

Research Article

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Magical Realism as a Metaphor for Migration: The Symbolism of Doors in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid, both as a literary form provided by magical realism and as a critical theory of migration and displacement offered by postcolonialism. It claims that the magical doors of the novel are a central metaphor that essentially restructures the traditional migration discourses since the physical process of migration is eliminated and focus is shifted on the psychological, emotional, and existential impact of forced displacement. The doors create a porous spatial and temporal distance that makes the geopolitical boundaries permeable and increases the feelings of loss, moral discomfort, and identity dissociation. Based on an intensive textual analysis of important passages in which the doors are involved and the way in which the cultures of the main characters, Nadia and Saeed, are changing, the paper will show how the theme of migration in *Exit West* is embodied not as a single event, but as a state of becoming, characterized by liminality, silence, and the breakdown of relationships. By externalizing interior conditions of fear, grief, and moral uncertainty, Hamid blends the fantastical with intimate realist detail, demonstrating the disorientation of life after displacement rather than a display of transition. Finally, this study argues that *Exit West* does not follow the traditional realist and humanitarian manifestations of migration but promotes interior change and moral thinking. Thus, it is the depiction of the way magical realism can serve as an effective narrative tool for developing empathy in readers and reflecting the psychological aspects of the modern world—dislocation.

Keywords: Magical Realism, Migration, Displacement, Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West*, Postcolonialism, Liminality, Psychological Impact

1.INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, global migration is now one of the most characterizing and controversial human phenomena, often constructed in a political and media discourse using the prism of crisis, security, and border control. These stories usually focus on previous numbers, legality, and humanitarian emergencies without focusing on the psychological, emotional, and relational aspects of displacement. Consequently, migration has been frequently demoted to a logistical or spectacular spectacle and not perceived as a long-term and transformative state that reformulates identity, belonging, and ethical sensibility.

The abundance of literary accounts of migration is a critical alternative to these hegemonic models in the sense that it prefigures interior experience and subjective transformation. *The Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid is in a special place among the modern migration literature because it does not dramatize the physical migration process. Rather, the novel adds a network of mysterious doors that allow immediate movement along borders, thus getting rid of the potentially dangerous transit that typically defines realist migration stories. This narrative choice poses one of the main questions: what is migration when movement is no longer its characteristic feature?

This paper presents a thesis that *Exit West* transforms the idea of migration into a psychological, emotional, and existential state, instead of a specific action of crossing a border. The novel alters its focus on spectacle through the continued employment of magical realism to the consequences of displacement, loss, uncertainty, broken intimacy, and the slow renegotiation of the self. The magical doors are not used as a means of escapism but as symbolic points of exit that externalize interior fragmentation and show how borders remain as psychological and moral imperatives despite their physical permeability.

The theoretical framework of this paper relies on magical realism as a mode of narration and the postcolonial theory as a critical approach. Based on the insights of Wendy B. Faris on the idea of magical realism being the process of making the extraordinary normal in the mundane, the study considers the doors as narrative units that cannot be reduced to realism and thus cannot reveal emotional and ethical realities that remain untenable to realism. The concept of liminality, hybridity, and the third space, especially through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha, also underlies the discussion, positioning the migrant subjectivity in the persistence of in-between states, as opposed to stable national identity.

Although accessible literature on *Exit West* has extensively recognized the symbolic meaning of the magical doors, most of this critical interest has been on the political, technological, or spatial implications of the same. Little attention has been given to magical realism as a long-held metaphorical construct to narrate the psychological consequences of migration, especially in connection to emotional home readjustment and post-migration identity. The paper fills that gap by considering the way the narrative structure of the novel in itself performs the act of displacement.

Based on this, the main focus of this study is to examine the way magical realism in *Exit West* is an ethical and representational strategy that reconfigures the migration discourse by the physical movement and emphasizes the role of the interior change. The study shows that migration in *Exit West* is not depicted in terms of the event that had its resolution, but rather as a state of becoming, one that persists long after the process of movement is seemingly closed in the past. Additionally, hybrid cryptography emerges as a synthesis of the benefits of both asymmetric and symmetric cryptography, significantly enhancing the overall security level. The proposed hybrid method integrates dynamic shifting with a symmetric algorithm, specifically utilizing a dynamic AES key.

1.1 Migration, Borders, and Identity in Exit West

In modern theory the process of migration is becoming understood not as simply a movement through national borders but rather as a complicated psychological, emotional, and existential phenomenon. Postcolonial critics and theorists of migration highlight the fact that borders are not merely geopolitical demarcations but also symbolic and affective shifts that distort subjectivity, memory, and belonging. In this sense migration is not a passage between fixed identities but a continuous state of becoming, characterized by the state of indecision, loss, and renegotiation.

The concept of liminality and the third space developed by Homi K. Bhabha is especially helpful to explain this state. Migration places people in a kind of in-between place, in which constructed concepts of home, nation, and identity are disrupted. Instead of settling down the issue of displacement, border movement tends to heighten experiences of fragmentation and hybridity, resulting in provisional and fluid identities. In this regard, belonging is not spatially determined but relational and affective.

Exit West entirely reforms this interpretation of migration by referring to magical realism. The fourth aspect Hamid uses to eliminate the physical adventure of the story is by introducing the magical doors—portals that allow one to move instantly to another country. Less risky movement does not relieve the suffering; on the contrary, it transfers the focus to the emotional and psychological impacts of uprooting. The abruptness of the departure and arrival heightens the sense of disorientation, sorrow, and moral discomfort, which supports the idea that the most unsettling elements of migration are not the movement but its result.

The sorrowful permeability of boundaries in Exit West disputes traditional realist migration discourses that promote spectacle, menace, and perseverance. The absence of a depicted journey prefigures silence, emotional depletion, and disrupted intimacy, which serves to affirm the notion that migration is lived as a state of being and not a state of being resolved. Though the boundaries are made physically permeable, they still stand as psychological and moral places within which migrants have to negotiate.

Hamid uses this narrative technique to counter magical realism with postcolonial arguments on inflexible national identities and exclusionary border regimes. The doors are not used for escapism but symbolize ready points, which outwardly externalize internal rupture. Migration is thereby modeled as a stable current condition of liminality, an upheaval in which identity, belonging, and ties are never fixed or positioned but are fluid and continuously redefined.

1.2 Magical Realism

The genre of magic realism is characterized by the fact that fantasies in a realistic surrounding world of the story are smooth. The magical realist works do not tell us that the supernatural is extraordinary and unrealistic; it is the norm of ordinary life. Faris (2004) observes that magical realism refers to a genre of fiction in which the author incorporates irreducible bits of magic that cannot be explained by the author and finally cannot be explained by the significant epistemological paradigms. In the same manner, Bowers (2004) points out that magical realism challenges the traditional demarcations of reality and fantasies and, in the majority of instances, is an artistic strategy of representing marginalized or unstable realities.

Mode has also been closely associated with the postcolonial realities where it enables the writers to manifest their existence using violence, historical detachment, and alienation (Faris, 2004; Bowers, 2004). Magical realism permits authors to address psychological and emotional truth and find emotional reality in addition to the abilities of linear temporality and fixed space limits more than realism itself. In contemporary literature it has been employed increasingly to speak of such phenomena in the world as migration and uprooting, with a focus on interior change and not on physical activity.

In *Exit West*, we can see magical realism through the symbol of the doors, which allow one to go through the borders easily. These doors are being accepted as the normal aspect of the fictional world, and this situation contributes to the normalization of the process of the mass migration, but at the same time, it reveals the psychological costs of such a process (Hamid, 2017). In this literary device, magical realism serves as a system of exploring how migration disrupts identity and belonging and defines home.

1.3 Exit West (2017)

Exit West is a book written by Mohsin Hamid about the experiences of two young people, Nadia and Saeed, who are compelled to leave their nameless native country as violence and political instability continue to escalate in the country. The novel does not follow the traditional themes of refugees by substituting the physical journey with the use of a sequence of magical doors that carry migrants through the world. Following the protagonists as they journey across different places, such as refugee camps and work settlements, the storyline reveals the transformation in the relationship between the protagonists, their identity, and belonging (Hamid, 2017).

Declining to specify the country of origin of the main characters, Hamid makes them generic, enabling the story to serve as a more general parable about the displacement of the world at large (Perfect, 2019). Instead of survival on transit, the novel highlights emotional adoption, separation, and broken intimacy. *Exit West*, with its mixture of magical realism and intimate realist detail, presents a unique literary treatment of migration that prefigures interior experience and psychological transformation.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyze the narrative function of magical realism in *Exit West*, focusing on how the motif of the magical doors shifts attention from physical transit to interior experience.
2. Examine the symbolic significance of the magical doors as psychological and ethical thresholds that reshape notions of borders, identity, and belonging.
3. Explore representations of post-migration subjectivity, including emotional dislocation, fractured intimacy, and identity renegotiation.
4. Situate the novel within postcolonial and migration theory to demonstrate how it challenges dominant realist and humanitarian migration narratives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter is a review of the current literature that is applicable to the current research topic, where three areas are related and connected, namely: (1) magical realism as a modern narrative technique of enacting migration, (2) migration, borders, and identity construction, and (3) critical studies of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. Combining the theoretical background of studies with current critical analysis, the review builds the academic framework on the application of magical realism used in *Exit West* as the future prediction of psychological displacement and identity reformation.

2.1 Magical Realism as a Contemporary Migration Narrative Strategy

Migration theorists and postcolonial critics have highlighted the fact that borders are not just geopolitical boundaries but also symbolic and emotive boundaries. The liminality concept as conceived by Bhabha (1994) and the concept of third space make identity fluid and constantly negotiated, especially when it comes to the situation of displacement. In this sense, migration is perceived as a continuous process of becoming and not as a change between fixed identities.

The magical openness of borders via the magical doors in *Exit West* does not avoid suffering but only intensifies the emotional shock of departing and arrival. The lack of a presented journey is a precursor of psychological disintegration, loss, and indecision, which supports the notion that migration is undergone as a protracted process, as opposed to one that is resolved. This figure corresponds with postcolonialism theories of rigid national identities and supports the idea of a precarious belongingness in a globalized space (Bhabha, 1994; Perfect, 2019).

2.2 The Doors as Metaphors of Borderlessness and Psychological Dislocation

The symbolic role of the magic doors is one of the issues of the *Exit West* scholarship. The doors of the building are construed by Hashmi (2024) as polyvalent metaphors, which consist of escape, fear, uncertainty, and aspiration. The suddenness of the move into an instant transition is reflected in the doors as well as the vulnerability that the migrants feel when they arrive and the emotional labor that must be undertaken to reestablish identity.

According to Ashraf, Ali, and Ahmad (2025), the doors are also a postmodern challenge to the borders of the naturalization of the nation-states and territorial sovereignty. By putting the novel in the postcolonial discourse, they suggest that the doors are undermining the boundaries that both colonial and postcolonial systems of power have created. The symbolic nature of the doors in this reading has become that the political, cultural, and psychological barriers are dismantled, and a new, though not very sound, sense of belonging can be created.

These definitions are aligned with the broader theoretical claims that the borders are not only what define the physical boundaries but also what define the psychological and emotional frontiers. The doors change the emphasis from the threat and survival to the emotional destabilization, the ethical conflict, and the identity transformation, which once more supports the idea that migration is experienced more through its consequences.

2.3 Migration, Identity Fluidity, and Liminal Existence

The study of migration as a topic in literary criticism is taking the focus towards the identity being fluid, relational, and negotiated. According to Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), the concept of borders is to be conceptualized as a complex socio-political process that governs movement, work, and membership and should not be visualized as a geographical boundary. This model has contributed to literary studies that understand migration as a constant state as opposed to a successful transition.

Long postcolonial theorists have emphasized how the process of migration disrupts the fixed concepts of identity. The notion of hybridity introduced by Bhabha (1994) puts the migrant identity into the liminal condition shaped in the in-between spaces that oppose national and cultural essentialism. Similar sentiments are echoed by Said (1978), who notes that displacement reveals the artificiality of the borders created under the influence of colonial structures of power.

The recent scholarship brings in affect theory to this debate. Wise and Velayutham (2017) focus on such issues as emotional transnationality, stating that migrants have to deal with conflicting emotional schemas based on the society of origin and the host country. Tosi (2024) suggests the term "affective borderscapes" to express spaces of such emotional labor as fear, hope, and loss, as well as resilience in which migrant subjectivities are formed. These methods alter the main emphasis points of the policy and legality towards the emotional experience.

Research of *Exit West* always coincides with such theoretical points of view. According to Razzaq (2024), the state of Nadia and Saeed is an extended liminal space, with the magical doors being an indication of not a transition into stability but a state of uncertainty and becoming. A transnational analysis of 2025 also serves to stress the importance of geography as a determinant of the characters,

implying that the characters are defined more by memory, interpersonal relationships, and emotional negotiation than by geography only.

2.4 Postcolonial Critique and the Global Politics of Migration

Exit West is postcolonially read in advance of its attack on nationalism, border regimes, and exclusionary citizenship. According to Khalil (2025), magical realism by Hamid is a form of political intervention, as it envisions a world where the mobility of human beings becomes normal instead of criminalized. The doors in this meaning symbolize opposition against the movement that is controlled by the state and rethinking the global coexistence based on mutual vulnerability.

The influential research by Perfect (2019) is still the groundwork of this question. Perfect shows how Exit West is an anti-spectacular, anti-suffering divergence from dominant discourses of refugees, predicting intimacy, interiority, and ethical responsibility in the future. This interior focus has influenced a great deal of later criticism, making the novel seem to be a warning against the reductive humanitarianism of the humanist-realist tradition.

This criticism is also extended to political readings. Based on Jacques Ranciere's idea of dissensus, Brauer (2019) suggests that the magical doors discomposing consensual political orders reveal the exclusionary logic of the borders and the citizenship. Migrants in the novel become visible again, albeit temporarily, through squatting and general action, as they protest against the dominant power structures.

2.5 Critical Studies on Exit West (2017)

Vast literature places Exit West in the context of the postnational and cosmopolitan discourse. Kumar (2019) argues that Hamid breaks the distinction between a citizen and a refugee and imagines mobility as a common human experience and not a nationality-infected privilege. This argument is also espoused by Spencer (2018) and Pattanayak and Tiwari (2025), whose work was built upon the idea that the novel is a critique of nationalism as it envisions communities based on empathy, flexibility, and experience instead of territorial affiliation.

The newer research is considered to have a wider interpretive context of the novel. The author makes a reading produced by technological forces; the magic doors were understood as the symbolic agents of digital connection and artificial intelligence that reveal how modern technology has been changing the speed and disorienting it (Hassan, 2023). With the theory of affect and postmigration studies, Tosi (2024) considers Exit West a chaos world in which identities are continuously being reshaped through emotional bargaining, multilingual experiences, and transnational identifications.

In spite of this rich literature, very little has been conducted to know how magical realism as a special metaphorical mode of handling psychological adjustment and identity reconstruction after relocation across countries. In spite of the fact that many sources understand the symbolic meaning of the doors, they are inclined to focus more on the political, technological, or spatial meaning instead of the emotional impact and the change of the interior.

2.6 Research Gap

Current literature recognizes the symbolic significance of the magical doors, but it generally focuses on the magical doors as political allegories, technological metaphors, and spatial devices with relatively little attention to magical realism as a prolonged metaphorical system to describe the psychological sequelae of the migration process, especially the emotional adjustment process, identity fragmentation, and post-migration becoming.

2.6.1 Synthesis of Scholarly Perspectives

The scholarship on *Exit West* provides an example of an interdisciplinary approach to the novel based on an array of magical realism, postcolonial theory, migration studies, affect theory, and globalization studies to discuss how Hamid reimagines displacement not as a logistical or geopolitical phenomenon. The difference between those who dislike the magical doors and those who like them is that the magical doors are a kind of irreducible component that disrupts the traditions of realism as well as shifting the focus off of dangerous journeys and onto the psychological, relational, and ethical effects of migration (Faris, 2004; Bowers, 2004; Perfect, 2019). Postcolonial readings also highlight how the novel critiques nationalism and rigid ideas of belonging and understands borders as social structures and morally unsound processes, which create liminal, hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1994; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013).

Recent affect-oriented and transnational approaches emphasize the role of emotion, memory, and interpersonal negotiation in coming up with migrant subjectivity (Wise and Velayutham, 2017; Tosi, 2024), whereas the role of the political and technological is read as an allegory of resistance or digital acceleration (Brauer, 2019; Hassan, 2023). Alongside this deep vein of criticism, relatively little has been made of the functioning of magical realism as a long-term metaphorical model of explaining the psychological aftereffects of migration—especially the operations of emotional adjustment and the formation of identity following border crossings. To fill this gap, the current research paper investigates how *Exit West* reverses the migration discourse of movement that centers on bodily motion and the discourse of migrant subjectivity and movement that is recurrent and continuous in existing literary research.

To ensure conceptual coherence and to demonstrate clear alignment between the identified research gap, the study’s objectives, and the principal analytical outcomes, **Table 1** maps each objective directly onto a specific gap in existing scholarship and indicates how that gap is addressed through close textual analysis of *Exit West*. This structured alignment illustrates how the study progresses systematically from critical context to interpretive findings, thereby reinforcing the internal coherence and scholarly contribution of the research.

Table 1: Research Gap, Objectives, and Analytical Outcomes

Research Gap Identified	Research Objective	Key Analytical Focus	Confirmed Outcome
Limited attention to magical realism as a sustained framework for the psychological aftermath of migration	Examine magical realism as a narrative framework in <i>Exit West</i>	Normalization of the magical doors; absence of physical journey; emphasis on interiority	Magical realism operates as an ethical narrative strategy rather than a stylistic device
Magical doors predominantly interpreted as political or technological metaphors	Analyze the symbolic significance of the magical doors	Doors as psychological and ethical thresholds	Doors externalize internal rupture, liminality, and existential vulnerability
Insufficient focus on post-migration identity reconstruction and emotional aftermath	Explore psychological and emotional transformation in the novel	Silence, fractured intimacy, labor, loss	Migration represented as an ongoing condition of becoming rather than a resolved event

As this overview demonstrates, the study’s objectives emerge directly from identifiable gaps in existing scholarship and are systematically addressed through textual analysis, ensuring a coherent analytical trajectory and a clearly articulated contribution to contemporary debates on migration, magical realism, and postcolonial literature.

3. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative, interpretive research approach used in this study is based on the close textual analysis. The critical methodology is guided by magical realism as a narrative mode and postcolonial theory as a critical approach. Instead of attempting to measure the empirical variables, the research is interested in analyzing symbolism, the role of narrative, and how psychological and emotional experience is represented in *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid (2017). Since the novel gives precedence to the inner world and the affective experience compared to the outer events, which are observable, the qualitative method will best suit the study purposes.

The construction of literary meaning in *Exit West* is achieved not by narrative action, but by the use of language, imagery, narrative restraint, and juxtaposition. Thus, interpretive analysis of the textual form and thematic patterns allows achieving a more accurate insight into the way in which the concept of migration is described as an existential and psychological state. This method fits the qualitative literary research work, where depth of interpretation and theoretical interest take precedence over generalization.

3.1 Research Design

The study uses close reading as the main research design. Close reading provides an opportunity to devote prolonged attention to language, imagery, symbolism, and narrative point of view; that is why it can be especially appropriate to analyze the magical realist works where fantastic elements are perfectly incorporated into the normal reality. In *Exit West*, magical doors are not described in a narrative manner with an authorial accent, which means that the interpretation of the story should be done with a careful eye to implication, a sense of normalization, and symbolic resonance.

This is a single-text qualitative case study research paper, with a single film, *Exit West* (2017). The choice to focus on a single text gives an opportunity for the depth of analysis and the intellectual consistency, in particular, to focus on the main metaphor of the novel of the magic doors. Instead of approaching the analysis in the comparative or corpus manner, the analysis focuses on the analytical intensity to uncover the demonstrated ways in which narrative form, symbolism, and thematic organization all bring migration out to represent a psychological and an existential condition.

3.2 Theoretical and Analytical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks used to guide the analysis include magical realism and postcolonial theory, which complement each other.

To start with, magical realism is used both as a narrative and analytical form, which relies mostly on the definition of the genre offered by Wendy B. Faris, who suggests that magical realism is the coexistence of the magical with the real, without the explanatory priority. This structure allows the analysis to perceive the magical doors not as abstract allegories, external to the reality, but as normalized narrative elements, which externalize the psychological, emotive upheaval. In *Exit West*, there is no spectacle around the doors that prompts changing the focus of critical attention from the material motions to the internal outcomes of displacement.

Second, postcolonial theory offers the conceptual possibility to analyze the migration, borders, and identity. Liminality, hybridity, and the so-called third space, which is described, most of all, by Homi K. Bhabha, are some of the concepts that inform the analysis of the expression of migrant subjectivity as unstable and constantly negotiated. In this context migration in *Exit West* is perceived not as a progressive difference of risk to safety but rather as a long-term state of betweenness that rearranges the concept of belonging both emotionally and relationally.

These frameworks combined enable the paper to investigate the intersection of narrative form and political critique and how *Exit West* breaks down the ideas of nation, citizenship, and identity with its presentation of displacement.

3.3 Data Selection and Analytical Procedure

The primary data in the present study are chosen passages telling about the magical doors in *Exit West*, which describes psychological disorientation prior to and after migration. The selection of these passages is based on the fact that they signify instances of emotional discontinuity, ethical friction, loss, and relation shift on the part of the main characters of the novel, Nadia and Saeed.

The analysis does not discuss the doors in terms of being separate symbols; hence, it looks into the doors being a component of a larger symbolic economy where displacement is demonstrated to be internal before the body is physically displaced. The previous accounts of mass slaughter and preemptive dread are thus discussed together with subsequent examples of migration, supporting the thesis that their psychological displacement comes first and goes further than the physical one.

The process of analytics is carried out in three steps. First, passages that are considered relevant are marked and placed in the form of a narrative of the novel. Second, repetition of images, words, and plot lines are analyzed in order to follow the lines of movement or stasis and emotional reactions like fear, grief, detachment, moral ambiguity, and adaptation. Third, it is a blend of magical realism and postcolonial theory insights, which are used to understand the role of the doors as both the psychological and ethical barriers, as well as the fluidity of the identity and the lack of the answers to the question of belonging.

In order to explicate operationalization of theoretical concepts in the analysis, Table 2 provides a summary of the main analysis frameworks and how they are applied to *Exit West*.

Table 2: Analytical Framework Applied to *Exit West*

<i>Theoretical Framework</i>	<i>Key Concepts Used</i>	<i>Application in Exit West</i>	<i>Analytical Outcome</i>
Magical Realism (Faris; Bowers)	Irreducible element; normalization of the magical	The doors treated as ordinary within the narrative	Shifts focus from physical migration to psychological aftermath
Postcolonial Theory (Bhabha)	Liminality; hybridity; third space	Nadia and Saeed's unstable identities post-migration	Identity shown as fluid and unresolved
Affect / Migration Studies	Emotional aftermath; relational rupture	Silence, grief, labor, intimacy	Migration framed as emotional and ethical condition

By mapping theoretical concepts onto specific narrative strategies and textual moments, this framework underscores how theory informs the analysis throughout the study, enabling a nuanced interpretation of migration as a psychological and ethical condition in *Exit West*.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Psychological Disorientation and the Pre-Migration Condition

Prior to the emergence of the magical doors, *Exit West* creates one of the most all-encompassing moods of mental instability that makes migration an emotional necessity. Hamid gives subtle but progressive indications of the collapse of social order by mentioning that militants have started occupying and

capturing territory across the city (Hamid, 2017, pp. 31-32). Instead of being melodramatic about the battle, the narration focuses on the seepage of territory, which implies that violence does not flash upon the scene but constantly seeps out into the day-to-day lives of people. This is further strengthened when the city is stated to get impossible to disconnect from the surrounding countryside, which means that it is no longer possible to contain the danger or keep it external; instead, it is everywhere and impossible to avoid.

Further reading of the responses of the family also shows that displacement starts internally. In retrospect, Saeed's father criticizes the life decisions of his father, who thought that he should have pursued wealth at any cost to save his son (p. 31). This self-criticism portrays the way in which crisis redefines moral principles and reveals the inequalities of access to safety and movement based on class. On the contrary, the mother of Saeed emphasizes that nothing changed as she experiences sleeplessness and secretly takes tranquilizers (pp. 31-32). This is contradictory to her actions of denying, which is a psychological survival mechanism. Put together, these situations demonstrate that fear, guilt, and uncertainty are all traumatizing the psyche long before the actual physical movement takes place, which reinforces the argument in the study that displacement precedes border-crossing.

4.2 Anticipatory Migration and the Ethics of Choice

Hamid makes the notion of migration as the voluntary or even rational choice a little more complicated by introducing it as the ethical dilemma based on fear, duty, and possible future. The internalized stigma is seen as Nadia imagines the life of migrants as being reduced to subsistence on handouts by becoming vermin locked in pens (Hamid, 2017, pp. 58-59). With careful focus on the use of language, the simile of vermin life shows how dehumanizing the discourse of the masses about refugees is and that it is adopted into the self-conception of the latter even prior to their movement.

The moral dilemma of migration is best expressed when the father of Saeed insists on not going through the door. His mere statement that your mother is here (p. 59) restates the concept of belonging as an emotional and mnemonical belonging instead of a geographical one. The desire of the father to somehow exist in the past highlights how migration discontinuously breaks the continuity of time, and it is necessary to either choose the mode of physical survival or the mode of emotions being rooted. His metaphor of a flooding, where the loss of one of the children keeps the two others and the father together at the same level, makes migration look like a loving gesture that cannot be performed without the accompanying loss that is irreversible. The analysis provides this close reading to reveal how the novel condenses the ethical violence into the scenes of personal conversation, which is the key element in its magical realist approach.

4.3 Fragmented Intimacy and Emotional Thresholds

The sense of instability of the world is reflected in the relationship of Saeed and Nadia as migration approaches. Their physical proximity generates uneasiness over reassurance, and this is expressed in the words "unnatural nearness" (Hamid, 2017, p. 88). The oxymoronic nature of this phrase explains how crisis makes intimacy into emotional rubbing, and bonds that could have been relied upon as providing security are shaken.

Nadia is anxious about violating her promise to the father of Saeed—lest she become someone who does not keep her word—she does not want to become someone who does not keep her word because that makes her say nothing about herself after she becomes a moral person (p. 88). Consistency in ethics makes her sense of self dependent in a situation where consistency can hardly be achieved. The fox, which continually plays in the garden, is a symbolic antithesis to this instability. Although its recurrence indicates continuity and survival, its bloody disembowelment of a diaper (pp. 88-89) infuses domestic innocence, which indicates that there is no private place of violence. The commonplace and disturbing appearance of the fox is an example of magical realism, its combination of the familiar with the disturbing, which anticipates the logic of the narrative of the doors but is maintained by material reality.

4.4 Post-Migration Labor, Silence and Liminal Identity

After they have migrated, Hamid is against representing arrival as closure. Both the action of Saeed among the natives and his work with the natives in London put him in new lines of hierarchy that recreate exclusion rather than eradicate it. He has the advantage of speaking the English language, which presents him with a middle ground between the foreman and the rest of the migrants (Hamid, 2017, p. 108). This is a specialized understanding of the word "midway"; the word is "liminal," as Saeed neither is nor is not, but rather is in between, and that is what his identity is, the fragmented self.

It is particularly important that the foreman does not react as Saeed thanks him. This is a rejection in terms of words that reminds those reading the book of the silence of soldiers who... looked at you as though you did not know how much you were asking when they were questioned about war (p. 109). It is the point of this comparison that the unspoken pasts are heavy and restrictions of cross-cultural knowledge can be. Silence also subdues the relationship between Saeed and Nadia, where the couple are unable to communicate the exhaustion and the desire to seek the meaning together. The inability of Nadia to express herself and the restrained nature of Saeed are the results of emotional depletion and gradual loss of people (pp. 111-112). The depiction of birds whose trees are cut down for construction parallels the uprooting of migrants, reinforcing the novel's portrayal of displacement as a systemic and ecological phenomenon rather than an isolated human experience.

4.5 The Magical Doors as Internalized Thresholds

Even though the magical doors are not present in most of the passages discussed above, they acquire a kind of symbolic power owing to the fact that the characters already have a psychologically fragmented state by the time they come in contact with the magical doors. Early in the novel, Hamid suggests that an individual in isolation possesses little substance (Hamid, 2017, p. 7), anticipating the existential vulnerability later embodied by the magical doors. It is seen that the doors do not begin the loss or transformation, but they bring into existence an internal break that has already taken place.

Through obliterating the physical voyage, Hamid deprives the readers of witnessing the suffering and rather challenges them with the consequences of suffering, namely, silence, changed intimacy, and transitional identity. The doors, therefore, are psychological and existential gates and not means of transportation. They break down boundaries physically and stretch their spiritual and moral impacts further. The migration in *Exit West* is not the act of abandoning danger and entering the safe world but a state of becoming that is characterized by grief, acclimatization, and the unresolved quest of belonging.

5. DISCUSSION

This paper was aimed at analyzing how the use of magical realism in *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid, in this instance, the magical doors, aims to redefine migration as a mental, emotional, and existential state and not necessarily a physical one. The analysis above has shown that the narrative technique Hamid uses systematically diverts the focus of the spectacle of border-crossing and moves it to the inner implications of displacement. In this way the novel questions the mainstream realist and humanitarian migration discourses that focus on danger, endurance, and survival without paying much attention to the psychological and relational changes that forced movement may bring in the long run.

Stereotypes in close readings used in Chapter 4 show that migration in *Exit West* is not sudden and externally imposed, but before it takes place, it is accompanied by psychological fragmentation, anticipatory grief, and doubt. Such results support the idea that magical realism as applied by Hamid is no mere ornament but happens to be at the core of the depiction and interpretation of migration in the novel.

5.1 Magical Realism and Reconfiguring Migration Discourse

Magical realism in *Exit West* is conjured around works in the form of narrative intervention rather than escapism, based on the analysis. Eliminating the physical journey through the magic doors, Hamid is disobeying the classical conventions of migration, where valuing the pictures of threat, survival, and suffering of the body is permitted. The introduction of the doors is not demonstrated or outlined in the analysis as it is presented and made prosaic even though it suggests extraordinary connotations. This naturalization helps forget all the movement and pay attention to the results of the migration, loss, dumb silence, broken intimacy, and identity crisis.

The disastrous thesis that magical realism permits expression of psychological and emotive truths, which are often difficult to articulate through the cohort of realism, is given credence through these observations (Faris, 2004; Bowers, 2004). As opposed to diminishing the gravity of the displacement, the erasure of the trip supports it all the more from the standpoint of feeling and previews the post-reality before the event itself. The non-dramatization of transit in *Exit West* contradicts the commodification of migrant pain, which is typically brought out by realist discourses of refugees, and instead shows the inadequacy of journey-centered plots to define displacement as a persistent condition of existence.

5.2 Borders as Psychological and Ethical Thresholds

One of the key outcomes of the analysis is that it has redefined the borders in *Exit West* as psychological and ethical boundaries and not just as geopolitical boundaries. The experiences of the characters prove that migration starts at the very core, in fear, guilt, denial, and moral conflict, before the crossing of some physical border. The responses of the parents of Saeed toward the approaching violence and the denial made by the father of Saeed to migrate expose the impact of attachment to the past, loss, and memory as the increasing power in the choices made by the person rather than the reflection of safety.

This observation is rather consistent with the postcolonial theory, especially the idea of liminality and the third space, according to which identity is negotiated and not determined. Instead, as the analysis indicates, Nadia and Saeed do not pass between one stable identity to another, but they live in a long in-between condition where they experience emotional exhaustion, moral tension, and recalibration of their relationships. The magic doors bring this liminal state into being, and instead of being resolved, borders have become locations of psychic discontinuity and moral impact.

5.3 Identity Fluidity and the Limits of Belonging

The parts of the novel that follow the migration are against the argument of the study that arrival itself cannot be a solution to the displacement. The talk reveals that the labor hierarchies and language privileges, as well as the social distance, remain intact beyond the borders, resulting in the emergence of new forms of exclusion rather than offering a feeling of coherence or belonging. The intermediate status granted to Saeed due to his command of the English language is a good illustration of why inclusion is not absolute and complete but rather under some conditions, and, therefore, it becomes more difficult to streamline the process of integration and assimilation.

Further to the end, the emotional vacuum, which replaces the relationship between Nadia and Saeed, brings the general impact of displacement and destruction not only of national identity but also of personal affiliations. The psychological cost of long-term liminality is indicated by the fact that they both make no explanations regarding fatigue, longing, and loss. These findings conform to the existing body of research that migration is a process of constant identity renegotiation, not a transition that is complete, and confirm the view that belonging in *Exit West* is provisional and subject to alteration.

5.4 Empathy, Interior Experience and Ethical Reading

The empathy that *Exit West* develops with the reader is one of the most important implications of this study. As it has been discussed in the analysis, Hamid bases magic in banal and intimate aspects, insomnia, routine labor, collective silence, suppression of emotions, etc., and thus, he is able to make displacement human but not sensational. The doors have the fantastical logic that is always balanced with emotional realism, which makes the reader approach the migrant experience as an ethical experience and not as a spectacle.

This helps to argue that magical realism may serve as an ethical mode of narrative, compelling the readers to think of the migration as a common human weakness instead of a unique crisis of isolated people. Focusing on interior experience and external threat, *Exit West* provokes the readers to rethink their expectations about the borders, belonging, and home and create a more reflective and responsible form of interaction with the migration narratives.

5.5 Contribution to Migration and Literary Studies

On the whole, this argument confirms that *Exit West* contributes greatly to the modern migration literature, as it shifts the narration emphasis to the psychological change and postcolonial commentary. As this novel goes on to show, magical realism can serve as a potent narrative and analytical model of global displacement in the era of mass migration and solidified borders. Crippling the physical space and exaggerating the emotional and moral impact, Hamid presents an example of how to narrate the migration that is focused more on interiority and fluidity of identity and moral depth.

By integrating close textual analysis with theoretical perspectives drawn from magical realism and postcolonial theory, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on how migration can be represented beyond conventional realist paradigms. It argues that *Exit West* does not merely portray migration through an alternative narrative technique; rather, it fundamentally reconceptualizes migration itself. In this novel, migration is no longer framed simply as physical movement between fixed geographical locations, but as an ongoing condition of becoming—marked by loss, adaptation, transformation, and the continuous negotiation of belonging.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the novel *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid under the multi-faceted conditions of magical realism and postcolonial theory to establish its main research purpose: that of illustrating the novel's reconception of migration as a psychological, emotional, and existential state and not just merely as a physical phenomenon of locomotion. By anticipating the motif of the magical doors, the analysis has demonstrated that Hamid intentionally eliminates the spectacle of border-crossing so that he could focus more on the inner implications of the displacement, such as loss, indecision, disintegrated intimacy, and identity adoption.

The results show that migration in *Exit West* is not depicted as a novel incident with a narrative resolution but a constant state of liminality. The abolition of physical travel only heightens but does not lessen the emotional and moral intensity of the migration experience, concealing the role of boundaries in acting as a psychological and moral boundary at a time when they become physically permeable. By doing that, the novel defies the mainstream realist and humanitarian migration discourses emphasizing danger, survival, and visibility and relegates the emotional and relational consequences of displacement over time.

The paper also shows that magical realism in *Exit West* is more of an ethical mode of narration than a way of embellishing the style. Hamid develops the sympathies of the readers against the spectacle and

sensations by making the extraordinary seem normal in daily life, without making use of any spectacle or sensationalism. The ethical spectrum of the contemporary disaster of migration literature is broadened because the continuous specialist interest in interiority and silence, fragmentation of relationships, and anti-political elements invites the reader to approach migration as a common human frailty instead of a remote political form.

This study brings to light the usefulness of non-realist types of narratives in the articulation of aspects of migration that cannot be depicted using realist forms, especially psychological adaptation and post-migration identity renegotiation. Although the study is confined to a single text, the evidence found within it hints at the fact that magic realism can provide a fruitful paradigm through the lens of which it is possible to reconsider migration in ways other than based on a movement-focused paradigm. The strategy can be further developed in future studies by conducting comparative studies of hypothetical or non-realist migration discourses or interdisciplinary studies of affect theory, trauma studies, and reader-response criticism. In conclusion, this thesis proves that *Exit West* is not just another manifestation of migration, but a re-scaling of the experience, telling, and moral vision of displacement as it is being encountered and narrated in the modern world.

Disclaimer

The article has not been previously presented or published and is not part of a thesis project.

Conflict of Interest

There are no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest to declare.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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