriarchal hegemonic discourse. Thus, in conclusion, we might argue that such literary narratives illustrate that the effect of migration on the migrant woman can no longer be strictly and uniformly referred to as either constructive or destructive to her identity formation. Rather, it is a concept that is constantly subjected to change as a result of various forces which include her individual experiences and circumstances.

2.3.3 The Migrant Woman's Hybrid Identity

Living in diverse and multicultural societies, the migrant woman renegotiates her identity as she straddles among many cultures in a world of hybridity or liminality. Possessing a liminal identity, the migrant woman is “neither one nor the other but a negotiation of both” (Farahmandfar 35). Thus, as she navigates different places and cultures for her survival; the migrant woman, therefore, acquires a hybrid identity that is simultaneously influenced both by her place of origin and her new places of destination.

A large number of texts in contemporary literature seem to present the migrant woman as characters of hybrid identity. Camilla Erichsen Skalle describes the hybrid migrant woman as someone who “contest homogenizing conceptions of identity and belonging” (77). This destabilization occurs in a way that the migrant woman is not obliged to choose between two identities, particularly between the cultural identity of the country where she comes from and that where she finds herself. According to Skalle, both identities “can co-exist in the same person, dialoguing and promoting cultural understanding” (85) which she particularly finds in her analysis of the hybrid migrant woman in Italian migrant literature through the works of Igiaba Scego. In *My Home is Where I Am* (2010), Scego's migrant heroine, whose family is from Somali but is now living in Italy, narrates that she finds it difficult to answer unequivocally as to whether she is an Italian or Somali. Skalle contends that eliciting a simple answer from such a complicated question makes the protagonist “suffer like a trapped animal or like someone lost at a crossroads not knowing which direction to take” (78). At a later stage in the novel, the heroine finishes her drawing of a map of Mogadishu, the Somali city where she grew up as a child. At the same time, she attaches sticky notes of her memories in Rome to the map. Skalle concludes that the map is a representation of the heroine as a migrant woman whose identity is not fixed or uniform but is rather an identity that is composed of different memories of several places and events (79). This dilemma of the migrant woman is further illustrated in Scego's short story entitled, *Sausages* (2005). In one of the scenes in the story, the female protagonist, a young Italian-Somali woman is interviewed for her application for Italian citizenship. During the interview, she is asked as to whether she feels more Italian or Somali to which she untruthfully answers, “Italian”. As she reflects on the question, she finds herself not having an identity or a single identity but rather as a woman who has multiple identities. In order to explain this to

herself, she writes fifteen things which make her feel Somali and does the same for things which make her feel Italian (79-80). According to Skalle, this portrayal of the migrant woman in Scego's works destabilize the concept of identity as simply "either or" and instead highlight the fact that two or even several identities can exist in one person without having the need to prefer one over the other (81) thereby allowing the characters to achieve a deeper understanding and a coherent self-knowledge (85).

Parallel to the hybrid migrant women with multiple personalities posited by Skalle is the "kaleidoscopic" characters identified by Karine Ancellin in migrant Muslim women fiction (11). In her analysis of fifteen contemporary English novels written by women authors of Muslim ancestry, she finds that the novels' migrant heroines are "kaleidoscopic" in a sense that they are in the constant process of reinventing their flexible, ever-changing, and hybrid identities. These women maintain their loyalties both to their place of origin and to their place of destination where they have attained their education and professional fulfillment (Ancellin 8). This is depicted in Azadeh Moaveni's novel, *Lipstick Jihad* (2005), where the migrant protagonist is always in search of balance between two places and two cultures. Ancellin argues that the heroine is able to maintain her American-Iranian identity without choosing one over the other. She also shows her cultural hybridity with the way she relates accordingly with people such as that the same character would speak to her family and friends in Tehran and California by just "using different grids for the same message" (7). Ancellin likewise finds that this depiction of the migrant Muslim woman is mirrored in Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* (2007). The novel's protagonist is obsessed with her Arabic name "Salma", as she wishes to retain her Muslim ancestry. However, having been raped by a village youth, she flees from the family wrath and honor killing in her home country and moves to England. Once in England, her name is inevitably changed to the English name, "Sally" as she needs to hide her identity. Ancellin writes that this change of name is a catastrophic metamorphosis on the part of the heroine. However, she also finds that both the defiant Salma and the adaptable Sally do exist in the same character and such names depict the need for "a negotiation involving her affect and her social, her intimate and her communal, her victimized and her social self" (Ancellin 10). Dalal Sarnou claims that such representations of Arab migrant women in English narratives create "an important element of distinctiveness and individuality" (58). Such writings, whether termed as hybrid or kaleidoscopic, "defy any categorization and speak articulately to the diversity of Arab

women wherever they are- to their ideas, desires, emotions, and strategies for survival” (Sarnou 58).

It is worthy to note that Ancellin’s analysis discusses the hybridity of the migrant Muslim woman while Skalle writes about the hybrid Italian migrant woman. However, both studies, though covering migrant women from very different cultures and regions agreeably claim about the celebratory feature of hybridity that is illustrated in literary texts. Both studies testify to the capability of the migrant woman to take advantage of different cultures and influences simultaneously without having the need to exclude one over the other or to choose a definite side.

In migrant Latin women literature, such positive hybrid migrant woman is similarly but more particularly labeled as the transnational migrant woman. Just like the hybrid protagonists recognized by Skalle and Ancellin who are not forced to reject their ties to their homeland or to be completely loyal to their new place, Alexandra Fitts avers that the transnational migrant woman maintains a “seamless connection” to both places. Her transnational characteristics allow her to flow effortlessly between her country of residence and country of origin thereby empowering her economically and enhancing her more balanced and fluid personality. Thus, the transnational migrant woman “eliminates the need to establish a self that is single, stable, and nationalized” for she has the capability to navigate various places and cultures (Fitts 61).

Fitts expounds that this “embodiment of transnationalism” of the Latina migrant is epitomized in the works of Judith Cofer, a highly acclaimed writer of the Puerto Rican-American diaspora. She argues that the female protagonist in Cofer’s short story, *Bad Influence* from the collection *An Island Like You* (1995) represents the transnational migrant Latina “in its most optimistic incarnation” (61). The story’s heroine is a young Puerto Rican-American who resides in America with her family but is forced to spend her summer in Puerto Rico with her grandparents after having been caught dating a boy outside the confines of the Puerto Rican dating culture. At first, she is reluctant of her Puerto Rican heritage and culture such as she does not believe in her grandfather’s gift as the town’s spiritual seer and finds herself to be overwhelmed by the Spanish language whenever her family members talk to her in Spanish. However, in the end, her stay in Puerto Rico proves to be useful as she learns to communicate in Spanish without difficulties and learns to embrace her Puerto Rican culture that used to be so foreign for her at the beginning (Fitts 60). According to Fitts, the transnational characteristic that

the heroine attained in the story through her trip to Puerto Rico “has somehow eased the fraught passage through adolescence” by benefitting her physically as she is cured of her asthma and by making her into a person who embraces her ethnicity and appreciates even a non-White standards of beauty (61). This conclusion by Fitts resonates the findings earlier postulated by Skalle that it is by embracing her hybridity or transnationality that the migrant woman is able to attain a deeper and coherent sense of self.

Writing about the migrant women identities in Judith Cofer’s autobiographical fiction, Carmen Faymonville concurs with Fitts on the transnationality of the migrant subjects in Cofer’s works. Her analysis postulates that Cofer’s heroines “are located between at least two worlds, two languages, and two definitions of subjectivity constantly, mediating among all of them” (Faymonville 135-136). However, in contrast to Faymonville, Fitts argues that the female migrant protagonists in Cofer’s works hurdle a number of difficulties in forging a transnational identity. Transnationalism, according to Fitts, is not always an easy, seamless, and straightforward process. Maintaining social, economic, and cultural connections between the female migrant’s country of residence and her country of origin is almost unattainable especially among second, third, and later generation immigrants. Fitts argues that the acceptance of ethnic and cultural otherness still remains as a myth and the truth is, immigrants still face a great demand to assimilate. More so, the pressures of adolescence such as the society’s ideals in terms of feminine body image, beauty, and sexuality make it more difficult for Cofer’s female migrant protagonists to attain a seamless and fluid transnational identity (Fitts 61).

In Cofer’s *Silent Dancing* (1990) and *Line of the Sun* (1989), Fitts describe the Puerto Rican-American heroines in the novel to be suffering the “worst of both worlds”. The contrasting and competing cultures in Puerto Rico and America inescapably put the young female protagonists “in a shaky negotiated space” (66-67). In both novels, the migrant heroines’ parents adopt conflicting approaches toward assimilation. Their fathers are proud of their acquired American identity, would refuse to discuss and return to Puerto Rico, and would often separate themselves and their families from the other Puerto Rican immigrants. On the other hand, the heroines’ mothers represent the exact opposite as they incessantly long for their home in Puerto Rico such as by creating a “faux microcosm” of the country and its culture in their own homes. The protagonists thus find themselves confused and “caught between these poles” contrastingly represented by their parents (Fitts 62-63).

Just as Cofer's migrant heroines who are described by Fitts as torn between two extremities, Nomita Loktongbam poses that the Chinese-American female migrants in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) are also "caught mentally and physically between two worlds" (56), between East and the West and between China and America. Loktongbam claims that the continuous battle between these two cultures is illustrated throughout the story, whereby the Chinese culture tries to dominate itself over American culture and vice-versa (57). Tan's commercially acclaimed novel particularly portrays the generational gap and cultural adversities between first and second generation immigrants particularly that of Chinese born mothers and their American born Chinese daughters (56). The mothers represent their native Chinese culture in contrast to their daughters who symbolize the contemporary American culture. This constant clash between two generations further intensifies their feeling of displacement. Aside from being linguistically displaced, the mothers are trapped in a state of nostalgia although they have already been living for a long time in America. On the other hand, the daughters are in constant struggle of harmonizing their Chinese roots as they strive hard to assimilate in the American culture. Loktongbam argues that younger generation immigrants often find themselves "spilt between two worlds", that of the "native world and the immigrant world" (58).

However, unlike the migrant heroines in Cofer's *Silent Dancing* and *Line of the Sun*, where their "process of becoming Puerto Rican-American woman is not seamless and fluid but ambivalent and decided" and thus, are never able to achieve a sense of "neat resolution" (Fitts 62) of their hybridity even at the end of the story, the main character in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* attains a sense of resolution not only with her Chinese mother but more so with her Chinese heritage at the conclusion of the novel. In Tan's narrative, it is the heroine's final act of embarking on a pilgrimage to China after the death of her mother to meet her elder sisters who have remained in China that leads to such reconciliation (Loktongbam 56). In her concluding analysis of the novel, Loktongbam cites the words of Jade Snow Wong, that "to achieve a balance in the between world condition then, one cannot cling solely to the new American ways and reject the old Chinese ways, for that is the way of the child. One must reconcile the two and make one's peace with the old" (59).

Taking on the middle ground, Charles Exley contends in his analysis of Tawada's *The Naked Eye* (2004, that the novel is more concerned about the migrant heroine's act of "experiencing gaps" as "part and parcel of the migrant subjectivity" (Exley 56). As a hybrid

migrant woman, the protagonist in the novel finds herself in a state of “in-betweenness”. This “in-betweenness” includes being torn between languages, nationalities, affiliations, cultures, institutions, and ideologies; particularly that of the East and West. Exley argues that as a migrant, the protagonist considers herself as part of both worlds however at the same time, she could not find a home in either. There is a space between these two worlds which he calls “a gap” which the migrant must experience. Thus, in contrast to Fitts’ conclusion that highlights the hybrid migrant heroines’ never-ending state of struggle and confusion in Cofer’s novels or to Loktongbam’s argument of making peace between two worlds in order for the hybrid migrant woman to achieve reconciliation as reflected in Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, Exley’s analysis of the depiction of the migrant woman in Tawada’s work does not focus much on the negativity of these gaps or on how the migrant successfully overcomes these gaps but rather on the act of experiencing such gaps itself as an inevitable part of migrant subjectivity.³

The migrant woman’s state of being caught in between, according to Exley, can also be partly derived “from a sense of confinement by borders” which is strictly applied through the law (56). In Tawada’s novel, having to abide by the law is a consistent problem for the protagonist. As she lives as an illegal migrant in Paris, her lack of proper visa precludes her not just in moving from one country to another but even within the city fearing that the police officers will ask for her legal papers (Exley 56). This state of confinement is experienced by the protagonist in its most dramatic sense when she fails to achieve her plan to leave France to Thailand through a stolen passport. After receiving a marriage proposal by a fellow Vietnamese, both plan to solve her visa situation by getting married in Thailand. In order to achieve their plan, the migrant heroine has to pose as a Japanese citizen using a stolen passport which she acquires through the black market. However, their plan did not materialize as the protagonist does not make it through the customs officials and was rather taken away for interrogations in French, Vietnamese, and Japanese. According to Exley, the novel proposes that “immigration law, the confinement of the nation-state, and its role in the upholding and potentially forceful maintenance of artificial borders incomprehensible to the migrant mentality or identity of the protagonist” (57). The novel then is somehow a criticism of national laws that only protect its citizens without taking into consideration the concerns of migrants especially those who are caught in between.

³*Silent Dancing* (1990) and *Line of the Sun* (1989)

All of the studies aforementioned are connected to each other through the shared theme of home and identity. These studies can also be considered as representative on how the migrant woman is portrayed in contemporary migration literature as the texts covered by their analyses encompass women from different ages and backgrounds. More precisely, what emerges from these studies is the point that understanding migration through the lens of the literary diaspora can serve as an impetus on how we view the representations of the migrant woman. These narratives have been scrutinized by literary scholars and from these scrutiny two important shifts in the representations of home and identity for the migrant woman emerge: (1) the shift from the understanding of home as a fixed, stable or national concept to a multiple or fluid concept and (2) the transformation in the migrant woman's identity which is influenced by her geographical location, circumstances, and culture both from her place of origin and destination and the shift from the simplistic notion of the migrant woman's identity to a hybrid identity that allows her to exist in the liminal space in between cultures. All of these shifts identified are indispensable for a broader and deeper understanding of the complex status of the migrant woman. Beyond the data and statistics, it is through the lens of literature that the figure of the migrant woman is fully examined and her seemingly neglected experience is made visible.

3. Chapter Two

REPRESENTATIONS OF HOME FOR THE MIGRANT WOMAN

“And now all these doors from who knows where were opening, and all sorts of strange people were around, people who looked more at home than she was, even the homeless ones who spoke no English...”- Hamid

Traditionally, the concept of home is predominantly defined as “a fixed, bounded, and discreet place” (Ralph and Staeheli 518). In this approach, the representation of home is rigidly constructed in relation to the nation-state (Daiya 391). From this perspective, John McLeod argues that the concepts of home, community, belonging and a sense of rootedness in the land are significant to the construction and goal of nationalist representation (71). Nations inevitably place geographical borders that separate the people 'within' from different peoples outside and thus, as imagined communities; nations evoke a feeling of home, belonging, and community for the people (McLeod 74). Thus, within this view, we define home in relation to our place of birth or origin or to the place where our ancestors, family, and community are located.

However, in recent years, the concepts of home and homeland have become highly problematic as we now live in a strongly multicultural and globalized era (Nyman 24). Citing Sara Ahmed, Ricardo Gomez and Sara Vannini point out that the meaning of home is particularly complicated for the migrant for whom the concept of home has become “translocated” in view of the inevitable separation “between his place of origin and his place of being”(1). Thus, within the diasporic field, the notion of home in relation to some mythical geographical homeland is destabilized. Through the migrant, the rigid conception of home in association with the nation is problematized. Therefore, it becomes the task of the diaspora to portray that home is not automatically a fixed or stable issue (Nyman 24-25) but is actually one which is a multi-faceted and multi-scalar phenomenon (Duyvendak 4). In other words, the concept of home is now represented and experienced by the migrant in a variety of ways.

Taking from this recent development on the multi-concept of home, this chapter will mainly explore the multiple ways by which the notion of home is represented or conceptualized by the migrant woman in *Exit West* through the character of Nadia, the text’s female protagonist. More particularly, it will look into the ways by which she experiences or gives meaning to the

word, “home” throughout the narrative. Pursuant to this main objective, the first section of this chapter will examine the symbolism of the migrant heroine’s homes as an expression of the self or her identity. Following this, an analysis of the home as a dynamic process of emplacing objects and practices and as a construction of nostalgia by the migrant woman will be discussed. And lastly, the final section will look into the relationship between the migrant woman’s notion of home and with its closely related concept of belonging. With these analyses, it is hoped that through the figure of the novel’s migrant heroine, a better understanding of home with its multifarious meanings and implications will be achieved.

3.1 HOME AS A SYMBOL OF THE SELF

This proposition of the close equation between the home and the self is elaborated by the French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard who suggests that “just as the house and the non-house are the basic divisions of geographic space, so the self and the nonself represent the basic divisions of psychic space” (qtd. in Cooper 131). In her reading of Bachelard’s book, *The Poetics of Space* (1964), Clare Cooper proposes that the home or the house has two essential components in relation to the self: “The house both encloses space (the house interior) and excludes space (everything outside it). Thus, it has two very important and different components: its interior and its facade. The house therefore nicely reflects how man sees himself with both an intimate interior or self as viewed from within and revealed only to those intimates who are invited inside and a public exterior (the persona or mask in Jungian terms) or the self that we choose to display to others” (55).

This provocative concept that an individual’s home is a reflection of how man views himself is first introduced by the renowned psychologist, Carl Jung, in his autobiographical text, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1961). In this book, he recounts his dream of himself as a house. Jung’s interpretation is that the house represents a kind of image of his psyche which reflects his state of consciousness, along with his unconscious additions (160). Building from Jung’s personal discovery, Cooper puts forward that next to the human body; human beings frequently choose the house or the home as the most fundamental protector of his internal environment aside from his skin and clothing as symbolism or reflection of the intangible self (131). In other

words, the particular architectural structure and interior designs of an individual's home can reveal different aspects of his personality.

In literature, homes are personified and attributed with human qualities such as in many cases, the adjectives, "austere, welcoming, friendly"(Cooper 137), which are traits normally attributed to a person are also used to describe it. Cooper suggests that the real meaning of the home-self analogy is indeed more comprehensible by looking at works of fiction and dreams since these forms of expression delve deeper into true unconscious meanings as compared to sociological surveys or similar empirical investigations (Cooper 137). Most specifically, the concept of home is often associated with the woman in works of fiction. Rosemary Marangoly George notes that the meaning of home is frequently associated with the status and capacity of women. She argues that "the association of home and the female has served to present them as mutual handicaps, mutually disempowering. Hence, the woman is incapacitated because she is "tied" to the home, and the home is the shelter for the incapacitated" (19). That is to say, the home as a psychic space subverts feminine power and is detrimental to the welfare of the woman. In a more positive light, Cooper argues, on the other hand, that the home actually takes on a maternal figurative function, as a symbol of the mother or the womb (137). Like a mother, the home protects the safety and contentment of its inhabitants.

The house as a symbol of the self, particularly that of the woman, is deeply engrained in *Exit West*. This section will particularly look into the ways by which the different "homes" inhabited by Nadia throughout the course of the novel reveal her inner self and the different aspects of her persona. For her, these spaces serve as sites of both containment and contentment. Furthermore, it will be argued that for Nadia it is only within these "homes" that Nadia engages with her contented self that she is truly able to find a permanent sense of being at home.

Early in the text, we are introduced to a short description of the interior decorations in Nadia's childhood home: "The art in Nadia's childhood home consisted of religious verses and photos of holy sites, framed and mounted on walls" (17). This brief illustration of her family home is however embedded with a much deeper and subliminal representation of her family members including Nadia. The fact that the decoration of the house consists of religious objects symbolizes the religiosity of its inhabitants. This is particularly true in the case of Nadia's mother and sister who are described as "quiet women" (17) and Nadia's father, a man who tries to be quiet believing that silence is a virtue. On a more symbolic level, we can also argue that the

religious objects “framed and mounted on walls” (17) in Nadia’s family home are reflections of the silenced, submissive, and conformist women living in the house. Similar to the “religious verses and photos of holy sites framed and mounted on walls”, they are restricted with their words and actions and are not given the freedom to express themselves hence, the description of Nadia’s mother and sister as silent women.

However, although their family home also reflects the constrained Nadia, its description is in truth exactly the opposite of her inner desires. In contrast to the fixed and religious art display in her home, Nadia’s passion for art since childhood is the kind that allows her to express herself, her inner thoughts, and her dreams. In order to satisfy her love for the arts, which she is restricted to do at home, the young Nadia does it during class hours in her school by “doodling in the margins of her textbooks and notebooks” illustrations of “curlicues and miniature woodland universes” (17). This description of her drawings is likewise a reflection of her non-conformist and independent persona who dreams of breaking free from the restrictions imposed in her family home. Moreover, unlike her mother and sister who have consistently succumbed to the silenced, patriarchal, and overtly pious way of life in their family, Nadia tries to question the veracity of such values. Thus, this frequently puts her in conflict with her father who is obviously the patriarchal symbol in their family. As the text reveals, Nadia’s “constant questioning and growing irreverence in matters of faith upset and frightened him” (18). The fact that Nadia is often the source of her father’s anger and anxiety is an indication of her attempt to subvert patriarchy and to articulate her inner personality. Her father’s way of forcing religion upon her stifles her sense of choice and independence. In stark contrast to her devoutly religious family members, Nadia is absolutely not a pious woman. This side of her is revealed at the beginning of the novel during one of her first conversations with Saeed wherein she strikingly reveals to the latter that she does not pray despite of the fact that she wears a black robe, an outward symbol of religious reverence. Thus, her helplessness to project her true self within her family home eventually forces her to leave it upon finishing university and secure a place of her own. Nadia’s act of leaving her family is in accord with Caren Kaplan who proposes that the act of leaving the home can actually be beneficial to the woman since it is “often the cite of racism, sexism, and other damaging social practices” (194). We may therefore argue that the patriarchal structure and stifling religion in her family home are the damaging practices that force Nadia to abandon it.

In describing the physical structure of the new home that Nadia rents for herself after she decides to leave her family home, Hamid symbolically illustrates it in a way that it reflects Nadia's self-image and the notion of projecting onto the home her inner desires, struggles, and determinations both as a person and as a woman:

Nadia rented the top portion of a narrow building belonging to a widow whose children and grandchildren all lived abroad. This building had once been a single house, but it was constructed adjacent to a market that had subsequently grown past and around it (24).

The fact that Nadia chooses to rent a flat of her own atop of a building reflects her personal self-determination to rise above the obstacles and danger arising from her decision to leave her family and live on her own. Her decision has sparked anger and resentment from all of the members of her family including Nadia herself. Thus, by living on the top, she is projecting her inner desire to prove to herself and to her family that she has made the right choice.

As a woman, it can also be argued that having her home on the top of a structure as a single and unmarried woman is a reflection of her fortitude to challenge the patriarchal society that she lives in. Living on top symbolically means that she wishes to be the one in control of her own life and to not be under the domination of any man. Indeed, her capacity to lead despite being a female is consistently shown throughout the novel most specifically with respect to her dealings with the male characters in the novel. First, this aggressive and almost dominating attitude of hers is very apparent in terms of her relationship with Saeed. Between the two of them, she is always the one who initiates, from inviting Saeed to her house, to smoking marijuana, and to pressing Saeed into premarital sex. More significantly, Nadia is always the one who leads or goes first whenever they have to pass through the symbolic black doors to move from one place to another. Moreover, in one scene while Saeed goes for a smoke break at work, he spots a hawk and remembers Nadia: "Saeed had spotted a hawk constructing its nest. It worked tirelessly... Saeed thought of Nadia and watched the hawk" (4-5). The hawk that carries with it the symbolism of power, courage and strength possibly stands for Nadia. Like Nadia who lives atop a building, the hawk rules above the sky.

Aside from Saeed, Nadia also exudes her feminine power with regard to her relationship with her ex-lover, a musician. It must be noted that during the early times that she is building up her romantic relationship with Saeed, she is still in a sexual relationship with the musician. Thus, her confidence in having two love interests at once can in a way be interpreted as an exertion of

her feminine power over men. The way that Nadia challenges the patriarchal power of her father has already been discussed but her relationship with Saeed's father is also worth mentioning to demonstrate her capability to lead as a woman. As a matter of fact, before Nadia and Saeed leave their city of birth to Mykonos, Saeed's father has asked Nadia to promise him that "she must see Saeed through to safety" and that "she remains by Saeed's side until Saeed was out of danger" (93). Thus, the act of Saeed's father of entrusting the life of his son to Nadia is also an acknowledgment of her feminine power and strength.

The additional detail that the owner of the house is a widow is also significant to show the subliminal relationship between Nadia and her new home. Her choice to live with a widow may be viewed, upon the surface, to be due to convenience purposes on her part. But choosing a widow's abode can also be interpreted as a reflection of her unconscious thoughts of making the widow as her female role model. In fact, in order for her to get the landlady's approval and overcome her suspicions that she is actually a single unmarried woman, Nadia has to falsely claim that she too is a widow whose husband has just been killed in a battle as a young infantry officer. But more than such a false statement of claiming herself as a widow is the mirroring of identities between Nadia and her widowed landlady. First, both of them have their own family with whom they could have chosen to live with, but both prefer to live alone. Nadia has a family who is adamant about her decision of leaving the family home while the landlady has her children and grandchildren abroad to whom she is expected to live with and depend on. Thus, they are equally defiant of the norms in their society that a single unmarried woman and a widowed woman are not supposed to live alone. Aside from this, both are financially capable. To augment their daily living, Nadia works in an insurance company while her landlady earns income by leasing the bottom floor of her building to a car battery seller and the uppermost floor to Nadia. From this, we can deduce that both of them are self-sufficient and independent women who do not necessarily live by the rules and expectations of the society upon the woman. Thus, by living in a building owned by a widowed woman whose personality somehow mirrors her own, Nadia is able to project the image that she aims to show not just to herself but most especially to other people.

Aside from the physical exterior of Nadia's new home, the description of its interior structure is also carefully selected to reveal how Nadia personally views herself both as an individual and as a social being and how she wishes to present herself to other people:

Nadia's flat comprised a studio room with an alcove kitchenette and a bathroom so small that showering without drenching the commode was impossible. But it opened onto a roof terrace that looked out over the market and was, when the electricity had not gone out, bathed in the soft and shimmering glow of a large, animated neon sign that towered nearby in the service of a zero-calorie carbonated beverage (24).

Living in a studio room is also symbolic of Nadia's inner character. A studio room which mainly consists of one single room that simultaneously serves as its inhabitant's living room, bedroom, and kitchen is a reflection of Nadia's complex personality. Within herself, lies her different and sometimes opposing persona. One primary example is the way by which Nadia makes use of her black robe. It is a common stereotype that the black robe which she religiously wears would signify her assumed religiosity and submissiveness as a woman. Nadia however proves otherwise. When Saeed asks her during their first date as to the reason why she wears it, Nadia unequivocally replies: "So men don't fuck with me" (16). Contrary to Saeed's assumptions, she wears her black robe in order to assert her femininity and non-conformist personality. This recurring trope of the black robe in the novel will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, which shall look into Nadia's complex and hybrid identity. The complexity of her character is therefore exemplified by the fact that Nadia prefers to decide and create a path for her own instead of fitting herself into the limited box that the society creates for her.

The diminutiveness of her flat might be read then as a replication of her inner struggles and difficulties as a single and unmarried woman which she does not want to show to other people. However, as admitted by Nadia herself, her family did not fail in their warning about the risk and dreadfulness of her decision to live on her own. Despite her strong and independent character, she still suffers from violence and discrimination primarily because she is a woman. On the other hand, the additional description that her home opens "onto a roof terrace that looked out over the market" (24) that "had subsequently grown past and around it" (24) symbolically represents the part of herself which she wants to expose to other people. The roof terrace symbolizes her open and confident personality. Likewise, it could also be a manifestation of herself who has acquired new and wider perspectives in life by living alone. In addition, the market surrounding her home stands for her sociable character who can deal with different people from all walks of life. This is further accentuated by the elucidation that at night and when electricity is available, the market "bathed in the soft and shimmering glow of a large,

animated neon sign”. Based on the Western history of neon signs, even these luminous electric signs are thoroughly entangled with a sense of identity, as a symbolism of modernism and new age (Postrel). Thus, the inclusion of neon signs which can be sighted from Nadia’s home can be interpreted as a symbolism of the modern and counter-hegemonic Nadia.

What is more interesting is the fact that even when Nadia migrates to foreign lands with Saeed, the homes that she lives in do still reflect a part of her inner self. However, it is further claimed that the physical structure of these diasporic homes are significant in determining as to whether Nadia finds a sense of permanently being at home in it or not.

Arguably, Nadia could never acquire a permanency of home in some of these diasporic homes as they reflect the vulnerability and instability of her inner self, particularly because of her migrant status. These primarily include the tent that Nadia and Saeed have built in Mykonos and the shanty that they have assembled in Marin. The tent is constructed on “a patch of land at the edge of the camp, partway up the hill, that wasn’t too windy or too rocky” (102). It is further described as one “too small for them to stand, a long but low pentahedron, in shape like the triangular glass prism” (106). Likewise, the shanty which they have assembled is also located on a spot high up the hill and is primarily made of “corrugated-metal roof and discarded packing-crate sides” (191). Interestingly, both “homes” reflect an image of Nadia which however is possibly too much for her to accept thus explains her urgency and determination to leave it. They are symbolic of Nadia’s state of being specifically as a migrant woman for the following reasons: First, both the tent and shanty are basically made up of light and disposable materials thus; these shelters arguably reflect Nadia’s vulnerable and unstable state as a migrant. The tent which is also moved by Nadia and Saeed throughout their stay in Mykonos reflects their mobility. However, it also reflects the precarious state that they are in as migrants who do not have a fixed dwelling and a stable source of living. Their predicament is indeed in accordance with Cooper’s proposition that “a person who lives in a house that moves must somehow be unstable as the structure he inhabits” (134). Second, the tent and the shanty are also symbolic of Nadia’s self that is susceptible to danger. Just like these diasporic homes which can easily be destroyed by strong winds and earthquake, Nadia is also easily put at risk just because she is a migrant and a woman. One example of this is when a pale-skinned tattooed man tries to threaten her with a pistol while she is working in a food cooperative in Marin. And lastly, living in a tent or a shanty reveals Nadia’s otherness and marginality as a migrant woman. Aside from its physical structures that

are far from what is normally considered as a home, this is exemplified by the fact that they have to build these structures in a location such as on a hill which is far from the vicinity of the natives living in such places. Moreover, the additional description that these houses do not have a wired access to water and electricity is symbolic of their otherness and minority unlike their native neighborhoods. There are other instances in the novel where Nadia and Saeed have been subjected to discrimination and violence due to their status as migrants such as when they are shooed away by a man in Mykonos, subjected to nativist backlash in London, and when Nadia is ostracized by her co-workers in Marin.

Therefore, Nadia's persistence to leave Mykonos while living in a mobile tent and her new found confidence to leave the shanty in Marin where she used to live with Saeed are perhaps a reflection of her great concern for her inner self and her desire to feel secure in her own being. Cooper avers that most people find themselves as fragile and vulnerable beings so it is a basic human instinct to enclose ourselves in a symbol for self which is "familiar, solid and unchanging". Hence, "a conventional house and a rigidly static concept of self are mutually supporting" (144).

As discussed above, these diasporic homes are particularly reflective of the weak part of Nadia's self. Therefore, since it reflects the part of herself that she wants to suppress or that she does not want to show to other people, Nadia could not find a sense of being permanently at home in it and thus her determination to leave these homes. On the surface, we may initially point out that her persistence to leave Mykonos is due to the reason that they are already running out of funds and that she chooses to leave their shanty in Marin because of her strained relationship with Saeed. However, a much deeper analysis based on the home-self analogy would give us a novel and another interpretation. These homes are rejected by Nadia because it is a threat to the contained and stable part of herself that she wants to retain or that she hopes to fully attain.

When Nadia and Saeed are forced to leave the London mansion due to nativist backlash and government intervention, Nadia has not likewise adopted the idea of permanently living in the so-called London Halo, a working encampment camp that is built in the city to accommodate the massive influx of migrants in the city. This camp is enclosed by a perimeter fence and inside it are "large pavilions of grayish fabric that looked like plastic" which are merely "supported by metal trusses" (168). In one of these pavilions or "dormitories", is "a small curtained-off space"

(169) occupied by Nadia and Saeed. It is reasonable to speculate that Nadia could not find a sense of permanent home in it for the same reason that it symbolizes her vulnerability and instability.

It is likewise interesting to add that during their stay in the working camp and as a remuneration for their work in “clearing terrain and building infrastructure and assembling dwellings from prefabricated blocks”, Nadia and Saeed are promised “forty meters and a pipe: a home on forty square meters of land and a connection to all the utilities of modernity” (167-168). However, despite such promise and the fact that they are not too far down the housing list, they still decide to abandon the camp, surrender their position on the housing list, and pass through the black door to the new city of Marin upon Nadia’s suggestion. Perhaps her proposition that they should abandon it is a reflection of her thought that she cannot accept living in a worker camp as a valid image of a permanent home. It is possible that her decision is a manifestation of her inner psyche that such physical structure is a deliberate contradiction to her unique and non-conformist self-image. She wishes to leave it not just because she wants to patch things up with Saeed but because permanently living in it would repress her true values.

In contrast to the above-discussed homes, Nadia finds a permanent sense of home while living in the London mansion. Although it must be noted that when Nadia and Saeed first arrive in the mansion, Nadia finds her new abode to be initially strange, unwelcoming, and unsafe. This inner feeling of anxiety and unsafeness is again reflected in the room which Nadia and Saeed choose during their stay in the mansion. It is “a small bedroom in the back, one floor up from the ground, with a balcony from which they could jump to the rear garden, if necessary, and from there with luck make an escape” (120). Thus, at first, Nadia does not imagine herself living permanently in it. Although she feels incredibly fortunate for finally having a room to themselves for the first time after leaving their country, she is more concerned about the temporalities of their situation. Knowing that they might be forced to leave it at any moment, Nadia thus only takes out of their backpack things that are absolutely necessary. However, as Nadia becomes more accustomed about living in the mansion and finds home in it, the mansion soon becomes an expression of herself. Cooper avers that as individuals start to embrace the house, become accustomed to it and lay claim to it, the physical structure eventually becomes a projection of the self (131).

In describing the structure of the London mansion, Hamid finely illustrates it in a way that it becomes an expression of Nadia's newly-acquired hybrid and kaleidoscopic character. The first spot in the mansion where Nadia and Saeed stay in after passing through a black door in Mykonos is pictured as "a bedroom with a view of the night sky and furnishings so expensive and well made that Saeed and Nadia thought they were in a hotel" (117). The fact that they cannot ascertain the place that they are in mirrors their state as migrants who are confused as they find themselves in a strange and unfamiliar place. But on the other hand, Nadia's feeling of awe and astonishment is perhaps also a foreshadowing of her subsequent attitude who finds her new migrant lifestyle and the idea of living with different kinds of people as something very novel and exciting. This becomes more evident as Hamid further describes the mansion when Nadia and Saeed decide that they cannot remain inside the bedroom:

They waited for a while but knew they could not stay in this hotel room forever, so eventually they tried the handle of the door, which was unlocked, and emerged into a hallway, leading to a staircase, one flight down which led them to an even grander staircase, off which were floors with more bedrooms but also sitting rooms and salons, and only then did they realize that they were in a house of some kind, surely a palace, with rooms upon rooms and marvels upon marvels, and taps that gushed water that was like spring water and was white with bubbles and felt soft, yes soft, to the touch (118).

The unlocked door and hallway symbolize the new journeys and experiences once an individual becomes a migrant and thus, it probably reveals Nadia's psyche who finds it as a good opportunity to enrich herself. The stairs in the house which connect one floor to another floor and to the different parts of the house likewise represent Nadia who has the capacity to connect with different kinds of people. On the other hand, the various sections in the house which include a number of bedrooms, sitting rooms and salons reflect the inhabitants of the mansion who come from different races and cultures. On the part of Nadia, it reflects her hybrid herself who embraces a multicultural community. As a matter of fact, Nadia becomes the only non- Nigerian member in a group of Nigerian elders who regularly meet in the mansion's courtyard to resolve the residents' concerns in the house. And lastly, the description that the mansion has "taps that gushed water that was like spring water" (118) is arguably likewise a symbolism of Nadia's appreciation of her hybridity. Like a spring water that is believed to be good for health and can

make people feel better, Nadia takes advantage of her hybrid personality in order to better herself.

With these, it is argued that since the mansion reflects Nadia's self, she finds a permanent sense of home in it. This is clearly elucidated in one scene when Nadia refuses to leave when Saeed asks her that they should leave the mansion and live in a house with their fellow countrymen. She feels at home in the mansion because she finds comfort and security in it. However, due to nativist backlash and government intervention eventually, they are forced to leave it and move to the London Halo and thereafter, to Marin.

In Marin, which is the final foreign destination that Nadia inhabits in *Exit West*, she similarly finds a permanent sense of home in the cooperative's room that she occupies after separating from Saeed. Parallel to the multicultural community in the London mansion where Nadia feels a sense of belonging with the other refugees, Marin is also described as a place that allows cultural diversity. Furthermore, in describing Nadia's room in Marin, Hamid once again employs the home-self symbolism to evoke Nadia's multifarious personality:

The room smelled of potatoes and thyme and mint and the cot smelled a little of people, even though it was reasonably clean, and there was no record player, and no scope to decorate either, the room continuing to be used as a storeroom (215).

Gem Rigsby writes that based on biblical scripture and ancient Greek and Roman history, the herbs, thyme, and mint respectively symbolize courage and wisdom ("Symbolism of Herbs."). Potato, on the other hand, is considered a staple food in the West and is usually mixed up with almost any other food ingredients. Hence, even the scent of the room evokes Nadia's brave, wise, and flexible personality. In Marin, Nadia's bravery is evinced by her decision to live on her own as well as in a scene when she silently fights back against a tattooed man who attempted to rob the cooperative. Her flexibility and sociability are likewise shown by her ability to form friendship with her co-workers and her romantic relations with their head cook who is also a woman.

The description of Nadia's new home as a storeroom, a room where unused things are usually kept, likewise reflects Nadia's aspect of herself which she has somehow suppressed while living with Saeed. Her choice to live in the room reveals her inner desire to bring back her old independent and courageous self and especially those times when she used to live on her own in her studio room. Thus, living in the room reminds her "of her apartment in the city of her

birth, which she had loved, reminded of what it was like to live there alone” and as the room symbolically reflects her true inner self, it is not surprising that it “came to feel to her like home” (215).

From these discussions of the migrant heroine’s different homes as a reflection of her inner self, it is reasonable to conclude that there indeed exists a truer and deeper meaning beyond the surface and physical structure of the home even in *Exit West*. Furthermore, for the migrant woman, as represented by Nadia, these homes can offer a feeling of contentment as well as of containment. For beyond the surface and physical structure of the various homes that Nadia has occupied, lie the true meaning of her personality and her inner desires, both as a woman and as a migrant. We can say, therefore, that the homes that Nadia occupies in the text are central to her complex sense of self as a migrant woman. Crucially, it is not simply the physical structures of these homes that are in a dialectical relation with Nadia’s sense of self, but also their symbolic resonance in terms of what they represent in migrant women constantly negotiating her femininity, sexuality, and identity.

3.2 BEING AT HOME BY EMPLACEMENT OF OBJECTS AND PRACTICES

Migrants construct a sense of home not only by building relationships with people but also through the process of emplacing objects and practices in their new destination. As mobile individuals, migrants do not necessarily attach the meaning of home to a particular location for it is not the place which gives definition to the word “home”. Instead, home is built through a dynamic process of placing certain objects and habits or practices in close proximity to the migrant (Nowicka 78). It is by retaining these objects and practices within the migrant’s reach or spatial distance that a feeling of being at home is attained.

This act of emplacing objects and practices applies most predominantly in the case of the migrant woman. Magdalena Nowicka notes that migrant women do not only primarily organize their homes around people but also with objects. Citing the studies of Asis et al, she reiterates that this is due to the fact that women have the fundamental role of constructing the “materialities of home” and her role continues even in cases of migration. Thus, the transportation of objects to a new place is basically the task of women as it makes them feel

somewhere at home (Nowicka 12). This assertion evidently applies in the case of Nadia who repeatedly emplaces objects and practices as she moves within and outside her homeland.

One of the objects that are repeatedly mentioned specifically in the early parts of the novel is the image of Nadia's lemon tree. This image is important in interpreting the various representations of home for the characters in the novel especially for Nadia. In her early movements in the story, she emplaces the lemon tree to show her thoughts on the meaning of home. Apart from her record player and vinyl records, she decides to take the tree when she moves to Saeed's home after the death of his mother. Upon reaching Saeed's home, they put it in Saeed's balcony together with Saeed's father. It is worthy to note that Nadia also puts the clay pot in the terrace of her house where she used to live alone. Putting it in the same area as it has always been in Nadia's home is one of the ways that she creates a home by emplacing a familiar object in a new place.

We might argue that the lemon tree which is planted in its soil, and the soil in turn which is planted in the clay pot, symbolizes a nationalistic meaning of home which is anchored on rootedness to the individual's original homeland. Thus, it is not surprising that Saeed, who loyally lives by his patriotic notion of home, also develops a deep and meaningful connection with the lemon tree. In one scene, after he has taken psychedelic mushrooms with Nadia, Saeed is washed over by sudden awe and dreamy feeling as he regards the lemon tree in Nadia's balcony. As he looks at it, he dreamily thinks on how the tree's roots are amazingly connected to the clay pot and the unity of the pot with the brick of the balcony and, thus, with the very earth that Nadia's building stands upon. With these, Saeed feels as if the tree itself is reaching up in an attractive gesture that he is suddenly filled with feelings of love, gratitude for his parents, and hope for world peace. These positive emotions that the lemon tree invokes within Saeed as he reflects on the unity and rootedness of the tree reveal his fixed and consistent stand in the novel that an individual can only build a sense of home in connection with his homeland and his people. Saeed sees the idea of permanent departure from his city of birth and a total disruption of communication with his friends and family as tantamount "to the loss of a home, no less, of his home" (90). For him, the meaning of home can only be attached to a particular location and that is, his city of birth.

Interestingly, the homing and nationalistic symbol of the lemon tree on the part of Saeed is resonated by his father. Thus, when Nadia and Saeed bring it to his home and upon seeing the

lemon tree, he manages to smile for the first time in a long time after the death of his wife. Just like Saeed who is filled with awe as he regards the lemon tree, the father's long-awaited smile upon seeing the lemon tree likewise stands for his view of home that is anchored on rootedness and fixity. For him, their homeland is also the only home that he knows most especially for the reason that it is the only place that can connect him with his deceased wife. Hence, he refuses to leave their city even after the time that Nadia and Saeed receives a note from their agent that a black door through which they can pass through to another country is finally available.

On the other hand, Nadia's perception of home in relation to the lemon tree is in stark contrast with how Saeed and his father strictly view it. Unlike them who holds on to the idea of home that is something fixed and rooted, she believes in its concept of mobility and as something that an individual can re-create wherever she is. If the lemon tree can be associated to the meaning of home, then, Nadia uses it as a materiality to build a feeling of home by emplacing it as she moves to another place. Likewise, in relation to its meaning of home, Nadia in a way affixes to it as a space for safety and security. When she decides to move to Saeed's place, Nadia also brings "some money and gold coins" and puts it "hidden in the tree's clay plot, buried within the soil" (78). She does not remove the money and coins from the pot even as they travel from her home to Saeed's home as she wants to hide it in case of a military checkpoint. With these, it is argued that the lemon tree does not only invoke a feeling of home for Nadia but also becomes a symbolism of a home that is safe and secured. However, the fact that Nadia moves it from one place to another signifies her adoption of the mobility concept of home. For Nadia, it does not matter where the home is because an individual has the ability to recreate it anywhere and acquire a sense of security in it. So, we can also argue that for her, the soil into which her sense home can be built does not necessarily pertain to a specific geographical location but to any soil in the world, as all soil is one soil of the Earth.

From another viewpoint, the lemon tree also reflects the ordinariness and homey ambiance in their city. Notably, when the mundane civic living that Nadia and Saeed enjoyed begins to lose its vitality, the lemon tree likewise slowly dies. In the end, Nadia's lemon tree fails to recover, "despite repeated watering, and it sat lifeless on their balcony, clung to by a few desiccated leaves" (89). It is interesting to note that the death of the lemon tree almost coincides just in time with Nadia and Saeed's departure from their city of birth. Therefore, we can argue that the lifeless lemon tree and its desiccated leaves signify the death of a fixed nationalistic

notion of home once an individual becomes part of the diaspora. Most specifically for Nadia, its death foreshadows her continuous and growing adoption of a diasporic meaning of home that is mobile, unfixed, and flexible.

Another object that Nadia consistently brings with her thereby emplacing it in a new place is her mobile phone. Nowicka notes that when people migrate, they take things that are important with them as a reminder of their loved ones and daily routines at home (13). The relevance of the mobile phone to Nadia and Saeed is explicit in the story. Throughout the novel, both rely on their phones to keep themselves updated with the happenings in the outside world, to connect with other people, and to each other especially during the early stage of their romance. In fact, it is through text messaging that they are able to access each other's separate existence and build a stronger bond that eventually develops into a romantic relationship.

Aside from the fact that Nadia emplaces her phone in the various places that she moves to, Hamid uses the recurring trope of the mobile phone in the novel in order to show the major characters' understanding of home in relation to it. Indeed, the mobile phone has always been associated with the word "home" as its existence has revolutionized the way that people communicate, making it easier for everyone to communicate with family and friends who make them feel at home. In the case of Nadia and Saeed however, the way in which they make use of their phones especially when they have finally moved outside of their homeland is relevant in interpreting the meaning of what or where their home is.

One of the first things that Nadia and Saeed decide to buy as soon as they arrive in the refugee camp in Mykonos are "local numbers for their phones" (102). Thereafter, both respectively try to contact people from their past. Saeed attempted "to call his father but an automated message informed him that his call could not be completed" (103). On the other hand, "Nadia tried to connect with people via chat applications and social media, and an acquaintance who had made it to Auckland and another who had reached Madrid replied right away" (103). The emplacement of the mobile phones in their new destination helps Nadia and Saeed "to bridge the spatial distance to home and feel similar well as at home during their stay abroad" (Nowicka 78). However, it is evident that Saeed makes use of his phone to connect him back to their homeland while contrastingly; Nadia uses it to reconnect with her acquaintances from different sides of the world. Thus, drawing from these is a reiteration of Saeed's nationalistic notion of home. It is only by reconnecting to his homeland that he feels similar well as at home.

On the other hand, it exemplifies Nadia's diasporic notion of home. By citing that Nadia uses her phone to connect with her acquaintances from other foreign countries, the novel is showing that for Nadia, bridging the spatial distance to make her feel at home does not necessarily pertain to her homeland. She can achieve such feeling from any place in the world.

In the latter part of the novel however, Nadia's mobile phone takes on a dual symbolism as it is utilized to show that its presence can in some ways make the individual feel at home while at the same time, not at home. In the novel, Nadia's mobile phone allows her to connect and disconnect with people, build or ruin her relationships, and as a means for her to be reached or be unreachable. Her phone enables her to reach out to people that she knows and to places all over the globe. However, her phone likewise becomes the source of hindrance and deterioration of her romantic relations with Saeed who is undeniably the primary person in the novel that gives her the feeling of home. Indeed, "phones themselves have the innate power of distancing one from one's physical surroundings" (185). As Nadia spends more time with her phone, she is able to find an excuse to avoid talking with Saeed and escape from his presence. This eventually leads for her to drift away from Saeed and build an invisible wall between them. It is argued that her growing estrangement with Saeed causes her to lose her sense of home with him which eventually leads her to separate from him at the end of the novel. With these, it is shown that Nadia's mobile phone therefore somehow takes a dual yet opposing function for her and that is, to make her feel at home and not at home at the same time.

While it is argued that the mobile phone makes Nadia to feel not at home at least in terms of her relationship with Saeed but still, its use to make her feel at home is far more evident. Aside from being one of her emplaced object, her phone also allows her to continue with her routine and practices that make her feel at home. As previously mentioned, the emplacement of practices or habits in the new place is as significant to the emplacement of objects for the migrant in the construction of a sense of home.

In the process of understanding the meaning of "home", J. Macgregor Wise argues that the home is not a place where a person comes from but rather, the place where the person is and where one establishes "a space of comfort" by personalizing it with objects and habits or practices (297). In other words, home does not necessarily pertain to a particular location but is rather a process of constructing one. This involves the personalization of a particular place to attain comfort and therefore create a sense of home. According to Wise, one of the ways by

which a person achieves this is by marking. Wise argues that “we mark out places in many ways to establish places of comfort” and “we may mark space more subtly by placing objects” (298). However, emplacing objects in a place alone does not mark a home but also entails the presence of the individual’s habits and practices since it is “the repetition of actions and thoughts that establishes a home” (295). Nadia’s mobile phone does not only enable her to mark her home by emplacing it in her new destinations, it also makes it possible for her to carry on her habit of listening to music and in effect, create her sense of home.

Music is another thing which plays a significant part in the individual’s construction of a sense of home. As argued by Wise: “The song begins a home, the establishment of a space of comfort” (297). Thus, according to Wise, even a simple melody such as a child singing to himself in order to take control of his fear of the dark gives him comfort, thus in a sense, home (297). This is very true indeed in the case of Nadia, who consistently turns to music throughout the story to feel at home. In foreign lands, such as when they are still living in a mansion in London, Nadia and Saeed would “listen to music on Nadia’s phone using the phone’s built-in speaker in their small bedroom after sunset” (133). Just like Wise’s example of a boy who hums a melody to create a feeling of home, by listening to music, the two of them are also able to mark their space and establish a home. Music has also been their way to escape their predicament and find peace even in the midst of nativist backlash and discrimination from the British natives. Nadia particularly finds happiness in “rebuilding her music library” (133). It is because by rebuilding her library, she is also rebuilding her home.

This home that Nadia rebuilds through music in her new destinations can be traced back to her own home in her city of birth. In fact, the significance of music to Nadia is already revealed in the early parts of the novel. Two of the things that Nadia immediately secures when she moves in to her own home from her family home are her record player and vinyl collections. She also takes it with her when she decides to move in to Saeed’s family home. In the case of migrants like Nadia or a person who moves from one place to another, one has the tendency to get rid of some or even all of his or her possessions. However, as Wise further avers, the individual will always strive to make himself or herself at home by recreating “a similar space, a similar home, with a similar feel” may it be “a sense of light, of leisure, of tension” (299). By emplacing such musical objects, she marks an effect on her spaces and expresses a similar feeling of home.

Interestingly, Nadia does not only find home in music per se but likewise symbolically finds home with persons who share the same passion for music as her. This is pertinent in the case of Nadia's first sexual partner who is a musician and whom she meets in an underground jam session. She loses her virginity during the first night she meets him and "she had shuffled off the weight of her virginity with some perplexity but not excessive fuss" (30-31). Nadia admires "his comfort with his own body, and his wanton attitude to hers, and the rhythm and strum of his touch, and his beauty, his animal beauty, and the pleasure he evoked in her" (31). She undeniably finds a feeling of bliss and comfortability with him and thus, a sense of home. This can also be interpreted as the reason for her attitude of not making a big fuss out of losing her virginity with him. Having already found a sense of home in him, Nadia thereafter finds it sad and difficult to part with him. Like a lost home, Nadia would sometimes remember him later in her life.

After her split with the musician, Nadia continues to share her love for music with Saeed. In a way, one of the possible reasons why she feels drawn to Saeed is because of their common love for music. And in the same way with the musician, she effortlessly feels at home with him. From the time that they have started to hang out in her home in their city of birth and up to the time of their separation in Marin, Nadia and Saeed have always bonded over music. In one of her early conversations with him, she tells him that if given the chance to visit a foreign country, she would love to go to Cuba as it reminds her of music. Hence, in Nadia's case, sharing her love for music with another person can be equated to finding a sense of home with that person.

The significance of music on how Nadia considers a certain place like home is also worth discussing. In her city of birth, she would listen to music even as the militants start to bomb their city. Music becomes her source of refuge and escape from reality. Nadia "would lounge around and listen to her records in the light of a single bare bulb, the harsh sounds of the fighting muffled somewhat by her music" (69). However, soon, the militants forbid the people to listen to music. Afraid of a possible house search by the militants, Nadia thus keeps her record player and vinyl collection out of sight. It is worthy to note that along with the forbiddance of music in their city, the city also gradually becomes less of a home for her as she could no longer find comfort and security in it. Soon thereafter, Nadia and Saeed leave their city. This situation in her city of birth is in stark contrast with the musical environment in Marin where Nadia finds once again her own sense of home. Nadia and Saeed would sometimes enjoy sitting outside their shanty in the open air where they could hear music playing from the other shanties. There is in fact "a great

creative flowering in the region, especially in music” (216). As Marin is a place that is surrounded with music, she finds in it a sense of home which is almost similar to the one that she has at the beginning of the novel. Thus, it is also in Marin that she finally decides to find her own place and separate from Saeed. Having achieved a similar feeling of home through music in Marin, she now finds the courage to live on her own as she has been doing from the beginning of the narrative.

Aside from listening to music, Nadia’s habit of smoking joint or marijuana is another significant trope employed in the novel to look into her notion of home. After the militants take over their city and a curfew is imposed, outbursts of fighting have made it impossible for Nadia and Saeed to travel and meet each other: “Air strikes were called in by the army on both occasions, shattering Saeed’s bathroom window while he was in the shower, and shaking like an earthquake Nadia and her lemon tree as she sat on her terrace smoking a joint. Fighter-bombers grated hoarsely through the sky” (52). In the heights of air strikes and war, smoking joints elicit a feeling of comfort and safety to Nadia. Parallel to her habit of listening to music, by smoking joints, Nadia is somehow able to overcome her fear of violence in their city, and thus, a home.

Hence, it is not surprising that Nadia is always the one who offers to smoke a joint to Saeed. While living in her studio apartment, aside from listening to music, she also personalizes her home through the mundane act of smoking joints with Saeed. This happens again in the latter part of the novel during their cohabitation in Marin by which this practice of hers has also been crucial in her attempt to save her relationship with Saeed. Since a year has already passed since they smoke a joint together, Nadia becomes hesitant about sharing it with Saeed. Realizing that both of them have already changed, she believes that they could no longer share together the pleasure of smoking it. But contrary to her expectation, Saeed feels amazed when she decides to still share it with him: “Saeed rolled the joint for them both, Nadia barely containing her jubilation, and wanting to hug him but restraining herself” (195). We can argue that Nadia’s jubilation is brought about by the fact that through the trope of smoking marijuana, she somehow becomes successful in her efforts of bringing back her sense of home with him.

Indeed, Nadia’s habit of smoking marijuana is symbolically employed in the novel to illustrate her feeling of homeliness in association with it. Aside from Saeed, Nadia also enjoys smoking joints with the local girl from Mykonos, her first foreign friend and whom she never fails to remember throughout the novel. It is therefore argued that parallel to the effect of music,

Nadia's habit of sharing joints with a person means that she has found a sense of home in that person. From these examples in the narrative which are exemplified through Nadia, we can come up with a transformative meaning of home that is not anchored on place or nation but is one that is continuously reconstituted by the migrant throughout her journey in the diaspora and one of which is by constantly emplacing objects and practices that are important to her.

3.3 HOME AS A CONSTRUCTION OF NOSTALGIA

The concept of nostalgia is another central theme in the experience of migration. In *Exit West*, the migrant heroine's memories of her homeland and of the past play an important role in her construction of the meaning of home. In this sense, the narrative is in accord with Sarah Ahmed's postulation that for a migrant, thinking of home is actually "an act of remembering" (343). Originally perceived as a form of medical diagnosis for those afflicted with severe homesickness in the 17th century, nostalgia comes from the Greek word *nostos*, which means to return home, and the word *algia*, which means longing (Skalle 76). We might argue that in fiction, nostalgia or thinking of home is generally depicted as a migrant's problem or illness that needs to be cured.

However, recently, scholars like Ghassan Hage, argues that this hasty generalization of all migrants yearning for home into a single "painful" sentiment is directed by a "miserabilist" tendency in the study of migration that aims to portray the migrants "as passive pained people at all times". He suggests that nostalgia can actually be "enabling" for the migrant, and argues that "affective" memories from a migrant's past can actually be transformed into a process of homebuilding at the new destination (417). His thoughts are in line with Svetlana Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia:

Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately (13).

In other words, restorative nostalgia deals with a longing for the past and homeland to the point of reliving or recreating it even in a new destination. Conversely, reflective nostalgia likewise deals with remembering the original home. However, instead of clinging unto the past, the individual acknowledges it and does not yearn for its return. In terms of its relationship to the

migrant's construction of the meaning of home; restorative nostalgia sticks to the rigid and fixed concept of home that is interchangeable to the original homeland and national identity. It "returns and rebuilds one homeland with paranoiac determination" (Boym 15). On the other hand, reflective nostalgia embraces a diasporic notion of home that embraces diversity, individuality, and flexibility (Boym 15). Therefore, through this kind of nostalgia, the migrant builds a sense of home that is not anchored in any geographical location.

Accordingly, Hage proposes that diasporic nostalgia as a memory of "back home" should not always be viewed in a negative light and as a form of homesickness that places the migrant in a state of passivity and disables him from assimilating in the new environment in which he is living. According to Hage, nostalgia can actually empower the migrant and can aid in the construction of the present and the future (416-417).

In this section, I will look into the representation of home as a product of the migrant's memory. Here, I make my argument through three interrelated points. First, I will argue that based on Boym's reflective nostalgia and Hage's proposition, the notion of nostalgia can actually enable or empower the migrant. Second, I explain that as a result of the dynamics of memory and nostalgia, the traditional or nationalistic notion of home in migration setting is destabilized. Third, I argue that it likewise results for the migrant to acquire a new sense of home which is not reliant on a place but more of as a feeling or as an affective construct.

When Nadia first arrives in Mykonos, she has fresh memories of home that pulls her attention and gaze towards her city of birth. The narrative underlines the significance of such a position in its noticeable contrast with the sense of diasporic nostalgia which Saeed demonstrates. This is allegorically depicted in a late afternoon scene during their first day in the Greek Island when both of them go on the top of a hill and gaze out to the sea but on different times:

And there they gazed out over the island, and out to sea, and he stood beside where she stood, and she stood beside where he stood, and the wind tugged and pushed at their hair, and they looked around at each other, but they did not see each other, for she went up before him, and he went up after her, and they were each at the crest of the hill only briefly, and at different times (103).

Their act of gazing out at the sea reminds us of Homer's Odysseus, the prototypical nostalgic character in literary fiction. At the beginning of *Odyssey*, he is portrayed as a man gazing out at

the sea, towards Ithaca, his eyes red with weeping (Spiegelman 151). Just like Odysseus, by dreamily gazing “out over the island and out to sea”, both Nadia and Saeed have a sense of yearning for their past and their original home. However, the fact that they have gone “at different times” and have not seen each other during this significant scene is arguably an allegorical representation of their different approaches and reactions when they are faced with nostalgic memories of home. For unlike Saeed who remembers home in order to escape the realities of their situation in foreign countries, Nadia makes use of her memories of a lost homeland as a means for her to build a home in their new destinations. Moreover, the fact that Nadia goes up to the hill first and leaves before Saeed goes up the hill can also be argued as a symbolic depiction of Nadia’s ability to let go of the past as compared to Saeed. It means that even when Nadia has already moved on, Saeed still helplessly clings to the memories of his homeland.

While initially equating home with place and landscape, with the character of Nadia, *Exit West* seems to hint that through her representation and that with the aid of nostalgic memories, a nationalistic notion of home can actually be replaced with a diasporic one. When these two characters are setting up a tent, as their temporary home in Mykonos, Nadia feels “as she was doing it that she was playing house, as she had with her sister as a child” (102). This means that she is actually enjoying the process of building a new home in a foreign land. Nadia recalls a childhood memory from her homeland but positively makes use of it. Her actuation is in accordance with Hage who notes that intimations of lost homelands are also employed by migrants as building blocks to create a feeling of home wherever they are (419). On the contrary, Saeed feels “as he was doing it that he was a bad son” (102). Unlike Nadia, his nostalgic memories make him a prisoner of the past. Once again, Saeed shows that his notion of home can only be associated with his homeland. Being a “bad son” does not only literally mean that he feels apologetic for choosing to leave his father behind but metaphorically, it also means that building a home in a country other than his own is an act of disloyalty to his father, his homeland. As he is constantly preoccupied with his memories, Saeed gets mad when Nadia tries to kiss him while they are building the tent. Since he still inhabits in the past, he fails to enjoy the present and this in effect causes the gradual deterioration of his relationship with Nadia.

Contrastingly, Nadia recalls the past in order to rebuild his relationship with Saeed. In one scene, after having just recently suffered from a nativist backlash in London, Nadia recalls and plays an album by a popular local band in their city of birth that Saeed likes. But Nadia's music nostalgia does not create in her a restless urge to dwell on the past and the negativity of their present situation. Instead, in accordance with Boym's reflective nostalgia, she makes use of music as a source of pleasure and as an opportunity for her to rekindle her relationship with Saeed. Through the music that she plays, she is able to express her thoughts and hidden emotions for him as their relationship gradually deteriorates as they travel from one place to another. By playing a piece of pop music sung by a local musician from the city of their birth for Saeed, Nadia positively makes use of nostalgia to restore their relationship in their new destination and her effort proves to be successful. She effectively resorts to the music of their past in order to bring them closer to each other again and to treat each other with more kindness and respect even for a while and as opposed to how they have been recently treating each other.

Generally, Nadia's nostalgic memory of the past is built around an image of her city of birth that is torn by war and terror hence her memories influence her perception of home that is not fixed to her homeland. Even when they are already living in new places, Nadia is reminded by her city of birth whenever a fright or violence would occur. In one early dawn scene during their stay in the London mansion, Nadia and Saeed hear someone calling for prayer in the distance. Nadia, particularly is "alarmed, waking from a dream and thinking for a second that she was back home in their own city, with the militants, before recalling where she really was" (125). The nativist backlash from the British natives and their clamor for the wholesale slaughter of migrants struck Nadia the most because it reminds her of the rage of the militants in her city of birth.

Thus, we can argue that Nadia's sense of nostalgia serves a dual role. First, she makes use of it to criticize the past that has endangered and terrorized her. In the novel, the concept of nostalgia reminds how the past has been endangering and restraining her as a woman. But on the other hand, her awareness of it plays a significant role in her determination to appreciate the present and embrace her new diasporic way of life:

But then around her she saw all these people of all these different colors in all these different attires and she was relieved, better here than there she thought, and it occurred to her that she had been stifled in the place of her birth for virtually her entire life, that its

time for her had passed, and a new time was here, and, fraught or not, she relished this like the wind in her face on a hot day when she rode her motorcycle and lifted the visor of her helmet and embraced the dust and the pollution and the little bugs that sometimes went into your mouth and made you recoil and even spit, but after spitting grin, and grin with a wildness (156).

As the text reveals, Nadia transcends the trauma of her memories of the past by focusing on the opportunities that are available to her in the present such as by seeing the beauty in a diverse and multicultural society. For Nadia, her previous understanding of home that is fixed to her city of birth is suffocating and that such notion can no longer be applied as she becomes a migrant. Instead, she realizes that being at home is a feeling of having the freedom to express one's self even as a woman. This new concept of home acquired by Nadia is alluded to those moments when she would ride her motorcycle in her homeland as it gives her the freedom and empowerment as a woman. At the same time, as she rides on, Nadia also embraces "the dust and the pollution and the little bugs" (156). This likewise shows that Nadia understands that the life of a migrant is not an easy road but difficulties are something that has to be managed. Such realization makes her "grin with wildness" (156). In other words, her newly found understanding of home fills her with excitement and a fresh start.

Nadia's nostalgic dreams are likewise an important attribute in elaborating her diasporic construction of home. Unlike Saeed who "often had dreams of his father" (170), Nadia dreams of the girl from Mykonos:

One night as Nadia slept on their cot beside Saeed she had a dream, a dream of the girl from Mykonos, and she dreamt that she had returned to the house they had first arrived at in London and had gone upstairs and passed back through the door to the Greek isle (169).

This passage is equipped with deeper meanings about the dynamics between nostalgia which in this case, comes in the form of a dream and the meaning of home as an affective construct.

Ghassan Hage proposes that the construction of home is an affective construct which is created out of "blocks of homely feeling" (418). According to Hage, a migrant can only achieve the feeling of being at home when he is able to attain any or in combination with others these four key feelings: security, familiarity, community, and a sense of possibility or hope (417-418).

From the text, it is clear that once Nadia eventually attains these feelings in her new destinations, she acquires a diasporic sense of home.

One example by which the text illustrates these key feelings is through her nostalgic dreams about the girl from Mykonos. Unlike Saeed who thinks about his homeland even in his dreams, Nadia nostalgically dreams of different foreign places which at some point in her life have provided her with such key homely feelings. Arguably, the girl from Mykonos represents the feelings of familiarity and sense of hope that Nadia is able to feel during her stay in Mykonos. Again, it must be noted that she immediately feels a strong connection with the local Greek girl and unexpectedly befriends her thus, a feeling of familiarity. Moreover, the girl is the one who gives her and Saeed a sense of hope when she helps them to pass through a black door from Mykonos to London. While living in the London mansion, Nadia likewise attains the feeling of security and community through her relationship with her fellow migrants especially with the members of the council.

Along with this concept of nostalgia or thinking of home is the notion of return to the original homeland. It is also one of the recurring trope that is often discussed in diasporic literature. Jopi Nyman notes that the concept of return is a central theme in post-colonial literature since most of the post-colonial authors are either political refugees or students who have stayed abroad for many years with limited contact with their families thus, their portrayal of return to the place of origin “has often been mythologized or idealized” (38-39). This generalization, however, does not apply in the case of Nadia. In Hamid’s novel, the migrant woman’s notion of a return to the original home is presented in a non-idealized manner. Nadia does not harbor any fantasies of return to her homeland. For her, “returning to where they had been born was unthinkable” (134) for aside from the terror and violence in her city, a return home cannot create for her a new and better possibility.

The migrant’s return to the original community is oftentimes depicted as a difficult process (Nyman 37). In Nadia’s case, it has taken her half a century before she is able to return to her city of birth. Her return to her homeland is described as one that “was not a heaven but it was not a hell, and it was familiar but also unfamiliar” (227). She wanders and explores the city which has already significantly changed over time. Most of the cafes near her old building have already been converted. Upon meeting Saeed, they recognize that both of them have also changed so much with time. Thus, with these, it is argued that her return home and her meeting

with Saeed at the end of the novel does not mean that she has reacquired a nationalistic sense of home but rather an acknowledgment of the unfixed and unstable meaning of it as “the fires she had witnessed in her youth had burned themselves out long ago” (227). This means that she can no longer mainly consider her city of birth as her home. The nationalistic or fixed sense of home that she feels in her youth during the time that she still lives in it is already lost after she left. Her movements between places that she have already come to consider in one way or another as home has already influenced her notion of the diasporic meaning of home that is not only associated to one’s nation but is also a feeling or as an affective construct.

3.4 HOME AND BELONGING

Home is not just experienced as a location but more so, as a feeling of belonging (Ralph and Vannini 518). An individual’s search for a sense of belonging is another recurring theme in diasporic fiction and is central to our understanding of how people give meaning to the concept of home. Parallel to the migrant’s constant reconstitution of a feeling of being at home, “belonging itself is a continual ongoing process, more usefully viewed as a journey rather than as a leap between absolute fixed points of departure and arrival” (Neelima 33). In this section, I aim to look into how the notion of belonging is both employed as a method and represented as a theme in creating and shaping the female protagonist’s sense of home in the narrative.

At the beginning, even a migrant like Nadia who is very open-minded to change and people of other cultures does maintain a strong connection and attachment to the people from her place of origin. Chennaiahgari Neelima sheds light on this issue by remarking that in moments of crisis or emotional crossroads which are recurrent in a diasporic life, migrants yearn for “comforting symbols and connections to their past and ethnicity” in order to achieve a sense of belonging (35). Neelima’s postulation is clearly evident in the case of Nadia and Saeed especially during the first time that they have reached the refugee camp in Mykonos from their city of birth. Hamid describes the camp as one composed of “hundreds of tents and lean-tos and people of many colors and hues” who speak “a cacophony that was the languages of the world” (100). What is being depicted here is the existence of a diverse and multi-cultural community in the camp. So in a way, all in the group are foreigners but at the same time, they are united by their foreignness. However, despite of the sense of oneness in the camp, “Nadia and Saeed

quickly located a cluster of fellow countrywomen and -men” (100). This means that as neophyte migrants, they both rigidly cling to the comfort and familiarity of their homeland by reconnecting with their people. Thus, despite the existence of a culturally and linguistically diverse population in the refugee camp, Nadia and Saeed are still gravitated towards their fellowmen.

Running primarily on bartering among its occupants, they are told that the camp is mostly safe and that “decent people vastly outnumbered dangerous ones” (101). However, they are also informed of the presence of gangs, swindlers, and murderers in the camp. This description of the camp as heard by Nadia and Saeed highlights that living in the island is not actually safe and thus, making it more necessary for them as new migrants to live closely with people who are from their country.

However, it is argued that their sense of belonging that is mainly anchored towards their home country and fellowmen can also turn out to be restrictive and disadvantageous at some point in time. During their stay in the refugee camp in the Greek isle, they meet an acquaintance of Saeed who assures them that he is a “people smuggler” (109) and thus, he can help them to get off the island. Being an old friend of Saeed, he gives them a discount on his rate. Nadia and Saeed, on the other hand, feel grateful for his generosity. However, to their surprise, they can no longer find him the next day. Apparently, both of them are easily trustful of the man as they belong to the same country. However, this scene exemplifies that a strict nationalistic sense of belonging is not always favorable to the migrant. Their different reactions after the incident are also worth discussing:

Nadia knew they had been swindled, such things were common, and Saeed knew it too, but preferred for a while to try to believe that something had happened to the man that had prevented him from returning, and when he prayed, Saeed prayed not only for the man’s return but also for his safety (109).

Interestingly, Saeed still tries to pretend and creates his own version of the story. His act of pretending and praying for the man exemplifies his blindness for the truth when it comes to matters that might besmirch his links to his country. On the other hand, Nadia outrightly acknowledges that they have been swindled. In Nadia’s case, this event can be interpreted as the starting point that impels her to shape a sense of belonging that is not only attained by maintaining links with her country and her people.

Thus, in Mykonos, Nadia starts to find a sense of belonging even with foreign people as exemplified by her friendship with the local Greek girl. And this sense of belonging that is not grounded on national roots intensifies as she moves farther away from her city of birth through space and through time. Therefore, it is argued that because of her new found sense of belonging, she is also able to find a meaning of home that is not tied to a specific place or location.

Such discovery becomes more evident when Nadia and Saeed move to the London mansion from Mykonos. While living in the mansion which is predominantly inhabited by Nigerians, Nadia becomes the only non-Nigerian member of a council that is primarily composed of Nigerian elders. The sense of belonging that she feels as a member of the council is crucial for her feeling of being at home in the mansion. During her meetings with the council, she realizes that a feeling of belonging is not only attained by sharing a similar racial, cultural, and religious background:

Over time she understood more and more, and she understood also that the Nigerians were in fact 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 tongues among themselves, and belonged to different religions (144).

Hage postulates that a feeling of belonging or community and thus, a sense of home is achieved when an individual lives in a space where one acknowledges other people as one's own and where one feels that he is also recognized by them as such (418). The novel sheds light on this fact through Nadia's realization that the members of the council are not actually full-blooded Nigerians and her insight that there is probably no such thing as being fully Nigerian at all. For Nadia, a sense of belonging and home are not only achieved by sharing the same geographical origin, nationality, religion or cultural background but more so, it is attained through "a feeling of shared symbolic forms, shared morality" and "shared values" (Hage 418-419).

Hamid describes the activities of the council as one that is basically mundane from "making decisions on room disputes or claims of theft or unneighborly behavior, and also on relations with other houses on the street"(145). Therefore, we can argue that it is because of their shared value or goal of creating a homely feeling in the house and that is by keeping the peace,

domesticity, and camaraderie among its inhabitants including their neighbors that the members of the council, especially Nadia, are able to attain a sense of belonging.

Sharing a common language is likewise universally acknowledged as one of the important factors in order for the individual to feel a sense of belonging in a particular group or community (Hage 419). In describing the language used in the council, the text reveals that the members of the council converse with each other in “a language that was built in large part from English, but not solely from English” (144). Some of the members are “more familiar with English than were others” and more so, they speak in “different variations of English, different Englishes, and so when Nadia gave voice to an idea or opinion among them, she did not need to fear that her views could not be comprehended, for her English was like theirs, one among many” (144). Thus, once again what is being stressed here is the importance of sharing a common language in the context of home and belonging. However, by describing the hybridity of the English language that is used by Nadia and the members of the council, the novel likewise stresses on the fact that the mastery or the ability to speak a language in the native level is not actually necessary for the migrant to achieve a sense of belonging. Through Nadia, the novel hints on the idea that what is more important is the fact that the individual is able to express himself without fear and is understood by his listeners on the other hand. This representation of the dynamics between language, home, and belonging in the novel is in line with the proposition of Pierre Bourdieu who avers that the home is an imagined place “where one possesses maximal communicative power” (qtd. in Hage 419). Thus, a person acquires a sense of home when he is given “the capacity to speak appropriately in a variety of recognizable specific situations. It is a space where one knows that at least some people—family or friends—can be morally relied on for help” (qtd. in Hage 419). Hence, drawing from Bourdieu’s proposition, it is no longer surprising that Nadia finds a sense of belonging in the council and a sense of home in the London mansion.

Contrastingly, Saeed finds his existence in the mansion as “more jarring” (129). Unlike Nadia who finds a sense of belonging and companionship with the other migrants in the mansion, Saeed is distrustful especially of the other men living in the house. He finds it disconcerting to be living in close proximity “with people who spoke in tongues he did not understand” (129). More so, the fact that he is the only man from his country who is living in the house worries him and makes him feel unsafe. In other words, Saeed finds it difficult to integrate

himself with people from other races and cultures. And thus, as opposed to Nadia, he cannot feel a sense of home and belonging in the mansion. Instead, he spends most of his time in another house in their neighborhood which is “known to be a house of people from his country” (148). Unlike Nadia who feels comfortable in communicating in a hybrid of languages, Saeed finds more comfort in the languages and accents of his countrymen. Moreover, the religious ambiance and practices in the house make him feel that he is a part of the group. And thus, after learning from a man who lives in the house that he and Nadia can also live with them although they will have to stay in separate rooms, Saeed tells the news to Nadia. However, instead of taking it as “good news” (149), Nadia is perplexed by Saeed’s suggestion and asks Saeed: “Why would we want to move?” to which Saeed replies, “To be among our own kind” (149). Nadia’s questioning that contradicts Saeed’s unequivocal statement already reveals their opposing views on the meaning of home and belonging. When Nadia asks Saeed as to what makes them their own kind, Saeed replies, “They’re from our country” (149). Once again, his reply reflects his desire for the nation. Hence, it is only by maintaining connections with the people from his country that he finds a sense of belonging. For him, people who do not share a common nationality or culture with him can never be considered as one of his kind. This also explains why he fails to assimilate himself and never finds a sense of home in the London mansion.

On the contrary, Nadia’s replies firmly reject Saeed’s fixed ideology of nation as home. For Nadia, similarities in nationality and place of origin do not necessarily equate for an individual to feel that he or she belongs to a particular group or community:

“From the country we used to be from.”

“Yes.” Saeed tried not to sound annoyed.

“We’ve left that place.”

“That doesn’t mean we have no connection.”

“They’re not like me.”

“You haven’t met them.”

“I don’t need to.” She released a long, taut breath. “Here we have our own room,” she said, softening her tone. “Just the two of us. It’s a big luxury. Why would we give that up to sleep apart? Among dozens of strangers (149-150)?”

As the text reveals, Nadia’s determination to stay in the London mansion is saturated with multiple meanings. The mention of having their own room as a big luxury speaks of a person’s

desire for material comfort. However, if taken deeply and figuratively, it also reveals her wish to keep her home and sense of belonging that she has already found in the London mansion. For Nadia, a “home” not just refers to a house that links the individual to her country of origin and its people but also to a community where he or she can find his or her place. For Nadia, it also symbolizes a space where she can keep her privacy and domesticity, where she can live her everyday life as normally as possible. This is shown by her desire to continuously occupy a private room that she and Saeed can use on their own. Nadia thus exemplifies Svetlana Boym’s thinking that “to feel at home is to know that things are in their place and so are you” (251). In her case, home becomes a state of mind that does not depend upon the place where she comes from or even her actual location. For her, finding home means a sense of belonging that allows her to build relationships and to live her life as a normal human being as possible wherever she is. Likewise, her reply that she is not similar to the inhabitants where Saeed wants to transfer to reveal her inner thoughts that unlike them and Saeed, she does not only find a sense of home and belonging by maintaining links to things that are associated to their place of origin. Instead, for her, it is something that an individual can create and find for herself.

Though Nadia seems to find a sense of belonging in every place that she moves to, the novel also hints at the fact that finding a sense of belonging is not easy. Neelima points out that for migrants, “eventual belonging is an arduous and long-term painful process and not an instantaneous privilege” (36). Indeed, this is true in the case of Nadia and Saeed who have to encounter backlash and discrimination in every place that they move to. Upon their arrival in a beach in Mykonos, they are shooed away by a native man and while in London, they are repeatedly subjected to nativist backlash. Even in Marin, aside from the tattooed man who threatened Nadia, she is also initially subjected to discrimination by her fellow workers due to her black robe.

However, despite the difficulties, the novel seems to arrive at the point that finding a sense belonging and therefore, a sense of home is possible for the migrant woman. In Marin, which is her last place of foreign destination in the novel, Nadia eventually finds a sense of community with her co-workers and starts a relationship with the cook who is also working in their cooperative. Although Saeed is the person with whom she always feels a sense of belonging. However, her separation with him at the end of the novel is a reiteration that a feeling of belonging and thus a sense of home is not only achieved by maintaining connections with

one's country or homeland and its people but rather, it is a journey or a process that must be continuously worked on by the migrant.

4. Chapter Three

REPRESENTATIONS OF IDENTITY FOR THE MIGRANT WOMAN

“For personalities are not a single immutable color, like white or blue, but rather illuminated screens, and the shades we reflect depend much on what is around us.”

-Hamid

The rise of globalization in the present century has made the topic of human identity to become an increasingly relevant subject across a variety of academic disciplines (Wagner 237). In the modern age, the notion of identity is associated with the ideas of “unity, continuity, coherence, sense of development” (Wagner 238). However, the same no longer applies in our postmodern society where the term is now accorded the meaning of “discontinuity, fragmentation, dispersal, reflexivity, and transition” (Wagner 238). Thus, as opposed to the traditional way by which identity is defined, we can no longer consider it as a generalized or fixed concept.

This transformative meaning of identity has become more applicable in the case of migration. Parallel to the diasporic concept of home, the notion of the self or identity is generally depicted as “dynamic, multi-dimensional, and evolving” (Neelima 33). Iain Chambers posits that, “our sense of being, of identity and language, is experienced and extrapolated from movement: the 'I' does not preexist this movement and then go out into the world, the 'I' is constantly being formed and reformed in such movement in the world” (24). In other words, as we human beings move across various places and cultures, our identity likewise changes. The act of leaving one’s country of origin likewise carries with it the inevitable loss of a part of an individual’s identity, most particularly, his cultural identity. When the migrant moves to another country, he tries to act normally in the same way that he used to act in his country of origin however, the reaction that he receives in the host country is no longer the same. Thus, since the normal reaction that he expects from his environment is already missing, the migrant suffers a partial loss in his identity (Wagner 238). Citing a study by Verena Vordermayer, Consuela Wagner posits that there are various strategies employed by migrants in order to reconstruct their identity in the host country and one of these is by creating a hybrid identity. The hybrid type is one who locates himself “between a rock and a hard place” (qtd. in Wagner 244), whereby the migrant maintains multiple backgrounds by keeping his link to the original culture while at the

same time actively assimilating himself in the host society (Wagner 244). Hence, by creating a hybrid identity, the migrant is able to navigate across different cultures without much difficulty.

These ideas of transformation in identity and the creation of a hybrid identity are very much evident in the case of Nadia in *Exit West* who is portrayed as a key example of a migrant woman whose identity is influenced by the places and cultures that she encounters throughout the narrative and who acquires a hybrid identity in the process. Interestingly, Nadia is the only female character who is given a name in the novel thus ideally giving her a fixed and distinct identity. However, the name “Nadia” in the text does not correspond to a single identity but to a hybrid or multiple identities. The migrant heroine undergoes different and distinct changes in her life as she moves from one place to another and yet, she also embodies different identities simultaneously. The shifts in her identity do not necessarily follow a sequential order but rather, overlap with each other; the “Nadia” of the present is constantly influenced by the “Nadia” of the past and vice versa. In its portrayal of hybridity and fluidity against a stable and fixed identity, *Exit West* asserts the migrant woman as one of both postcolonial and feminist sensibilities. In feminist writing, Teresa de Lauretis avers that such ability to create and muster fluid identities can be considered as a strategy that allows the individual to navigate across cultures:

“The concept of a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity, a subject that is not divided in, but rather at odds with language; an identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race, and class and often indeed across languages and cultures; an identity that one decides to claim from a history of multiple assimilations, and that one insists upon as a strategy” (9).

In other words, there are many advantages to having a multiple and fluid identity since it gives the individual the capacity to combine or make use of his multicultural background in order to assimilate himself in the society. Throughout the novel, Nadia’s “multiple, shifting and self-contradictory identity” can be interpreted as a strategy that enabled her to reconstruct herself and find a sense of home and belonging in the various places that she lives in throughout the narrative.

Engaging with the preceding theories of the migrant’s negotiation of multiple identities; this chapter will explore the identity transformation as well as the reconstruction of a hybrid identity by Nadia, the migrant heroine in *Exit West*. The first section focuses on the character of Nadia as a migrant woman whose identity transformation is influenced as she moves through

different nations and cultures. In the second section, the discussion will highlight Nadia's black robe which is one of the major tropes in the novel as a symbolism of her hybridity. It will look into the robe as a representation of her multiple identities and as to how she makes use of it in order to navigate different cultures and thus exert her hybrid personality. And finally, the third section analyzes Nadia's relationship with Saeed alongside the major foreign women that she develops a relationship with in the novel. This study argues that through the portrayal of her relationships with these characters, *Exit West* is likewise able to illustrate a different frame of Nadia's hybrid identity.

4.1 THE TRANSFORMED MIGRANT WOMAN

As the migrant makes contact with and tries to assimilate himself or herself in the new culture, an inevitable change happens to the individual and thus arise the need to confront or reform his or her identity. For Nadia, the prospect of migration and the promise of change that it could bring in her life give her excitement. Unlike Saeed who detests the idea of leaving their home and loved ones behind, Nadia is more likely the one who is eager to depart. However, at the beginning, she also feels anxious about the idea of living in a foreign place and leaving their city. She is afraid that doing so will mean that they will have to be controlled by others, putting them "at the mercy of strangers, subsistent on handouts, caged in pens like vermin" (90). In other words, Nadia believes that living as migrants will deprive them of their freedom and decency. She has a presumption that migrants are not treated with human compassion and are rather stereotyped by the natives in the society.

Nadia's perceived allusion to the life of a migrant with that of a caged vermin reflects the pervading negative attitudes towards migrants. Recent data by the Migration Data Portal shows that people, especially in Europe, tend to have an unfavorable view of migration with a majority of the population opting to have it decreased ("Immigration & emigration statistics"). Thus, this choice of using vermin as a symbolism is significant in understanding Nadia's initial perception to the life of a migrant in a foreign country before she becomes one herself. Nadia visualizes a migrant's life as one of the despicable and repugnant "other", alienated and detested in the society just like a venomous vermin. Likewise, even prior to their migration to another country, Nadia is already aware that their movement will lead to a transformation in her identity. Turning

into a caged vermin represents the destructive identity alteration proposed by Ladele and Omotayo as the migrant woman loses her identity, becomes faceless and voiceless, and is merely objectified (56). In Nadia's case, her symbolic visualization of herself as a caged vermin in another country represents her early perception that becoming a migrant will metaphorically turn her into a detestable object or animal.

Such representation of the migrant's "otherness" as imagined by Nadia is instantly experienced by her and Saeed upon their arrival in Mykonos. As they make their first voyage through the black door and make their way outside of it, they find themselves emerging between two small buildings by a beach. Fronting the beach is a beach club with various bars and restaurants marked with signs in English and other European languages. As they stand by the beach club, soon, "a pale-skinned man with light brown hair came out and told them to move along, making shooing gestures with his hands, but without any hostility or particular rudeness, more as though he was conversing in an international pidgin dialect of sign language" (100). The descriptions of the signs in the beach club as "written in English but also in other European languages" as well as the description of the man as one of "pale-skinned man with light brown hair" are crucial to depict the rapidly growing migration issue particularly in Europe and North America. Likewise, the comparison made between the "man's shooing gestures with his hands" with that of "an international pidgin dialect of sign language" (100), reiterates the universal reality that the presence of migrants in a foreign country is viewed with disparagement and opposition. Nadia and Saeed on the other hand, need not speak the man's language to understand his message that they are not welcome in such area of the beach. His act of shooing them away suggests that they are not welcomed by his countrymen and their way of living. Viewing them as the "other", his gestures also indicate the man's inner thoughts that they ought to live only with their fellow migrants. In response, Nadia and Saeed leave the area near the beach club and eventually catch sight of a refugee camp on a sheltered portion of a hill.

While living on a refugee camp in Mykonos, Nadia does not immediately let go of her past beliefs and practices that she used to have in her homeland. Anxious of their "otherness" as a migrant, "Nadia and Saeed quickly located a cluster of fellow countrywomen and men" (100). Even though there is a prevailing sense of unity in the camp as everyone in the group was foreign, they still find themselves gravitated towards the people from their own country. Their

connection to their original culture remains and their heritage pulls them to stay in their comfort zone by living with their fellowmen.

However, although Nadia initially clings to her homeland and its people, migration inevitably creates an unexpected change in her action and behavior. In Mykonos, Nadia starts to free herself from the rules and prohibitions imposed on them in their homeland, particularly on how she should behave in public. This is soon exhibited by Nadia on the day of their arrival in the refugee camp. While in the midst of preparations of their tent, “Nadia squatted down beside a scraggly bush and bade him (Saeed) squat down as well, and there concealed tried to kiss him under the open sky” (102). Nadia’s migration in a new land immediately allows her to transform into a woman who defies societal norms that are expected of her in her homeland. Kissing each other in public or any other form of public intimacy is something that they were never allowed to do in their home country for such acts are prohibited by the radical militants. Thus, by doing so, Nadia begins to transgress against the rules and to detach herself from the imprints of her past. Her sudden transformation is met however with bitterness and perplexity by Saeed: “He turned his face away angrily, and then immediately apologized, and placed his cheek against hers, and she tried to relax against him, cheek to bearded cheek, but she was surprised” (102). Unlike Nadia, Saeed’s angry reaction shows that he still clings to his obedient and conservative self. Thus, in this, Saeed represents the usual and resolute hesitancy of a migrant to let go of past beliefs and practices. Nadia, on the other hand, is beginning to view their living in a new country as an opportunity for change and exploration. While most of the people in the camp live their days in boredom and false hopes, Nadia comes up with an idea and encourages Saeed that they should rather “explore the island as if they were tourists” to which “Saeed laughed and agreed” (108). Her idea exemplifies that she is already starting to embrace her diasporic life. Instead of hanging on to her old negative thoughts that migrants are like caged vermin, she now opts to consider themselves as tourists. Her new environment and experiences inevitably push her to challenge and shape her old views and beliefs.

It is when Nadia meets a young local girl from Mykonos that the narrative shifts and Nadia displays a significant transformation in her identity. Meeting the girl from Mykonos is the very first instance that Nadia and Saeed meet a compassionate local during their travels. Compared to the pale-skinned man whom they met upon their arrival, the girl has shown empathy to their needs. Their meeting has a great impact especially to Nadia as she starts to

discover a new part of her identity and finds in her the possibility of establishing cross-cultural friendships. Nadia's relationship with the Greek girl will be examined in detail in the third section of this chapter. Not long thereafter, the girl helps them and takes them to a house with a door that brings them to the London mansion.

The black door in Mykonos leads Nadia and Saeed into a beautiful and expensive bedroom with a dazzling view of the city skyline at night. Upon turning on the TV, they found out that they are in London and eventually, they soon realize that they are not actually in a hotel but in a large empty mansion. Delighting in the luxury of the place that they have found for themselves, Nadia satisfies herself with her long wanted desire to take a shower. Her shower scene rivetingly albeit metaphorically portrays her inevitable desire for transformation in her identity:

In the hall nearby was a bathroom, and Nadia wanted to take a shower more than anything, more even than she wanted food. Saeed stood watch outside, while she went in and stripped, and observed her own body, leaner than she had ever seen it, and streaked with a grime mostly of her own biological creation, dried sweat and dead skin, and with hair in places from which she had always banished hair, and she thought her body looked like the body of an animal, a savage. The water pressure in the shower was magnificent, striking her flesh with real force, and scouring her clean. The heat was superb too, and she turned it up as high as she could stand, the heat going all the way into her bones, chilled from months of outdoor cold, and the bathroom filled up with steam like a forest in the mountains, scented with pine and lavender from the soaps she had found, a kind of heaven, with towels so plush and fine that when she at last emerged she felt like a princess using them, or at least like the daughter of a dictator who was willing to kill without mercy in order for his children to pamper themselves with cotton such as this, to feel this exquisite sensation on their naked stomachs and thighs, towels that felt as if they had never been used before and might never be used again (120-121).

Nadia's strong craving for a bath represents her desire to refashion not only her physical self but more so, her inner self. The "grime", "dried sweat", "dead skin" and "hair in places from which she had always banished hair" that she observes in her body symbolize her invisible baggage of beliefs, practices, and memories of the past. Looking at her body, she finds that her body looks like that "of an animal, a savage". With such past baggages, she feels objectified and limited like

a ferocious animal thus Nadia feels the need to clean up and refashion her self-image by taking in the pleasure of the magnificent water pressure of the shower and its superb heat. These indicate Nadia's desire to leave her old self behind as she experiences unexpected delights in a new place. Thus, by the symbolic act of taking a shower, Nadia finds herself transforming from a savage animal into a princess or a dictator's daughter. As a migrant woman, Nadia finds her circumstance as an opportunity to reinvent herself into a more positive version, as a way to acquire freedom and agency like a princess or a dictator's daughter.

Nadia's shower scene likewise exemplifies her capability to adapt to a new place despite the complexity of their circumstances. As foreshadowed earlier in the novel, "Nadia had long been, and would afterwards continue to be, more comfortable with all varieties of movement in her life than was Saeed" (90). Instead of feeling anxious for having been flung into an extremely unfamiliar context, she feels excitement and remains open to change. The bathroom also becomes a sort of microcosm or starting place of the greater London that provides her a new space to transform herself, away from the gaze or judgment of the public. It becomes the private place that allows her to renew and realize the impossibility of holding on to her roots for familiarity and security. She has already encountered new places thus, inevitably resulting to a new version of herself so much so that as she begins to put her old clothes back on, she suddenly finds it unbearable as "the stench from them was overpowering" (121). Again, her old and filthy clothes signify the remnants of her past which she is trying so hard to get rid of. Hence, she decides to wash them in the tub however, as she was about to do so, she hears Saeed pounding on the locked door. Upon opening she finds "a nervous and annoyed and dirty-looking Saeed" (122). Perplexed by Nadia's easygoing reception of their unfamiliar situation, Saeed is angered telling her that she has been in the bathroom like forever, acting as if it is their house. In response, Nadia tells him that she needs a few more minutes to wash her clothes and Saeed "stared but did not disagree" (122). However, Nadia believes that despite his disapproval, Saeed could not stop her as she already "felt a steel in herself which she knew meant she would have washed them anyway" (122). This resolution that Nadia finds in herself signifies her commitment to change herself.

However, as much as she wants to discard her history, Saeed remains to remind her of her past and origins. Thus, as she washes her clothes, she finds that "the extraordinary satisfactions of the steamy bathroom seemed to have evaporated as she shut the door, and the washing of her

clothes, watching the turbid water flow from them down the drain of the bathtub, was disappointingly utilitarian” (122). Her discussion with Saeed challenges her earlier new found resolution to unlearn her past and cling to new ways. Nadia then finds herself “caught in between two worlds” as earlier pointed out by Charles Exley (56). Therefore, “she exists in a puzzling state of being pushed and pulled by two lands” (Li 209). Nadia shares this state of being pushed and pulled by her homeland as represented by Saeed and London, her new land. Physically she is in London, but mentally and emotionally, her identity is caught between the two.

However, despite the constant push from her past that constantly connects her back to her old self and homeland, the rift in her relationship with Saeed has already started in Mykonos, when Nadia tried to kiss Saeed in the open but is met with bitterness by the latter. This rift further intensifies when they move to London. As they continue to stay in the mansion, other refugees begin taking things from the house that are valuable. Notably, Saeed is the only person who objects about it. Nadia, in turn, chastises him for taking such an absurd and dangerous position. She harshly tells him not to be an idiot, and this shocks him although he understands that she only means to protect him. Nadia’s actuation is contrary to the united disposition that they both previously have when they first arrived in London wherein just like Saeed, she is also adamant about taking things from the house, as they consider it as an act of theft. Their personality begins to contradict each other in the same way that their past contradicts their present, their homeland versus their new land. A rupture in their relationship results each time they step through one of the black doors. Nadia’s drifting apart from Saeed metaphorically means detaching from her old self.

And although she is never able to completely let go of the past Nadia, her detachment from her old land and her attachment to a new land inevitably results for her to acquire a new identity. Living with the other refugees in the mansion in London, Nadia finds the experience very positive and rewarding. She also joins a council in the mansion which is mainly composed of Nigerians except for her. In other words, instead of viewing herself as the repugnant “other”, Nadia starts to appreciate that there can actually be multicultural unity in diversity. Her newly acquired positive views about living with other people continue on even when they finally move to Marin. Just like when she is still living in London, Nadia is likewise able to form friendship with her co-employees in the food cooperative and with their head cook. She has also learned to appreciate diversity in terms of music and food. Thus, from these discussions, we can surmise

that from the Nadia who can only initially link herself to her country's people and culture, her diasporic experiences have significantly transformed her into a multicultural migrant woman who embraces the idea of living with foreign people and cultures with all positivity.

4.2 NADIA'S BLACK ROBE AS A SYMBOL OF HYBRIDITY

At the beginning, we are introduced to the character of Nadia who is described as “a young woman” who “was always clad from the tips of her toes to the bottom of her jugular notch in a flowing black robe” (1). Although Nadia's religious or racial affiliation is never identified in the narrative, we can argue that Hamid alludes her “black robe” to the niqab or the burqa, a religious robe worn by Muslim women. In *Exit West*, we might argue that Hamid employs the trope of Nadia's black robe in order to illustrate its multiple representations and highlight Nadia's hybrid personality in the process.

For many, most particularly in the Western world, women who wear these religious robes are stereotyped as oppressed women who are always in call for help (Down 378). Sarah Down argues that with this monolithic stereotype that associates the robes to the symbol of women oppression or submission lies the assumption that there is a lack of choice or agency on the part of the women who choose to wear the garment (378). Women who don the black robe are perceived as strictly conforming to the dictates of their cultures and traditions (386). In the novel, these stereotypes are primarily demonstrated and enforced through the character of Saeed and his perceptions of Nadia. This is revealed early in the novel during one of their first conversations:

In the stairwell he turned to her and said, “Listen, would you like to have a coffee,” and after a brief pause added, to make it seem less forward, given her conservative attire, “in the cafeteria”?

Nadia looked him in the eye. “You don't say your evening prayers?” she asked.

Saeed conjured up his most endearing grin. “Not always. Sadly.”

Her expression did not change.

So he persevered, clinging to his grin with the mounting desperation of a doomed rock climber: “I think it's personal. Each of us has his own way. Or . . . her own way.

Nobody's perfect. And, in any case— (2-3)”

As the text reveals, Saeed already has his stereotypical assumptions about Nadia due to the robe she is wearing. His words and actions represent the common stereotype about women who wear the black robe as conservative and conformist. His timidity as made known by his “brief pause” exposes this stereotype. Moreover, his usage of the words “in the cafeteria” reveals his presumption that Nadia does not talk to men except in public spaces due to her conservativeness.

Likewise, due to Nadia’s decision to wear her robe, Saeed presumes that she is a religious woman. This is depicted by his endearing grin and persistence to justify and explain himself to her for not regularly doing his evening prayers. Since he already assumes that Nadia is devoutly religious, he also attempts to present himself as equally religious although in a different way which he argues, is only personal to him. In order to win her over based on his presumptions, Saeed also tries to uphold his religiosity to Nadia.

The rest of their initial conversation and Nadia’s actions afterwards reveals that in fact, Nadia is quick to debunk these stereotypes that Saeed associates with her black robe. While Saeed is still trying to explain himself, she interrupts him:

“I don’t pray,” she said.

She continued to gaze at him steadily.

Then she said, “Maybe another time.”

He watched as she walked out to the student parking area and there, instead of covering her head with a black cloth, as he expected, she donned a black motorcycle helmet that had been locked to a scuffed-up hundred-ish cc trail bike, snapped down her visor, straddled her ride, and rode off, disappearing with a controlled rumble into the gathering dusk (3).”

By straightforwardly saying that she does not pray, Nadia controverts the stereotype that wearing the black robe strictly reflects the cultural or religious belief of the woman who is donning it. Through her steady gaze towards Saeed, she likewise makes use of her eyes as a powerful symbol to challenge his predetermined assumption. Her refusal to drink coffee with him can also be interpreted as a rejection of his stereotypes about women due to their clothing. Thus, through her initial interaction with Saeed, Nadia highlights the idea that the fixed and dominant perception of the black robe as a symbol of traditionalism and oppression does not apply in all circumstances and that it is in fact endowed with multifarious meanings.

One of the multiple meanings that Nadia exhibits with her black robe during her meeting with Saeed is the view that women who wear the black robe do actually have the right to express their freedom and agency. This is further reinforced through Nadia's portrayal of a woman who rides on a motorcycle. The fact that she rides a motorcycle is heavily laden with meanings that contradict the outward appearance of her black robe. First, it highlights Nadia's agency and independent personality. In media and literature, women are often depicted as mere back seat passengers. With this portrayal, women are metaphorically depicted as individuals who do not have the freedom or the capacity to govern themselves. Thus, by portraying Nadia with her motorcycle, the novel debunks this stereotype. Indeed, her agency and independence is unquestionably illustrated in *Exit West* and is set in framing with Nadia's decision to move out of her family home at the beginning of the narrative and her final decision to leave Saeed and live on her own at the end of *Exit West*.

We might say that Nadia's depiction as a woman riding on a motorcycle with her black robe also stresses her unconventionality despite being a woman who is constrained by the rules and norms of her society. In Hamid's words, she "puts on her robe" in order "to resist the claims and expectations of the world" (45). Her non-conformity is made known through her unconventional views such as with regards to pre-marital sex. Contrary to the appearance of her religious robe which invites people to assume that she is a reserved woman, Nadia is in fact very open to pre-marital sex. Unlike Saeed, she does not believe that a person has to wait until marriage before one has to become intimate. This is also evident during her previous relationship with the musician. In fact, during their first meeting in an underground concert, she "as was by then usual for her, been wearing her black robe, closed to her neck" (30). But again, in contrast to the image of her black robe, Nadia exhibits her unconventionality by sleeping with him and by losing her virginity during the first night that she meets him.

Most importantly, Nadia considers her black robe as a means to subvert patriarchy. This becomes evident during the time when she finally accepts Saeed's invitation over a cup of coffee. Confused by the outward appearance of her black robe and Nadia's true personality behind the robe, Saeed inquires Nadia about her real purpose for wearing it:

"If you don't pray," he said, lowering his voice, "why do you wear it?".....

She smiled. Took a sip. And spoke, the lower half of her face obscured by her cup.

"So men don't fuck with me," she said (15-16).

From their conversation, we are informed once again that from Saeed's point of view, Nadia's black robe represents her religious and cultural belonging and we might argue the self-suppression of her sexuality. However, her reply reveals otherwise. She makes use of her black robe as a symbol of protection especially against men. However, rather than a defensive marker, her robe is actually reclaimed by Nadia as an object for her power as a woman. The language that she uses in this scene to intentionally subvert Saeed's reading of the robe, and to shock him, underlines her tenacity and agency. Through her words and actions, she repeatedly debunks his fixed understanding of the black robe as a symbol of female conservativeness and piety. Contrary to his expectations, Nadia bestows it with another meaning and that is, to subvert male domination or patriarchy by the robe as an object for her use.

Indeed, true to Nadia's words, there are many instances in the novel where her black robe has been significantly useful in protecting herself from men or from liberating herself from their desires and caprices. In one instance, she is able to save herself from the groping of a man who tries to penetrate her with his finger because of the "multiple fabrics of her robe" (59). By sexually harassing her, the man attempts to wield his male power or dominion over her. However, through her black robe, Nadia effectively creates a boundary that resists such power. Consonant to her words, she indeed wears the black robe to keep men away or so that men do not fuck with her.

Interestingly, the subversion of patriarchy which Nadia exhibits through her use of the black robe is also demonstrated when Nadia makes Saeed wear the robe himself. One such instance is Saeed's need to wear the robe in order for him to be able to enter Nadia's apartment:

The bag landed beside Saeed with a muffled thump. He opened it, found her spare downstairs key, and also one of her black robes, which he furtively pulled on over his own outfit, covering his head with its hood, and then, with a mincing gait that reminded her of a stage-play robber, he approached the front door, unlocked it, and a minute later appeared at her apartment, where she motioned him to sit (25).

Noteworthy in this scene is the fact that it is Nadia who drops the black robe out of her window in order for Saeed to wear it and make his way to her room. Thus, we can argue that by making Saeed wear her black robe, Nadia is the one exerting her feminine authority over Saeed. It must also be noted that wearing the black robe is the only way that gives Saeed some sort of power to enter a space which he is ordinarily not allowed to like "a stage-play robber" (25). From this, we

can argue that the portrayal of Saeed wearing a black robe likewise symbolizes empowerment as espoused by Nadia. By making Saeed wear the black robe, the novel is able to show that the meaning of the religious robe significantly varies especially when one finally wears it as compared to when an individual merely views it from the outside. Thus, in effect, the narrative successfully challenges the monolithic meaning of female oppression and subversion as earlier pointed out by Sarah Down that is accorded to the black robe.

In accordance to the multiple meanings that Nadia is able to portray through her black robe, it is also argued that the robe likewise becomes a symbol of her multiplicity or hybridity when she becomes a migrant woman. Surprisingly, despite being an unconventional and multi-cultural woman, Nadia continues to wear her black robe as she and Saeed move to different countries. Once again, her action arouses curiosity on the part of Saeed during their stay in Mykonos:

He asked Nadia why she still wore her black robes, since here she did not need to, and she said that she had not needed to wear them even in their own city, when she lived alone, before the militants came, but she chose to, because it sent a signal, and she still wished to send this signal, and he smiled and asked, a signal even to me, and she smiled as well and said, not to you, you have seen me with nothing (110).

Once again, Nadia reiterates that she actually exercises her free will and agency by wearing the black robe. In addition, she exclaims that wearing the black robe allows her to send a “signal” even in their new destinations. Based on how she makes use of her black robe, it is therefore argued that such “signal” or symbolism can refer to her representation as a hybrid migrant woman. In other words, Nadia has the ability to utilize her black robe in order to maintain her original identity and connection to her place of origin while at the same time; she makes use of it in order for her to seamlessly assimilate in her new places of destination.

We might argue, therefore, that there are two main narrative strands related to Nadia’s wearing of the robe. On one hand, we can argue that by continuously wearing her black robe as a migrant woman, she is also unconsciously maintaining her link to her homeland. As a matter of fact, Nadia still wears her black robe when she returns to her city of birth and meets Saeed at the end of the novel. Therefore, arguably, just like Saeed who always connects her to her past, the black robe likewise symbolizes her connection to her past and her homeland.

Symbolically, the black robe represents her inexorable and ceaseless relation to her place of origin.

However, at the same time, the black robe symbolizes her capability to navigate foreign cultures. During their stay in the London mansion, she acquires “a bit of a special status” (145) among both the young and the old Nigerians inhabitants which is said to be probably due to her black robe. Unlike Saeed who always feels afraid and unsafe while living in the mansion, Nadia “came and went unruffled through the crowded rooms and passages” (145). Indeed, even in new places, she successfully employs her black robe as a symbol of agency and protection. And this still holds true when they move to Marin from London. Initially, many of her fellow employees in the food cooperative where she is working thinks of her black robe as “off-putting, or self-segregating, or in any case vaguely menacing” (213-214) thus, only a very few has really attempted to get to know her. Their stereotypical assumptions have changed however when “a pale-skinned tattooed man” (214) comes in the cooperative while Nadia is working on the register:

A pale-skinned tattooed man had come in while she was working the till and had placed a pistol on the counter and said to her, “So what the fuck do you think of that?”

Nadia did not know what to say and so she said nothing, not challenging his gaze but not looking away either. Her eyes focused on a spot around his chin, and they stood like this, in silence, for a moment, and the man repeated himself, a bit less steadily the second time, and then, without robbing the cooperative, or shooting Nadia, he left, taking his gun and cursing and kicking over a bushel of lumpy apples as he went (214).

In here, Hamid makes use of the description of the man as a “pale-skinned tattooed man” in order to show that he represents the common Western ideology about women who wear the religious robe. We can interpret that his action of threatening Nadia with his words and a pistol reveals his Western stereotypical presumption that she is an oppressive and victimized woman who does not have the ability to defend herself as represented by her black robe.

In this scene, Nadia defies once again the man’s stereotype by showing her bravery and fearlessness through her silence and by merely training her eyes around his chin. The man’s subsequent action of leaving without shooting anyone or taking anything shows his defeat and of Nadia’s victory in subverting his assumptions. By defying the stereotype about her black robe, she is also able to effectively assimilate herself in Marin’s foreign culture. After the incident,

“several people on her shifts began chatting with her a lot more after that” (214). In other words, people start to embrace her and Nadia also feels a sense of belonging.

From the close reading analysis of the employment of the black robe in Nadia’s narrative in *Exit West*, we can therefore conclude that through the multiple meanings of her black robe, Nadia is also able to portray herself as a hybrid woman. Indeed, as Hamid writes in the novel, her black robe is comparable to the “opaque usernames and avatars” (37) that she frequently uses online in order to explore the field of social media. Both of which allow her to portray different identities and navigate different cultures in a positive way. Through Nadia’s representation of the black robe, a conclusion as to whether the black robe is either uniformly oppressive or liberating to the woman is therefore not applicable. Instead, it is submitted that the black robe is subject to different meanings and interpretations and in Nadia’s case, it becomes a reflection of her complex and hybrid identity that allows her to navigate across cultures.

4.3 NADIA’S RELATIONSHIP WITH SAEED VIS-A-VIS THE THREE FOREIGN WOMEN IN *EXIT WEST*

In *Exit West*, Hamid likewise employs the perspective of Nadia’s relationship with Saeed alongside with the three foreign women that she respectively develops a relationship with during her diasporic movements throughout the novel to illustrate another frame of her hybrid identity. These foreign women include the girl from Mykonos, the old Nigerian woman in the London mansion, and the female cook from Marin. Through these relationships, Nadia is able to exemplify the advantages as well as the disadvantages of having a hybrid identity and most of all, her ability to navigate across cultures.

By taking this narrative approach, we might also argue that Hamid is suggesting that Saeed represents Nadia’s homeland while on the other hand, the three foreign women represent the diasporic lands that Nadia respectively inhabits throughout the novel. Among these three women, it is the local Greek girl from Mykonos whom Nadia meets first in the narrative. Interestingly, it is also through her meeting with the Greek girl that Nadia has started to appreciate the advantages and celebratory nature of her hybrid identity. Hamid describes the Greek girl:

A partly shaved-haired local girl who was not a doctor or a nurse but just a volunteer, a teenager with a kind disposition, not more than eighteen or nineteen years of age, cleaned and dressed the wound, gently, holding Nadia's arm as though it was something precious, holding it almost shyly. The two women got to talking, and there was a connection between them, and the girl said she wanted to help Nadia and Saeed, and asked them what they needed (113-114).

Again, it must be noted that in the early parts of *Exit West*, Nadia has a negative preconception about the natives with regards to their treatment of migrants. Her presumption is however contrary to the way that the Greek girl is described in the novel. As the text reveals, she is depicted as a young native volunteer who is very much willing to provide any form of help to Nadia and Saeed. Likewise, her gentle act of dressing Nadia's wound and holding her hands is in stark contrast to Nadia's early fears that as migrants, they might just be placed "at the mercy of strangers, subsistent on handouts, caged in pens like vermin" (90). In other words, she treats her with kindness and empathy. Thus, through the Greek girl, Nadia's stereotypical assumption about the natives of foreign places is debunked. This in effect has led her to a new understanding that a sense of openness to foreign people and their culture can actually be advantageous and uplifting on the part of the migrant. Hence, having discovered a new positive aspect of her hybrid identity, Nadia instantly forms a friendship with the Greek girl. After their first meeting, Nadia starts to meet her everyday and would sometimes smoke joints and have a coffee with her.

The Greek girl's influence to Nadia's newly acquired sense of hybridity is likewise exemplified by the fact that it is her who has helped Nadia and Saeed to find the door which takes them from Mykonos to London. Literally, by assisting them, the Greek girl has paved the way for them to move from one geographical border to another. But symbolically, we can likewise interpret that just like the magical black door, the Greek girl has opened up new possibilities and discoveries for Nadia. It is through her that Nadia is able to open up herself and be more tolerant of foreign people and cultures.

It must be noted that Saeed's reactions differ however. For an extremely nationalistic person like him, friendships and connections can only be formed between people of the same national or cultural background. Thus, he was astounded during the farewell scene between the Greek girl and Nadia:

The girl wished them good luck, and she hugged Nadia tight, and Saeed was surprised to see what appeared to be tears in the girl's eyes, or if not tears then at least a misty shine, and Nadia hugged her too, and this hug lasted a long time (114-115).

This hugging scene between the Greek girl and Nadia suggests that multicultural friendship between a native and a migrant is actually very possible. Furthermore, it is also argued that Nadia's act of hugging the Greek girl does not only reveal her connection with her but symbolically, it might also represent her newfound openness as a migrant. By embracing the girl, she is also metaphorically starting to embrace foreign people, culture, and places.

Their subsequent movement to London has proven more Nadia's capability as a hybrid migrant woman. During their stay in the London mansion, Nadia once again builds a sort of friendship with an old Nigerian woman. And just like the Greek girl, this woman has made it more possible for Nadia to take advantage of her hybrid personality. There is a sort of mutual relationship between the old Nigerian woman and Nadia. In one instance, Nadia attends the meeting of the council for the first time in which the old Nigerian woman is a member. Her presence is initially met with awkwardness not only because she is the only one who is the non-Nigerian attendant but more so, because of her young age:

Momentarily there was a silence, but then an old woman with a turban who lived with her daughter and grandsons in the bedroom above Saeed and Nadia's, and whom Nadia had helped on more than one occasion to ascend the stairs, the old woman being regal in posture but also quite large, this old woman motioned to Nadia, beckoned Nadia to come stand at her side, to stand beside the garden chair on which she was sitting. This seemed to settle the matter, and Nadia was not questioned or asked to leave (143-144).

As the text reveals, there has been a sort of reciprocal relationship between Nadia and the old Nigerian woman. Both of them are helping each other whereby Nadia would help the woman ascend the stairs while the old woman helps Nadia to be easily accepted by the council without any question or hesitation. Her act of beckoning Nadia "to come stand at her side" (144) shows her full support to her. It must be noted that the membership acquired by Nadia in the council is very significant in enhancing her multicultural personality. Through the council, she learned to embrace and be tolerant of people whose culture and language are different from hers.

Even in Marin, which is their final foreign destination in the story, Nadia is still able to prove her capability to navigate across cultures. One way by which she shows this is through her

relationship with the head cook of the cooperative where she is working. The cook introduces to Nadia “all sorts of old cuisines, and to new cuisines that were being born, for many of the world’s foods were coming together and being reformed in Marin, and the place was a taster’s paradise” (217). Thus, just like the Greek girl and the old Nigerian woman, the cook introduces to Nadia a new world and that is through food. And most of all, through her, Nadia discovers a new part of her sexuality by having a relationship with her.

Unlike Nadia, Saeed relentlessly represents the migrant who continues to hold on to his past and maintains a loyalty to his homeland. In *Exit West*, Saeed can be interpreted as a metaphor for Nadia’s relationship with her homeland. Just like her relationship with Saeed which starts strong but gradually wanes as the story progresses, her attachment and connection with her homeland likewise deteriorate as they move from one place to another. On the other hand, along with her relationship with Saeed, it is interesting that in every foreign place that Nadia they move to, Nadia becomes close to a woman who seems to mirror the diasporic identity that she aims to be. If her waning relationship with Saeed represents her attempt to let go of her past or national identity, her blossoming relationship with the other women in the novel reflects her desire to acquire a diasporic identity.

As earlier pointed out by Camilla Skalle in chapter one on recent research on representations of the migrant woman, the hybrid migrant woman does not necessarily choose between the culture of the country where she comes from and the new place where she finds herself. Instead, she positively makes use of both to adapt in various environments (85). It must be noted that Nadia is still living with Saeed during those times that she meets and has been building friendship with these foreign women. Drawing from this analysis, it is argued that her choice to maintain relationships with Saeed and the foreign women symbolically reflects her ability to navigate among cultures. Her decision to stay with Saeed suggests that no matter how hard she tries to assimilate in her new society and change her identity, the same is not possible because the past and her origin always live within her. On the other hand, her friendship with the foreign women reflects her diasporic identity.

In the final chapters of the novel, Nadia decides to leave Saeed. However, it must be noted that even after their separation, Nadia still continues to see him which means that she cannot completely let go of her past identity and her link to her homeland. Eventually, they stop seeing each other for a number of years. But in the final acts of the novel, Nadia returns to her

city of birth and meets Saeed. Her return and reunion with Saeed can thus be interpreted that even when she becomes a migrant, she can never completely let go of her connections with her homeland no matter where she goes. She may change but a remnant of the past or her place of origin remains in her thus, her hybrid personality. Nadia undergoes a profound identity shift as she moves from one foreign destination to another throughout the novel however, her return home can be interpreted as a reflection of her ever-hybrid and flexible identity that celebrates both her original and acquired diasporic cultures.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has critically analyzed the representation of the migrant woman in Moshin Hamid's *Exit West* by focusing on the text's engagement with the diasporic concepts of home and identity. In essence, this study explores the ways in which the migrant heroine engages with and represents these concepts and on how her representations destabilize the dominant and traditional meaning of home and identity. Such a reading of the novel illustrates how Nadia's narrative indicates that home and identity can no longer be considered as generalized, definite, or as fixed concepts. Instead, these concepts must be accorded multiple representations as they are experienced by the migrant woman in multifarious ways. For the migrant heroine in *Exit West*, the notions of home and identity are not strictly or unilaterally defined in relation to her place of origin or to any affiliation with a particular place. In other words, the narrative in the text is centered on the fact that although the migrant heroine initially defines her home and identity in strict association to her homeland or place of origin, this subsequently changes as she moves out of her city of birth and encounters various places and cultures.

In chapter two, we learned that the migrant woman represents and evokes the meaning of home in multiple ways. To start with, her home is shown as an expression of the self or her identity. And yet, beyond the interior decorations and physical structures that the migrant heroine has occupied throughout the novel lies her true personality. This is true in the case of Nadia's family home which is primarily decorated with religious artifacts framed and mounted on the walls and thus, could be read as reflecting the piousness, silence, submissiveness, and conformity of its female inhabitants. When Nadia decides to leave her family home, she rents her own home which enables her to project her inner desires, struggles, and determinations both as a person and as a woman. Her choice of a new home that is located atop of a building reflects her strong determination to rise above the obstacles in her life, her independence, and her fortitude to challenge the patriarchal structure in the society where she lives in. The roof terrace that she occupies which overlooks the market that has grown around the building where her home is situated can also be interpreted as a reflection of her open, confident, and sociable personality who has the ability to deal with different cultures and people from all walks of life. In addition, we also find that not only the physical structure of her new home reveals Nadia's personality but also its interior structure. It being a studio room is symbolic of Nadia's complex personality as

exemplified by the way she wears her black robe. Likewise, the diminutiveness of her flat reflects her difficulties and struggles as a single and unmarried woman.

More interestingly, we have also found that even the homes that Nadia has occupied when she migrates to foreign lands do in fact still reflect some part of her inner self. The physical structure of these diasporic homes is also significant in determining as to whether Nadia finds a sense of permanently being at home in it or not. Among these diasporic homes, Nadia could not find a permanent sense of home in the tent that she and Saeed built in Mykonos, the working encampment camp, or the so-called London Halo that they lived in after they were forced to evacuate the London mansion, or even the shanty that they assembled in Marin. The physical structure and composition of these diasporic homes which are mainly made of light and disposable materials reflect the vulnerability and instability of Nadia's inner self as a migrant woman. It has been interpreted that since these homes reflect the weak part of Nadia's self and the part that she wishes to suppress or does not wish to show to other people, Nadia could not find a sense of being permanently at home in it and thus her determination to leave these homes. On the other hand, Nadia finds a permanent sense of home in the London mansion and the room that she occupies on her own in Marin by the end of the novel. Unlike with her previous diasporic homes aforementioned, these homes symbolically represent the positive and strong part of Nadia's self. The structure of the London mansion which has many floors, rooms, and stairs as well as the presence of its inhabitants from different parts of the world reflects Nadia's hybrid and multicultural personality. Likewise, the room in Marin which she occupies after she decides to leave Saeed reflects her independent and courageous personality. Hence, since these homes reflect the part of Nadia's self that she wants to enhance or retain as a migrant woman, Nadia finds a permanent sense of home in these diasporic homes.

Another way by which the migrant woman evokes the meaning of home is by emplacing objects and practices in her new places of destination. One of the objects that Nadia emplaces early on in the novel is her lemon tree. Through the symbolism of the lemon tree which Nadia carries with her as she moves through places, she also demonstrates that the concept of home is not something that is fixed or rooted but is rather a feeling that the migrant woman can recreate wherever she may find herself. This also applies in the case of Nadia's mobile phone which she constantly carries with her throughout the story. Her mobile phone allows her to maintain her connections with her acquaintances not just from her homeland but with people from different

parts of the world who also make her feel at home. Hence, just like the lemon tree, the text employs the trope of the mobile phone in order to represent a diasporic meaning of home that is not specifically linked to a particular place but is one that the migrant woman can reconstruct in any part of the world. Aside from these objects, we have also found that Nadia's practices of listening to music and smoking joints or marijuana are also her ways of constructing a sense of home. Through these acts, Nadia symbolically marks a homely place in order to retain a feeling of security, familiarity, and comfort thus, a sense of home.

Third, it is clear that nostalgia, or the migrant woman's memories of her homeland and her past, plays a significant role in her construction of the meaning of home. Contrary to the stereotypical literary depictions of migrant women who are always in pain due to their nostalgic feelings, Nadia is depicted as a migrant woman who employs her nostalgic memories in order to enable or empower her in new places and rebuild her sense of home. For Nadia, her sense of nostalgia serves a dual role. First, she makes use of it to criticize the past that has endangered and terrorized her. In the novel, the concept of nostalgia reminds how the past has been endangering and restraining her as a woman. But on the other hand, her awareness of it plays a significant role in her determination to appreciate the present and embrace her new diasporic way of life such as by embracing the positivity of living in a multicultural society.

And lastly, the text illustrates how the notion of belonging is found to be closely linked to the migrant woman's experience of home. For Nadia, a sense of belonging is not only attained by sharing a similar racial, cultural, and religious background but is rather a feeling that is achieved when the migrant woman lives in a space in which she is acknowledged and recognized as one's own by a certain community. Ultimately, it is when the migrant woman is able to find a sense of belonging that she is also able to find a sense of home.

In chapter three, we find that parallel to the diasporic concept of home, the migrant woman's identity is not represented as a fixed or definite notion. In *Exit West*, Nadia is portrayed as a key example of a migrant woman who undergoes different and distinct changes in her identity as she is constantly influenced by the places and cultures that she encounters throughout the narrative. Although Nadia has always been an independent and open-minded woman, she has also been portrayed as a woman who has a very strong connection to her homeland in the early parts of the narrative. With her initial assumptions that migrants are basically treated with discrimination and disgust by the natives of foreign countries, just like Saeed, she is also

somehow worried about leaving their homeland. Hence, when they first move from their city of birth to the Greek island of Mykonos, Nadia also initially clings to her past and her link to her nation. This is exemplified by her act of solely maintaining connections with her fellowmen, especially with Saeed. However, due to the change in her environment, Nadia inevitably reconstructs her identity as well. This is already shown by Nadia during their stay in Mykonos whereby she starts to learn to love a foreign place by exploring it like a tourist, with the way she romantically interacts with Saeed in the public such as by kissing him in the open, and her new-formed friendship with a local Greek girl. In other words, in Mykonos, Nadia is already beginning to develop her multi-cultural personality by appreciating foreign places and forming friendship with people whose culture is different from her own.

This transformation continues on as she moves from Mykonos to London. While living in the London mansion, she especially finds the idea of living in a home composed of people from different parts of the world as something very positive and exciting. She also joins a council in the mansion where the members of the council are generally Nigerians except, of course, for her. In other words, instead of viewing herself as the repugnant “other”, Nadia starts to appreciate that there can actually be multicultural unity in diversity. Her newly acquired positive views about living with other people continue on even when they finally move to Marin. Just like when she is still living in London, Nadia is likewise able to form friendship with her co-employees in the food cooperative and with their head cook. She has also learned to appreciate diversity in terms of music and food.

In view of these transformations in her identity, Nadia likewise acquires a hybrid identity in the process. The second section of chapter three looks into the trope of Nadia’s black robe as a symbol of her hybrid personality. First, contrary to the stereotypical presumption of the black robe as a symbolism of women conformity, oppression, and submission, Nadia dons it in order to assert her feminine power and agency. Second, as a migrant woman, there are two main narrative strands related to Nadia’s wearing of the robe. On one hand, by continuously wearing her black robe as a migrant woman, she is also unconsciously maintaining her link to her homeland. However, at the same time, the black robe symbolizes her capability to navigate foreign cultures. As an example, her black robe, which is initially thought of as off-putting by other people, becomes a way for Nadia to gain the respect and camaraderie of her fellow inhabitants in the London mansion and her co-employees in the food cooperative in Marin.

And lastly, Hamid employs the perspective of Nadia's relationship with Saeed alongside the three foreign women that Nadia builds a relationship with during her diasporic movements throughout the novel to illustrate another frame of her hybrid identity. In *Exit West*, we can interpret that Saeed represents Nadia's homeland while, on the other hand, the three foreign women which include the girl from Mykonos, the old Nigerian woman in London, and the female cook from Marin, represent the diasporic lands that Nadia respectively inhabits throughout the novel. By portraying the fact that Nadia can simultaneously build a relationship with Saeed and the foreign women, the text points to the positivity of a hybrid migrant woman who does not need to choose between two places or cultures and instead takes advantage of both in order for her to seamlessly assimilate herself in any society.

This study, therefore, enters into dialogue with emerging studies in literary diasporic literature on the multifarious themes of home and identity for the migrant woman. Moreover, since *Exit West* is a very recent novel in contemporary migrant literature, it is perhaps important to argue for the importance this novel, and this study of this novel, as shining necessary light upon the often overlooked position of the migrant woman in our present society and, indeed, turning our attention to the disregarded role of women in migration studies more generally. Undoubtedly there will be more interdisciplinary research on the migrant woman and representations of the migrant woman in the near future and I hope that this thesis might provide a good basis for future studies of literary representations of migration, and, perhaps even more importantly, on the literary representations of the migrant woman.

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