TOWARDS A RACELESS FUTURE: A MAGICAL REALIST STUDY OF MOHSIN HAMID'S *EXIT WEST* (2017) AND *THE LAST WHITE MAN* (2022)

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Thesis Title: Towards a Raceless Future: A Magical Realist Study of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022)

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Candidate of **<u>Master of Philosophy</u>** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Title: Towards A Raceless Future: A Magical Realist Study of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022)** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Towards A Raceless Future: A Magical Realist Study of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022)

The present research examines two novels by Mohsin Hamid: *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022). It focuses on the lived experiences and consequent repercussions affecting racially and ethnically marginalized individuals residing in white supremacist societies, which subject them to systemic segregation and dehumanization. The study posits a vision for a future where the concept of race is superseded, not through the erasure of individual racial or ethnic identities, but through the dismantling of race as a socially constructed paradigm that perpetuates injustice and fosters a society where individuals of color are not only scorned and deemed inferior based on their skin color, but also subjected to violence and severe psychological trauma. Since it is imperative to acknowledge the existence of a problem before its eradication, envisioning a future free from racism necessitates an initial recognition of the profound extent to which such prejudicial constructs have permeated societal structures. Therefore, the theoretical framework of the present study is informed by the underpinnings of critical race theory, magical realism, and Jeremy Griffith's propositions regarding the end of the human condition. This blend highlights the intersection of racial violence and its psychological toll on victims, while also foregrounding the subsequent journey towards acceptance and appreciation of diversity. This qualitative research employs Cathrine Belsey's textual analysis to examine selected literary works: *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022). Through this, the researcher attempts to show that despite being critical of racism, Hamid presents an optimistic view, hinting towards harmony and coexistence of people of different colors and origins. Hence, in an attempt to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, this study brings up some of the revolutionary explanations of the "human condition" presented by leading Australian biologist Jeremy Griffith in his book *FREEDOM: The End of Human Condition* (2019), which can aid in the eradication of racism and lead humankind towards a future free of prejudice and hatred.

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DEDICATION

To my beloved parents, whose love, support, and encouragement have been the driving force behind my academic journey. Your guidance, encouragement, and unconditional love have been my constant source of inspiration and strength.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Racism has been a point of discussion and a subject of literary productions by authors and theorists of decolonized regions for ages. Be it Chinua Achebe highlighting the clandestine racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or Edward Said foregrounding the subsidiary status of the colonized Other in the West, intellectuals have made groundbreaking revelations providing the readers with critical approaches for assessment of literary works with covert racism. Many theorists have defined and explained race in conjoint definitions. As defined by Ashcroft et al., race is a term for categorizing humans into discrete groups based on their physical appearance and genetics (180). This grouping of humans is hierarchal and places the group with power where it can define and represent the groups it has subjugated. Moreover, the term 'race' suggests that the behavior of human beings, their beliefs, and capabilities can be determined by racial origin, which can provide an account for their social conduct (180). In short, the premise that the history, language, and socio-cultural practices of the colonized object are primitive is rooted in a hierarchic gradation of human beings. Hence, racism is not an outcome of race rather, it is the entire reason for its existence (181). John McLeod regards race as a "human invention and not a biological fact" (110). This proposition is based on the fact that humans, with all the differences in their physical appearance, cannot be assorted precisely into discrete groups called races, primarily different from each other (110). Moreover, McLeod argues that if physical differences account for people being placed in distinct racial groups, then why is it only confined to the skin color of the individual as certain other features, like eye color, are looked over while labeling people with different racial tags? (110). In other words, color difference serves as the most important rather deciding factor in establishing human discrepancy.

In the light of the above-mentioned definitions of race, racism can be delineated as a belief that judges the spiritual and intellectual characteristics of a human being based on their unalterable corporeal physical features (Ashcroft et al. 181). Hence, it believes in the naturalness of race i.e., human beings are naturally different, and their differences are used as a base by white supremacists in marginalizing people of color

as the "Other" (1). These recurring images are employed by Europe to portray itself as a "contrasting image" (2) of the Orient, rendering it strange and bizarre. Such descriptions propel a fear of the "Other" in the Occident, which in turn results in racial discrimination, contempt, and violence toward the "Other". Although the ex-colonial nations claim to have a liberal approach towards heterogeneity of cultures, appearances, and behaviors, racial and cultural discrimination still prevails modern times in different forms as compared to the colonial period.

1.1 South Asian Authors on the Theme of Racism

Racial identity and racism are among the prevalent themes in the works of South Asian diasporic writers. This is because even after the end of the colonial regime, racialization or racial profiling is a common practice in white supremacist countries. Such works highlight the varied ways in which South Asian literature deals with racism in historic and present-day settings exploring the complications of race relations and identity construction. *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie, a Pakistani-British author, points out racial profiling against a British Muslim family stemming from Islamophobia. The novel focuses on the contemporary problems of prejudice and racism that migrants, particularly people of color, have to face. Jhumpa Lahiri, a British-American author of Indian descent, touches upon the lives of South Asian people confronting racism and identity crises in white-majority countries, particularly in the context of Indian immigrants and their progenies in the United States. Monica Ali, a British writer of Bangladeshi and English descent, in her novel *Brick Lane,* explores the struggle of a Bangladeshi immigrant living in London and her quest to find her true self as she is caught in a clash between different cultures. *Home Boy* by H.M. Naqvi, a Pakistani novelist, is set post-September 11 attacks in New York City. This novel depicts the daily lives of Pakistani immigrants in the pursuit of the American Dream and their experiences with racial discrimination and identity crises post-9/11 attacks. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, a British-Pakistani novelist, follows the protagonist, a Pakistani man living in the United States, as he navigates post-9/11 America and faces suspicion and prejudice due to his ethnic background. This novel raises questions about identity, assimilation, and the impact of geopolitical events on personal lives.

Rabia Aamir in her essay "Post 9/11 Pakistan's Diasporic Fiction: Redefining Boundaries of South Asian Literature" (2016) states that Pakistani diasporic fiction

writers writing in English can be broadly categorized into pre and post-9/11 writers (1). Where pre-9/11 writers can be defined as those who wrote before the start of this century and had an overriding post-colonial standpoint, post-9/11 writers, also known as the second generation of Pakistani diasporic fiction writers, are the ones who composed their works mainly in the twenty-first century and their writings reveal a "poignant bend" in the post-colonial vantage point (Aamir 1). Mohsin Hamid is one of the second-generation, post 9-/11 writers whose works draw attention to many grave issues of the present-day world, be it the political condition of the country of his origin or the morally degenerating state of the countries of his relocation.

Born in Pakistan, Mohsin Hamid has spent most of his life outside his birthplace, dividing his time between Lahore, New York, and London. In the introduction of his collection of essays titled *Discontent and its Civilizations* (2014), he regards all three of these dwellings as his home but admits to feeling like a half-outsider (Hamid 11). This feeling can best be described in the words of Hamid Dabashi, who, while listing the types of exilic intellectuals, describes "outsiders" as "those individuals at odd with their society" while "insiders" as "who belong fully to the society as it is, who flourish in it without an overwhelming sense of dissonance" (Dabashi 6). A scrutiny of the themes and subjects of Hamid's works set in the West would reveal that he considers himself an outsider because he is at odds with the idea of judging individuals based on longstanding myths and false generalizations.

1.1.1 Introduction to Selected Literary Texts for the Present Research

The selected texts for this research deal with the subjects of race and racism in different ways reflecting the experiences of people of color and the impacts of the imposition of racist ideologies on their identities and psychologies.

The plot of *Exit West* (2017) revolves around the story of two individuals, Saeed and Nadia, who flee their civil-war-ridden homeland through magical portals, doors that teleport them to far-off lands. Upon their arrival in London, they face a backlash from the locals who perceive them as intruders. As more immigrants arrive in London, tension increases between incomers and the locals. This leads to violence and eventually, the immigrants are driven into a poor, isolated area with limited electricity called dark London. When an attempt to remove them from London fails, the locals offer a compromise: a separate area called Halo London. However, this solution

reinforces the immigrants' status as outsiders. After being dissatisfied, Saeed and Nadia find a portal that takes them to California. Finding the circumstances to be slightly better in California, they decide to work and stay there. Upon realizing that they do not feel strongly for each other anymore, they decide to go their separate ways. Hence, when they meet up in their homeland after fifty years, Saeed is married to the daughter of a local preacher, and Nadia is also at peace with her present. The instances of exclusion of the migrants and the violence committed against them render the narrative apt to be studied from the perspective of Critical Race Theory, CRT.

The *Last White Man* (2022) is Hamid's fifth novel. It is about a white man, Anders, who wakes up one morning to find himself metamorphosed into a darker skin color and a different appearance. As time passes, more and more people in the town start to wake up with dark skin. The transformation causes a lot of unease and violence in the town. People are struggling to accept their new identities and the consequences that come with them. Anders finds it hard too to accept himself as a dark-skinned person because he is rejected and ridiculed by society. His father avoids having eye contact with him and Oona, his lover, also finds him bizarre initially. He is subjected to hatred and racial slurs daily. However, the novel ends with Anders being accepted by his dying father and him and Oona living together with their daughter, denoting a new beginning and an opportunity for humanity to start afresh. Hence, Hamid, through the plot of this novel, foregrounds the issues of race, identity crisis, and the human condition and how it feels like to be a non-white in a majority-white country.

1.1.2 Introduction to Theories Chosen for the Present Study

Recognizing that new premises and strategies were required to resist the subtler forms of racism, several lawyers, activists, and legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, formulated Critical race theory (CRT) in 1970. Critical race theory builds on the insights of two previous movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism (Delgado and Stefancic 19). Although this framework began as a movement in the law, it has rapidly spread beyond that discipline and was adopted in other fields. The main beliefs of the theory include the social construction of race and the normality of racism, interest convergence, differential racialization, intersectionality, counterstorytelling, and the voice of color thesis. However, the theoretical framework of the present research is informed by the doctrine of social

construction of race and the normality of racism, and counterstorytelling from CRT. It also attempts to challenge the proposition of the permanence of racism by Derrick Bell.

To show his dissent from a society that practices the criminal act of racialization and social inequality, Hamid utilizes the narrative of magical realism which allows him to make the readers see the true horrors of racism. By employing the strands of magical realism, he portrays a society where people are waking up to be of a different color or a country where inhabitants are taking magical doors to get teleported to other spaces. Hence, Hamid envisions a world ruled by empathy, harmony, and co-existence. His portrayal of a world infested with racism and an alternate world on the way of being purged of race and racism can be described in Bowers' words as "magical realism often indicates opposing worlds or at the very least, world views" (Bowers 79). Based on magical realism's indication of opposing worlds or world views, Hankock defines magical realism as a "conjunction of two worlds" the magical and the realist (qtd. in Bowers 79). Zamora and Faris state that this incorporation of the two words results in the formation of a "third space", which is a mixture of opposing views and "gives equal credence to the influence of the other two" (qtd. in Bowers 79). Hence, it is a relatively common practice for writers whose cultural standpoints include multiple and often contradictory influences to get drawn to magical realism as a form of expression (Bowers 79). Hamid's inclination to use the rhetoric of magical realism in *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* can be described through the same logic.

World's dynamics have changed enormously since the colonial projects ended and to move on from a vehement past and a prejudiced present to a future that pertains to a truly pluralistic civilization, we have to gouge our way out of biased social practices such as racism. To support the stance of eradication of racism and move towards an amicable future, the present research borrows some of the revolutionary explanations of the "human condition" presented by leading Australian biologist Jeremy Griffith in his book *FREEDOM: The End of Human Condition* (2019). He defines the human condition as a state of conflicted conduct resulting from a deep-rooted psychological predicament and the human inability to answer why we are the way we are, divisively instead of behaving cooperatively. He asserts that liberation can be achieved if humans come out of the denial of the human condition and start making conscious efforts to bring it to an end.

Hence, this study will explore how Hamid deprecates the racial biases in his works through counter-stories by employing the narrative art of magical realism. It will also attempt to show Hamid's optimistic stance regarding the elimination of racism which is a somewhat contrasting idea to Derrick Bell's belief in the permanence of racism.

1.1.3 Toward Racelessness: Dismantling Race as a Social Construct

A raceless future, or moving beyond race, in the context of this study, refers not to erasing or ignoring individual racial or ethnic identities, but to dismantling the socially constructed concept of race that perpetuates inequality and racism. Race is a social construct, not a biological fact, created to categorize individuals and reinforce power hierarchies that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Moving beyond race, in this context, is fundamentally distinct from racial colorblindness. The notion of racial colorblindness originates from Justice John Marshall Harlan's decision in the 1896 Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson. Homer Plessy, a biracial person, petitioned the case after being arrested for defying a Louisiana law that required separate railway cars for Black and white passengers. Justice Harlan disagreed with the majority's decision to uphold the law stating: "The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is, in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth, and in power, but . . . . Our constitution is color-blind" (qtd. in Delgado and Stefancic 32). Though the judge meant to use the phrase 'color-blind' in a positive connotation and his ruling even went in favor of the convicted biracial person, Critical Race Theorists critique this idea. They argue that this conviction of 'color-blindness' overlooks systemic racism.

As to what exactly systemic racism is, we may understand it with an example. For instance, there are several examples in history where a black person is stereotyped with negativity of stealing, stabbing, raping, etc., etc. So, when we say that the law is color-blind in the context of such a person, it implies that his blackness is disregarded when giving a verdict against him and he is treated as the same as a while person in the eyes of the law. However, the facts state otherwise. Racial discrimination has never ceased to exist. The recent example of George Floyd, murdered by a white police officer in 2020, stands as a visible example. Though the law claims that it was the same for everyone, the ground realities are opposite. Therefore, we can deduce that though "colorblindness" assumes that ignoring race will lead to the end of racism, in practice,

it often results in the denial of systemic inequality, the dismissal of the lived experiences of people of color, and a reluctance to engage in the challenging yet essential conversations about race and power. This promotes a system where those in privileged positions can remain oblivious to the benefits they derive from existing racial structures, while leaving the underlying causes of inequality intact.

In effect, colorblindness obscures ongoing discrimination and reinforces the same systemic inequalities it claims to overcome. In contrast, the goal here is to fully acknowledge and affirm the identities of individuals and the real ways race shapes their experiences, while actively working to dismantle the structures and narratives that promote racial hierarchies and unequal access to opportunities. Therefore, this study utilizes the term "human race" even while promoting the vision of a raceless society, as it aims to deconstruct race as a sociocultural construct and instrument of marginalization, yet does not disregard individual distinctions, lived realities, or the richness of diverse cultural heritages.

The above approach aligns with the principles of Critical Race Theory, which recognizes race as a social construct and emphasizes the need to confront and transform the systems of power that sustain racial inequities. CRT maintains that racism is structurally embedded within legal, political, and cultural institutions, and that true progress requires confronting these underlying systems rather than ignoring their existence. In that spirit, transcending race does not imply denying its significance, but rather building a society where race no longer operates as a source of division, inequality, or harm. While formation of such a society is undoubtedly a complex and ongoing process, it is achievable through collective commitment to justice, education, and structural change. This requires an honest reckoning with historical injustices, transforming institutions that sustain racial inequalities, uplifting marginalized groups across all areas of society, and cultivating empathy and unity across diverse identities. It also calls on individuals to thoughtfully reflect on how they may contribute to either reinforcing or resisting racial systems. Though the road is long, history has shown that sustained activism, coalition-building, policy change, and cultural shifts can transform societies. Creating a world where race no longer functions as a tool of oppression is not an unreachable ideal but an attainable and urgent objective. With collective intention, moral courage, and consistent effort, such a society can be built.

1.2 Thesis Statement

This study critically examines Mohsin Hamid's two novels, *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022) as literary critiques of racial violence, employing the "social construction of race" and "counter-storytelling" tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) alongside the framework of magical realism to reveal narratives of resilience. While grounded in CRT, the study departs from its "permanence of racism" thesis, proposing instead that Hamid's novels envision a transformative future in which racial boundaries are transcended and the possibility of overcoming racism is visionarily affirmed. Therefore, through the utilization of magical realism in his fictional works, Mohsin Hamid highlights and reproaches the atrocities committed against dark-skinned people by white supremacists and native militant groups viewing the former as a threat to their sense of community and nation. Exploring the potential for literary narratives to challenge racial hierarchies and imagining a more inclusive, equitable future, the research provides a roadmap towards a world where the inhabitants can work their way out of the race and set forth towards a raceless future.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To highlight the peripheral status of people of color and the acts of racism against them.

2. To foreground the psychological impacts of the racist ideologies through counterstories utilizing magical realism.

3. To offer a counterpoint to Derrick Bell's assertion on the permanence of racism and to support a more hopeful perspective on its potential eradication.

1.4 Research Questions

The questions addressed in the present research are as under:

1. How does the narrative technique of magical realism in *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* critique prevalent racist agendas against people of color?
2. How can the permanence of racism, a tenet of Critical Race Theory, be challenged by envisioning a raceless society?

1.5 Significance & Rationale of the Study

Due to the lack of job opportunities and decelerated economic progress, people from many parts of Pakistan attempt to migrate to prosperous countries, mainly the USA, to chase the so-called American dream. With the current rise in political unrest and economic challenges in Pakistan, more people are seeking chances to improve their standard of living; hence, migration has picked up the pace. However, racial profiling against people of color in white supremacist countries hinders their desired growth and subjects them to additional trouble in combating racism. Consequently, highlighting the issue of racialization and the resulting problems faced by non-white people in majority-white countries is a matter of great importance. The present study is significant as it attempts to build its argument around the discussion of race and how despite the centuries-long struggle against racial prejudice, it still prevails in covert and overt forms. Pakistani literature produced in English mostly has the recurring themes of economic imbalance, social disparity, class struggle, identity crisis, feminism, and the desolation caused by partition. This study focuses on Mohsin Hamid's works, as he is a notable Pakistani diasporic author who has explored the theme of race in multiple novels, shedding light on the experiences of brown racial minorities and challenging stereotypes.

Furthermore, critical race theory has been used in multiple literary research to analyze the power dynamics of blacks and whites in America; however, this research attempts to make its contribution by highlighting the acts of racism committed against people with brown complexion through the utilization of this theory which is essentially believed to be originated to foreground the racialization of African Americans. This shows the peripheral status of people of color and a somewhat similarity between their experience with racism. This research is also important as it ventures to analyze the selected work of Pakistani diasporic author through a theoretical framework that is informed by conceptions not only from critical race theory but also magic(al) realism, a narrative art used by post-colonial writers to present an alternate reality to the Eurocentric view of reality. In addition to the analysis of selected texts from different vantage points in CRT, the present study endeavors to challenge Derrick Bell's assertion that "racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (ix) as he states in the preface of his book *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*. The researcher attempts to achieve this by presenting a

differing view of Hamid whose works exhibit an optimistic view towards the eradication of racism. This optimistic approach in turn is validated by Jeremy Griffith's proposals for freedom from the human condition contributing further to the newness of this research.

1.6 Delimitation

From the entire body of Mohsin Hamid's works, the researcher delimits the scope of investigation of this study to the analysis of only two works of fiction by him, namely, *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022). The sampling technique employed in this study is purposive sampling, a non-random sampling process that includes consciously selecting specific cases or samples based on their relevance to the research phenomenon being investigated. Hence, the novels *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* by Mohsin Hamid are purposefully selected due to their relevance to the research thrust of this thesis. The chosen novels perfectly fit this study because they vividly portray the themes of racism, displacement, and identity crisis, hence offering rich insights into the complex experiences of individuals of color and how they battle and survive in the racist and supremacist societies.

Furthermore, among the range of themes that deem the selected works apt to be studied from multiple theoretical perspectives, this research delimits its analytical scope to a theoretical framework that integrates critical race theory as its primary paradigm, supplemented by magical realism as a secondary analytical lens and a literary tool used by the writer for maximum impact. By employing this conceptual framework, the study construes Hamid's works as counter-narratives that illuminate the experiential realities of people of color confronting racism and violence.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This section of the research presents a review of the already existing studies pertinent to the selected texts and the theories of the present study. *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* can be seen to belong to multiple categories of literature such as South Asian literature, post-colonial literature, post-9/11 literature, Pakistani diasporic fiction, and Pakistani Anglophone magical realist fiction, etc. Keeping that in view, the literature review of the present research will include studies that present a background of these categories and provide a literary context for the selected novels. The literature review of the current study is mainly divided into two parts. The first part presents analyses of research that is conducted in the field of post-September 11 South Asian literature and Pakistani Anglophone magical realist fiction. It explores the studies that deal with themes of racism, identity crises, and the struggle of various characters, particularly the people of color, in foreign lands and also presents the studies conducted on Pakistani Anglophone magical realist fiction. It is vital to add this section in the literature review of the present study as it provides a context and additional related information about selected works of Hamid, which manifest the qualities of magical realism and post-9/11 texts. The second part presents studies that are predominantly relevant to the analyses of the selected novels *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* from various relevant angles.

2.1.1 Post-9/11 Literature by South Asian Diasporic Writers

The works of South Asian diasporic writers run rampant with the themes of identity, hybridity, assimilation, integration, home, nostalgia, and exile. Away from the land of their origin and culture, some authors attempt to present the culture and people of their ancestral lands accurately to mark a distinction from the prevailing misconceptions about them that result from faulty representations and interpretations. In the case of Pakistani diasporic authors, the task of representation is herculean, especially after the incident of 9/11. Talking about refining the boundaries of South Asian literature, Aamir in her article, "Post 9/11 Pakistan's Diasporic Fiction: Redefining Boundaries of South Asian Literature" (2016) points to a great shift in the

themes employed by Pakistani diasporic writers of fiction and non-fiction following 9-/11. Where the post 9-/11 American fiction dealt primarily with the themes of psychological trauma and disillusionment, Ashcroft notes that the Pakistani diasporic authors are presenting narratives and accounts that attempt to combat the stereotypical image of Pakistan and Pakistani people. Aamir's exploratory paper, studies post-9-/11 Pakistani fictional writers such as Ali Sethi, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsi, and H. M. Naqvi, to establish that only Pakistani diasporic fiction portrays the ethnic background, issues of identity, and impact of 9-/11. This enables diasporic authors to present a complete and wider picture of the influence of the 9-/11 event on the lives of Pakistani expatriates in America. Hence, the range of the themes employed by post 9-/11 Pakistani diasporic fiction redefines South Asian literature, as it is not only about the issues of identity and nostalgia for home and past anymore.

Elaborating on the theme of the impact of 9-/11 on the lives of Muslim expatriates, particularly Muslim expatriates of Pakistani origin, the fictional accounts presented by many authors can be termed as resistance narratives. The need for such resistance narratives arose out of the renewed racial discrimination and dehumanization of Pakistani Muslims. Talking about this condition and status of Muslims in a post 9-/11 America, Azeem in his paper "From Post-colonial to Post-9/11: A Study of the Contemporary Pakistani-American Fiction" (2018) evokes the concept of "homo sacer" by Giorgio Agamben (75). He defines it as a term in Roman law for a person who is considered cast out and "ostracized from a civil society so that his killer does not face any legal punishment" (75). Azeem supports this argument by presenting textual evidence of violence and brutality committed against Shehzad, Ali Chaudhry, and Jamshed from H.M Naqvi's *Home Boy* and racial profiling of Changez from Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. These characters, already marginalized as immigrants from a third-world country and people of color, were labeled as terrorists, which reduced their status from legal citizens of the United States to "homo sacer" (75). This shows that although it is claimed that the colonial stance of hyper-nationalism is replaced by transnationalism, making America a melting pot of cultures and ethnicities, it still has the underlying imperialist tendencies that subject the out groups to the worst violence. In short, the homo sacer has no rights as a citizen; hence, their abuser is exempted from prosecution or any other consequences.

Aamir's essay with the title "Ecumenical Environmental Ethics in Post-9/11 Pakistan's Diasporic Fiction: Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and Transcultural Multiculturalism in South Asian Literature" published in the collection of post-colonial essays entitled *Postcolonial Literature: Selected Essays on Past, Present, and Future Trends* (2022), builds on the concept of ecumenism. The author explores Hamid and Naqvi's selected texts to show how their characters are made the citizens of the world. Ecumenism can be delineated as a movement that calls for unity, cooperation, and mutual understanding among different religious groups and philosophies (Word Web n. pag.). The multicultural nature of the present times does not leave much room for the claim of singleness of culture therefore; these hybridized diasporic authors have pushed the boundaries of current literary trends to contest the stereotypical image of Pakistan "and therefore have implicitly worked for environmentally informed ecumenism" (123). Be it the character of Changez from Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) or the trio of A.C, Jimbo, and Chuck from Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2010), all of them appear to be a complete embodiment of the West, hence, entirely Occidentalized. Said calls it a replication of the behavior of the dominant group, driven by a desire to be not just accepted, but fully embraced and accepted (Aamir 127). Changez admits that as a young New Yorker, he felt the city at his feet. Moreover, he proudly narrates that he was the product of an American university, infatuated with an American woman and earning a handsome salary. He describes this list with a sense of achievement. Similarly, the characters in *Home Boy* were assimilated into American society. The Occidental features in all these characters change into Anti-occidental traits due to faulty interpretations and this happens when "something or someone is understood in certain brackets and prototype" (Aamir 131). In other words, the racial profiling of these characters, therefore the act of viewing them as a suspect of terrorism and subjecting them to the worst physical and psychological abuse based on their appearance and country of origin is acting as a faulty interpretation. This state of human misery can be avoided by utilizing the phenomenon of ecumenism.

In addition to multiculturalism, the concept of the worldliness of literature can also be explained in terms of ecumenism as presented by Aamir in her essay entitled "Ecumenical Environmental Ethics in Shamsie's Burnt Shadows: A Study of Occidental and Anti-Occidental Patterns" (2021). Exploring Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* for occidental and anti-occidental patterns, Aamir looks for how characters in

the novel exhibit environmental ethics, highlighting both Western and non-Western influences. (765). Eleanor Lowenthal commends Burnt Shadows (2009) for its masterful storytelling, which effortlessly linking together historical events across various continents, from Nagasaki to post-9/11 New York. (qtd. in Aamir 766). The main character of the novel, Hiroko, moving through all these spaces can be seen as a true incarnation of the concept of hybridity. She also represents the fluidity of a person's identity and the malleability of human nature. Her sense of identity contrasts with the traditional concept of restrictive cultural identities, which if politicized, can give rise to separatism. Where the first half of the novel shows a remarkable integration of characters of different descents, the second half, portraying the second generation, exhibits characters combating identity issues. Raza, who is Sajjad, and Hiroko's son, suffers from the stigma of being biracial. Amir, after presenting an insightful analysis of occidental and anti-occidental patterns prevalent in the novel, suggests that the state of a politicized culture can only be improved by searching for and promoting universal values that foster a sustainable world with social equity, and economic fairness for the benefit of all individuals and communities.

2.1.2 Review of Literature on Magical Realism in Works of South Asian Writers

Magical realism is a genre where magical elements blend seamlessly into an otherwise realistic setting blurring the boundaries between the mundane and the extraordinary, hence creating a plot where magical events are depicted matter-of-factly while keeping the realistic portrayal of the world. "Magical Realism in Indian Literature" by R. Hithayath Khan provides an insight into the utilization of magical realism in Indian literature by Indian authors. According to Khan, the writers of colonized countries are inclined to incorporate magic realism in their narratives in their writings as a mode of resistance to Western rationalism (Khan 1958). The study discusses Salman Rushdie as one of the active feminists of the Indian diaspora who uses magical realism that is influenced by Indian sources. *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Rushdie explores themes of reappearance and acts as an allegory for the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. The novel merges fantasy with realism and uses magical elements to show historical events and political commotions together with genuine human emotions (Khan 1958). This narrative technique is employed by Rushdie to lace together the themes of post-colonialism and India's multi-cultural and multi-ethnic

identity. Khan regards Rushdie as an "expert in Magical Realism" among all the writers in India, as a vast corpus of his works is a fine example of magical realism" (Khan 1959). Discussing magical realism in Indian literature, Khan also talks about R.K. Narayan, a prominent South Indian novelist known for his contributions to magical realism in Indian literature. Rushdie and Narayan are both contemporary writers employing magical realism, however, magical realist features in Narayan's novels are greatly influenced by "Hindu Mythology and Mysticism" (Khan 1959). His use of magical realism expresses typical Indian myths realistically. Khan further mentions other renowned Indian authors who use magical realism in their works including Arundhati Roy, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai, and Girish Karnad. Khan states that although these writers might have their individualistic approach to the incorporation of magical realism in their works, almost all of them challenge Western rationalism by employing Indian myth, folk tradition, and supernatural elements in their magical realist narratives.

Showkat Hussain in "Magic Realism in the Novels of Zulfikar Ghose" describes Ghose as an unusual postcolonial writer who does not take sides in a political sense and is concerned more about how it is conveyed than what is conveyed (Hussain 389). According to the author, one of the main reasons behind the popularity of magical realism as a mode of narration is that supports it the inclusion of contradictory elements, hence allowing perceiving reality in an alternate manner fairly different from the Western interpretation of reality (Hussain 389). Although linked to Latin America, magical realism is not bound by any geographical constrictions nor is it limited to be used for a single purpose. Zulfikar Ghose uses it as a postcolonial mode of narrative and chooses to write about the native South American people who were disempowered by their cultural beliefs constantly at threat (Hussain 391). Ghose's approach to magical realism is different from Rushdie's because, unlike Rushdie, he takes a more subtle approach to challenge the assumptions about what it means to be human. Hussain states that one of the sources of magical realism in Ghose's novels is the "shock of the new," therefore, he writes about spaces and circumstances that are unfamiliar to the reading public (Hussain 391). Analyzing Ghose's *Torments and Don Bueno*, Hussain quotes that the mythical and the dreamlike are still very much a part of reality, and the balance between reality and magic is so subtle that it is barely recognized (qtd. in Hussain 394). Magical realism naturalizes the supernatural and presents it in a way that natural and

supernatural are shown to be in a state of equivalence. According to Khan, Ghose's novel The Figure of Enchantment has almost all the characteristics of a magical realist novel as the characters desperately desire an alternative world where their impoverished lives are magically transformed. Hence, it can be said that Ghose's idea of art and life is based on "a sustained urge and deep desire for alternatives" (Khan 394). In addition, he uses symbols, magical occurrences, rites, and rituals to prove the illusory nature of reality as he has done in his novel A Triple Mirror of the Self. Thus, Ghose's magical realistic works are replete with myths, illusions, and cravings for an alternate world because he believes in the helpfulness of magic realism in a world where having only a single version of a story is not suitable.

Hajra Khalid in "Unveiling the Magical Realism of Pakistan: A Thematic Analysis of *A Firefly in the Dark* and *Midnight Doorways*" (2024), analyzes contemporary Pakistani Magic Realist texts in an attempt to localize the genre of Magic Realism to the geolocation of Pakistan and establish the discreteness of Pakistani Magic realist works (Khalid 355). Although magical realism has been a crucial part of the oral tradition of Pakistani fiction, Anglophone Magic Realist Fiction is still an emerging field of literature in Pakistan. Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist Fiction manifests a multiplicity of themes extending from the personal to the political as evident in works like Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Trespassing* (2003), Musharraf Ali Farooqi's *The Story of a Widow* (2008), Bina Shah's *A Season for Martyrs* (2014), and Shazaf Fatima Haider's *A Firefly in Dark* (2018). Critical analyses often reveal how Pakistani Anglophone fiction explores themes of identity and belonging, migration and diaspora, and gender and sexuality. Critical studies of this fiction also show how it challenges the binaries that are usually called upon to describe Pakistani identity in political and cultural conversations (Khalid 357). So, by showing that Pakistani Anglophone magic realist fiction employs native mythologies and aesthetics, Khalid attempts to establish that the "Pakistani variant of Magic Realism is a distinct subset of the broader genre" (Khalid 358). While analyzing Malik's and Haider's works, Khalid states that the writers do not introduce the sources of magic instantly, rather, they do it slowly and gradually so that their readers are conditioned to accept the presence of magic. One of the hallmarks of magical realism explained by Faris is the "irreducible element of magic", which essentially means that the element of magic is not supposed to be explained or rationalized rather, it coincides with realistic descriptions of what is

considered routine life. Haider in *A Firefly in the Dark* familiarizes the readers with the worldview of her characters by using bedtime stories, about invisible entities such as Jinns, narrated by a character Nani to inculcate the alternate belief system of her characters (Khalid 360). In addition, both Malik and Haider make use of deities and other mythological creatures that are native to their cultures just like in the magic realist fiction produced by writers originating from post-colonial nations. Haider's narratives run replete with a cadre of Jinns and Janarees (female Jinns) (Khalid 362), whereas Malik channelizes Adar Anshar, the supposedly Night Emperor who rises from the ruins of a bathhouse of Mohenjo-Daro city (Khalid 362). Both writers present prehistoric deities, signifying Pakistan's native belief in supernatural powers beyond human control, hence, which conflicts with Empiricism's scientific approach, which questions non-experimental realities. Other magical elements presented by Malik and Haider include stunted superheroes, transmogrification, and metamorphosis of space. Khalid concludes that, though it appropriates some approaches from Western Magic Realism, Pakistani Magic Realist fiction is a distinct subgroup influenced by local culture and native mythology, making it a valuable addition to the broader Magic Realist genre.

2.2 Review of Literature on Selected Texts

This section of the literature review contains the reviews of literary studies conducted on Hamid's *Exit West* and *The Last White Man*. It presents analyses of research that deal with the selected works of Hamid through various perspectives including refugee crisis, identity and belonging, postcolonialism and racial struggles, globalization and politics, trauma and memory, racism and whiteness, power dynamics, alienation and identity crisis, magic realism and surrealism, and hope and resilience etc.

2.2.1 Review of Literature on *Exit West*

In the background of relocation and displacement, "Empathy and Unity in *Exit West*" (2023) by Kelsey Madison Dietrich explores how Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* portrays empathy and unity. Dietrich studies how, in the face of social upheaval, the characters Nadia and Saeed navigate their relationship and how Hamid, using magical realism, highlights the universal human experiences in the situation of a global crisis. The article argues that *Exit West* urges the readers to empathize with the predicament of refugees and understand the common humanity that surpasses borders

and differences. Dietrich develops this argument in three segments. He borrows conceptions from Wendy Brown, a political theorist who works on sovereignty, borders, and political theory, to understand the political background of mass migration at the time of the publication of *Exit West* (Dietrich 2). Secondly, Dietrich challenges the argument by literary scholar Michael Perfect, who claims that magical doors, as a mode of relocating from one country to another, negate the trouble that is associated with the process of migration. Instead, he proposes that these doors do not sidestep the trauma of migration; rather, they acknowledge the difficulties related to migration, and by doing so, help build understanding and compassion for people who migrate for various reasons (Dietrich 2). Thirdly, he reviews the identities presented in the novel to support Hamid's stance: "we are all migrants through time" to establish that this statement emphasizes that unity and empathy are required to make migration and relocation an uncomplicated phenomenon as humans are all moving through time together (Dietrich 2). Wendy Brown sees the act of building border walls as an attempt to preserve capitalism. However, the process of wall-building and globalization are taking place concurrently. Through various definitions of the term refugee quoted by Dietrich in the study, it can be said that a refugee is a person who is forced to leave his country due to undesirable circumstances, be it caused by disorder or natural disaster. The United Nations defines a migrant as somebody who moves from their usual country of residence, where this usual residence is considered the central place of their life, to another country (qtd. in Dietrich 5). Despite the distinction between refugee and migrant, Hamid uses these terms synonymously throughout the novel to show that what matters is not the distinction but the stories of the humans going through the process of migration. Moreover, through the use of magical doors in places of borders, Hamid challenges the reader to conceive a world where, unlike in modern society, these intense barriers are not present. So, the magic doors symbolize the act of migration being made easy, as Hamid is bringing to light the fact that migration is a universal reality as many people of the world are forced to leave their countries for various reasons. Furthermore, Dietrich states that the novel presents a situation where identity does not limit the ability of different people to migrate or access migration pathways although they face different experiences and treatment based on who they are. Therefore, Dietrich concludes that through its narrative, the novel advocates for unity and compassion as essential responses to the challenges of migration and displacement in our contemporary world.

Qurratulaen Liaqat's "Poetics of Migration Trauma in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*" (2022) examines the novel to see how migration trauma is portrayed in contemporary literature. She achieves the goal of tracing the artistic evolution of the depiction of migration trauma through the analysis of metaphors, symbols, and narrative techniques used in Hamid's work. The theoretical framework of the study draws on postcolonial literary theory and trauma studies. Trauma, although used previously for a physical injury or a wound, has now come to mean a severely stressful or disturbing occurrence or an "emotional shock following a stressful event or physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis" (qtd. in Liaqat 143). The metaphor of "doors" is explored in the study as a symbolic depiction of the trauma related to migration. These magical portals stand for the existential trials and uncertainties migrants have to face as they set out to explore unfamiliar territories. Furthermore, the process of passing through these doors is compared to a metaphorical death and rebirth, as the migrants must murder their old lives to enter into new ones (Liaqat 147). The study also emphasizes how these doors are considered a crisis universally, suggesting the hostile attitudes of natives towards migrants in many parts of the world. Liaqat also studies the deep trauma endured by migrants in the novel by presenting the violence they had to suffer through in addition to the hard living conditions. Hence, she highlights the emotional and psychological toll of migration on the migrants as they live in the constant fear of being attacked. That is why, according to her, "the Saeed before migration and after migration are two different persons" (Liaqat 152). She further explores the technological surveillance of migrants, by means of military technology including drones, helicopters, and surveillance cameras, and states that this causes the already terrified migrants more trauma which she calls technological trauma. Thus, she stresses the need for a critical examination of these issues, highlighting the pressing need for humanitarian intervention to protect the rights and well-being of migrants globally.

"A Surrealist Reading of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*" (2022) investigates the novel through the lens of surrealism. This study examines how the characters' experiences of displacement, identity crisis, and their quest for a sense of belonging are portrayed through surrealism as he presents dream-like sequences and the blurring of reality and fiction in *Exit West*. In addition to surrealism, the study also deals with magical realist elements, such as the magical doors that transport Saeed and Nadia out

of their war-torn country. These doors, which are labeled as magical, are presented as a normal part of the characters' reality rather than something that is obviously fantastic (Naseem et al.). Furthermore, the study talks about the power of dreams and how they brought the characters close together. Saeed dreams of carrying Nadia on his back and wakes up sweating, symbolizing his responsibility towards her and the intensity of this duty. Upon discussion with Nadia, he comes to know that she had a similar dream where she was being carried by Saeed, which suggests she might also realize the pressure of Saeed's expectations and recognize a power dynamic between them. This instance demonstrates how the characters' subconscious fears, desires, and the power dynamics within their relationship are revealed through dreams in the novel. The language used to describe the dislocation experienced by Saeed and Nadia as they leave their country vividly depicts their sense of fragmentation and disarray. In addition to dreams, the authors also discuss the uncanny through Nadia and Saeed's experiences in unfamiliar settings e.g. Nadia's encounter with obstinately closed doors arouses panic (Naseem et al. 264). Hence, the study shows that through the use of surrealism in the novel, Hamid stresses the unconscious attributes of human behavior, presents a critique of social norms, and explores unconventional ways of expression.

Debating on the definition of world literature in his essay entitled "Reading Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* as a World Novel" (2020), Bilal presents the proclamation of Goethe as "national literature is now rather an unmeaning term" and the new era is going to be an era of world literature (410). Bilal then goes on to share Pascale Casanova's notions about the division between world and national literature. According to Casanova, although we might not recognize it "our literary unconscious is largely national", and so are our tools of analysis and interpretation. This is the reason literary studies are organized on national lines everywhere in the world. The author, after presenting multiple definitions and approaches to national and world literature, poses a series of questions. The series of these questions include; if most literary works originate within national literature and if our literary unconscious is largely informed by national domains then which national literature would Hamid's works fall in, as he has often stated all three of the countries of his dwelling as his home? Bilal then goes on to suggest the genre of postcolonial literature as well as Pakistani literature to be suitable categories for the placement of Hamid's fiction given his place of origin and how it was once a colony of the place of his relocation (416-17). However, for Bilal,

the apt place of his work, specifically *Exit West* (2017), is indeed world literature as it portrays the dislocation of his characters, Saeed and Nadia from the Global South to the Global North (424).

Manzoor Ahmad Mir in the article "Global Refugee Crisis: A Study of Mohsin Hamid's Novel *Exit West*" (2018), discusses the ongoing mass migration in modern times. By referring to "That summer it seemed to Saeed and Nadia that the whole planet was on the move" (qtd. in Mir 15), Mir draws attention to the plight of the refugees and asks a very vital question i.e. "What makes a refugee move?" (1). In an attempt to answer the question posed, Mir deems the decision to move from one's homeland to be tough and demanding. According to him, one tries their best to hang on to the last shred of hope and survive the challenging times their native country has fallen into and moves only if it is inevitable. Saeed's plight to leave his father behind is narrated in the novel as "When we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (qtd. in Mir 16). Hence, he regards *Exit West* to be a novel more about what made the refugees want to move and what happened to them in the new place than it is about how they moved (Mir 2). The magical doors through which they moved are not merely modes of instant and hassle-free transport but also serve as an important character exerting influence on the lives of many. Hamid portrays the life of migrants on both sides of the door, either fleeing militants in their native country or white supremacist groups in the place of their migration, hence presenting a migration apocalypse. The present study attempts to establish that these magically appearing doors serve as a way for the writer to bring people from different origins in close proximity to witness each other's plight and come upon an agreeable settlement.

While referring to Hamid's initial works as a mouthpiece for people of his birth country, Michael Perfect in his article "'Black holes in the fabric of the nation': Refugees in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*" (2019) discusses *Exit West* as a text that uses a near-future setting to investigate present global issues and events (Perfect 5). Perfect compares *Exit West* to 'Terminator: Attack of the Drone', a short story published by Hamid in 2011 that suggests a post-apocalyptic future where only a few humans are left, and surviving children are afraid of the flying machines that kill. Both works are set in unnamed countries, which is an approach taken by Hamid to open the stories up to the readers so they can identify with the protagonists and imagine these spaces as their cities and countries to widen the access points into the novel (Perfect 6). In

addition to the similarity in the aforementioned texts in terms of the namelessness of certain countries, Perfect notes the contrast in the tone of the two works. He believes the short story to be classical dystopian tale that warns of a frightening future if we do not identify and deal with its symptoms timely (qtd. in Perfect 5), he mentions *Exit West* to be ultimately hopeful in tone (Perfect 5). The present research, by studying the tone of *The Last White Man* and *Exit West*, tries to establish that although Hamid protests against blatant acts of racism committed against people of color, he still maintains an optimistic stance regarding coexistence and harmony.

2.2.2 Review of Literature on *The Last White Man*

"Decentring Whiteness: A Critical Study of Race and Identity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*" (2024), is a study of race and identity that challenges the prevalent notions related to race. Employing the theoretical framework of Derrida's theory of deconstruction, the study sets out to explore how Hamid has dealt with the basic conventional ideologies about the non-white races, yet his work promotes the same racial stereotypes while attempting to contest them. In addition to the ideology of race, the study tries to debunk various other ideologies that lack a solid basis but are deeply rooted in society. The authors do so by stating that "Every ideology existing in the world is dependent upon the social and cultural values, more precisely upon the collective unconsciousness of a particular group of individuals" (Saqib et al. 1401). The researchers challenge the ideology of the autonomous nature of human beings by stating that the characters of the novel are not able to control the incidents of violence that are prevailing in the town. Moreover, Anders's father and Oona's mother's reaction to seeing the skin color of their children change defies the ideology of selfless parental love. Instead of accepting their children's changed identities, the parents show disapproval and even disgust, hence proving that parental love is not entirely conditionless but is "restricted to specific conditions and bound to specific societal norms" (Saqib et al. 1401). In addition, the paper ventures to establish that the novel blurs the dichotomy between the boundaries of existing binaries. The previously existing binaries of whites as virtuous and blacks as evil are rejected by showing the violence by whites against blacks. Where this study successfully establishes the subversion of the theories of the autonomous nature of human beings, selfless parental love and race as a geographical phenomenon through the lens of deconstruction, the attempt to prove that the novel "possesses the racial stereotypes rather than their

rejection" (Saqib et al. 1404) appears to be forced. The claim that the novel shows that the town fell into frenzy and violence after people started to get dark-skinned lacks basis because the violence was majorly perpetrated by "pale skinned militants" (Saqib et al. 1404). Hence, to say that the novel promotes certain racial biases against dark-skinned people is not apt. "Interrogating the Discourse of Racism and Identity Crisis in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*" (2022) is a discourse analysis of the novel by Somy Manzoor and Balkar Singh. The study explores the novel through the discourse of racism which is a discursive ideology that discriminates against people with darker skin tones and propagates the belief that people of color are inferior and less intelligent. Hamid has been writing about the themes of identity crisis, hegemony, migration, as well as the political and economic state of Asian countries in the post-colonial world, hence his works can clearly be regarded as post-colonial discourses. Utilizing the postcolonial studies lens, the authors analyze how the novel portrays the experiences of a white man who finds himself changed into a brown man on waking up one morning. The author argues that the novel effectively critiques racism and its sinister effects on individuals and society. Through discourse analysis of the novel, the authors state that the discourse of racism is based on the constructed nature of race, a concept that is used to maintain power structures and social hierarchies. The author also examines how the novel portrays the identity crisis that results from these societal expectations and power structures. Although the reviewed study is a thoughtful analysis of *The Last White Man* which sheds light on the novel's exploration of racism and identity crisis, it is different from the present study which mainly employs critical race theory as a theoretical framework and also calls upon the presentations by Griffith's freedom from human condition.

In "Colors Clash: A Fanonian Perspective of Hamid's *The Last White Man*" (2023), the authors regard Hamid's work as a page-turner fiction that deals with racism and the struggles of colored people. The story of Anders, Hamid's protagonist, is inspired by Kafka's Metamorphosis where Gregor Samsa turns into hideous vermin. Anders, unlike Samsa, metamorphosed from a white man into one with visibly brown skin, a transformation more hazardous than a change from a man into a pest (Hamza et al. 1353). This is because of the connotations such as evilness, subordination, insolence, brutality, and unsophistication attached to darker skin color. As a result, a person of color finds himself trapped not only by social discrimination but also by his psychology

which is deeply affected by the propagation of such false images. Hence, a non-white person often develops double consciousness because of which they always look at themselves through the eyes of the white community. Although the article efficiently employs Frantz Fanon's conceptions about race given in, *Black Skin, White Masks*, to analyze the intricacies of black identity, its total focus on black identity might restrict its scope to interact with other race theories that deal with the experiences of other marginalized groups.

"Racial Alienation in Hamid's *The Last White Man*: A Fanonian Study" (2024) is another study that delves into race issues presented in the novel *The Last White Man* through a Fanonian perspective. The study describes race as a tool that causes alienation by creating a division between oneself and the world around them. The authors quote Fanon's definition of alienation as a social and psychological phenomenon in which the subjugated group internalizes feelings of inferiority and estrangement (qtd. in Baqar et al. 322). The article uses Fanon's ideas on whiteness, blackness, and the "other" to describe the transformation of the protagonist from white to black and the social and psychological struggles brought on by this transformation. Fanon's alienation theory is developed under his personal experiences in Algeria where he felt the European hunger for power and expansion fulfilled through the exploitation of the weaker nations. According to Fanon, alienation occurs in five main forms: from one's own self, from loved ones, from society, from cultural legacy, and from the ability to create positive change (qtd. in Baqar et al. 327). The authors also highlight the connection of Fanon's theory of alienation with Marx's economic determinism because he sees social and economic disparity as a consequence of one group of people being exploited by the other, and acknowledging this social and economic reality is essential for the dis-alienation of the black man (qtd. in Baqar et al. 328). The study points out that racialization of the colored individual leads to alienation, which further results in traumatic stress triggering an identity crisis. The racist attitude is inflicted on the victim not only by the white individuals but in some cases by the institutions, which the study calls institutional or structural racism. Anders faces racist behaviors not only from the surrounding individuals but also on an institutional level, which forces him to alienate himself and battle with the consequences brought on by his new skin color. Although my research deals with issues of race in the novel, it is different from the study discussed above as it attempts to present an optimistic stance.

"Portrayal of Identity Crisis in Hamid's *The Last White Man*" (2023) is yet another study that employs Fanon's conceptions regarding race and identity crisis presented in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Through this study of the novel, the authors contest the idea that societies have moved beyond racism, despite claims to the contrary. Marginalized by society, black people grapple with their identities given that dark skin is often linked with undesirable qualities such as "evilness, inferiority, rudeness, brutality, and unsophistication" whereas whiteness is associated with desirable qualities like "superiority, intellect, sophistication, civilization, and attention" (Ijaz et al. 590). According to the authors, these binaries based on racial categorization are traces left behind by colonialism, and the impacts of these biased dichotomies are not confined to just the societal judgments but extend to the social status, opportunities, and privileges offered to the racialized person (Ijaz et al. 590). Hence, black identity is complex, consisting of many intricate layers that if explored would reveal the sensitivity to the issues of race and the struggle in coming to terms with their identity. To analyze Hamid's *The Last White Man*, the authors employ the theoretical framework pertaining to Fanon's conceptions because Fanon's works deal with the psychological impact of colonialism on the colonized individual's self-image resulting from the racist ideologies they have internalized. The sense of self of people of color is impacted adversely as they desire to become white to get the privileges that are offered to their white counterparts. The key terms from Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* employed by the authors in the study of the novel "include neurosis, disconnection, collective catharsis, awareness, and unconsciousness" (Ijaz et al. 592). Describing Anders's experiences with racism and violence after his transformation, the study establishes the prevalence of racism in so-called post-racial societies. Hamid's *The Last White Man* has been frequently explored through the Fanonian perspective providing insights into the black psyche and the struggle of people of color with identity. My research is distinct from these researches as it examines the narrative of the novel through the lens of critical race theory with a special focus on Hamid's optimistic stance that he presents by employing magical realist elements in the novel. Moreover, my research borrows the presentations by Griffith's freedom from human condition.

Vanshika Kapur and Gowher Ahmad Naik in their article "Racial Metamorphosis and Bigotry in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*" describe the town as deserted and frightening as people remained indoors, too afraid to go out due

to the danger of being targeted because of their skin color (Kapur and Naik 1761). Anders was also in a similar situation if not worse as he was among the first people who went through this metamorphosis. Hence, he was "trapped indoors" physically and consumed by fear of his new skin color. This resulted from isolation caused not only by society but also by his friends and family. Being formerly a white person who never had to experience color discrimination, Anders now gets to see the other side of the story. He notices that the night janitor, a person of color, at the gym where he works is the only person who does not work out there (Kapur and Naik 1761). Later on, when Anders turns dark-skinned and gets a hostile response from his boss, he gets to understand the reason why the janitor did not exercise there. Oona, Anders's girlfriend, has a similar experience when she uses a darker tone of make-up to see how she will be perceived in society. Her mother reacts horribly and passes racist comments due to which Oona has to take her make-up off (Kapur and Naik 1763). Kapur and Naik conclude with a very significant point about coexistence in Hamid's novel under discussion i.e. the strength of this book lies in its ability to foster human connection, despite dealing with tough issues like racism and prejudice (1764). Both, Anders's father and Oona's mother become accepting of their transformed children, and Anders and Oona's love for each other also strengthens as they go through the upheaval of transition. The current study brings in insights from Jeremy Griffith's conceptions about curing the anxiety-ridden human condition with altruistic and selfless love as human beings are created on the principle of love.

2.3 Conclusion

This literature review encompasses a comprehensive analysis of extant research pertaining to post-September 11 South Asian literature and Pakistani Anglophone magical realist fiction. It scrutinizes studies that address themes of racism, identity crises, and the struggles of marginalized characters, particularly people of color, in foreign contexts. In addition to this, the literature review critically evaluates studies that are germane to the multifaceted analysis of the chosen texts, namely *Exit West* and *The Last White Man*, from diverse, pertinent perspectives. These existing studies focus on how Pakistani diasporic writers reject hegemonic designs and faulty interpretations of non-white cultures, promoting inclusivity through concepts like ecumenism, universalism, multiculturalism, and globalization.

Despite the valuable contributions of existing research, we may find a gap in literary criticism regarding the intersection of racial violence, its psychological toll on victims, and the subsequent journey towards acceptance and appreciation of diversity. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the transition from a violent society to one of peace and acceptance, highlighting the importance of collective effort in promoting a more inclusive and equitable society that sees past the color of the people. While envisioning a raceless future, this study does not disregard the enduring realities and traumas of racism, nor does it embrace a colorblind perspective that negates the significance of racial identities and the cultural histories of marginalized communities. This balanced approach contributes meaningfully to the existing body of research on South Asian Anglophone fiction by offering a nuanced framework that engages with both the historical weight of racialization and the potential for more inclusive and equitable representations of identity in diasporic narratives. In addition, the study's distinctive theoretical framework is composed of three interrelated components: critical race theory, which interrogates the structural and systemic dimensions of racial inequality; magical realism, a literary device to disrupt conventional perceptions of reality and foreground marginalized voices; and Jeremy Griffith's propositions on the resolution of the human condition, which explore the innate tensions within human behavior and societal development. Magical realism is utilized alongside the concept of "counterstories" from critical race theory to shed light on the psychological effects of racism, serving as a narrative device that disrupts dominant narratives and amplifies the voices of marginalized communities. Furthermore, this research seeks to lay the groundwork for future studies by offering a methodological framework that can be applied to the analysis of other literary texts with similar themes, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework of the present study is informed by the underpinnings presented in the field of critical race theory, magical realism, and Jeremy Griffith's propositions regarding the end of human condition. The researcher uses three propositions, i.e., the social construction of race, counter-storytelling, and permanence of racism from critical race theory, which serve as the primary lens for the study. In addition, this study utilizes magic(al) realism and conceptions of liberation from the human condition to study the selected works of Hamid.

3.2 Selected Theoretical Framework

Firstly, from CRT, the researcher will employ the social construction of race thesis and ordinariness of racism to show how Hamid highlights the acts of violence perpetrated against people of color, a behavior stemming from the stereotypes invented and propagated by society. Then, to analyze Hamid's fiction, this study will use the idea of "counter-storytelling" delineated by CRT theorists as a means to challenge and disrupt the destructive narratives and beliefs about the racially marginalized members of society. Because the chosen works employ elements of fantasy, the researcher will utilize magic(al) realism as delineated by Maggie Ann Bowers in *MAGIC(AL) REALISM* (2004), to study how this narrative technique helps the author to present a counterstory of racialized individuals. Next, the research will contest the proposition i.e. "racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (8) as stated by Derrick Bell in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (1992). His firm belief in the permanence of racism led the critics to deem the theory as a pessimistic approach. However, the selected novels by Hamid, despite being critical of racism, present an optimistic view hinting towards harmony and coexistence of people of different colors and origins. Hence, in an attempt to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, this study brings up some of the revolutionary explanations of the "human condition" presented by leading Australian biologist Jeremy Griffith in his book *FREEDOM: The End of Human Condition* (2019) which can aid in the eradication of racism and lead humankind towards a future free of prejudice and hatred.

3.3 Rationale for Theoretical Framework

The researcher has selected the theoretical lens of critical race theory to analyze Mohsin Hamid's novels, *The Last White Man* and *Exit West,* because it is an apt framework to understand the underpinnings of the narratives including the complex power dynamics and social hierarchies. The selection of critical race theory's social construction of race thesis to study the acts of racialization in the novels permits an investigation of how whiteness is constructed, manifested, and confronted in the texts. It reveals how people of color deal with and counter the racist ideologies prevalent in majority-white spaces and how this racial prejudice, in turn, shapes their identities. Moreover, the lens of critical race theory provides a profound insight into the complicated power relations and how they influence and structure the daily lives of characters. It makes it possible to probe into the intersectionalities of racism with other shapes of subjugation, for example, xenophobia as battled by Hamid's characters in *Exit West*. The second tenet of critical race theory selected by the researcher to analyze Hamid's fiction is the idea of counterstorytelling delineated by CRT theorists as a way to challenge and dislocate the destructive narratives and beliefs about racially marginalized members of society. Hamid narrates the counter-story by employing magical elements and incidents in the narratives, hence selecting a theoretical lens of magical realism to analyze his novels, The *Last White Man* and *Exit West*, which offer an exclusive perspective on how the author retaliates against racism and xenophobia. An examination of the fantastical elements in the texts through magical realism reveals how the narratives subvert and challenge dominant accounts of race and identity. The lens is fit to analyze the selected works as they blur the lines between fantasy and reality, which is a way in which Hamid critiques the fabricated nature of racial categories and the belief in a fixed identity. It is significant to analyze the magical elements presented in the texts as they serve as a form of resistance, which enables the characters to go beyond and challenge the constraints of a racist society. Through the lens of magical realism, we can see how Hamid presents the magical elements as a powerful tool to uncover the bizarreness of racism and to uncover the injustices of racialization. He achieves this by creating a narrative that is both a stern critique and a testament to the strength of the human spirit. This lens offers an enhanced understanding of Hamid's innovative storytelling.

To study Mohsin Hamid's optimistic stance in *The Last White Man* and *Exit West*, the researcher has selected the theoretical lens of eradication of the human condition. This lens shows how Hamid's narratives extend beyond traditional human limitations, proposing a vision of hope and transformation. By eradicating the restraints of the human condition, Hamid's characters can reinvent identity, community, and existence. This optimistic perspective is evident in the magical realist elements, which symbolize the possibility of change and liberation. Through this lens, Hamid's works can be seen as a call to redefine human potential, embracing a future where individuals can evolve and thrive.

3.4 Bridging Magical Realism and CRT: A Counter-Narrative Approach

Magical realism and critical race theory (CRT) may seem like disparate theoretical frameworks, but they converge in their challenge to dominant narratives. Magical realism subverts realist conventions by presenting the extraordinary as ordinary, blurring boundaries between reality and fantasy. Many writers, especially Postcolonial authors try to present alternate realities to express non dominant or nonwestern perspectives. Similarly, CRT's counter-storytelling disrupts dominant, often oppressive, narratives of race and power by centering marginalized voices and experiences. This convergence allows for a nuanced understanding of how Mohsin Hamid's novels employ magical elements as a narrative strategy.

By combining these frameworks, it becomes clear that Hamid's works use magical realism to normalize the experiences of racialized individuals. Magical elements, such as doors leading to distant lands in *Exit West*, are presented as mundane, mirroring how CRT's counter-storytelling treats the everyday experiences of marginalized people as valid and central. This narrative move validates the lived realities of racialized communities, challenging the erasure or distortion often found in dominant discourses.

Furthermore, magical realism and CRT intersect in their disruption of dominant racial narratives. Just as magical realism defamiliarizes the ordinary, CRT's counter-storytelling defamiliarizes dominant racial narratives, exposing their constructed nature and challenging white supremacist ideologies. Hamid's magical elements, like sudden migrations or racial transformations, serve as metaphors for the fluidity and

constructedness of race, aligning with CRT's goal of dismantling racial hierarchies and imagining alternative futures.

The integration of magical realism with Critical Race Theory (CRT) constitutes a paradigm-shifting approach that significantly enhances the analysis. By merging these frameworks, the subversive potential of magical realism in disrupting dominant racial narratives is underscored, while CRT's counter-storytelling concurrently centers and validates marginalized voices and experiences. This synergy not only critiques extant racial hierarchies but also inspires the envisioning of alternative realities and futures wherein such hierarchies are dismantled. Hamid's deployment of magical elements, interpreted through a CRT lens, emerges as a radical mechanism for reimagining race, and resilience, thereby highlighting the transformative capacity of literature in challenging systemic oppression.

3.5 Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) mapped out by various scholars' studies race and racism in countries with a majority white population and their treatment of the colored minority. Derrick Bell is regarded as the father of the theory. It is further developed by insights offered by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams on the subject of prejudiced societal behaviors based on the physical appearance of the members of society mainly the color of their skin. CRT mainly argues that the power structures in American legal system are racially biased and the legal power and social power in American institutions are directly related. Hence, the power structures based on race are fabricated into the institutions. CRT deems it essential to deconstruct such bigoted structures to understand how racially influenced power dynamics are used as tools of oppression and exclusion. The main tenets of the theory include the social construction of race and the normality of racism, interest convergence, differential racialization, intersectionality, counter-storytelling and narrative analysis, and the voice of color thesis. However, this research will invoke a few tenets of CRT.

To analyze the selected texts, the current study utilizes "the social construction of race" doctrine of CRT. The "social construction" thesis asserts that race does not exist in nature rather it is a perception formulated by society to privilege the dominant group and subjugate the one that does not fit into the set standards of the so-called

superior racial group. As stated by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (2017), racial classes are social constructs, created and changed by society to suit its requirements (21). Therefore, they are not based on science or biology, but are instead social tags that can change over time (21). Although CRT acknowledges the physical differences in human beings such as skin color, build, and hair texture it displaces the idea of ascribing spiritual and intellectual attributes to people based on their appearance. CRT scholars believe that physical traits such as skin color or hair texture make up a tiny part of a person's genes and have no connection to important qualities like personality, intelligence, or morality (21). Hence, CRT challenges the social practice of ascribing myths and stereotypes to people based on the color of their skin and the texture of their hair.

The social construction thesis is further explained by Ian F. Haney López in a chapter entitled "The Social Construction of Race" in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (2013), a compilation of essays edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. Lopez opens the essay by presenting a case from 1806 where three generations of women, the Wrights, grandmother, mother, and daughter, had to prove in court that since they come from a free maternal ancestor, they were free and not slaves. In 1806, laws stated that a person's status as slave or free was decided by their mother's status. Therefore, to be decreed as free, the women needed to prove their free ancestry and win the case against the defendant, their owner Hudgins, who did not have any proof that the plaintiffs descended from an enslaved mother. The matter was resolved by the court deciding to determine the ancestry of the women by judging their physical traits. The women's future depended on their skin tone, hair texture, and facial features as the judge decreed that to be African means to have "a flat nose and woolly head of hair" (239). The Wrights were declared free because Hannah, one of the plaintiffs, had long and straight hair. From this incident, Lopez concludes that a person's fate is still often determined by their appearance and "that the law serves not only to reflect but to solidify social prejudice" (239). So, race becomes a way of understanding and navigating the world, often without even realizing it. (Delgado and Stefancic 240), and the social meanings of race connect faces to souls by presuming the morality, intellect, and spirituality of a person based on the aspects of their appearance. Although the judgment of declaring the women free by analyzing their physical features against the stereotype of African appearance set by the society was a racist act, the choice of

the women to resist the imposed subjugation and sue the owner to reclaim their free identity was a courageous move. Hence, Lopez suggests that "by choosing to resist racial constructions, we may emancipate ourselves and our children" (Delgado and Stefancic 246). Utilizing the aforementioned underpinnings of CRT, this study will attempt to analyze Hamid's selected novels.

To resist the misrepresentations caused by the social construction of race, CRT scholars talk about storytelling or counter-storytelling as a favorable technique to rectify the harm done by the fabricated images of racialized people presented by a Eurocentric view. The accounts narrated by the racialized group referred to as out-group by Delgado in his essay titled "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative" in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (2013) are retaliation narratives that are meant to displace the stories of the majority group, referred to as in-group (71). Where some of the colonial writings presenting a case for colonialism regard the colonial practices as enlightening missions, postcolonial authors, by narrating the stories of their land and culture before being plundered by colonizers, present counter-stories. These counter-stories are counter-narratives through which the oppressed can make their voice heard and relate the challenges they experience due to racial prejudice. Delgado and Stefancic state that "Critical race theorists have built on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a deeper understanding of how Americans see race" (41). So, counter-stories let the misrepresented and silenced groups state their worldview and narrate to the dominant white group what it is like to be nonwhite (Delgado and Stefancic 42), a situation faced by Anders, the white protagonist of Hamid's *The Last White Man* who wakes up one day only to find out that he is transformed to an undeniably brown man.

Lastly, although the belief that racism is an everyday experience of people of color is a social fact, and it is depicted in Hamid's works as well, Bell's assertion regarding racism as a permanent component of American life appears to be a defeatist approach. Hamid presents an optimistic view towards harmony and coexistence as the selected works end in people trying to move past racial violence. In an interview entitled "Mohsin Hamid: Writers need to create 'optimistic' futures" with DW, an international media outlet from Germany, Hamid emphasizes a need to articulate "optimistic, inclusive visions of the future" instead of nostalgic visions. He states, "One of the important things we need to do as citizens, and certainly as writers, is to begin to

imagine optimistic futures that are not nostalgic" (Peschel, n. pag.). A nostalgic approach to the future calls for a reincarnation of the past, a revival of the world of the olden days. According to Hamid, nostalgic politics stem from pessimism and it is detrimental because it "tends to be racist, xenophobic, exclusionary, regressive and very, very dangerous" (Cain n. pag.). Hamid equates the nostalgic or pessimistic vision of the future with depression as he states in *Exit West* that "depression is a failure to imagine a plausible desirable future for oneself" (215). Saeed and Nadia keep on moving from the violent places through magical doors in hopes of finding a place where they can live without facing conflicts. Hence, when they stay in Marin, a comparatively less violent place, Hamid regards their hope of survival as "intermittent optimism that refused entirely to die in Marin" (192). Similarly, he describes Anders's feelings in comparison to his country. According to him, their country was "a country in mourning, and it suited Anders, and it suited Oona, coinciding as it did with their own feelings, but at other times it felt like the opposite, that something new was being born, and strangely enough it suited them too" (Hamid 173). Hence, in addition to the feeling of loss, they also experience emotions that are contrasting to mourning, i.e., a feeling of mirth that celebrates the birth of something new, the dawn of a more agreeable future.

3.6 Magical Realism

The author narrates this counter-story by employing the narrative art of magical realism. The explanation of magical realism in this chapter draws on Maggie Ann Bowers' book *Magic(al) Realism*, which examines the fusion of reality and fantasy in literature. The key figures in the development of the term are the German art critic Franz Roh and the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli from the 1920s, the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier and Latin American literary critic Angel Flores from the mid-twentieth century, and the Latin American novelist Gabriel García Márquez from the late twentieth century (Bowers 7). Bowers defines magical realism by delimiting "the terms magic and magical realism (sometimes encapsulating both in the term magic(al) realism" through an exploration of their connections to related genres and terms, including realism, surrealism, allegory, and the fantastic. (19). According to her, the term 'magic' has different meanings in the different variants of magical realism. In the term 'magic realism', it denotes mystery, whereas in 'magical realism' it stands for extraordinary events, especially those which cannot be accounted for by science (19). 'Realism' in magical realism derives its meaning from Aristotle's concept of mimesis;

the idea of depicting the real actions in art, which, according to him, is a natural instinct of humans (20). The modern theories of realism, however, emphasize the role of imagination in art and literature, where realism is attained not by imitation but by creation.

This creation, according to David Grant, is a result of working with the ordinary occurrences and events of life but elevating them through imagination so that they are not merely the factual representation but a portrayal of a greater level of understanding and artistic ability (qtd. in Bowers 20). So, this approach blends the real with the imaginary, using creative visualization to craft a more reflective and stable form of realism in literature. Based on the above-mentioned meanings of 'magic' and 'realism,' Bowers defines magical realism as a technique of fiction writing "that includes magical happenings in a real matter of fact narrative" (2). Hence, magical realism blends the real/ordinary with the magical/extraordinary in a straightforward way.

Bowers distinguishes magical realism from other closely related terms or literary modes that employ magical elements in their narrative structure. These genres include marvelous realism, surrealism, and fantastic. The reason she presents a distinction among these terms is that they tend to overlap, as their boundaries can be obscure. Surrealism, although, is confused with magical realism because both tend to explore the impractical and non-real aspects of human existence, however, what makes surrealism discernible from magical realism is its focus on the imagination and mind, venturing into the inner or spiritual life and psychology of humans through art. Magical realism, unlike surrealism, does not present the extraordinary in the form of a "dream or a psychological experience" because when magic is limited to dreams, it loses its ties with the tangible reality that magical realism intends to present in the first place (Bowers 22).

In addition to surrealism, marvelous realism is another term that is often seen as closely related to magical realism. Although both of these narrative forms combine a realistic image of daily life with magical elements, magical realism tends to be more anchored in social commentary, whereas marvelous realism stresses the individual's experience and the sense of wonder (qtd. in Bowers 96). 'Fantastic' is another term that is associated with magical realism, but the two are subtly different from each other. Bowers quotes the definition of fantastic by contemporary critic and theorist Tzvetan

Todorov as a narrative in which there is a "constant faltering between belief and non-belief in the supernatural or extraordinary event presented" (24). In magical realism, the supernatural or extraordinary events are presented in a matter-of-fact way to explore the human condition, civilization, and society, rather than merely to arouse a feeling of wonder or dread.

Bowers further distinguishes magical realism from allegory and science fiction. Allegory, according to *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, is a form of storytelling where "literal characters and events which contain sustained reference to a simultaneous structure of other ideas and events" (qtd. in Bowers 25). In allegory, the narrative is often a vehicle for conveying a deeper meaning, whereas in magical realism, the focus is on the narrative itself. Science fiction differs from magical realism because, unlike magical realism, it requires a logical and physical explanation for any uncommon incident. The purpose of providing the definitions of the closely related terms and establishing their differences from magical realism is to clarify the direction of the present research. The otherworldly elements manifested in chosen texts for the present research will be analyzed strictly under the lens of magical realism.

Magical realism has emerged as a famous narrative mode that "provides a means for writers to express a non-dominant or non-Western perspective" (Bowers 97). The writers who desire to write against totalitarian regimes opt for magical realism as the narrative mode for their works because it challenges the set definitions and norms that support dictatorial systems, disclosing their weaknesses and instability. Hence, Bowers notes this writing style disagrees with "official and defined authoritative assumptions about reality, truth and history" (90). The postcolonial critic Brenda Cooper has a similar stance about magical realism as she considers it as a narrative that opposes the idea of absolute truth and the notion of purity in race, culture, or identity. Instead, it rejoices in hybridity, multiplicity, and the mixing of cultures.

Additionally, it rejects racist ideologies by depicting the experiences of marginalized communities and highlighting the irrationality of racist beliefs. Brenda Cooper, a postcolonial critic, states, "Magical realism at its best opposes fundamentalism and purity; it is at odds with racism" (qtd. in Bowers 4). For that reason, the magical realist writers, belonging to the locations that were once British colonies, share the common thread in their writing, i.e., condemnation of British

colonialism. That is why the "writers currently in conditions of oppression in the United States, such as Native American, Chicano and African Americans, have also adopted magical realism as a means to write against dominant American culture". (Bowers 46). Bowers talks about Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Arundhati Roy, the award-winning magical realists from India, who have written against British colonialism and the effects on postcolonial identity and sensibility.

In The New Yorker interview with Cressida Leyshon, Hamid describes *Exist West* and *The Last White Man* as both bending the rules of reality: one changes how doors function, and the other changes how people's appearances can shift (Leyshon n. pag.). By tweaking the rules of the physical universe, Hamid creates a setting that brings people of varying colors and belonging to different places together to show a future where coexistence is conceivable. Such characteristics of his stories deem these works apt to be viewed under the prism of magic(al) realism; hence, it will serve as a secondary lens to view Hamid's selected works of fiction.

3.7 FREEDOM: The End of the Human Condition

To support the stance of eradication of racism and move towards an amicable future, the present research borrows some of the revolutionary explanations of the "human condition" presented by leading Australian biologist Jeremy Griffith in his book *FREEDOM: The End of Human Condition* (2019). The author, who has devoted his entire life to answering the essential questions arising out of the dilemma of the human condition, claims that this text will liberate the reader from the underlying "insecurity" and the resulting "psychosis", something humans have been suffering from since they became "fully conscious species some two million years ago" (Griffith 31). Such insecurity and psychosis existing in human beings is an outcome of deeply rooted anxiety or uncertainty about human behavior which appears to be "so competitive, aggressive and selfish when the principles of life are so evidently to be cooperative, loving and selfless" (31). Hence, Griffith argues that the human condition is marked with a deep-seated sense of insecurity, self-doubt, and anxiety that arises from our species' unique capacity for self-awareness and introspection and the anguish of being unable to truly answer the essential question of "why we are the way we are—divisively instead of cooperatively behaved" (32). He calls this particular problem or condition, our human condition. Though many believe that humans are competitive, violent, and selfish because of their animal heritage, Griffith rejects the premise that humans have

these hostile competitive instincts because of that. He believes that the explanation of egocentric, arrogant, inspired, deluded, pessimistic, optimistic, hateful, or corrupt human behaviors does not lie in a "genetic-opportunism-based, non-psychological animal condition" but in a "conscious-mind-based, PSYCHOLOGICALLY troubled HUMAN CONDITION" [sic] (32). Since the human condition is marked with fear and insecurity as well as the need to exert power and control, racism can also be seen as a form of human condition. The fear of the unknown or unfamiliar can lead to fear and mistrust of people who are different from us, which can lead to racist attitudes. Moreover, the desire for power and control can lead powerful individuals and groups to subjugate and oppress others, often based on racial or ethnic differences, resulting in discriminatory beliefs and racial prejudice.

For Griffith, the underlying causes of the human condition can be eliminated and, by doing so, "transform every human into a new, human-condition-free person" (32). Griffith insists on a desperately needed "psychologically redeeming" consideration of the human condition to give rise to a new world for humans that is not burdened by the human condition, a world in which we all stand liberated (107). He asserts that liberation can be achieved if humans come out of the denial of the human condition and start making conscious efforts to bring it to an end. He states that humans once lived in a "completely loving, unconditionally selfless, altruistic state" (110). It was only after they developed a "good-and-evil-afflicted" conscious mind that resulted in a "psychologically upset condition" (110). Therefore, to combat this psychologically distressed condition and move toward "the truth of the importance of nurturing," we need to see how "nurturing created our moral instincts" (214). The concept of nurturing an infant is based on the act of altruistic and unconditional love. Hence, to get rid of the adverse effects of the current human condition or the social injustice that is running rampant in human societies, we as the inhabitants and citizens of this world, need to exhibit patience and adopt the doctrine of selfless and unconditional love.

3.8 Research Method: Textual Analysis

This research is qualitative in nature. It focuses on two main literary works: *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022). These texts are the primary data sources, whereas the additional data comes from secondary sources like articles, books, and websites that discuss the novels and relevant theories. The primary texts are analyzed directly, while secondary sources provide supporting evidence to reinforce the study's

claims. The sampling technique employed for the selection of the primary texts in this study is purposive sampling, a methodical sampling process that comprises consciously selecting specific cases or samples based on their relevance to the research subject being investigated.

The research method used for conducting the present research is textual analysis. The researcher employs Catherine Belsey's textual analysis approach, as outlined in her article "Textual Analysis as a Research Method" (2013). The rationale of choosing this analytical approach for the present study can be given from Belsey's essay itself. She justifies the selection of textual analysis as a research method, asserting that "textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism… as well as any other discipline that focuses on the text" (182). According to Belsey, this method necessitates a close examination of textual details while maintaining objectivity. The current research focuses on texts and aims to minimize preconceptions, which makes textual analysis a suitable methodological approach. Moreover, Belsey stresses maintaining the originality of the research, where originality, according to her, does not mean that there are no references to previous works. Rather, research should "involve assembling ideas that have not been brought together in quite that way before" (186). The current study triangulates aspects from three theories, namely critical race theory, magical realism, and freedom from the human condition, which have never been brought together previously to examine the selected works of Mohsin Hamid. Therefore, Catherine Belsey's textual analysis is suitable to use as an analytical approach for the present research.

Belsey states that when using textual analysis to carry out research, the researcher is "engaged in a dialogue with the text" while ensuring it retains "a certain independence" (Belsey 186). To be engaged in a dialogue is the initial step in analysis, which means reading and familiarization with the chosen works. This foundational step facilitates the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and motifs within the text, which then undergo analysis to decipher meanings and extract insights, thereby facilitating the formulation of conclusions that are grounded in the analysis and contextualized within the research question or theoretical framework. However, her advocacy for retention of the text's independence implies that the researcher should allow the text to convey its own meanings, rather than imposing predetermined or biased interpretations. The current research adopts the same methodological approach,

entailing a thorough examination and analysis of texts, and intends to ensure the textual examination is conducted with minimal preconceptions.

3.8.1 Steps Involved in Textual Analysis

The present study employs a qualitative textual analysis to explore Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* through the intersecting lenses of magical realism and Critical Race Theory, with a particular focus on racial violence and counter-storytelling. The first step involves the selection of texts, identifying Hamid's two novels as the primary literary corpus for analysis. These works are chosen for their engagement with themes of migration, race, and transformation. Alongside the primary texts, relevant secondary sources including critical works on Hamid, studies on magical realism and on CRT are reviewed to establish the scholarly context and theoretical grounding of the research.

The second step establishes the theoretical framework by defining the key concepts of magical realism, Critical Race Theory, and Jeremy Griffith's propositions, and by exploring how these frameworks intersect to illuminate racialized experiences in Hamid's fiction while also offering a vision for overcoming racism. Magical realism, with its blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary, provides a mode through which Hamid reimagines social realities and challenges dominant narratives of race and belonging. CRT, particularly its concept of counter-storytelling, serves as a critical lens to uncover how the novels articulate resistance to racial hierarchies and offer alternative perspectives on identity and power.

Following this, the study proceeds to a close reading of the novels. Each novel is examined closely to explore how Hamid uses magical elements such as the mysterious doors in *Exit West*, which permit instantaneous migration across borders, and the transformative change of skin color in *The Last White Man*, which dissolves racial boundaries, as narrative strategies that simultaneously expose and question the mechanisms of racial violence, othering, and systemic inequality. Particular attention is given to the portrayal of racialized bodies and how they are subjected to surveillance, exclusion, and transformation; to the politics of migration and displacement as global experiences shaped by racial hierarchies; and to Hamid's reimagining of community and belonging as fluid, inclusive, and grounded in shared humanity. This stage of analysis emphasizes how Hamid's use of magical realism not only critiques existing

racial structures but also gestures toward alternative modes of coexistence and empathy that transcend the boundaries of race and nation.

The next stage of the analysis focuses on identifying recurring images that link magical realism with experiences of racialization. Elements such as racialization based on social construction of race, racial segregation, are grouped into broader thematic patterns that reveal consistent modes of representation and resistance across the novels. Through this process, the study highlights how Hamid employs the fantastic to question, disrupt, and expose the underlying structures of racial violence and exclusion embedded within social and cultural systems.

The interpretation phase extends these findings by examining how Hamid's use of magical realism operates as a form of counter-storytelling within the framework of Critical Race Theory. His narratives challenge dominant racial ideologies, give voice to marginalized perspectives, and open imaginative spaces for transformation beyond rigid racial binaries. In conclusion, the study synthesizes these insights to show that the intersection of magical realism and CRT reveals the often "unseen" dimensions of racialized experience and positions Hamid's works as compelling counter-narratives that resist systemic oppression. Ultimately, the research highlights the capacity of literature, and Hamid's magical realism in particular, to envision more just and inclusive futures through the imaginative power of narrative and critical reflection.

3.9 Conclusion

The theoretical framework of this research is structured with the selected conceptions from the field of critical race theory, magical realism, and freedom from the human condition. Selecting three propositions, i.e., the social construction of race, counter-storytelling, and permanence of racism from critical race theory, the researcher designs the primary lens for the study, which is further built upon by underpinnings in the field of magic(al) realism and conceptions of liberation from the human condition to study the selected works of Hamid.

CHAPTER 4

COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF RESILIENCE: AN EXPLORATION OF RACISM, OPTIMISM, AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN HAMID'S *EXIT WEST*

4.1 A Brief Overview of Hamid's *Exit West*

Exit West is an intriguing novel by Hamid about two young lovers caught up in the chaos of life. Dealing with the ordeal of displacement, identity crisis, and various forms of racism, including xenophobia, this novel presents the journey of Saeed and Nadia, who meet in a classroom of an unnamed country burdened with civil war. The condition in the country worsens as their relationship progresses. Nadia moves in with Saeed and his family for safety. Saeed loses his mother as a result of a shooting, which proves to be the final factor forcing them to escape the country and seek refuge in the West. They approach one of the agents who is known to make arrangements for people to travel through the mysterious, magical doors. They pay him for themselves and Saeed's father, but when the time comes to finally leave, Saeed's father refuses to leave behind the place where he spent his life with his beloved wife. Saeed and Nadia were not alone in their decision to flee the situation rather; there was a flood of people trying to survive by moving to locations they considered safe.

Initially appearing on the Greek Island of Mykonos, they decide to move again from the refugee camp there. The next move takes them to London, where they stay in a mansion occupied by migrants. Saeed is intimidated by the other refugees, whereas Nadia grows closer to them. With the passage of time, conflict between the immigrants and nativists grows, and the refugees are presented with various challenges, including cutting off the electricity to the settlement that the refugees are living in. Exhausted and heartbroken, Saeed and Nadia pass through the magic portal yet again and appear in Marlin, California, where Nadia starts to work at a food cooperative, and Saeed gets associated with a charity body run by a black preacher whose daughter catches Saeed's eye. As time passes, Saeed and Nadia drift apart and pursue different paths until they, in their native city, flee ages ago, perhaps for one last time.

To explore the universal nature of the refugee crisis, Hamid brings in the magical realist element of the mysterious doors transporting people to far-off places like Mykonos, Greece, London, and California. Although successful in escaping their war-torn country, the couple's tribulations do not end there as they are now presented with more challenges in foreign lands. In addition to cultural dislocation, Saeed and Nadia combat xenophobia and struggle to maintain their relationship and identities. The psychological and emotional impact of dislocation from one's country to the unseen lands is brilliantly portrayed by Hamid as he narrates the struggles of the couple to maintain their relationship and navigate the hardships presented by the unfamiliar setting.

4.2 Social Construction of Race and Ordinariness of Racism in *Exit West*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) posits that race is not a natural phenomenon, but rather a social construct formed and perpetuated by society to maintain power dynamics that benefit the dominant group. This concept is used to oppress and exclude marginalized groups deemed inferior. CRT argues that dismantling these biased structures is crucial to understanding how racial power dynamics continue inequality and discrimination. The discriminatory treatment of people of color who migrate from their countries of origin to white-majority countries, often reveals the deep-seated racial biases running rampant in society. To migrate from one's own country to a foreign land is a decision marked with numerous concerns and fears, including the fear of confinement, deportation, and parting from the families. In addition, when non-white migrants move to majority-white countries, they often face the added challenges of racial discrimination, social and cultural clashes, stereotyping, language barriers, and a lack of representation. These struggles can lead to feelings of marginalization, exclusion, trauma, and cultural dislocation. Hamid's characters in *Exit West* express similar fears before leaving their country, as he writes, "But she was haunted by worries too, revolving around dependence, worries that in going abroad and leaving their country she and Saeed and Saeed's father might be at the mercy of strangers, subsistent on handouts, caged in pens like vermin" (90). These lines reveal Nadia's concern for their safety and well-being and her deep-seated fears of being treated adversely in a foreign land by strangers. Although a citizen of a civil war-ridden country, she is still haunted by the idea of losing her independence and being imprisoned on distant shores.

Another fright for the migrants is separation anxiety on moving away from their families, as circumstances often do not allow the families to migrate together. Hamid notes this concern: "For when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (94). Nadia moved leaving her biological family behind and Saeed's father refused to join them as he preferred to stay at the place he spent his entire life with Saeed's mother. So, both Saeed and Nadia had the additional baggage of leaving their remaining families behind and moving forward. The burden of the anxiety for the families they leave behind and the fear of their own safety in the foreign countries can cause the migrants severe trauma which is worsened by their experience of racism and exclusion which impacts their mental health and physical well-being profoundly.

According to critical race theory, the ordinariness of racism denotes that racism is not rare but rather a common and frequent occurrence in the majority white societies. It is the "usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (Delgado and Stefancic 20). Immigrants, particularly people of color, are often portrayed as "others" and segregated from their native communities. Hence, they have to suffer dehumanization and are made to feel undeserving of dignity and rights. Saeed and Nadia, being the outsiders and the people of color, had to face similar racist behaviors along with the other immigrants due to the set racial hierarchies. Hamid states that Saeed and Nadia avoided the old town, as migrants like them were banned at night and discouraged from visiting even during the day, except for the outskirts where they could trade with locals (113). These lines clearly demonstrate the dehumanization and segregation of immigrants based on their status as 'other' in society. Xenophobia, i.e., an intense or unreasonable fear, aversion, or prejudice against people from other countries or cultures, and nativism i.e. a policy of preferring native populations as opposed to immigrants, are usually the two ideologies that work behind such a divide in the society. This divide results in a social setting where the powerful group, i.e., the natives, may express antagonism towards the weaker community, i.e. the immigrants, perceiving them as a threat to their cultural and national identity and their economic stability. In addition, this hierarchal classification benefits the dominant group in several ways, as stated by Delgado and Stefancic that as a result of the social structure of white-over-color the dominant white group benefits psychologically and economically from the existing power structure that favors whiteness (20). Psychic benefits may include maintaining a sense of supremacy and

entitlement to social and material privileges such as access to resources and opportunities, which can result in economic benefits, social status, and political influence. The dominant also gets social and cultural gains by designing the cultural narrative, defining societal norms, and influencing the media, education sector, and other organizations to maintain dominance.

Racism stemming from xenophobic or nativistic sentiments, whether due to fear of the 'other' or to maintain dominance, can manifest in various ways, from slight microaggressions to blatant violence and hate crimes. Hamid describes the state of othering and violence committed against the immigrants as,

> They realized that their street was under attack by a nativist mob, Palace Gardens Terrace being roiled in a way that it belied its name. The mob looked to Nadia like a strange and violent tribe, intent on their destruction, some armed with iron bars or knives, and she and Saeed turned and ran, but could not escape. (131)

This describes a fanatic response of the nativists to the presence of immigrants on their land. Hate crimes taking the form of physical violence can cause serious bodily harm to the immigrants in the case of Hamid's characters, both suffered injuries in the nativists' attack, mentioned as "Nadia's eye was bruised and would soon swell shut and Saeed's lip was split and kept bleeding down his chin and on his jacket (131). Hence, Saeed and Nadia, who escaped their country to evade the viciousness of civil war, are once again caught in a wave of violence, this time stemming from racism based on their physical and cultural differences from the natives. Muneer I. Ahmad in his essay A Rage Shared by Law, earlier titled as Post–September 11 Racial Violence as Crimes of Passion, states "The physical violence exercised on the bodies of Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians accompanied a form of legal and political violence toward these communities as well" (Delgado and Stefancic 492). The physical atrocities and racial violence faced by Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians resulted not merely from the fear of the 'other' by the native community, but it was also backed by systemic injustices and discriminatory policies of the state that targeted these communities. Hamid explains the involvement of the state forces in the maltreatment of the racial other as,

> To reclaim Britain for Britain, and it was reported that army was being deployed, and the police as well, all those who had once served in the army and

the police, and the volunteers who had received a week-long course of training. Saeed and Nadia heard that nativist extremists were forming their own legions, with a wink and a nod from authorities. (132)

The deployment of military personnel, often equipped, to the regions where immigrants have taken refuge can create a hostile and violent environment for the migrants, causing them severe trauma besides physical damage. Saeed and Nadia know that they will have to face similar racial biases and vehemence if they go to other countries considered to be lands of opportunities and welfare, as these are often believed to be the European states. They express their fear and disappointment as "They knew that in other desirable cities in other desirable countries, similar scenes must be unfolding, scenes of nativist backlash" (134). So, they have accepted that they will have to bear violence and aggression if they move to white supremacist countries with nativist agendas. Such agendas work on the belief that immigrants are outsiders and their presence can lead to a change of cultural and social norms that nativists perceive as a threat to their way of life. Hence, nativism overlaps with racism as it is manifested in the form of violence and hate towards outsiders considering them inferior and undesirable.

Muneer I. Ahmad points out that following the 9/11 attacks, two forms of racial violence unfolded in the US: private violence, including physical attacks by individuals against Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians, and state-sponsored violence, involving the state policies that targeted people perceived as Muslim (Delgado and Stefancic 493). Therefore, if any racial minority faces nativist backlash, this involves direct state participation as it acts as an enabling power for the violation of basic human rights of the colored minorities. Hamid describes such a violation by narrating the vulnerability of Saeed, Nadia, and other migrants during the incidents of nativist attacks, where migrants were captured and detained while those who were unable to prove their legal residence were sent to "great holding camps" (135). The presence of great holding camps points to the sinister schemes against the foreign refugees, who are often picked up and taken to makeshift detention cells, where they are exposed to inhumane conditions, including inadequate food and water, overcrowding, and poor sanitation. Many are subjected to physical and emotional exploitation at the hands of their captors, with some even facing bogus charges and indefinite imprisonment.

Leslie G. Espinoza and Angela P. Harris state that "Racism damages us. The material circumstances of outsiders are inferior. If you are African American, Latino/ Asian, or otherwise another, you are more likely to be poorly housed, poorly fed, poorly educated, poorly employed, and in poor health" (Delgado and Stefancic 572). In supremacist countries, immigrants and refugees are often denied the opportunities that are necessary for them to rebuild their lives. This is achieved through these countries' laws and policies that frequently reflect a prejudiced and exclusionary vision that propagates systemic inequality. Hamid sketches the living conditions of Saeed, Nadia, and others in the periphery of the central city of London: "That night the electricity went out, cut off by the authorities, and Kensington and Chelsea descended into darkness. A sharp fear descended also" (140). Electricity is an essential component of modern life, playing a crucial role in supporting various daily activities that are fundamental to the daily functioning of human life. Withholding electricity is a way of exercising control and establishing dominance, hence, effectively denying individuals a fundamental necessity and demonstrating power over their daily lives. So, the immigrants who are already living in fear of being attacked by the armed forces or the nativist mob, feel further targeted and more vulnerable when their residences get drowned in the darkness by cutting off the power supply. In addition to the fear, it also makes the immigrants conscious of the clear divide between the insiders and the outsiders and who is more deserving of the rights and opportunities in the state. Hamid highlights this through the envious thoughts of his characters,

> From dark London, Saeed and Nadia wondered what life must be like in light London, where they imagined people dined in elegant restaurants and rode shiny black cabs, or at least went to work in offices and shops and were free to journey about as they pleased. (142)

This shows that immigrants, upon not getting equal opportunities as native citizens, often experience a profound sense of envy, which might lead to disappointment, frustration, and anger. Saeed and Nadia, coping with fear and uncertainty in the dark London, can be seen as going through similar feelings upon thinking about all that is accessible to the residents of light London, which appears to them as a place that is lit by opportunities and better prospects. Thinking about people of light London, who have the liberty to dine out and ride in their luxury cars while they are sinking in the darkness, Saeed and Nadia feel stuck and unable to achieve what they envisioned. They are

trapped in a dangerous situation, besieged by soldiers and armored vehicles and haunted by drones and helicopters, serving as a reminder of the technological superiority of their opponents (150). As night approaches, the darkness is filled with the sounds of these drones and helicopters, and the migrant community has to face riots, assaults, rapes, and killings. There are rumors of a massacre, including one that claimed over 200 migrants, mostly children, were killed in a cinema fire (161). Hence, due to xenophobic sentiments, migrants have to face dire situations involving violence and trauma lurking around every corner. The migrants, due to prevalent racist ideologies, live in a state of constant fear, unsure of what the future holds for them.

4.3 Counter Storytelling through Magical Realism in *Exit West*

Magical realism is a literary genre that combines realistic descriptions of everyday life with magical elements, presented straightforwardly and ordinarily. This blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary creates a unique narrative that makes the magical appear unremarkable while still maintaining a realistic depiction of the world. Magical realism as a literary device has been particularly helpful for postcolonial writers in presenting their counterstories. Counterstories challenge and resist the dominant perspectives and discourses, propagated by those in positions of power, such as colonialism, racism, and other forms of oppression. Counter-storytelling as a tenet of critical race theory, states that in the legal system, preconceived opinions and myths about certain communities, like the idea that black people are more likely to be responsible for the committed crimes in society or that Muslims are more likely to be behind any terrorists activities, can greatly influence how cases are understood and decided. "Critical writers use counterstories to challenge, displace, or mock these pernicious narratives and beliefs" (Delgado and Stefancic 44). Hamid attempts to achieve the same as he employs magical realist elements in *Exit West* to narrate Saeed and Nadia's experiences of marginalization and racial violence due to supremacist ideologies such as racism and xenophobia. The reason behind the choice of magical realism to narrate the counterstory is that the merging of realistic descriptions of everyday life with magical elements can create narratives that capture the complexities, challenges, and triumphs of the experiences of immigrants.

Hamid presents magical doors as a medium to transport the characters from one territory to another. Bowers explains that magic in magical realism refers to 'any extraordinary occurrence and particularly to anything spiritual or unaccountable by

rational science" (19). Hence, Hamid's description of the magical portal as "A normal door, they said, could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all (69), depicts these entryways as a classic example of magical realism as the narrative does not explain the mechanics of these doors. The characters view the doors as a threshold to security, a means of escape from the atrocities of war, but they can also represent the deceptive promises of safety that may not actually exist, leaving migrants disillusioned and vulnerable. "The passage was like dying and like being born" (98). This suggests that passing through the magic doors is an experience that is both destructive and creative. The phrase "like dying" implies a sense of loss or disintegration of one's old self or reality. In contrast, "like being born" implies a sense of renewal or creation of a new self or reality. Psychologically, this feeling can trigger an existential crisis, leading to anxiety and uncertainty about the future.

Moreover, these doors, in Hamid's narrative, are characterized by darkness and blackness as the author states, "The agent gestured with his head to the blackness of the door" (97). This darkness and blackness can be strong symbols for ambiguity and uncertainty, hence, can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of the obstacles that migrants might have to face. Darkness can hinder clarity of vision, making it difficult to tell apart reality from illusion. This ambiguity can reflect the migrants' uncertain destiny as Hamid explains Nadia's experience of passing through the door as, "She was struck with its darkness, its opacity, the way it did not reveal what was on the other side" (98). It can also represent the fear of the unknown or unseen dangers that migrants may face. Darkness can make navigation difficult as it can disorient. This disorientation can symbolize the migrants' perplexity in unfamiliar environments. Similarly, blackness can represent a vacuum, symbolizing the unknown or the unexplored. This void can point towards the migrants' uncertain futures. Blackness can also represent invisibility, highlighting how migrants may be rendered invisible or marginalized. Hamid further explains Nadia's emotions while going through the door: "Nadia experienced a kind of extinguishing as she entered the blackness and a struggle as she fought to exit it" (98). By employing darkness and blackness as symbols of ambiguity and uncertainty in a magical realist narrative, Hamid attempts to tell the counterstory of marginalized individuals effectively, as magical realism can provide a platform for the muffled voices to be heard. The use of darkness and blackness to show the complexities of their experiences also helps the author to centralize the struggles of the victims and highlight

how racism operates in subtle, insidious ways. In *Exit West*, the areas where the migrants have taken refuge are referred to by local newspapers "as the worst of the black holes in the fabric of the nation" (126). By referring to the area as a "black hole," the newspaper dehumanizes and stigmatizes the migrant community and spreads a narrative that implies that the presence of migrants is a problem that depletes the nation's resources and identity. This rhetoric reinforces xenophobic ideologies and further marginalizes the migrant community. Hence, Hamid effectively narrates the counterstories of marginalized communities by reframing their experiences and providing alternative perspectives that challenge dominant narratives.

When Saeed and Nadia leave Mykonos and appear in a bedroom that they believe is in London, their first instinct is to clean themselves by taking a shower, desperate to wash away the grime and dirt that has been building up on their bodies for days. Showering is their most pressing desire, surpassing even their hunger for food (120). Nadia is the first to do so and while showering she observes her body to appear "leaner than she had ever seen it and streaked with grime mostly of her own biological creation, dried sweat and dead skin, and with hair in places she had always banished hair, and she her body looked like body of an animal, a savage" (121). This passage presents a description that suggests that her body undergoes a change due to the circumstances she has been in, a change that blurs the lines between human and animal, arousing a sense of magical realism. The graphic and realistic description of her body, stressing on grime, sweat, dead skin, and overgrowth of hair, creates a sense of hyper-reality that is intense as well as disturbing. By comparing her body to that of an animal, a "savage," the author draws attention to the inhuman treatment of racial minorities and the brutal conditions the immigrants are exposed to and have to endure. This description of the human body ridden with grime, sweat, dead skin, and hair also challenges traditional notions of human beauty and dignity, presenting an alternate reality of the victims, hence offering a counterstory utilizing the traits of magical realism. Moreover, Saeed and Nadia's readiness to get rid of the contaminants can be seen as a demonstration of their inner state, a physical reflection of their emotional and psychological struggles, which is a hallmark of magical realism and serves well for the author to present the trials and tribulations of the minority groups at the hands of the dominant group. Hence, Hamid's narrative offers a counterstory of Nadia and Saeed, highlighting their struggles as they explore unfamiliar territories in search of refuge and

better prospect but are often denied fundamental human rights, including access to basic sanitation and hygiene facilities.

In addition to being denied fundamental human rights, the immigrant communities are victimized and marginalized with the oppressive gaze of constant surveillance. The monitoring systems used for the endless scrutiny of immigrant areas can be a source of anxiety and trauma for immigrants. Many immigrants arrive in their host country having escaped war or violence in their home countries, hence already bearing trauma which is only worsened by the pervasive surveillance making them feel more fearful and powerless. Hamid demonstrates the state of the relentless surveillance as:

> Even more than the fighter planes and the tanks these robots, few though they were, and drones overhead, were frightening because they suggested an unstoppable efficiency, an inhumane power, and evoked the kind of dread that a small mammal feels before a predator of an altogether different order, like a rodent before a snake. (151)

The description of the robots and drones conjures a sense of magical realism as it presents the machinery of war as something almost supernatural. The passage portrays surveillance technology, i.e., robots and drones, as having a life of its own, exercising a kind of supernatural power over humans. Furthermore, the use of words like "unstoppable" and "inhumane" sketches a terrifying picture, adding to the sense of mystery as well as horror. By comparing a robot to a predator and the humans to a small mammal, Hamid creates a sense of trepidation and dread that blurs the lines between the human and animal worlds as well as serves as a counterstory of the immigrants who suffer dehumanization at the hands of the dominant forces. Hamid's portrayal of the suffering of Saeed and Nadia and their fellow immigrants humanizes their experience as well as questions the dominant narrative of surveillance and observation as a mandatory requirement for ensuring national security. The portrayal of the immigrants as small mammals being targeted by robotic predators highlights the suffocating and dehumanizing nature of surveillance. It also stresses the sense of fear and defenselessness that immigrants may feel when being monitored by drones and helicopters. By giving voice to these emotions of anxiety and vulnerability, Hamid's

narrative counters the dominant narrative and offers a more intricate and profound understanding of the immigrant experience.

Another quintessential example of magical realism from *Exit West* is when Nadia experiences a strange, disorienting sensation of being disconnected from reality and time. It happens when Nadia, sitting on a building's steps across the street, troops and a tank, scrolls through the news on her phone and sees an online photo of herself in the same spot, reading the news with the troops and tank in the background. Startled, Nadia wonders about the possibility of such a thing. The immediate publication of the photo leaves her perplexed. In her bewilderment "she looked about for a photographer, and she had a bizarre feeling of time bending all around her, as though she was from the past reading about the future or from the future reading about the past" (155). The ordinary and mundane are loaded with a sense of enigma and wonder. Although Nadia sitting on the steps of a building, reading the news on her phone is a perfectly normal activity the indication of the detachment of troops and the presence of tanks across the street adds a sense of tension and oppression. This incident is a stark reminder of the harsh reality that immigrants often have to live a life of constant scrutiny and perpetual fear, which keeps them from fully integrating into society. The passage also deals with the theme of time and its relationship to human experience. Nadia's feeling of being from the past reading about the future or from the future reading about the past creates a sense of temporal dislocation, where the past, present, and future are tangled. It also refers to the trauma of war and violence she experienced in the past in her homeland and the painful irony of still facing similar fears in the present in the place she was supposed to find safety. Hamid further utilizes the traits of magical realism to narrate the counterstory of Nadia by highlighting the profound sense of dislocation and disorientation she faces in the uncharted territories of a new country. Hamid explains this as:

> She almost felt that if she got up and walked home at this moment there would be two Nadias, that she would split into two Nadias, and one would stay on the steps reading and one would walk home, and two different lives would unfold for these two different selves, and she thought she was losing her balance, or possibly her mind and then she zoomed in on the image and saw that the woman in the black robe reading the news on her phone was not actually her at all. (155)

The description of Nadia splitting into two Nadias, each living a different life, invokes magical realism, where the boundaries between reality and fantasy are blurred. This idea challenges the notion of fixed identity, suggesting that the self is not singular, but rather diverse and fragmented. The use of the digital image as a stimulant for Nadia's fragmented identity is also significant. Her zooming in on the image and seeing that the woman in the black robe is not actually her at all, raises questions about the nature of identity and reality in the era of technology. The fact that Nadia thinks her mind is playing tricks on her adds to the sense of uncertainty and ambiguity, characteristic of magical realism. By presenting Nadia's fragmented selfhood as a literal possibility, he highlights the complexities and multiple realities of human experience and therefore narrates a counterstory that deals with themes of identity, selfhood, and migration trauma utilizing tropes of magical realism.

4.4 Challenging Permanence of Racism through Freedom from Human Condition in *Exit West*

Under CRT, the selected works of Hamid effectively expose the prevalent racism in the majority white societies and highlight the struggles of racial minorities by presenting counter-narratives, but they diverge from Derrick Bell's, the father of CRT, argument that racism is a permanent and enduring aspect of American society. Bell states that "Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those Herculean efforts we hail as progress will produce no more than temporary 'peaks of progress,' short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance" (12). The conclusion of Bell's book *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* also presents that racism is a permanent feature of American society and that despite efforts to eradicate it, it will continue to persist. In the final chapter, Bell presents a fictional story called "The Space Traders" (158-194), which serves as a metaphor for his conclusion. In the story, a group of aliens propose that they will solve the country's economic and environmental problems in exchange for America's entire black population. The story ends with the majority of Americans opting to accept the aliens' proposition, revealing the depth of racism and the readiness of many whites to sacrifice the welfare of black people for the benefit of the majority. Bell concludes that racism is so deeply rooted in American society that it is unlikely to be abolished. He insists that the efforts for racial justice must continue,

but that they must come with a recognition of the permanence of racism. Hamid's views appear to differ from Bell's assertions as he presents an optimistic stance towards harmony and coexistence. This can also be observed through the selected works as they end in people trying to move past racial violence and creating communities that are centered more on compassion and understanding. Hamid emphasizes the importance of having an optimistic view of the future, as the opposite can lead the masses to follow harmful ideologies that promote hate and regression. He believes that it's historically and statistically correct to be optimistic, as it has contributed significantly to making the world a better place. By adopting an optimistic outlook, we can resist harmful ideologies and work towards creating a more positive and inclusive world (Peschel n. pag.). Despite highlighting racial violence and trauma, the selected works of Hamid also hint at empathy and understanding by creating relatable and well-rounded characters from various backgrounds, allowing readers to connect with their experiences and views. In addition, these works explore the complexities of racism, including internalized racism, covert racism, and systemic injustices, to raise awareness and promote empathy.

Racism as a harmful ideology can be uprooted by acknowledging its presence in our societies, rather than ignoring or downplaying its existence. Jeremy Griffith, an Australian biologist and author of *FREEDOM: The End Of The Human Condition*, states that understanding of the human condition can make the inhabitants secure, sound, effective managers of the world consequently, peace and happiness will prevail materializing a dream "that humans throughout history have hardly dared to dream of can come into being" (511). Hamid's works also exhibit such a hopeful stance as they share narratives of characters who face and overcome racist challenges and portray communities that come together to support one another, demonstrating the power of collective action against racism and inspiring hope in readers. In *Exit West*, Saeed and Nadia witness violence and bloodshed, but instead of giving up, they decide to flee and carve a new destiny for themselves. Saeed's father, although unwilling to leave his home country, urges Saeed and Nadia to keep trying their luck with the magic doors that can take them away. He says to the children, "Let us hope" (85) no matter what the future has to offer. It is perhaps this advice that enables them to be resilient in the face of adversity and challenges they come across on the Island of Mykonos as well as in London.

Despite acknowledging the harsh realities of racial violence and migration, Hamid simultaneously highlights the presence of hope and humanity. One such incident is narrated by Hamid as, "And yet while all this occurred there were volunteers delivering food and medicine to the area, and aid agencies at work and the government had not banned them from operating, as some of the governments the migrants were fleeing from had, and in this there was hope" (135). This passage offers a powerful message of empathy and courage in the face of racial violence and adversity. The fact that volunteers, aid agencies, and the government have joined hands to provide basic necessities to those in need suggests that humanity can prevail, even in the darkest of times. The cooperation and collaboration between volunteers, aid agencies, and the government shows that collective action can lead to positive change and provide a sense of hope for a better future. This counters the permanence of racism by showing that combined effort helps move past racial violence and a more inclusive and compassionate society can be built. The passage also implies that by surpassing racial boundaries and prioritizing humanity, we can create a brighter future, one that is free from the shackles of racial violence and discrimination. Another incident that offers a moving and powerful message of optimism and hope for a future beyond racial violence is the young nativist boy caring for the health and welfare of the immigrant community. Hamid narrates this as;

> Saeed in particular was touched by a nativist boy, just out of school, or perhaps in his final year, who came to their and administered polio drops, to the children but also to the adults, while many were suspicious of vaccinations, and many more, including Saeed and Nadia, had already been vaccinated, there was such earnestness in the boy, such empathy and good intent, that though some argued, none had the heart to refuse him. (136)

The image of a young nativist boy administering polio drops to migrant children and adults amidst the riots is a striking one. The boy's sincerity, empathy, and good intentions win over even the most skeptical individuals having suspicions and mistrust about vaccination efforts. This moment is significant because it foregrounds the potential for connection and understanding between individuals from different backgrounds. The boy's actions show that even at the peak of racial and ethnic tensions, there are still individuals from the nativist groups who are willing to reach out and help others, irrespective of their background. This justifies Griffith's proposition that

underlying causes of the human condition can be eliminated and that doing so can, "transform every human into a new, human-condition-free person" (32). The small act of goodness and compassion of the nativist boy offers a glimmer of hope for a future where people can move past their differences and work towards an unprejudiced and equitable society. The fact that migrants did not have the heart to refuse the boy's help suggests that even in the most challenging of circumstances, human connection, trust, and empathy can prevail.

In London, as the violence reaches its peak, it eventually subsides, and the natives pull back from the edge of chaos. It seems as if locals have concluded that the level of violence required to drive out the migrants is extreme, and they should explore more humane options that can result in coexistence. Hamid narrates this as "the denial of coexistence would have required one party to cease to exist, the extinguishing part too would have been transformed in the process" (164). This statement suggests that if two groups or parties refuse to coexist, the only way to resolve the conflict would be for one group to be eliminated.

However, this process of elimination would not just impact the group being destroyed but also the group causing the destruction. "Too many native parents would not after have been able to look their children in the eye, to speak with head held high of what their generation had done" (164). This instance reveals the moral and emotional consequences of violent and racist actions. It suggests that such actions would have had a profound impact on the native population's sense of morality and the generation's legacy. It is eventually this reason that causes the individuals to rethink their approach towards the migrants as if they are trying to free themselves of the guilt-ridden human condition and build a society that is liberated from the human condition. Hamid explains the revival of hope in the migrant community of London as,

> And so irrespective of the reason, decency on this occasion won out, and bravery, for courage is demanded not to attack when afraid, and the electricity and water came on again, and negotiations ensued and the word spread, and among the cherry trees on Palace Gardens Terrace Saeed and Nadia and their neighbors celebrated, they celebrated long into the night. (165)

This passage offers a deeply hopeful message, one that proposes that even in the most trying and divisive of times, decency, bravery, and compassion can ultimately win. The

fact that decency "won out" on this occasion implies that there is a deeper, more fundamental human urge towards compassion, empathy, and understanding. The impulse of kindness can overcome even the most bitter conflicts, including those caused by racial and ethnic tensions. This verifies Griffith's assertion that to get rid of the unfavorable effect of the current human condition or the social injustice that is prevailing in human societies, we, as the inhabitants and citizens of this world, need to be patient and adopt the doctrine of selfless and unconditional love. This is a profoundly optimistic message, one that suggests that individuals and communities have the power to choose how they respond to challenges, hence, the permanence of racism can be battled with continuous struggle as well as undying hope and optimism. The scene of Saeed, Nadia, and their neighbors celebrating among the cherry trees on Palace Gardens Terrace is a powerful symbol of hope and renewal. The fact that they can come together and celebrate, despite the struggles and challenges that they have faced, suggests that there is always the possibility for joy and connection even in the toughest of times. This image offers a vision of a future where people from different ethnic backgrounds can come together, celebrate their differences, and build a more just and compassionate world.

CHAPTER 5

OPTIMISM IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY: A LITERARY EXAMINATION OF RACISM, RESILIENCE, AND COUNTER-STORIES IN MOHSIN HAMID'S *THE LAST WHITE MAN*

5.1 A Brief Overview of Hamid's *The Last White Man*

The novel *The Last White Man* is a speculative novel about a white man in a majority-white country, transforming into a brown man, followed by the change of the society into brown-skinned people. As it deals with the themes of white privilege, racial discrimination, misery, and the irrationality of the social construction of race, *The Last White Man* illustrates a society that is battling with fear and turmoil while moving towards enlightenment. According to Hamid, the novel is inspired by his personal experience of dealing with racism when he felt that he was losing his partial whiteness as a brown man who had spent a great deal of his life in the West due to intensified racial profiling after 9/11.

Set in an unnamed, majority-white, English-speaking country, the novel tells the story of Anders, who is among the first people who transition from being white-skinned to brown-skinned. Considering the transformed beings to be responsible for the prevalence of this change in the community, white militant groups start chasing the "changed" people out of town hence, violence breaks in the streets of the town, which results in the disruption of routine matters of life and day-to-day business. Anders, being among the first people to change, faces severe backlash from the townspeople. He is initially rejected by his father, as well as his lover, Oona. Although both of them come around Anders as time passes, some people are more resistant than others, including Oona's mother. Due to the ongoing riots and episodes of violence, Anders takes refuge with his ailing father meanwhile, Oona moves in with her paranoid mother. By the time winter comes to an end, most people, including the racialist militants, have transitioned from white to brown; hence, the violence in the city subsides. Swinging between anguish and hope, people in the society move on with their lives and begin to mend and reconstruct the infrastructure that was mangled during the riots. When

Anders's father passes away, many turn up to attend his open-casket funeral. At the occasion, Anders's father is the only pale one in the room, the last white man in town. The novel ends with Anders and Oona raising their daughter in Anders's childhood home and continuing to live their life there.

For a novel that investigates the beliefs and operation of racism, *The Last White Man* is noticeably an optimistic story. Although it is categorized as speculative fiction, its conviction ultimately leads to societal enlightenment. It shows that the light of justice shines even through the darkest of nights, surely when we finally choose to move on from the horrifying construct of racial hierarchies, we will be able to see each other for what we actually are.

5.2 Social Construction of Race and Ordinariness of Racism in *The Last White Man*

Delgado and Stefancic, in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (2017), state that the "social construction" thesis of critical race theory suggests that race and racial hierarchies are socially fabricated and, hence, are not fixed but rather fluid, and context-dependent. These constructs are not backed by biology, genetics, or any objective reality, but rather are fashioned, modified, or cast off by society as it suits its interests (21). Therefore, it is a concept created by society to categorize and differentiate people and as a result treat them differently. This differential treatment based on the physical traits, particularly the color of an individual, leads to systemic inequality and judgment against colored individuals which causes self-doubt and identity crisis among colored individuals. Hamid opens his latest novel *The Last White Man*, with such a predicament where Anders, the protagonist, and "a white man, woke up to find he had turned a deep and undeniable brown" (3). Anyone who wakes up to be a different color would indeed be concerned but Anders's reaction upon seeing the change in his skin color is marked with extreme anxiety and panic. Although he knows that it is still him in a differently colored body, "he wanted to kill the colored man who confronted him in his home" (5). This shows his profound disappointment and intense anger at being trapped in brown skin which he, as a previous member of the dominant white group, knows is looked down upon. The thoughts of the vanishing privileges and the coming judgment associated with his new skin color, make him feel like "he had been robbed, that he was the victim of a crime" (5). Loss of whiteness in a majority white society meant the loss

of white privilege that comes with this color. White privilege refers to the unjust advantages, gains, and exemptions that white individuals enjoy in society because of their racial identity. These privileges are often not acknowledged by those who profit from them, but they can lead to a serious imbalance of opportunities in society and have a significant impact on the lives of individuals from marginalized racial groups. Another privilege that comes with being white is to not have to think about racism and its effect on their routine lives. They do not have to face the fear and insecurity that come with color, so they feel more comfortable and safer in public spaces without the concern of racial harassment or violence. In an interview with *The New Yorker*, Hamid talks about his experience with racism. Although he has never been physically white, he had been living in white countries for a long time, getting an education and building a career, hence enjoying the available opportunities, after 9/11 he felt stripped of the honorary whiteness as he was subjected to racialization due to his brown skin and Muslim name. Hamid states, "I had become an object of suspicion, even fear. I had lost something. And, over the years, I began to realize that I had lost my partial whiteness" (Leyshon n. pag.). Anders, upon losing his whiteness, fears a similar response.

Racism comes in various shapes and forms. Racial othering and dehumanization of colored individuals are two of the most detrimental aspects of racism against people of color. Othering is a complex process that involves the formation and maintenance of a social divide between the dominant and marginalized groups. Hamid points out the reaction of society to the people who transitioned from white to brown as, "the weird people who now came when you called for anything, for a plumber, an electrician, for help with your garden for help with anything at all" (22). Despite possessing the same skill set and qualifications as before, the mere fact that they have brown skin suddenly renders them odd or peculiar. The qualities and traits of the colored individuals are overshadowed by their skin color as they are reduced to and identified merely by the color of their skin on their body. This leads to the dehumanization of non-white individuals, which involves denying or downplaying the humanity of colored individuals. This happens when the emotions and feelings of the racial minorities are not acknowledged, reducing them to objects, often animals. The consequences of stereotyping and dehumanization are immense and far-reaching as colored individuals may internalize negative labels and dehumanizing inferences, leading to low self-worth and self-image. Hamid highlights these aspects of racism and the toll they on the

racialized individual through Anders who battles with self-doubt and insecurity. As he goes around town, he feels "vaguely menaced" due to his skin color hence he tries his best to veil it as much as he can, leaving no part exposed. This includes wearing a hoodie and pulling it down his face to make it invisible from the sides and keeping his hands inside his pockets, only briefly exposing them, when necessary, like "a flash of brown like a fish darting up to the surface and down again, aware of the hazards of being seen" (25). This reveals the profound effect of racism on his sense of self. Hamid states, "The way people act around you, it changes what you are, who you are" (53). One's self-perception is often formed by the way others in society perceive and treat them. Our day-to-day interactions with others, including family, friends, colleagues, and authority figures, contribute to our self-image.

Power structures also play a significant role in one's self-image as the impact of others' views on one's self-perception can be more distinct when there are power disparities, such as in situations involving racism. In Anders's case, he is facing abandonment from those he was once familiar with. Hamid explains his situation as "People who knew him no longer knew him" (26). Moreover, Anders is also avoiding them to protect himself from the impending contempt and humiliation. In addition to the fear of being recognized and judged by a white acquaintance, he also fears being recognized by "someone dark", the people who are often seen sweeping the sidewalks or huddled at the back of a truck "like a group of animals" transported from one site to another (26). This reveals Ander's fear of being seen as a person of color and associated with the colored individuals. This also highlights the limited access to opportunities for people of color, who are often confined to low-skilled and low-wage jobs, such as janitorial or construction work, continuing occupational segregation and economic disparity. The gym Anders works at is described as "A gym that had been whites-only gym" (72) and the only dark person there before Anders turned was the cleaning guy. This practice of the society is informed by white supremacist ideology which is built on the belief in the essential superiority of the white race and the inferiority of other racial groups. This ideology depends on racist stereotypes to dehumanize and debase people of color while white supremacists often use these stereotypes to rationalize discriminatory practices and violence against racial minorities. At his workplace, Anders is forced to tolerate not only contemptuous comments but also violent remarks, with his boss callously remarking that "I would have killed myself" … "if it was me"

(35). Hence, the boss's comment suggesting that it is better to die than to live with the shame of having dark skin normalizes violence and disseminates self-hatred. This incident also exposes institutional racism, where discriminatory approaches and beliefs are rooted within the workplace culture, propagating systemic inequality. A similar instance can also be seen in the case of the darkening of Oona's mother, a traditional white woman and a firm believer in white supremacy. When Oona transitions, her mother pities her for losing her fair skin, implying that her beauty is tied to her whiteness, and it is the lighter skin that is valued and seen as a measure of beauty. Hamid highlights the mother's racist and colorist ideas: "Oona's mother knew this must be difficult for Oona, so difficult for her poor, once beautiful daughter, to be like that now, look like that now, to have everything taken from her" (129). Oona keeps watch for "those first few days after her mother turned dark, concerned that her mother could harm herself" (140). She was worried that her mother's racist ideology would lead her to harm herself due to the sudden change in her skin tone, which contradicted her deeply ingrained white supremacist beliefs.

Constituted racism and xenophobia can lead to militant violence against racial minorities, who are seen as threats to the dominant group's power. Extremist ideology plays an important role, as militant groups often follow doctrines that promote intolerance, hatred, and violence against perceived enemies, especially racial minorities. In many cases, these groups target marginalized people and promote a narrative of complaint and resentment. In this way, they develop a sense of shared identity and aim among their followers, which can be a powerful motivator for violence. Hamid depicts the scenes of violence in Anders's town as, "There were flareups of violence in the town, a brawl here, a shooting there" (62). The escalation from callous racist remarks to physical violence targeted at individuals of color demonstrates the rage of supremacists towards those they consider inferior. Hamid further describes the events of violence and the appearance of the perpetrators of violence as "militants had begun to appear on streets, pale-skinned militants dressed almost like soldiers in combat uniform" and "others dressed like hunters", causing chaos with impunity because "the police made no real effort to stop him" (62). This description shows a disturbing progression from verbal to physical aggression highlighting the dangerous consequences of unchecked racism. It also draws attention to institutional racism where law enforcement turns a blind eye towards racial violence and fails to intervene,

allowing the perpetrators to act with reckless passion. Despite militants bent on eradicating the people whose skin color changed and the law enforcement agencies overlooking the problem, the victims cannot get defensive or violent as it will aggravate the situation leading to further destruction. Anders feels like "It was essential not to be seen as a threat, for to be seen as a threat, as dark as he was, was to risk one day being obliterated" (67). Hence, to protect himself from the ongoing hostility, Anders thinks to appear as non-confrontational as possible because from a person of color, any attempt at self-defense, no matter how justified, will be perceived as a threat and subsequently met with brutal force. Anders knows the outcome of resistance because of the widespread dissemination of violent images on social media. He sees the "images of fire and beatings and throngs … the sounds were of shouts and roars and laughter and screams" (80). These scenes perpetuate a culture of fear, intimidating victims and discouraging them from resisting or speaking out against violence.

5.3 Counter Storytelling through Magical Realism in *The Last White Man*

Magical realism is a literary genre that combines realistic descriptions of everyday life with magical elements, presented ordinarily, therefore creating a distinctive narrative that makes the magical appear mundane while still retaining a realistic picture of the world. For postcolonial writers, in presenting their counterstories, magical realism has proved to be a facilitative literary device. Counterstories are alternate narratives that challenge and resist the dominant views spread by those in positions of power. Telling a counterstory as a trope of critical race theory debunks prejudiced opinions and myths about people of color and racial minorities. Hamid strives to achieve the same as he utilizes magical realism in *The Last White Man* to narrate Anders's experiences with marginalization, identity crisis, and racial violence due to supremacist ideologies such as racism and xenophobia. The reason behind the choice of magical realism to narrate the counterstory is that the merging of realistic descriptions of everyday life with magical elements can create narratives that capture the complexities, challenges, and triumphs of the experiences of people of color.

Hamid opens the novel, "One morning Anders, a white man woke up to find he had turned a deep and undeniable brown" (3). The shift from a white man to a brown-skinned individual is presented as a common event that takes place suddenly without any warning or explanation. This event can be viewed as a classic example of magical

realism, where the fantastic and inexplicable are depicted as ordinary, challenging the reader's views and understanding of reality. Hamid states, "With more people changing, so many it was almost to be expected when the next one did, it was commonplace, it seemed that half her online contacts had changed" (105). In this passage, the phenomenon of people changing is presented as a mundane and ordinary occurrence, which is a hallmark of magical realism.

The fact that it's "almost to be expected" and "commonplace" suggests that this transformation has become a normal part of everyday life. The use of the phrase "half her online contacts had changed" adds to the sense of ordinariness, implying that this transformation is not only widespread but also easily observable in one's daily online interactions. With the change in the color of the residents, the town feels to have a different aura. Hamid narrates the change, "The town was a different town now, a town in a different place, a different country, with all these dark people around, more dark people than white people, and it made Anders uneasy, even though he was dark too" (116). In terms of magical realism, this passage depicts a changed town space that is both familiar and strange. The town's demographics have transformed, with a sudden influx of "dark people" who are now more in number than the white population. Anders's "unease" in presence of a greater number of dark people highlights how racism and colorism are deeply rooted in societal norms and individual psyches. Moreover, the discomfort about the changed town and its demographics points to how whiteness is often prioritized and normalized, while people of color are marginalized and othered. Overall, using magical realist elements, this passage shows how the author narrates a counterstory by presenting a powerful criticism of racism and colorism and their impacts on the consciousness of colored individuals.

By having a white man change into a brown-skinned person, Hamid attempts to reverse the conventional power dynamics of racism. This reversal allows him to question the dominant white narrative and foreground the experiences of people of color in majority-white societies. Therefore, it can be argued that the author's decision to utilize magical realism to narrate an alternate reality from the perspective of people of color is an intended and effective narrative choice. Hamid presents Anders's initial reaction upon discovering his transformation from a white to a brown individual as that of fear and shock. Anders feels that "somebody else was in bed with him, male, darker, but this, terrifying though it was, was surely impossible, and he was reassured that the

other moved as he moved, was in fact not a separate person, but was just him" (3). Although it is normal to feel shaken upon discovering that one has changed color overnight, the emphasis on the presence of a "darker" individual and the resulting fear depicts how white people often perceive people of color as "other," separate and distinct from themselves. The protagonist's initial reaction of horror and disarray reflects this sense of otherness, but as he comes to realize that the dark-skinned male is, in fact, himself, the boundaries between self and other begin to blur.

After discovering he's alone in bed, he thinks of the color change to be a trick of the light as well, suggesting he's questioning the reality of his transformation. Hamid states this as, "the notion that he had changed color was a trick too, an optical illusion, or a mental artifact, born in a slippery halfway place between dreams and wakefulness" (3,4). In these lines, the protagonist is confronted with a surreal and disorienting feeling: a darker, male figure is in bed with him. However, as he tries to make sense of this appearance, he begins to question his own perception of reality. The state of his disbelief is shown as "he had reversed the camera, and he saw that the face looking back at him was not his at all" (4). In the context of magical realism, this statement suggests that the protagonist's transformation is not merely a physical change, rather, it's a complete alteration of his identity. The fact that he sees a face that is "not his at all" depicts detachment between his physical appearance and his sense of self. The camera, as a tool for capturing reality, is "reversed", suggesting that the protagonist's perception of reality has been overturned. This reversal of the camera can also be interpreted as a symbol of the protagonist's newfound ability to look at himself and the world from a different perspective. The explanation or justification for the protagonist's overnight color change is not provided in the narrative. This lack of explanation is typical of magical realism, where phenomena are presented without rationalization or justification. Utilizing magical realism, allows the author to explore the bleary lines between fantasy and reality. Rather than focusing on the scientific or rational aspects of the color change, the narrative emphasizes the emotional and psychological impact on the protagonist. This focus on the inner, subjective experience is a key view of magical realism and Hamid employs the aspect to narrate the counterstory effectively. Anders' boss ruthlessly suggests he should end his life due to the shame of having dark skin, revealing the toxic attitudes of society towards people with darker complexions.

People vary in their ability to cope with the abuse, therefore, persistent racism

can take a destructive toll on its victims. Tragically, Anders comes to know of one such individual who, unable to endure the escalating racism, yields to despair and takes his own life. Hamid describes this unfortunate event as "and the sum of it all was clear, in other words, that a white man had indeed shot a dark man, but also the dark man and the white man were the same" (48). The statement suggests that the boundaries between identity, race, and self are fluid and not fixed. The notion that the "dark man and the white man were the same" implies a merging of identities, which is a common theme in magical realist fiction. The white man who shoots the dark man is overcome with hatred and unacceptability toward the colored individual and is not able to live with the stereotypes associated with colored people. Upon seeing that this transformation from white to brown is permanent and irreversible, he prefers to die rather than continue to live as a colored person. This reveals the height of judgment and racism towards racial minorities. Overall, the statement is a vivid example of how magical realism can be used to look into complex social and philosophical issues and to urge readers to think critically about the nature of reality and identity.

> Oona had a feeling that her mother was right, not morally, but along a different dimension that her understanding of the situation was deeper than Oona's was, as though she has access to a mystical truth, a terrible mystical truth, a kind of conjuring that Oona did not believe in and yet that worked anyway, and it was as if all the ghosts were coming back, ghosts coming to each town and each house, ghosts coming to her mother, and compensating her for her loss, and others for their losses, but Oona did not feel compensated, she felt even more bereft. (Hamid 89)

In this passage, magical realism is used to convey the idea that the mother has access to a deeper, mystical understanding of the state of affairs, one that goes beyond moral or rational explanations. The use of phrases such as "mystical truth", "conjuring", and "ghosts" creates a sense of unfamiliarity and other worldliness, blurring the lines between natural and the supernatural. In magical realist terms, this passage can be seen as a commentary on how our understanding of the world is formed by our cultural, social, and personal experiences. The mother's mystical understanding is presented as a kind of intuitive knowledge that is not necessarily rational or logical, but rather a product of her own unique perspective and experiences. Hence, by choosing magical realist elements such as blurring the lines between reality and fantasy, and presenting

unexplained magical events loaded with ambiguity and uncertainty, the author narrates a counterstory while presenting a powerful criticism of racism and colorism and their impacts on the consciousness of colored individuals.

5.4 Challenging Permanence of Racism through Freedom from Human Condition in *The Last White Man*

Derrick Bell's book *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* concludes with a thought-provoking message. Bell asserts that racism is an inherent and lasting aspect of American society, bound to persist despite efforts to eradicate it. The book's final chapter narrates a powerful allegory, "The Space Traders", which supports Bell's central argument. Bell concludes that racism is so deeply rooted in American society that cannot be eradicated. He insists that the struggle for racial justice must continue, but that it must come with a realization of the permanence of racism. Hamid's views appear to differ from Bell's suggestions as he presents an optimistic stance towards peaceful coexistence.

Despite the ongoing riots and violence in the town due to racist agendas, Hamid still demonstrates the air of normality, hinting at the fact that peace can be sought out even in the most turbulent times. Afraid of being caught in the chaos, people avoid leaving their houses particularly at threat are those who have undergone the change from white to brown. In the same town that is raging with beatings and killings, Hamid shows that there are people, although apprehensive, who still manage to facilitate the ones bound to their homes. He states: "But the deliveries continued, and you could get a pizza or alcohol or medicine or drugs, or anything you might imagine, right there on the doorstep" (99). This passage offers a subtle but strong message of optimism, courage, and people coming together as a community. The deliveries of necessary and non-essential items to the doorsteps of the people suggest that even in times of turmoil and conflict, there can still be systems and structures in place that can provide a sense of normalcy and continuity while facilitating the individuals in distress. It shows the humans' ability to accommodate and persevere, even in the most challenging of circumstances. If, somehow, societies and communities can create such systems of care and resilience, human conditions such as racism can be uprooted. Moreover, the fact that people are still able to access basic necessities like medicine, as well as comfort commodities like pizza and alcohol, implies that there are still networks of care and

support that can function even in turbulent times. This also suggests that if resilient and compassionate, communities can find ways to support each other without prejudice, siding with victims or perpetrators of violence. The passage also hints that the rhythm of everyday life can be a potent antidote to the trauma and disorder resulting from racial violence.

Hamid's selected fiction highlights and criticizes the racist agendas as well as the hatred and violence that result from them but as the narrative progresses, he demonstrates the subsidence of the aggression and formation of a society that is ready to explore more humane options of coexistence. Therefore, as more and more people change, the white supremacists, as well as the people of color, both realize the inevitability of the situation. Hamid states the situation as

> With more people changing, so many it was almost to be expected when the next one did, it was commonplace, it seemed that half her online contacts had changed, and that there was less violence on the streets, less violence being reported, and one or two people she knew, the most daring among her acquaintances, were starting to go out again, to go for drives, seeing what was up. (105)

The reason behind the subsided violence can be the realization of the supremacists that the level of violence required to eliminate or destroy the people transforming into brown-skinned individuals is massive and if carried out, can ruin them as well. Hence, the reduced violence can be seen as the nativist groups rethinking their approach towards the colored individuals as they could not carry out violence that could wipe out such a large number of people. It can also be interpreted as if they are trying to free themselves of the guilt-ridden human condition and move to create a society that is liberated from the human condition. Another reason can be seen as the resilience and courage of the people changing who refuse to give up and continue to struggle with their newfound identities as well as battle with the stereotypes associated with them. In this way, Hamid challenges the permanence of racism through the changing attitudes of the supremacists as well as through the courage of the members of racial minorities, hence imparting hope and optimism in the readers.

Despite the destruction, the townspeople's determination remains undefeated as they shift their focus from despair to rebuilding and revitalizing their city. Mending

the city structures serves as a symbol of hope and can be a powerful way to improve a community as a unit and promote resilience. Hamid expresses this: "And the damage was repaired, and shattered glass was swept up and burn marks were plastered and painted over" (133). This passage offers a powerful symbol of hope and renewal in the aftermath of communal riots. The picture of damage being repaired, broken glass being cleaned, and burn marks being covered up and painted over suggests a community's determination to heal and move forward. The fact that the physical scars of violence are being actively acknowledged and erased points to a desire to leave the past behind and create a more peaceful future. According to Griffith's views, this can be seen as an active attempt of the citizens to liberate themselves from the human condition. Griffith states, "In a world fast going crazy from the effects of the human condition, this is the now desperately needed reconciling understanding that brings about a new world for humans FREE of the agony of the human condition. In short, this is the understanding that ends human suffering and unites the human race" (37). Despite the trauma and devastation caused by racial prejudice, the community is refusing to be defined by the past. Furthermore, the quoted passage from Hamid's text implies that the process of healing and moving forward is not just about physical healing but also about emotional and psychological repair. The act of rebuilding the city can be seen as a metaphor for the process of confronting and overcoming the emotional trauma caused by racism and discrimination. The community's steps towards healing psychological wounds that linger long after the physical damage has been repaired are also crucial as they stop the generational trauma from being passed on to the next generation.

Unlike Anders and Oona, who are born white and later transformed into brown-skinned individuals, their daughter is brown by birth. Oona's mother and the girl's grandmother, a white supremacist, tell the child about the glory of the days they were white, "of what they had really come from" (177). The girl, although fond of her grandmother, refuses to listen about the whiteness that, according to her grandmother, cannot be seen but is still a part of them. Hamid narrates the girl's disapproval, "She held her grandmother's hands, and said stop, that was all, just one word, stop, and it was not much, but it affected her grandmother deeply" (177). The girl saying "stop" to her grandmother stands for her putting a stop to the glorification of white culture and white supremacy, which perpetuates the toxic ideals of a society that stigmatizes and marginalizes people of color. The grandmother is deeply affected by the girl's actions,

as if she could see that the girl is embarrassed, not of herself but of her grandmother. In essence, the girl is asserting pride in her identity as being brown-skinned and refuses to accept and internalize the toxic messages of a society that seeks to erase and marginalize the existence of brown people. Hamid notes the grandmother's reaction: "She waited and waited until her grandmother finally shook her head and, somehow, somehow, smiled" (178). This interaction can be seen as a step towards healing the intergenerational trauma. The grandmother disapproves of whites who transformed into brown people, including Anders and Oona. Upon Oona's transformation, she thinks that her daughter has lost all her beauty, but her granddaughter's love and her words have helped her confront her own biases. The grandmother's smile indicates a willingness to learn and grow. This moment marks the beginning of a healing process that can help bridge the gap between generations. Hamid expresses the positive outcome of intergenerational healing as "Oona had thoroughly scrutinized her daughter for signs of her brother's woundedness, and of her own woundedness, and Oona had not readily found them" (179). Oona, looking for signs of trauma in her daughter, reveals a deep-seated fear that her daughter will inherit the family's traumatic experiences. By scrutinizing her daughter, Oona tries to reassure herself that her daughter is not plagued with fears. In addition, Hamid records Anders's interaction with his daughter: "He placed his brown hand on the side of her brown face, soothing her, his brown daughter, and miraculously she let him" (180). This shows that although Anders initially struggles in coming to terms with his brown self, he adores his brown daughter, indicating that racial biases can be overcome with the right mindset. This serves as a symbol of hope, hence challenging the permanence of racism.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This chapter outlines the primary results of the current study, emphasizing the widespread racism encountered by people of color and its severe psychological consequences for marginalized groups, while also illustrating how these findings respond to the research questions. Additionally, the chapter explores the contributions of this research to the field of race studies. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research directions in this area, providing a foundation for further exploration and discovery.

The thesis statement postulated in the first chapter of the present study asserts that dark-skinned people suffer atrocities at the hands of white supremacists and native militant groups who view the people of color as a threat to their sense of community and nation, causing them severe physical and mental trauma, an outcome that can be avoided only by moving past the racist ideologies and focusing on the compassion that brings the people together irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. The two literary texts selected to conduct the research and authenticate the proposed argument are Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2022). The theoretical framework of the present research is informed by the underpinnings presented in the field of critical race theory, magical realism, and freedom from the human condition.

6.1 Research Findings and Answers to the Research Questions

The first question of the present research asked how Hamid, the author of the selected texts, excoriates the racist agendas against brown people by employing the narrative technique of magic(al) realism in his fictional works. Magical realism as a literary genre combines realistic descriptions of everyday life with magical elements, presented ordinarily, therefore creating a distinctive narrative that makes the magical appear mundane while still maintaining a realistic picture of the world. For postcolonial writers, particularly diasporic authors, magical realism has proved to be a facilitative literary device in presenting their counterstories, the alternate narratives that challenge and resist the dominant negative views, spread by those in positions of power. To address this question, I analyzed instances from Hamid's *Exit West* and *The Last White*

Man, highlighting the prejudiced treatment of the characters for being people of color in white majority societies. Saeed and Nadia in *Exit West* are migrants who escape their war-ridden country through magical portals to seek refuge in the so-called lands of opportunities and protection but instead become victims of prejudice and racial violence. The Magical door taken by Saeed and Nadia to transport themselves out of their home country is described by Hamid as "The passage was like dying and like being born" (98), suggesting that passing through the magic doors is an experience that is both cataclysmal and creative. The phrase "like dying" implies a sense of destruction of one's old self or reality, whereas "like being born" implies a sense of rebirth or creation of a new self or reality. In addition, Hamid utilizes magical realism by presenting tools of surveillance as supernatural beings trying to overpower the victims like monsters. This highlights the trauma of the migrants who face the constant fear of being observed, scrutinized, and attacked. Moreover, these doors, in Hamid's narrative, are characterized by darkness and blackness the author states, "The agent gestured with his head to the blackness of the door" (97). This darkness and blackness can be strong symbols of ambiguity and uncertainty and, hence, can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of the obstacles that migrants might have to face. Hamid explains Nadia's passage through the door as "She was struck with its darkness, its opacity, the way it did not reveal what was on the other side" (98). It can also represent the fear of the unknown or unseen dangers that migrants may face.

Hamid strives to achieve the same as he utilizes magical realism in *The Last White Man* to narrate Anders's experiences with marginalization, identity crisis, and racial violence due to supremacist ideologies such as racism and xenophobia. By having a white man transform into a brown-skinned person, Hamid attempts to reverse the traditional power dynamics of racism. He opens the novel, "One morning Anders, a white man, woke up to find he had turned a deep and undeniable brown" (3). The change from a white man to a brown-skinned individual is presented as a common event that takes place suddenly without any prior warning or indication. This reversal allows him to question the dominant white standpoint and foreground the experiences of people of color in majority-white societies. Through the change in skin color, Hamid reveals the extent of racial prejudice people of color have to face on a daily basis. Anders "had reversed the camera, and he saw that the face looking back at him was not his at all" (4). This shows that his transformation is not merely a physical change, rather,

it's a complete alteration of his identity. Hence, the author's decision to utilize magical realism to narrate an alternate reality from the perspective of people of color is an intended and effective narrative choice.

The second question of the study asked how the selected works of Hamid contend the permanence of racism and present a way to transcend it. To answer this, I analyzed instances from the selected works that showed that despite the ongoing riots and violence in the town due to racist agendas, there is still an air of normality hinting at the fact that peace can be sought out even in the most turbulent times. In accordance with CRT, the selected works of Hamid effectively expose the prevalent racism in the majority white societies and foreground the struggles of racial minorities by presenting counter-narratives, but they deviate from Derrick Bell's argument that racism is a permanent and indestructible aspect of American society. Bell states that despite efforts towards progress and change, Black people may never achieve full equality in this country. Temporary victories will likely give way to adapted racial patterns that maintain white dominance (12). Hamid emphasizes the significance of having an optimistic view of the future, as pessimism can lead people to follow harmful ideologies that promote hate. The research validates Hamid's stance through Jeremy Griffith's propositions regarding the end of the human condition. He states that acknowledging the existence of the human condition and active efforts to eradicate it can make the inhabitants secure and effective managers of the world consequently, peace and happiness will prevail, materializing a dream "that humans throughout history have hardly dared to dream of can come into being" (511). This can be observed through the conclusion of the selected works as they both end in people trying to move past racial violence and creating communities that are centered more on compassion and understanding. Instances such as native volunteers delivering food and medicine to the migrants (135), a nativist boy administrating polio drop to the children and adults (136) in *Exit West,* and the government allowing the delivery services to deliver food and medicine to people's doorstep (99) and the repairing the damage done to the infrastructure of the town in an attempt to rebuild it (133) in *The Last White Man* imply that the hope resilience and compassion can help communities to come together even in the darkest of times. The results of the analysis show that Hamid's selected fiction highlights and criticizes the racist agendas as well as the hatred and violence that result from them, but as the narrative progresses, he demonstrates the subsidence of the

aggression and formation of a society that is ready to move towards more humane options of coexistence.

6.2 Viability of a Raceless Future

As outlined in the introduction of the study, this research employs a raceless paradigm, envisioning a future that subverts the dominant racial schema. This vision of a raceless society that affirms identity represents a profound reimagining of how individuals relate to one another across lines of difference. Rather than adopting a colorblind approach that ignores race and dismisses the realities of inequality, this framework engages directly with the social construction of race. It does not advocate for the erasure of culture, heritage, or personal identity, but seeks to dismantle the systems and ideologies that have historically linked race to power, privilege, and exclusion. At the heart of this vision is the recognition that race has historically functioned as a tool for categorization and domination, and thus requires a critical deconstruction that challenges its hierarchical implications without dismissing its reality. The realization of a society that simultaneously affirms individual identity and deconstructs race as a mechanism of marginalization may appear aspirational and is undeniably complex. It challenges both the persistence of systemic racism and the ideological foundations of race itself. Despite encouraging shifts toward racial equity and critical engagement with systemic injustice, several significant challenges remain in the pursuit of a raceless society. One major obstacle is resistance to change, particularly among those who benefit consciously or unconsciously from existing racial hierarchies. Individuals in positions of privilege may perceive efforts to dismantle race-based systems as a threat to their social or economic standing. A further challenge stems from the deeply rooted institutional racial practices that perpetuate long-standing systems of inequality, including education, law enforcement, healthcare, and housing, which have been historically shaped by racialized policies. The reform of these systems requires more than simple policy changes; it needs profound structural changes, otherwise institutions are likely to reproduce and reinforce the very hierarchies they claim to challenge.

The envisioned future presented in the selected texts is ambitious, but several key factors could facilitate its gradual realization. Increased awareness and education, driven by global access to information, critical race theory, and diverse curricula, are

helping people recognize systemic inequalities and understand race as a social construct. This shift in perspective may lead to a greater willingness to challenge existing power structures. Policy initiatives aimed at promoting diversity, addressing historical injustices, and reforming institutions to be more inclusive are laying the groundwork for more equitable systems. Modern social movements are also becoming more intersectional, acknowledging the relationship between race and other aspects of identity. Furthermore, the growing presence of diverse voices in fields like media, literature, and policymaking is helping to break down stereotypes, affirm identities, and foster empathy and understanding. By amplifying diverse perspectives, we can build a more inclusive and equitable society that values and celebrates the complexity of human experience. While these efforts are not endpoints, they are significant steps in the right direction.

Greater access to global information, inclusive education, and the influence of critical race theory have significantly shaped the perspectives of younger generations. They are increasingly adopting fluid identities and challenging rigid racial categories. In Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*, a poignant scene unfolds amidst the chaos, where a young nativist boy, barely out of school, selflessly administers polio drops to children and adults. His actions profoundly impact Saeed, who, despite initial reservations, finds himself drawn to the boy's sincerity. The narrative beautifully captures this moment, where it says, "there was earnestness in the boy, such empathy and good intent, that though some argued, none had the heart to refuse him" (*Exit West* 136). This scene highlights the power of compassion and kindness to transcend differences. This shift reflects a growing opposition to racial determinism, particularly in diverse, multicultural urban environments where cross-cultural interactions are more common. Younger generations are also more engaged in social justice movements, digital activism, and inclusive policy advocacy, actively working to dismantle systemic inequalities and promote equity across lines of race, gender, and class. Policy initiatives that promote diversity, address historical injustices, and reform institutions to be more inclusive can also help achieve a more equitable future. Governments play a crucial role in implementing and enforcing these policies to drive meaningful change. The social movements and increased public awareness have pushed governments to rethink and revise policies related to race to a certain extent. In response, governments are shifting towards more inclusive frameworks, recognizing the need to address the

multifaceted nature of systemic inequality. In Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*, the persistence of delivery services amid widespread unrest highlights a striking contrast. While the government fails to address racial violence, its choice not to disrupt essential services shows a degree of restraint. As Hamid writes, "But the deliveries continued, and you could get a pizza or alcohol or medicine or drugs, or anything you might imagine, right there on the doorstep" (*Last White Man* 99). This minimal civic stability could serve as a starting point for deeper reflection and potential reform. Moreover, the government's efforts to repair the physical damage caused by racial violence in *The Last White Man* can be interpreted as a symbolic gesture toward healing and reconstruction. Through phrases like "the damage was repaired, and shattered glass was swept up and burn marks were plastered and painted over" (*Last White Man* 133), the narrative suggests a desire to restore normalcy.

Hence, creating a raceless and more equitable society is possible, but it requires deliberate effort. It involves ongoing conversations about race, power, and history, while rejecting ideologies that either ignore or rigidly define racial differences. Such a future is viable if justice is prioritized and inclusive education is promoted to transform the concept of race from a source of division into a way of affirming identity and humanity without hierarchy. The goal is not to erase race but to redefine its meaning and function, intentionally building a society that values shared humanity and promotes justice for all.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

The current study has explored Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and *The Last White Man* (2020) from the perspective of race, racism, and racial violence. It has investigated these works from various dimensions, including the author's use of magical realism to present counterstories of the racialized individuals as well as his optimistic stance regarding the eradication of racism and the formation of more inclusive communities and societies centered on empathy and compassion. While conducting the research for this study, several relevant concepts from the selected area of study arose in my mind that can warrant further academic investigation and could be explored in future studies.

Both novels depict violent clashes between supremacists and people of color; hence, they can be effectively studied through the framework of reconciliation after conflicts. Reconciliation theory focuses on mending relationships damaged by conflict

or wrongdoing. It involves acknowledging the past, taking responsibility, and making amends to heal and rebuild trust between individuals, groups, and societies. This process aims to overcome trauma, resentment, and division, promoting understanding and positive relationships. *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* by Mohsin Hamid can be powerfully explored through the theory of reconciliation after conflict, particularly in terms of identity, displacement, and healing after trauma.

While the present study focuses on individual narrative analysis, the novels' thematic and structural similarities invite comparative inquiry, offering opportunities for insightful critique. A comparative study of the couples in *Exit West* and *The Last White Man* through the lens of Trauma Theory, Psychoanalysis, and Critical Race Theory (CRT) can offer valuable insights into the complexities of human relationships and the impact of societal forces on personal dynamics. It can examine how Saeed and Nadia, who flee a war-torn, economically devastated country, and Anders and Oona, who were previously the privileged members of a white-majority society, respond to trauma, racism, and violence due to their contrasting backgrounds. Through close textual analysis, the study can explore how factors like race, displacement, privilege, and identity formation shape each couple's psychological responses and interpersonal dynamics. By combining these literary and theoretical approaches, the research can uncover how Hamid's characters embody broader issues of racial anxiety, belonging, and resilience in a globalized world.

Furthermore, the current analysis is limited to two works by a single author and does not include broader comparative contexts. Future research could broaden the inquiry by examining other contemporary authors through a similar theoretical lens. Comparative studies involving writers from different cultural or geopolitical backgrounds could reveal diverse perspectives on human relations.

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