



**DIASPORA, MIGRATION, AND CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN GLOBAL
ANGLOPHONE
LITERATURE: BELONGING, RACE, AND TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY**

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Abstract

Contemporary migration narratives frequently unsettle the assumption that movement from one country to another produces a simple transition from one stable identity to another. Migration may alter family relations, racial classification, language, cultural practice, and the meaning of home. This article examines these processes through Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017). Read comparatively, the three novels present different forms of mobility: planned migration and intergenerational settlement in Lahiri, educational migration and return in Adichie, and forced displacement represented through speculative doorways in Hamid. The analysis draws on Homi K. Bhabha's account of cultural hybridity and the "third space," Stuart Hall's formulation of diasporic identity, and Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space. It argues that these novels represent belonging as an unfinished negotiation rather than a choice between an original homeland and a destination country. Names, food, hair, accent, citizenship, religious practice, memory, and intimate relationships become sites at which cultural identity is revised and contested. The article also distinguishes international migration from forced displacement so that different forms of mobility are not collapsed into a single experience. By placing literary representations alongside contemporary migration data, the study shows how Global Anglophone fiction can connect large-scale movements of people with the everyday negotiations through which individuals make, lose, and remake a sense of home.

Keywords: diaspora; migration; cultural hybridity; transnational identity; belonging; race;
Global Anglophone literature; home

Introduction

Migration is often described in geographical terms: people leave one location and arrive in another. Literary narratives, however, reveal that the significance of migration cannot be measured by movement alone. A change of country may transform a person's relationship to family, language, race, memory, citizenship, and cultural practice. The contemporary scale of mobility gives these questions particular significance. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates that 304 million international migrants were living outside their countries of origin in 2024, representing approximately 3.7 percent of the world's population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). UNHCR likewise reports that forced displacement remained at an exceptionally high level at the end of 2025 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Such figures establish the scale of movement, but they cannot explain how migration is experienced within a household, a friendship, a workplace, or an individual consciousness. Literature provides precisely that smaller scale of representation.

This article examines three influential novels in Global Anglophone literature: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name-sake*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. Although the novels differ in setting, narrative method, and historical circumstance, all three challenge the idea that migration produces a stable opposition between "home" and "abroad." Lahiri concentrates on Bengali American family life across two generations. Adichie examines how migration changes the social meaning of race and how return complicates the idea of homecoming. Hamid employs magical doors to compress the physical journey of displacement and to foreground the social and political consequences of arrival. Their differences make comparison productive: migration is shown not as one universal experience but as a process shaped by generation, class, race, citizenship, legal status, and the circumstances of departure.

The central argument is that cultural hybridity in these novels should be understood as an unequal and continuing process of negotiation rather than as a harmonious mixture of cultures. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" is useful because it emphasizes the production of new cultural meanings through contact, but hybridity

does not eliminate structures of power (Bhabha). Hall similarly treats cultural identity as a process formed through history and changing positions rather than as a fixed essence (Hall). Brah's concept of diaspora space extends the discussion by bringing together migrants and the social groups among whom migration becomes meaningful (Brah). These approaches allow the article to ask not only how migrant characters adapt, but also who is permitted to belong, under what conditions, and with what consequences.

Objectives and Method

The study uses comparative close reading. It focuses on characterization, recurring cultural motifs, narrative form, and representations of belonging in the three selected novels. Four questions guide the discussion: (1) How do migrant characters redefine home after geographical separation? (2) How does cultural identity change across generations? (3) How do racial and legal classifications shape transnational identity? and (4) How do the novels represent borders, exclusion, and the formation of alternative communities?

The method combines literary interpretation with selected recent scholarship and international migration data. The statistical material is used as contextual evidence rather than as proof of the novels' meanings. The literary analysis remains grounded in the texts themselves, while criticism by Singh, Motahane, Knudsen and Rahbek, and Olumofin provides secondary perspectives on the selected works. This distinction is important because numerical accounts of migration and fictional accounts of individual experience answer different questions.

Cultural Hybridity and the Negotiation of Identity

"Cultural hybridity" can become an imprecise term if it is treated simply as the presence of two cultures within one person. Bhabha's formulation is more demanding. His "third space" describes a site in which cultural meanings are negotiated and transformed; it therefore unsettles the assumption that cultures exist as pure, separate, and internally uniform entities (Bhabha). At the same time, hybridity should not be romanticized. Cultural contact takes place within unequal institutions, and a migrant may adopt local practices without re-

ceiving equal social recognition. Hall's account of identity reinforces this point by understanding identity as a process of becoming, shaped by historical experience and social positioning (Hall).

The Namesake offers a particularly clear representation of this process. Ashima Ganguli's early life in the United States is marked by distance from family, familiar food, language, and social routines. Her efforts to reproduce Bengali practices with the resources available to her do not constitute a rejection of American life; instead, they show how cultural practice is modified through migration (Lahiri). Domestic space becomes a site of negotiation. Food, family gatherings, and ritual preserve connections with India while also taking new forms within the United States.

Gogol, Ashima's son, experiences cultural hybridity differently because the United States is the society in which he grows up. His Bengali inheritance is not an unfamiliar tradition encountered after migration; it is part of the family environment from childhood. His name becomes the most visible symbol of this tension. He initially experiences "Gogol" as a burden that distinguishes him from his peers and later uses "Nikhil" as a way of controlling how he presents himself in public (Lahiri). The distinction between the two names, however, cannot permanently divide his social identity from his family history. When he learns the story of his father's connection to Nikolai Gogol and the railway accident that shaped Ashoke's life, the name acquires a meaning he had previously lacked (Lahiri). Singh's discussion of cultural displacement across generations similarly identifies naming as a significant site of identity formation (Singh).

Ashima's later life complicates the assimilation model in another way. Her growing familiarity with American society does not require the disappearance of her relationship with India. Instead, she develops a form of transnational belonging in which more than one place remains meaningful (Lahiri). Gogol's development follows a different route: he gradually gains a more complex understanding of the experiences that shaped his parents. The novel consequently presents identity as variable across generations. Second-generation experience cannot simply be treated as a reduced version of first-generation migration, because the relationship to homeland, memory, and cultural inheritance is different.

Americanah: Race, Language, and Return

Americanah shifts the focus from intergenerational cultural inheritance to the racial meanings produced through migration. Ifemelu leaves Nigeria for the United States as a student. Before migration, race does not organize her social identity in the same way that it does after arrival. In the United States, she learns that Blackness functions within a specific racial system and that this system changes how other people read her body, hair, speech, and social position (Adichie). Migration therefore does not merely transport an already completed identity; it places the individual within new categories of classification.

Hair is one of the novel's most significant sites of racial negotiation. Ifemelu encounters pressures to conform to professional expectations associated with straightened hair, while natural hair becomes increasingly connected with self-definition and resistance (Adichie). Language works similarly. She adopts an American accent for a period and later consciously abandons it. The change is not a simple return to an untouched Nigerian identity. Her years in the United States have already altered how she understands both America and Nigeria. Motahane's study of race, transnationality, and identity formation in Americanah likewise emphasizes the continuing renegotiation of identity experienced by Black African migrants in Western racial contexts (Motahane).

Ifemelu's blog gives her observations about race a public form. Her position is distinctive because she is simultaneously an observer of American racial practices and a person living within them. Aunt Uju and Dike broaden this perspective by showing that migrant experiences differ according to generation, age, professional position, and social environment (Adichie). The novel therefore resists a single model of African migration. The experiences of adults who arrive from Nigeria cannot be assumed to be identical to those of children who grow up partly or entirely in the United States.

Obinze's experience in Britain introduces legal status as another dimension of belonging. His insecure position exposes the gap between economic participation and legal recognition (Adichie). The novel also makes return migration central to its treatment of home. When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, she does not recover the

exact life she left. Her years abroad have altered her perceptions, habits, and expectations, while Nigeria itself has changed in her absence. The term “Americanah” consequently carries an ironic force: return can make a person appear different from those who remained. Home is not a fixed location waiting unchanged for the migrant’s return. It is continually reconstructed by people whose own identities have changed.

Exit West: Forced Displacement, Borders, and New Communities

Exit West approaches migration through a speculative device. Mysterious doors allow Nadia and Saeed to move almost instantaneously between distant locations. By removing much of the physical journey, Hamid shifts attention from the mechanics of travel to the social conditions that follow arrival (Hamid). The doors therefore function as a narrative experiment: if distance can be crossed almost instantly, what remains of the border? The answer is that political and social boundaries persist. Migrants continue to encounter exclusion, surveillance, contested housing, and hostility even when the physical journey has been radically compressed. Nadia and Saeed first enter migrant communities in Mykonos and later move to London, where tensions between established residents and newcomers become increasingly visible (Hamid). Their experiences demonstrate that legal entry, physical safety, and emotional belonging are not identical. Migrant communities offer forms of support, but the couple’s responses to displacement gradually diverge. Saeed becomes increasingly connected to people who share cultural and religious affiliations, while Nadia is drawn toward more heterogeneous networks. Their relationship changes alongside their changing social worlds. The novel thus resists the assumption that people who leave the same place will necessarily develop the same understanding of home in the destination.

Knudsen and Rahbek read Exit West in terms of “radical hopefulness,” emphasizing the novel’s movement toward forms of belonging based on solidarity rather than national origin (Knudsen and Rahbek). Olumofin’s analysis similarly connects the novel’s treatment of mobility with technological surveillance and changing conceptions of national identity (Olumofin). These critical approaches help illuminate the political signifi-

cance of Hamid's doors. They do not erase borders; instead, they make the mechanisms of border control more visible by imagining what happens when ordinary geographical barriers are suddenly bypassed.

The novel also broadens the meaning of displacement. People who consider themselves permanently settled are forced to confront the possibility that stability is not guaranteed. In this sense, Hamid destabilizes the opposition between migrants and natives. The distinction between those who "belong" and those who arrive becomes historically fragile because communities themselves are products of earlier movements. Yet the novel does not erase the unequal consequences of displacement. Access to housing, safety, work, and social acceptance remains uneven, demonstrating that mobility is experienced differently according to social position.

Belonging Beyond Legal Citizenship

Across the three novels, legal status and emotional belonging repeatedly diverge. Gogol is an American citizen by birth, yet citizenship does not settle his questions about cultural inheritance (Lahiri). Ifemelu's legal residence in the United States does not protect her from racial classification or the pressure to adapt her appearance and speech (Adichie). Obinze's insecure status in Britain shows the reverse situation: participation in everyday economic life can coexist with legal vulnerability (Adichie). Nadia and Saeed encounter another form of uncertainty as displaced people who must negotiate new communities and changing political conditions (Hamid).

This distinction is significant when literary migration is placed beside global migration data. UNHCR reports that a large majority of refugees were hosted in low- and middle-income countries at the end of 2025, and many remained in countries neighbouring their places of origin (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Such data complicates a Western-centred picture of displacement. The selected novels do not represent every migration route, but together they challenge the assumption that migration literature is only about movement toward Western destinations.

Everyday Practices and the Making of Home

The novels make abstract theories of identity tangible through ordinary practices. In *The Namesake*, names and food connect memory with family history (Lahiri). In *Americanah*, hair and accent expose the social pressures through which race becomes an everyday experience (Adichie). In *Exit West*, clothing, religious practice, housing, and communal organization reveal how migrants construct forms of belonging under uncertain conditions (Hamid). These details are important because hybridity does not exist only as an intellectual condition. It is enacted repeatedly through decisions about what to preserve, what to alter, and what to reject. Bhabha's "third space" helps explain why these combinations cannot be reduced to a simple division between two cultures. Brah's concept of diaspora space adds the insight that migrants and non-migrants inhabit the same social fields, where belonging is produced through relationships of difference and power (Brah). Hall's emphasis on history further suggests that identities cannot be detached from the circumstances through which they have been formed (Hall). The literary value of these theories lies in their ability to connect large concepts with intimate experience.

Comparative Discussion: Generation, Race, and Circumstance

A comparison of the three novels demonstrates why no single model of migration is adequate. Ashima and Ashoke build a family after planned relocation; Ifemelu initially migrates for education and later returns; Obinze experiences irregular migration under legal threat; and Nadia and Saeed flee violence. The reasons for departure shape the meanings of arrival. Class and citizenship may make movement relatively secure for one character while rendering it dangerous for another.

Generation also changes the meaning of cultural inheritance. Gogol cannot remember India in the same way as his parents because it is not the place in which he was raised (Lahiri). Dike's experience differs again because his relation to Nigeria is mediated by family history and American upbringing (Adichie). Race creates another distinction. *Americanah* makes visible the way a person can encounter a new racial classification after crossing a national border. *Exit West* adds forced displacement, showing that migration may occur because

remaining in one's place has become impossible (Hamid). These differences require cultural hybridity to be used carefully. The concept is most useful when it remains attentive to unequal circumstances rather than treating all mixed identities as equivalent.

The distinction between migrant and refugee is equally important. International migrants constitute a broad population with varied reasons for movement, while refugees and other forcibly displaced people occupy particular legal and social positions. The UN figures cited above should therefore be read as different measures rather than as interchangeable categories (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). The novels reinforce this distinction by making the circumstances of departure part of the meaning of arrival.

Transnational Identity and the Changing Meaning of Home

The three novels ultimately redefine home as relational rather than purely geographical. For Ashima, home can encompass family, memory, India, and the United States simultaneously (Lahiri). For Ifemelu, Nigeria remains significant, but return does not restore a pre-migration self (Adichie). For Nadia and Saeed, belonging increasingly emerges through communities formed during displacement rather than through a single shared birthplace (Hamid). These representations correspond with Hall's understanding of identity as historically produced and continually repositioned (Hall).

Transnationalism also concerns language. The novels use English to represent Bengali, Nigerian, British, American, and other cultural contexts without reducing those contexts to a single linguistic norm. Migration changes the cultural work that English performs. The language becomes a medium through which characters negotiate belonging, difference, memory, and power. Global Anglophone literature is therefore not simply literature written in English about migration; it is also a space in which the English language itself is reshaped by transnational experience.

Contemporary migration statistics provide a useful background to these literary questions, but literature supplies a different kind of knowledge. A numerical estimate can indicate the scale of international movement,

but it cannot represent Gogol's discomfort with his name, Ifemelu's experience of racial classification, or the changing intimacy between Nadia and Saeed. Fiction gives individual experience a temporal and emotional dimension that statistical categories cannot provide. Its contribution is not to replace demographic evidence but to humanize the processes represented by categories such as migrant, refugee, citizen, and outsider.

Conclusion

The Namesake, Americanah, and Exit West present migration as a continuing process of identity formation rather than as a completed movement from one homeland to another. Lahiri emphasizes generational difference and the persistence of family memory; Adichie shows how migration changes the meaning of race, language, and return; and Hamid uses speculative mobility to expose the persistence of borders and the possibility of new communities. Read together, the novels demonstrate that belonging is produced through everyday practices and social relations as much as through legal status or geographical location.

The comparative analysis also clarifies the limits of an overly celebratory account of hybridity. Cultural identities may become more complex through migration, but the process is shaped by race, class, citizenship, generation, and legal vulnerability. Bhabha's third space, Hall's account of identity, and Brah's diaspora space provide complementary ways of understanding this complexity, provided that their concepts remain connected to the unequal conditions in which cultural negotiation occurs. Recent scholarship on the three novels reinforces the importance of naming, race, mobility, surveillance, and transnational belonging as interconnected questions (Singh; Motahane; Olumofin; Knudsen and Rahbek).

Ultimately, the novels challenge the idea that belonging ends with arrival. Migration changes both the destination and the remembered homeland. A person may acquire citizenship without resolving questions of identity, return home without recovering an earlier sense of self, or form new attachments without abandoning older ones. Global Anglophone literature makes these processes visible by bringing large histories of mobility into intimate narrative forms. Cultural hybridity, therefore, is best understood not as a final balance between

cultures but as an ongoing negotiation shaped by memory, relationships, institutions, and unequal structures of power.

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