

**The Shift from Thwarted Belonging
to Positive Belonging in
Jamal Mahjoub's *The Drift Latitudes***

***Prof. Dr. Lamia'a Ahmed Rasheed
Noor Abdullah Khalaf***

Abstract

Mahjoub centers his narrative on a group of marginalized and hybrid identities that must navigate their fragmented selves in three contemporary cityscapes, mostly London but also Liverpool and Khartoum. Due to a multitude of factors, including color, ethnicity, religion, and even sexual orientation, the people discussed in the novel who inhabit these countries and cites frequently find themselves "in-between" and on the perimeter. The paper discusses the issue of belongness as it is thwarted by previous lovers, family, social place or work place. This story, which spans various eras and locations in the history of twentieth-century Europe, centers on the life of the enigmatic German refugee Ernst Frager, a machinist, inventor, and tech enthusiast, as well as the lives of his two daughters, who do not know each other. While Rachel marries a Sudanese man and departs from Britain, Jade, who was born in Liverpool and is the daughter of Ernst Frager and the West Indian Miranda, looks for identity in contemporary Britain. The aim of the paper is to highlight the ways from which the characters have shifted from a complete lack of belonging to feel fulfilled and belonged and how their new selves emerges in the end.

Key words: identity, belongness, migration, memory, anti-belongness

Belongness Theory: An Introduction

Belonging concept includes communitarian relations, references constructs, guidelines values, behavior, and distribution of powers that are inherent to the community belonging. Individual participation, common language, and collective representations pass from one generation to another. Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) conceptualized belonging by describing three levels of understanding. The first level explores the notion of belonging by examining social positions, identification processes,

emotional bonds, and ethical and political values. On the second level, it is possible to focus on belonging policies and how they integrate into various plans and projects of individuals that live in society, for example, citizenship right and participatory actions. This level shows the status right in a belonging group. The third level presents belonging mechanics structure in political, cultural, social, and religious projects comprise certain characteristics of an individual (2006, p. 199).

Migration is more than merely moving from one nation to another. It entails more than just passing geographical borders, establishing in a new country, or obtaining nationality in the technical sense. A border, as Mexican writer and thinker Carlos Fuentes (1985) points out, is more than just a divide between two states; it is also a divide between two civilizations and two experiences. Above all, migration entails crossing national boundaries, encountering another culture, and establishing a new home in a new nation, along with all of the interior changes that such activities require. To begin, as Mae Henderson points out, there are numerous types of boundaries, including “geographical, cultural, national, linguistic, generic, specular, and disciplinary borders” (Henderson, 1995, p.2). Cultural borders, in contrast to geographical borders, which are generally static and immovable, at least over time, are flexible and dynamic. Guillermo Verdecchia, a Latin American writer, declares,

‘On all sides [of the border] I have been asked: How long have you been ...? How old were you when ... ? When did you leave? When did you arrive? As if it were somehow possible to locate on a map, on an airline schedule, on a blueprint, the precise coordinates of the spirit, of the psyche, of memory’ (Verdecchia 1993, p. 51).

Besides that, regarding Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) theory building of border as a metaphor, Brah splits boundaries as “psychological, sexual, spiritual, cultural, class, and racialized boundaries” (Brah, 1996, p. 204), British can be conceived as a border region and a “diasporic space” for its native-born in addition to its immigrants. “The native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is a native” in a diasporic place, and a native might become terrified, alienated, and displaced within her own home (Brah 1996, p. 204). Both occupy situations of 'multi-axial locationality,' which is described as a “simultaneous situatedness within gendered spaces of class, racism, ethnicity, sexuality, age” (Brah 1996, p. 204).

The 'politics of location,' or the politics of belonging, determine how each group/individual travels over altering cultural, religious, and linguistic barriers. Nevertheless, multi-axial locationality does not identify the subject's positioning or movement pattern (Brah 1996, p. 205). To put it another way, multi-axially placed within and throughout assumed and experienced state societies and politicized spaces of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and age. Finally, this constant negotiation of cultural affiliations, this politics of belonging, while impacted by the subject's multi-axial locationality, is not dictated by it, just as the subject's placement is not pre-determined. Avtar Brah distinguishes between 'feeling at home' and claiming a region as one's own. It is conceivable to feel 'at home' in a location and yet, as a consequence of social exclusion, not identify it as one's own, but to embrace another place and identities as one's own, even if one has never been there or knows very little about it. The immigrant in this investigation may claim to feel 'at home' in Britain (and to be very linked to this nation), but Britain is not their 'home' (or only home) nor their main identity (or their identity). People might also claim another nation as their 'home,' or immigrants can adopt Britain as their 'home.' Furthermore, based on the dynamics at play in a particular set of conditions, the same

immigrant person may represent both of these views at various times. In any event, 'home' for migrants or residents of a diaspora is frequently multi-placed, 'multi-locational' (Brah 1996, pp. 193- 197). Hence, as stated by Jopi Nyman (2011) that Jamel Mahjoub's *The Drift Latitude* blends British and European identities through the revealing of silenced family narratives and emphasizes the importance of remembering the experiences of common people who are left out of official history. The novel reconstructs European identity as transnational and in need of historical reevaluation because the apparently British family in the book seems to have connections to Sudan, Germany, and the Caribbean.

K. C. Gomes (2002), belonging mediation conveys the mediate to establish links that will anchor and provide a life story construction and enhances the mental health of the individuals. He further emphasizes that, "Belonging to something, beyond decentralizing from an egocentric omnipotence, nurtures a sense of pleasure and communion, since human beings cannot respond alone to their existential issues" (Gomes, 2002, p. 36). For Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (2004), belonging regards to family ties, to be a member of a given society among other relationships that will extend with the establishment of bonds, references, and values. Erickson (1987) also defined it on the basis of formal and informal organizations in which the individual participates in order to belong to an indentitarian group of mutual recognition among its members as cited in (Peter, 2015, p. 96).

Abram Maslow (1970) has placed a high importance on a sense of belonging and social recognition over life when he developed the theory of human requirements called Maslow's priority of demands in the human surroundings. Abraham Maslow, a well-known researcher in the field of human requires and inspiration, developed his hierarchy of needs

hypothesis, which proposed that humans are influenced by five stages of needs: (1) Physiological requirements, (2) security, (3) love and belonging, or social needs (4) Esteem and Prestige, or Ego Interests (5) and self-actualization or self-realization needs. According to Maslow, physiological requirements are human basic needs that are essential for human living in diverse interacting societies in society. Physiological needs centered on essential human needs such as food, water, clothes, shelter (hospitality or housing), sleep, and reproduction. According to Maslow, the supply of food for the world's growing population is an essential growth indicator in today's global context as cited in (Taormina, 2013, p. 156- 158).

In describing the belongingness needs (also called the “love needs”), Maslow (1987) noted that when physiological and safety–security needs are largely gratified, people “hunger for affectionate relations with people in general” (p. 381). In other words, belongingness means a lack of close, lasting, emotionally pleasant interactions with other people, in groups as well as in intimate dyads that yield personal relationships characterized by mutual affective concern. Thus, close relationships may take many forms, the foremost of which is the family, friendships, romances, marriage, work groups, and other forms. However, it should be noted that “love is not synonymous with sex. Sex may be studied as a purely physiological need” (Maslow, p. 381), which is how the two needs are examined in the present research. With regard to the place the belongingness needs take in the hierarchy, again, Maslow’s (1943) theory specifies that the relative gratification of a need at any of the levels releases the person to start focusing on satisfying the need at the next level up in the hierarchy. Thus, when one’s physiological and safety–security needs are largely satisfied, one will be able to pay more attention to satisfying his or her need to form pleasant interactions with others (1943, p. 381). To say that, when it comes

to survival, there are certain needs that human have it acquire for them to feel belonged, and part of something. This idea were essentially has been projecting in the issues of migration, exile, dislocation. This paper aims at discussing the idea of belonging in its psycho-analytical slant, when is belongingness is threatened or attained when its linked to the formation of identity. This paper make use of a blend of psychoanalytic and postcolonial concepts to analyses the ideas of belongness when its attained or lost by depending on various theorist, like “the need to belong” by Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary and Maslow's hierarchy of needs by Ibrahim Maslow as well as many others who discussed ideas like hybridity, identity, belonging, longing.

1.2 Mahjoub's *The Drift Latitudes* Novel

Jade is the daughter of Ernest Frager and Miranda, she is utterly discussed by her existence in town, she was already not happy with her situation, and what added insult to injury is when her husband, whom she loved dearly had an affair with a strange woman. As Baumeister and Leary (1995), stated that “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships.” (p. 497) in jade's case she loses the fact that she can form any interpersonal relationship with her husband. Baumeister and Leary (1995) further explain that a lack of belongingness may cause all sorts of ill effects (p. 497) so the person might resort to finding power, independence, or any other way to prove that he or she can and will survive against all odds (But the need for power may well be driven by the need to belong)

Jade was chosen by Giles, Stock & Waverley, which later became GSW, to construct a new idea for a building for PharmaKorp company. In

the novel, jade faces troubles after a man was found dead on the construction site, a couple of days later she finds herself against kyle and his sectary called Regan, whom jade resents because she tries to eliminate jade from the company “In my view, you are a liability to the firm. The sooner GSW is shot of you the better.” (mahjoub, 2006, p. 146)

The key to understanding a person's present is to dive into their past her father vague past created gaps in Jade's life, which pushed her to dive and search for answers. In the novel, jade is given a bundle of letters that were, as jade familiarized herself with it from her half-sister, Rachel. Jade's life was falling apart when she was given Rachel's letters, which represented the right moment of weakness and stress in order for her to keep reading and discovering who her sister is and what she wanted from her, these letters wouldn't be opened or cared about if jades' life hadn't fallen apart, as according to Angela Theisen (2021) when support exists in life, people become more resilient often coping more effectively with difficult times in their lives. Coping well with hardships decreases the physical and mental effects of these situations(para. 3). This meant that both of the sisters represent a form of support for each other.

In jade case she had the same old feelings of anti- belongness this might resonate from her childhood without a father, she has accomplished a lot and went through various roads of success unlike her father, yet she felt not belonged, according to john lock in his Essays Concerning Human Understanding in 1847, he defines personal identity :

the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person ; it is the same self now it was then ; and

it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done.(John Locke, 1847, pp. 210-211)

in the novel jade seems to remember her past, mainly questions that made her doubt herself and how come her father is a white German, and more importantly where she belongs, these questions seem to hinge on her memory If jades' is the person when she didn't feel belonged in the past anywhere, she is without a doubt the same person in the present with the same feelings of anti-belongingness. She even question her skin pigmentation and many other questions, She asked her mother about it, but all she got out of Miranda was that she was herself, and that was all that ever mattered. (mahjoub, 2006, p. 61)

when jade realizes that her career is on the verge of a fallout, she stands up and goes to stare from her workplace window, where a bunch of male architect ghosts appear from what they left in the city of various designs, "Male architects draw the world, the women just fill in the shading. She was a woman and she was black, well, brown. What could she actually hope to achieve? (mahjoub, 2006, p. 33)

This form of racism is mostly clear, in the way that Regan, kyle's secretary, treatment of jade. How she questions jade's position in the company attributing it only because kyle's father had some liberal ideas, "where you are today because Kyle's father had a few liberal ideas about equal opportunities, right? You've been persistently holding back the progress of this company with your quirky designs and your inconsistent behavior."(mahjoup, 2006, p. 146) which means that she exists in the company not because of her brilliance but because of her race and gender.

She feels insecure about "Old England", a restaurant which she meets an attorney that she wants to defend her incase the company fire her,

to which he assures that if she plays the racial card, she might not win, as they might refer to her old drinking habits. "Old England; a place you could visit, but where she would never belong. It (mahjoub, 2006, p. 121). The Englishness of the place, made her doubt her presence in the restaurant. "she had found something else. It seemed that making sense of her life was more about accepting that she would always be incomplete" (mahjoub, 2006, p. 192) jade's moment of restoration is built around the fact that incompleteness is normal, but more importantly, she wanted to do what she is meant to do in the way she thought is right, building things that are about the people when they inhabit cities, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-actualization is important, and people may expect a moment of discomfort when they do not do what they love to do, as explained by Ebrahem Maslow(1943), "unless the individual is doing what he is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man *can* be, he *must* be."(p. 10)

Rachel marries Amin who is a Muslim, she converts to Islam and travels with him back to his birthplace Sudan, where she is welcomed by his family and celebrated there. Nevertheless, this meant that in order to feel that she belonged with Amin and his family, which are the dominant group she has to assimilate into his culture, religion, and tradition.

Any dominant ethnic group has a tendency to infuse the idea of belonging with a rhetoric of similarity, which obstructs the realization of difference, according to Yuval-Davis (2006). One frequently has to assimilate to the language, culture, values, conduct, and religion of the dominant group in order to fulfill the "requisites" for belonging.(p. 209)Even if a person is trying to assimilate, there may still be some factors (such as location of birth or skin tone) that preclude complete sameness

and subject the individual to socio-spatial exclusion discourses and practices.(Antonsich, 2010, p. 650) as Rachel talks about her experience firsthand in Sudan, the culture, food, tradition, and rituals all suck Rachel into a complete form of obedience like a moth to a flame :

When we first moved here we lived in a house with Amin's relatives....They took it upon themselves to educate me in the proper skills a wife needed and which I had not been trained in. His mother showed me how to cook the kind of food he had eaten as a child... They drenched me in perfume and showed me how to dance the way a bride would, turning in small steps, eyes closed and head tilted upwards.... I was a foreigner. I understood something of what Amin had felt when he was at university in England, being viewed as a curious animal, as though you had suddenly grown spots overnight, or an enormously long neck. (pp. 65-66)

This also might feel durable, it wasn't until she lost her son, sayf that she begins to feel some kind of estrangement from her own self, distant from her husband, unable to comprehend the passing days. According to Antonsich (2010) Death, including one's own and other people's deaths, may elicit some of the strongest emotional responses in humans. One of the most traumatic life occurrences is the death of a spouse, child, or close friend.(p. 507) as stated by Lyn H. Lofland (1982), when people lose a spouse, son, mother, or friend, they not only disappear from other people's lives but also take with them the aspect of ourselves that enables people to feel included and understood. As a result, we are no longer married, have children, or are referred to as the lost one's friends. Whatever status is gone also contains a lost way of being. (p. 223)

Rachel's letters to her sisters covers a lot of incidents that occurred to her, mainly her son's death, and her husband's estrangement, how both of them became rather separated, the moment of change for Rachel was when she participated in a ritual called a "zar" with a group of women in order for her to get rid of her demons or what she called "djinn" as a part of a healing process, this process included smocking cigarette and drinking beer:

It had passed from me to one of the birds; the *zar* spirit which was haunting me. It had chosen white or black, and now it was inside one of them, trapped, and they were going to set it free. They were going to set my son free... This djinn had entered me after my poor boy left this world, the Sheikha said, having found a hole in my spirit made by the grief... They carried me to the river and we all went into the water together to cleanse ourselves. I floated in the silty warmth feeling drained and at the same time strangely fulfilled. (mahjoub, 2006, pp. 155-156)

This is Rachel, statement to her sister that in the end she felt Fulfilled and is changed by this experience.

The final piece of the jigsaw puzzle is represented by Ernest Fuhrer's travels and shifting of residences; what he did in the past has had an impact on both of his families. After the German Fleet Riot, which occurred in 1918, Germany descended into anarchy and began a war with itself. When Ernst came ashore after making a vow to never return to the water, he saw that things had changed significantly. The next three years, Ernst "moved from one place to another, finding himself in the tumult of poverty and desperation that had seized a country in revolt. He wandered from one job to another, from one town to the next." (mahjoub, 2006, p. 48)

In Mahjoub's work, according to Jopi Nyman (2011) Liverpool, a city that is also known for its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, is a crucial setting for the eradication of racial and cultural barriers. Its accounts of racial history, which cover both slavery and post-World War II immigration to Britain, highlight the dislocation of the immigrant but also hint at opportunities for their empowerment. This area, which is available for various cross-cultural interactions, serves as a signpost for the start of Frager's next stage of existence. (pp. 185-186) The search for belongingness for Ernst started as soon as he found himself alone in Liverpool, with no one to go to, he found himself a stranger. In this case, Ernst is a newcomer, according to C. Susana Caxaj and Helene Berman(2010) Newcomers and those establishing new homes in foreign countries encounter strange environments that can both endanger and enhance their sense of well-being. (p. 17) He enters a club, named the blue Nile club, attracted by its illumination in quest of someone to comfort his loneliness . in the club, he meets the owner, a big Egyptian man, and an ex-merchant sailor named Ismail Bilal. In this club, he meets a young women singer who dances with men who makes her laugh or wear sadness over their shoulder, Ernst dances with her and falls in love, to the extent that he feels that the void he once had, is gone, "Here, finally, in this city, of all places, he had found the antidote to that vacuum inside him." (mahjoub, 2006, p. 157)

This place represents a magical place where sorts of people meet from all walks of life, a place that enables cultural diversity, since cultural diversity as stated by Cong Lin(2020) refers to a reality of coexistence of diverse knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, religions, languages, abilities and disabilities, genders, ethnicities, races, nationalities, sexual orientations, etc., of human beings."(p. 1) he Furter

adds that People have the chance to interact with others in order to comprehend and experience other people's ways of being because of cultural diversity.(p. 3) the blue Nile club has succeeded in crossing cultural barriers and has gathered people from different places. So this club achieved not a general sense of belongingness but also this mixing leads to forming of a hybrid culture. As Homi K. Bhabha (1994) explains these places represent a third space, a space big enough for everybody where hybrid identities are created and where one can experience “the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world –the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extraterritorial and cross-cultural initiations”.(p. 13)

While a state of cultural diversity can lead to the formation of many relationships bridging two or more cultures together, it can also be a difficult concept for people who are not compatible with each other's Cong Lin(2020) explains that When several identities are forced to compete with one another and are not always compatible, problems occur. This can be difficult to accomplish, especially when there are ingrained prejudices and misunderstandings about other cultures that prevent individuals of various identities from coexisting, let alone working together. Which might hinder the process of belongingness.

This fact is shown in the novel, as the relationship and overall marriage of a white Germanies man and a black African woman are frowned upon by Marinda's sister Lillie, and her family who turned their back on her and left her alone, as Lillie is not ashamed to express her prejudiced thoughts, “white man twice her age. ‘A German?’ Lillie had exclaimed. ‘Are you crazy, girl, or what? They already hate us as it is. Where is your child going to show its face around here?’” (mahjoub, 2006, p. 162) for Miranda, Ernst made her feel “like a film star, the glamorous creature she had always dreamed she would become. (p. 139) As stated by

Baumeister and Leary (1995) To satisfy the need to belong, the person must believe that the other cares about his or her welfare and likes (or loves) him or her. (p. 500) Ernst cared for her and loved her, which satisfied the need to belong.

for Ernst who were always working on his inventions trying to reach perfection and success and fame , a transformative moment occurs in 1946, while Ernst was working as a interpreter in Germany, when he meets a ruthless Nazi scientist and realizes that a technological worldview with a belief in the potential of development through machine improvement is no longer available to him. He would run the risk of becoming like his Prussian mirror, a "wasted man... a mirror of possibility," if he went down that road. Ernst transformation was in a "cracked chapel" where an American Sargent sings, which makes the chapel's walls tremble with "bombing voice" according to Jopi Nyman (2011) In other Black music, in other words, begins to serve as a counter-narrative to Western reason as well as a semiotic and postcolonial critique of the symbolic and colonial system. As Ernst explains that " now he saw there was beauty in incompleteness, a sublime grace, a gritty, human kind of imperfection"(mahjoub, 2006, p. 183), Ernst didn't know what to say after this moment, but music her can surpass cultures the way language is unable to. The novel, as stated by Nyman (2011) makes the case that music is a tool to comprehend the complex experiences of diasporic migration and global mobility, and that this understanding may help with identity reconstruction.(p. 189) thus reinforce a feeling of belongness and familiarity.

Conclusion

Losing the sense of belonging can have serious psychological and social ramifications that can damage people's lives and their connection to reality as well as their connection to other people. The phenomena of non-belongingness can be studied in different fields such as sociology, geography, and psychology. African people have experienced the social crisis of non-belongingness for decades after as a result for being dislocated from their own homeland and taking to live in Europe, whether voluntarily or not. This has caused what is known as African diaspora. As a result, Mahjoub has portrayed the struggle of belongingness in different characters that happen to have a biracial parent. The novel shows that growing up with different cultural backgrounds can cause the person to identify with one of the parents and abandons the second culture or feel disconnected with it. The novel reflects on something very important besides belonging to different racial groups and different cultural backgrounds which is to live with more than one religion around. Religious identity becomes mixed with racial and cultural identity so that the individual can find a sense of belongingness in identifying with one or more of such groups at the expense of others. Mahjoub's novel is significant in showing the cultural diversity as a human being that can have its complication and side effects, and not only positive or negative outcomes.

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