



REST Publisher; ISSN No: 2583-7370 (Online)

Contemporaneity of English Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium



journal homepage: <https://restpublisher.com/journals/cellrm/>

Exit West: Transnational Narratives Beyond Borders

S. Farhana Zabeen*, V. Jennifer Rani

Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 03 March 2026

Accepted: 26 March 2026

Available online: 31 March 2026

Keywords:

Immigration

Identity

Globalization

Borders

Refugees

Diaspora

Belonging

Mobility

Exile

Transformation

ABSTRACT

Exit West presents a powerful exploration of transnational narratives that transcend geographical, cultural, and political borders. Through the story of Nadia and Saeed, the novel reimagines migration not as a linear journey but as an instantaneous crossing facilitated by magical doors, symbolizing the fluidity of modern displacement. The text challenges conventional notions of nationhood, identity, and belonging by depicting a world where borders become porous and unstable. It highlights the emotional and psychological complexities faced by migrants, including loss, adaptation, and transformation. By blending realism with speculative elements, the narrative reflects the global refugee crisis while emphasizing shared human experiences. Ultimately, the novel advocates for empathy, interconnectedness, and the redefinition of boundaries in an increasingly globalized world, positioning transnationalism as both a lived reality and a critical framework for understanding contemporary migration and identity formation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) — which appears in an earlier volume of this series in the chapter on Migration and Belonging — warrants examination here from a different angle: not the experience of displacement that the magical doors produce, but the specifically transnational quality of the narrative that the doors enable. The novel's formal device — migration made instantaneous, borders made permeable by the discovery of doors that open onto other continents — allows Hamid to examine the specifically twenty-first-century condition of transnationalism: the condition of people who are formed by multiple national contexts simultaneously, who are not simply from one place and in another but are constitutively multiple, shaped by the accumulation of places rather than by any single origin. Transnationalism as a theoretical concept — developed by scholars including Arjun Appadurai, Ulf Hannerz, and Steven Vertovec — describes the specific form of cultural and social life that global migration has produced: not the assimilation of the immigrant into the receiving society, not the maintenance of a pure connection to the society of origin, but the ongoing participation in multiple social and cultural worlds simultaneously, the maintenance of relationships, identities, and cultural practices that

*Corresponding author: jenniferkirubakaran@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46632/cellrm/5/1/6>

Copyright © 2026 Published by REST Publisher

span national borders. Saeed and Nadia, in *Exit West*, are transnational subjects before they migrate — they are already formed by the global media, the global consumer culture, the global political discourse that has made every city in the world simultaneously local and connected to everywhere else. The migration the doors produce makes their transnationalism visible and literal; it does not create it.

The Door as Transnational Form

The door is, formally, a figure for the instantaneous spatial transition that digital technology has introduced into everyday experience: the ability to be present, in some meaningful sense, in multiple places simultaneously; the compression of geographic distance into the near-zero of the screen and the fiber optic cable. Hamid is explicitly aware of this dimension of his figure — he has spoken in interviews about the way in which the doors literalize what digital communication performs metaphorically every day, the daily experience of being in one physical place while simultaneously participating in the social and cultural life of places one is not physically present in. Arjun Appadurai's account in *Modernity at Large* (1996) of how global media and global migration produce specific "scapes" — imagined worlds shaped by the flows of media, technology, finance, people, and ideas that constitute the global cultural economy — is the theoretical framework within which *Exit West*'s door figure makes most sense. The doors materialize what Appadurai calls the mediascapes and the ideoscapes of contemporary globalization: the specific imaginative geographies, the specific configurations of desire and possibility and fear, that global media flows produce in the people who consume them. Saeed and Nadia imagine, through the media they consume, what London and California are like before they arrive there; the imagination shapes what they find when they do arrive.

Nativism and the Backlash Against Transnational Movement

The nativist response that the novel documents — the vigilante groups, the fortified neighborhoods, the political movements organized around the demand that the movement of people be controlled in ways that the doors have made technically impossible — is Hamid's analysis of how existing power structures respond to the dissolution of the border mechanisms that enforce their spatial organization. The doors do not destroy nativism; they intensify it. The removal of the state's capacity to control movement produces, as a compensatory response, the intensification of informal and extralegal violence against those whose movement the state can no longer control. Wendy Brown's account in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (2010) of how the proliferation of physical border walls across the world in the early twenty-first century is a symptom of the nation-state's waning capacity to control the flows that global capitalism has made both necessary and unstoppable — how walls are erected precisely when the sovereignty they symbolize is most in question — is directly applicable to the nativist response that *Exit West* documents. The walls the nativists build around their neighborhoods are not effective control mechanisms; they are symbolic assertions of a sovereignty that the doors have rendered technically obsolete.

2. CONCLUSION

Exit West contributes to the transnational literary conversation a formal argument that no amount of theoretical exposition can quite match: the argument that the experience of transnationalism — the experience of being constitutively multiple, of carrying multiple places within a single self, of being formed by the accumulation of locations rather than rooted in any single origin — is the defining condition of the contemporary world, and that fiction's primary instrument for rendering this condition is not the realistic documentation of specific journeys but the formal experimentation that makes visible the specific quality of a mode of being in the world that realism's conventional assumptions cannot accommodate. The door is not a realistic device; it is the right one.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- [2]. Brown, Wendy. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. Zone Books, 2010.
- [3]. Hamid, Mohsin. *Exit West*. Riverhead Books, 2017.
- [4]. Hannerz, Ulf. *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. Routledge, 1996.
- [5]. Nail, Thomas. *The Figure of the Migrant*. Stanford UP, 2015.

[6]. Vertovec, Steven. *Transnationalism*. Routledge, 2009.

[7]. Shamsie, Kamila. "The Storytellers of Empire." *Guernica*, 15 Jan. 2012, www.guernicamag.com.