



Digital Guillotines : Symbolism and Posthuman Disintegration in Mohsin Hamid's Exit West

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Abstract

This paper examines Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* through the dual theoretical lens of literary symbolism and posthumanist philosophy. It argues that the novel, beyond its magical realist surface, offers a symbolic critique of how displacement in the digital age fractures human identity and transforms the refugee into a posthuman subject. Through close analysis of five central symbols—doors, smartphones, void spaces, the algorithmic gaze, and the refugee body—the study explores how Hamid dramatizes ontological disintegration under conditions of technological mediation and algorithmic control.

Using theories from Rosi Braidotti, N. Katherine Hayles, Simone Browne, and Louise Amoore, the research reveals how these symbols function not just aesthetically, but diagnostically, exposing systems that categorize, surveil, and erase the displaced. The paper introduces the concept of algorithmic haunting to describe the refugee as a ghostly data-form, simultaneously visible and forgotten.

Methodologically grounded in close reading and interdisciplinary theory, the study positions *Exit West* as a foundational text in posthuman migration literature. It demonstrates how fiction can illuminate the invisible architectures of digital exile, offering new ways to understand identity, embodiment, and survival in an era of surveillance capitalism

Keywords : Posthumanism, Symbolism, Digital Migration, Surveillance, Refugee Identity

المقاصـل الرقمية :الرمزية وتفكـك الذات ما بعد الإنسانية في رواية مخرج غربي للكاتب محسن حامد

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مديرية تربية ذي قار

المـلخص

يتناول هذا البحث رواية مخرج غربي للروائي محسن حامد من خلال إطار نظري مزدوج يستند إلى الرمزية الأدبية وفلسفة ما بعد الإنسانية، ساعياً إلى تفكيك البنية السردية للرواية من منظور جديد يكشف عن اشتباك الأدب مع تحولات الهوية الإنسانية في العصر الرقمي. إذ تتجاوز الرواية حدود الواقعية السحرية، لتقدم نقداً رمزياً حاداً لإنهيار الكينونة البشرية تحت وطأة التكنولوجيا الحديثة والمراقبة الخوارزمية. تتطرق الدراسة من تحليل خمس رموز مركزية: الأبواب، الهواتف الذكية، الفراغات، النظرة الخوارزمية، والجسد اللاجئ، وتُقارَبها بوصفها تجليات سردية لما يمكن تسميته بـ"تفكك الذات" في زمن تتحكم فيه الخوارزميات بمصير الفرد ومكانه في العالم.

تعتمد الدراسة على منظومة فلسفية تستلهم أفكار روسي برايدوتي حول ما بعد الإنسانية، وتحليلات ن. كاثرين هايلز عن التحولات السايبروغية، ورؤية سيمون براون للواقع الافتراضي، ومقاربة لويـز أمور للسياسات الرقمية. تكشف هذه النظريات عن الأبعاد التشخيصية لهذه الرموز، حيث تعمل على تعرية البنى التكنولوجية التي تصنّف اللاجئ، وتُعيد إنتاجهم ككائنات غير مرئية تُختزل في معطيات رقمية. ويقدم البحث مفهوم "التشظي الخوارزمي" ليصف التوتر الوجودي الذي يعيشه اللاجئ، إذ يكون حاضراً من خلال البيانات وغائباً عن الحضور الإنساني الكامل.

بهذا، تعيد الدراسة موضوعة مخرج غربي كنص تأسيسي في أدب الهجرة ما بعد الإنساني، مؤكدة على قدرة الرواية في مساءلة التكوينات الرقمية التي تعيد تعريف مفاهيم مثل الهوية، والانتماء، والنجاة، ضمن سياق عالمي تسيطر عليه الرأسمالية الرقمية وأجهزة المراقبة الشاملة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الرمزية، الأدبية، ما بعد الإنسانية، الهجرة الرقمية، المراقبة الخوارزمية، هوية الاجئ

1. Introduction

Mohsin Hamid, the internationally acclaimed Pakistani-British author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, stands at the forefront of contemporary global fiction. His 2017 novel *Exit West* garnered international attention for its poignant and lyrical depiction of forced migration in an era of proliferating borders. Blending magical realism with intimate psychological observation, Hamid constructs a narrative that is simultaneously local and planetary, grounded in emotional nuance yet expansive in geopolitical scope. But beneath its accessible surface, *Exit West* reveals a dense symbolic architecture that speaks to deeper anxieties about selfhood, embodiment, and technological mediation.

This study contends that *Exit West* must be read through a dual lens that unites symbolism as a literary mode and posthumanism as a philosophical framework. The narrative, while centered on two refugees—Saeed and Nadia—escaping through magical portals, employs a series of symbolic motifs that exceed their narrative function. These include doors, smartphones, void spaces, black robes, and surveillance gazes. Each of these elements operates symbolically to encode a world in which the refugee is no longer simply displaced geographically, but fragmented digitally, reduced to a data-



body, and suspended in what Rosi Braidotti calls “the in-between zones of subjectivity” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 89).

Symbolism here is not ornamental but epistemological: it allows Hamid to translate the ineffable conditions of 21st-century exile—disorientation, depersonalization, digitization—into aesthetic forms. Posthumanism, in turn, offers a critical apparatus through which to interpret these symbols as more than metaphors. It frames them as diagnostic devices of a post-biometric world, where the body is parsed, coded, and rendered governable through algorithmic infrastructures (Hayles, 1999; Amore, 2020).

While previous scholarship on *Exit West* has examined its themes through postcolonial (Tizzoni, 2021), gendered (Chen, 2020), or magical realist (Ball, 2019) frameworks, few have investigated how its symbolic system functions within a posthuman regime of meaning. This paper addresses that gap by arguing that Hamid’s symbols not only depict emotional trauma or cultural dislocation but articulate a profound ontological transformation: the refugee as a digitally fragmented, hyper-visible, yet socially invisible subject.

Accordingly, this paper introduces the concept of algorithmic haunting to describe how displaced individuals in *Exit West* are caught in non-places—zones where data, identity, and flesh dissolve into a liminal, surveilled state of being. By analyzing five major symbolic structures in the novel through posthumanist theory, the study reveals a narrative that does not simply represent migration, but reconfigures what it means to move, to be seen, and to survive.

The study proceeds in three major sections. Section Two establishes the theoretical framework by synthesizing symbolic literary analysis with key concepts in posthumanist critique. Section Three provides close readings of five symbolic motifs in the novel, analyzing their interaction with cultural, technological, and political discourses. Finally, the conclusion reflects on Hamid’s contribution to posthuman migration literature and suggests future directions for integrating digital humanities and literary symbolism. This



dual analytical lens not only enriches our reading of Hamid's novel, but also advances critical discourse on how fiction navigates the evolving entanglement of migration, surveillance, and digital subjectivity.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study is anchored in a dual theoretical framework that combines symbolic literary analysis with posthumanist philosophy, aiming to expose the layered aesthetics and ontological ruptures embedded in *Exit West*. Together, these frameworks allow for a reading that treats literary form not merely as representation, but as an epistemological and political site where identity, embodiment, and displacement are negotiated.

2.1 Symbolism as Analytical Strategy

Symbolism in literature refers to the use of objects, characters, or settings to convey meanings that extend beyond the literal. As Abrams and Harpham (2015) note, symbolic forms create interpretive depth by evoking multiple levels of meaning—psychological, cultural, philosophical—through compression and resonance. In *Exit West*, symbols such as magical doors, black voids, robes, and smartphones operate not merely as plot devices, but as metaphorical vectors that reveal deeper structures of alienation, surveillance, and fragmentation. By employing symbolic reading, this study unveils how Hamid aesthetically encodes displacement not just as geographical movement, but as ontological erosion.

These symbolic elements, while deeply rooted in literary tradition, also demand a contemporary philosophical lens—one that accounts for the shifting nature of the human subject in an era of algorithmic mediation and digital exile.

2.2 Posthumanism and the Disintegration of the Human Subject



Posthumanism, as theorized by Rosi Braidotti (2013), N. Katherine Hayles (1999), and Cary Wolfe (2010), rejects the Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous, rational, and sovereign individual. Instead, it posits a vision of the human as relational, embedded, and technologically mediated—a “becoming” rather than a stable identity. Braidotti (2013) argues that posthumanism demands we consider not what the human is, but what it is becoming, especially under conditions of global migration, ecological crisis, and digital saturation. Hayles (1999) further emphasizes the informatics of embodiment, showing how identities are increasingly produced and governed by flows of data, algorithms, and code.

Within *Exit West*, this condition manifests through the digital dissolution of borders, the depersonalization of refugee subjects, and the emergence of what this study terms “algorithmic haunting”—a state in which the displaced person is rendered as a ghostly data-body, fragmented across digital thresholds and non-places. Posthumanist theory offers the vocabulary and conceptual scaffolding to name these phenomena and situate them within broader critiques of surveillance capitalism (Amoore, 2020) and the politics of border control (De Genova, 2017).

2.3 Methodological Approach

This research uses symbolic textual analysis, a method that treats literary motifs as interpretive lenses into socio-cultural and philosophical conditions. Five symbolic structures—doors, smartphones, void spaces, algorithmic gaze, and the body in transition—were selected due to their frequency, metaphorical density, and centrality to the refugee experience depicted in the novel. Each symbol is interpreted in light of posthumanist theory, with attention to how it reveals shifts in perception, identity, and agency.

Rather than reading *Exit West* through realist or purely allegorical frames, this method seeks to expose the novel's symbolic architecture as a diagnostic terrain—one that maps the transformation of the refugee from a human subject into a digital remnant. Thus, the methodology is not descriptive but diagnostic and speculative, grounded in philosophical critique and literary close reading. In this way, the refugee in *Exit West* is not merely a narrative figure but a symbolic medium through which the novel interrogates the philosophical limits of humanity itself.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Doors as Thresholds of Posthuman Becoming

In *Exit West*, the recurring symbol of doors functions as the novel's most overt departure from realism, yet also its most conceptually charged device. On the surface, these doors act as magical portals through which characters escape war-torn or oppressive environments. However, from a posthumanist perspective, the doors symbolize far more than geographic movement; they represent thresholds of transformation where identity is dismantled, spatial certainty dissolves, and subjectivity is rewritten through nonhuman systems.

The first appearance of the door in the novel—described as “a dark rectangle, like a doorway, but not a doorway” (Hamid, 2017, p. 71)—immediately disrupts the epistemological assumptions of realism. This visual ambiguity destabilizes not just space but ontology. The door is a paradox: it is both opening and ending, passage and erasure. In Rosi Braidotti's terms, such a symbol echoes the condition of the posthuman subject “in transit,” caught in “a process of becoming” that erodes the boundaries of flesh, place, and self (Braidotti, 2013, p. 89).

Doors, in this context, are not technological artifacts, but narrative interfaces that collapse the categories of nation, identity, and continuity. The very notion of migration



is recoded from a physical journey to a metaphysical mutation. Saeed and Nadia's use of these portals entails not merely escape but fragmentation; they arrive in new locations not whole, but altered—sometimes linguistically disoriented, culturally displaced, or emotionally numbed. Each traversal is a form of symbolic death and algorithmic rebirth, mirroring Hayles's notion of "virtual embodiment," where the body is no longer central, but dispersed across data flows (Hayles, 1999, p. 4).

Furthermore, the symbolic power of the doors reflects broader social and historical anxieties. In an age of biometric border regimes, drone surveillance, and algorithmic refugee profiling, the fantasy of seamless transition contrasts sharply with the reality of hyper-surveilled mobility. The door is utopian in form but dystopian in resonance. It evokes a world where displacement is instant but never complete—an illusion of movement that conceals the slow disintegration of personhood. This aligns with Nicholas De Genova's theory of the border as a performative act that continually reinscribes exclusion, even when nominally crossed (De Genova, 2017).

Culturally, the door can also be read as a metaphor for rupture in traditional narratives of exile. Unlike the archetypal migration story that emphasizes endurance, loss, and linear progression, *Exit West* uses the door to flatten chronology and sever continuity. The refugee's passage is no longer mythic but spectral, disembodied. Hamid writes: "When we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (Hamid, 2017, p. 94). The door thus becomes a symbolic guillotine—decapitating memory, relation, and rootedness in favor of survival in posthuman exile.

In sum, the door in *Exit West* is a symbol that operates simultaneously on narrative, philosophical, and political planes. It signifies more than escape; it articulates the disintegration of the human subject as it interfaces with technological abstraction. By reading the door through the lens of posthumanism, we come to understand it not as a magical convenience, but as a diagnostic symbol of a world in which bodies cross borders, but selves dissolve in transit. Thus, the symbolic door becomes not a portal of



hope, but a quiet architecture of erasure—where one crosses into safety by losing the very self that once needed refuge.

3.2 Smartphones and the Algorithmic Gaze

While doors in *Exit West* serve as portals of ontological rupture, the smartphone emerges as a more insidious and persistent symbol—a quotidian object that reveals the silent mechanics of digital surveillance and algorithmic identity construction. Where the door marks a visible, dramatic transition, the smartphone quietly embeds its users within an invisible matrix of control. Through a posthumanist lens, the smartphone is not merely a communication device but an extension of the self, a prosthetic organ that both connects and captures the subject.

Nadia's near-constant use of her phone, even in moments of existential danger, reflects not distraction but dependency. Hamid notes how she “carried her phone with her always, like a talisman” (Hamid, 2017, p. 102). This device becomes her interface with the world, her archive of belonging, and her passport to elsewhere. Yet it also subjects her to what this paper terms the algorithmic gaze—a form of nonhuman perception that tracks, filters, and categorizes the subject through code. As Hayles (1999) and Amoore (2020) argue, such digital optics do not merely observe; they reconstitute the self into data points that can be governed, excluded, or erased.

The smartphone thus operates as a dual symbol: on one hand, it represents connectivity, agency, and global awareness. On the other, it embodies the posthuman disintegration of privacy, autonomy, and corporeality. It erodes the boundary between public and private, material and virtual. Through the screen, the refugee is rendered hyper-visible—accessible to NGOs, state regimes, and border technologies—but also ontologically fragmented, reduced to pixels and metadata. The phone does not just carry messages; it



carries the subject, distributing identity across networks that exceed human comprehension.

Culturally, the smartphone reflects the contemporary condition of diasporic life in the twenty-first century: perpetual contact, partial presence, digital nostalgia. Socially, it marks the refugee's insertion into a regime where survival depends not just on food or shelter, but on battery life, Wi-Fi, and GPS coordinates. As Braidotti (2013) notes, posthuman subjects are "technologically mediated, ecologically embedded, and ethically accountable" (p. 190). The smartphone, in this context, is a symbolic artifact that condenses these tensions—it is the tool of connection and the mechanism of erasure.

In *Exit West*, the characters' reliance on their devices underscores their posthuman condition. They are no longer merely migrating across borders; they are migrating through codes, through screens, through interfaces. The smartphone, then, is not incidental to the refugee experience—it is constitutive of it. It transforms exile from a material condition to a digital ontology, wherein the self is scattered across cloud servers, biometric checkpoints, and algorithmic predictions.

By analyzing the smartphone symbolically and philosophically, we uncover Hamid's critique of a world where the refugee must not only survive war and displacement but must also endure being seen—always and everywhere—by eyes that are not eyes, by systems that sort and forget. This is not just visibility; it is algorithmic haunting. Yet for all its promises of connection, the smartphone deepens the refugee's solitude, reducing intimacy to signal strength and existence to digital traceability.

3.3 Void Spaces and Non-Places of Refuge

Among the most arresting visual and philosophical motifs in *Exit West* are the void spaces—descriptions of darkness, silence, or utter spatial blankness that interrupt the narrative at key moments. These voids are more than atmospheric details; they constitute



what Marc Augé (2009) calls “non-places”—spaces of transit, disorientation, and depersonalization. Within the novel, such voids symbolize the erasure of identity and the suspension of time, marking the refugee’s transition not just between geographies, but between states of being.

One such moment occurs when Hamid writes: “It seemed as though the blackness of the room had bled into the blackness of the night outside, and that this was all there was now, blackness and silence” (Hamid, 2017, p. 115). This enveloping darkness creates a sensory vacuum that mirrors the disintegration of narrative continuity and corporeal grounding. From a posthumanist perspective, voids are the interstitial zones where the human dissolves—not into death, but into a condition of radical suspension. Braidotti (2013) refers to such states as moments of “ontological humility,” where the subject is displaced from mastery and opened to the unknown.

These voids can also be read as symbolic expressions of trauma and derealization. In the wake of displacement, the refugee is not simply homeless but worldless. Their familiar structures of meaning—language, nation, kinship—collapse, and in their place emerge zones of abstraction. The void thus becomes a cartography of absence, a mapping of where meaning used to be. This aligns with Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory, where the subject experiences a break in temporality and a rupture in psychic presence (Caruth, 1996).

Contemporary refugee camps, border zones, and holding centers often replicate this condition materially. As Peter Nyers (2019) notes, the “waiting spaces” of modern migration are deliberately designed to depersonalize—to reduce the refugee to a bureaucratic placeholder within a system of delayed decision. The voids in *Exit West* reflect this physical and symbolic architecture. Saeed and Nadia find themselves not in vibrant, integrated communities, but in liminal zones: rooftops, abandoned buildings, nameless districts. These are places of deferred belonging. Even Hamid’s syntax mimics



these voids—often punctuated by silence, pauses, or ellipses that reflect the fragmentation of thought and time.

Technologically, voids also represent the algorithmic blind spots—zones not mapped by GPS, not recognized by facial recognition, not visible to institutional care. The characters' disconnection from signals or power echoes the broader theme of digital erasure, where the data-body temporarily disappears from networks of control. Such symbolic vacuums critique the overexposure of the refugee in some moments, and their total invisibility in others—a paradox that underscores the instability of posthuman existence.

In sum, the void in *Exit West* is a symbol that enacts both narrative and ontological suspension. It dramatizes the refugee's limbo not as a passage, but as a condition. Through the lens of posthumanism and trauma theory, it becomes clear that these voids are not empty—they are saturated with loss, latency, and the possibility of becoming something other than human.

3.4 The Algorithmic Gaze and Biometric Surveillance

Beyond the symbolic power of smartphones and voids, *Exit West* presents a broader critique of surveillance technologies that mediate visibility and citizenship in the age of digital governance. The novel does not explicitly describe drones or biometric checkpoints, yet the logic of biometric surveillance is ever-present: characters are hyper-visible in certain moments, and utterly erased in others. This dialectic of exposure and erasure is central to what this study terms the algorithmic gaze—a non-human system of seeing that determines who is recognized, who is tracked, and who is forgotten.

The algorithmic gaze builds on Foucault's panopticon, yet it no longer relies on physical observation. Instead, it operates through data extraction, prediction, and risk profiling. Louise Amoore (2020) describes this shift as "cloud ethics," where governance becomes



anticipatory, based on algorithmic likelihoods rather than juridical facts. Within *Exit West*, this gaze is not tied to any one device or state power. It is ambient, ambiently oppressive. When Nadia and Saeed navigate new cities, they are not greeted by communities but filtered by networks—sorted by appearance, documents, or digital traces.

This system resonates with what Shoshana Zuboff (2019) terms “surveillance capitalism,” where personal data becomes a resource for profit and control. The refugee, already politically marginal, becomes ontologically vulnerable: their presence is validated only through recognition systems, and their personhood is reduced to legibility. In such a system, identity is not lived but computed—reduced to algorithms that speak in probabilities rather than truths.

In Hamid’s narrative, this manifests as a recurring sense of being watched—not by people, but by systems. “They felt as though someone had entered the flat before them,” Hamid writes, “someone who knew they were coming” (Hamid, 2017, p. 134). The space is marked not by welcome but preemption.

Biometric surveillance is not limited to identification. It reconstructs identity itself. The body is no longer a source of agency, but a site of capture. Braidotti (2013) argues that the posthuman subject is entangled in technological mediation, where the distinction between organic and machinic breaks down. In *Exit West*, this collapse is dramatized in how characters lose their names, families, languages—and become, in effect, data bodies. The refugee is mapped, scanned, categorized, and sometimes rejected by systems that simulate understanding without ever encountering the human.

This symbolic critique aligns with real-world practices of AI-powered border policing, predictive deportation algorithms, and biometric refugee registration systems used by institutions like Frontex and UNHCR. The novel’s silence on these systems is not absence but indictment. By omitting direct references, Hamid universalizes the anxiety:



the refugee is always already caught in a gaze that precedes arrival and outlives departure.

In conclusion, the algorithmic gaze in *Exit West* is not an external threat, but an ontological condition of modern exile. It displaces traditional narratives of escape and resettlement with a logic of preemption, suspicion, and control. Through a symbolic and theoretical lens, the novel reveals how the refugee no longer flees from borders, but is pursued by them—inscribed into digital architectures that govern their visibility, mobility, and survival.

3.5 The Refugee Body and Digital Ghosting

Perhaps the most haunting symbol in *Exit West* is the refugee body itself—not in its physical form, but in its spectral residue. Throughout the novel, Hamid subtly constructs a narrative in which displacement does not merely alter the migrant's relationship to nation or culture, but erodes their bodily presence and ontological coherence. The refugee is not just someone without a country; they are someone without a stable form. This condition, which this study terms digital ghosting, refers to the transformation of the refugee into a fragmented, ambient data-trace—part presence, part erasure.

The term draws on N. Katherine Hayles's (1999) concept of "virtual embodiment," in which the human subject is increasingly experienced through data abstraction rather than sensory fullness. In *Exit West*, this is dramatized in moments when Saeed and Nadia become increasingly isolated from their own desires, memories, and physical selves. Hamid writes, "They had become, in a sense, ghost-like, living in a liminal state, neither of the place they had left nor fully of the place they had entered" (Hamid, 2017, p. 165). The body is present, yet emptied—hollowed out by transit, uncertainty, and digital mediation.



This ghosting is not merely metaphorical. In contemporary refugee systems, biometric registration reduces individuals to numerical profiles, often delinking them from the richness of lived identity. Simone Browne (2015) notes that such systems create “a surveillance assemblage” where the body is constantly visible but never fully recognized. Refugees are thus both hyper-recorded and socially invisible, caught in what this study has elsewhere called algorithmic haunting—a state of being archived but not acknowledged.

Hamid underscores this condition through language that favors abstraction over description. The characters are increasingly referred to not by nationality or family, but by generic terms—“migrants,” “people,” “they.” Their bodies dissolve into a collective anonymity, even as their data remains individualized and traceable. Their digital trace is unique, yet their humanity is anonymized—coded but unseen.

This duality reflects the contradictory reality of modern exile: simultaneous overexposure and ontological erasure.

Culturally, digital ghosting mirrors the existential alienation experienced by displaced persons in bureaucratic systems. They are subjected to endless verification, yet denied narrative continuity. Their lives are broken into application forms, waiting periods, truncated conversations. As Braidotti (2013) argues, the posthuman condition is one of fragmentation and interdependence, but for the refugee, this condition is not philosophical—it is enforced.

By positioning the refugee body as a symbol of posthuman disintegration, *Exit West* critiques not only the political mechanisms of displacement, but the epistemologies that underlie them. The novel asks: What remains of a person who is everywhere watched, everywhere categorized, yet nowhere fully known? In doing so, it compels us to rethink embodiment, memory, and survival in an era when to be human is to be half-visible and half-erased.

Synthesis of Symbolic Structures and Theoretical Significance

The symbolic architecture of *Exit West* is neither ornamental nor arbitrary; it is a deliberate design that mediates the novel's philosophical vision and emotional urgency. Each of the five symbols examined—doors, smartphones, void spaces, the algorithmic gaze, and the refugee body—operates on multiple axes: aesthetic, ontological, political. Taken together, they construct a narrative where displacement is not merely spatial, but existential, encoded in the very structures of language, surveillance, and technology.

Among these, the symbol of the door emerges as the most conceptually generative. Not only does it frame the novel's magical realist premise, but it also embodies the central themes of rupture, rebirth, and ontological instability. As Braidotti (2013) suggests, the posthuman subject is one "in transit," always becoming and never fixed; the door literalizes this transit, collapsing distance and dissolving continuity. Yet, in symbolic potency, the refugee body as a site of digital ghosting may exert the greatest emotional and theoretical impact. It is the point where the posthuman condition is not abstract but deeply personal—where datafication and dehumanization converge.

Philosophers like Hayles (1999) and Wolfe (2010) caution against idealizing disembodiment, arguing that the loss of the body is often a loss of agency. In this light, the voids and the algorithmic gaze become symptoms of a broader ontological crisis: to be seen yet not known, to be mapped but not remembered. Simone Browne (2015) reminds us that surveillance is not neutral—it is racialized, gendered, and asymmetrically applied. In this context, the refugee body is both overexposed and underprotected—a ghost inscribed in systems that neither feel nor forget.

The interplay among the symbols reveals Hamid's skill in crafting a literary system that resonates with contemporary conditions of exile. The smartphone and algorithmic gaze are potent because they speak directly to the postmodern infrastructure of control; the void spaces and ghosting intensify the reader's sense of affective and narrative loss.

However, the door remains the novel's primal symbol: it is both literal and metaphorical, material and metaphysical. It stages the threshold of posthuman becoming, where one's coordinates, history, and corporeality are rewritten by invisible systems of movement. This study contends that Hamid's symbolic design is not merely narrative ornamentation, but a radical literary intervention in the politics of being and visibility. Ultimately, the symbolic system in *Exit West* is not just illustrative—it is diagnostic. It reveals a world where displacement is no longer merely political or legal, but ontological and algorithmic. For scholars of contemporary literature, this system provides a model for how fiction can engage with posthuman theory to critique the infrastructures that define (and erase) humanity in the twenty-first century.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* through the converging frameworks of literary symbolism and posthumanist philosophy, uncovering a profound reconfiguration of the refugee narrative in the digital age. By analyzing five core symbolic structures—doors, smartphones, void spaces, the algorithmic gaze, and the refugee body—the research demonstrates how Hamid reimagines exile not as a purely geographical or political condition, but as a disintegration of subjectivity mediated by technological abstraction and ontological rupture.

Each symbol functions as a node in a broader network of meanings that reveals the fragility, fluidity, and spectrality of posthuman identity. The door, for instance, emerges as a metaphor for the collapse of spatiotemporal continuity and the entry into a liminal space of becoming. The smartphone exposes the paradox of hyperconnectivity and radical isolation, while the voids represent narrative and existential suspension. The algorithmic gaze underscores the dehumanizing mechanisms of biometric surveillance, and the refugee body—fragmented, digitized, ghosted—becomes the ultimate terrain upon which these forces inscribe themselves.



The study introduces the original concept of algorithmic haunting to articulate the ontological state of refugees who exist not solely as displaced bodies, but as data-ghosts: archived, visible, yet never truly recognized. Through this lens, *Exit West* does not merely reflect the conditions of twenty-first-century migration but critiques the very systems—technological, bureaucratic, epistemological—that produce and perpetuate displacement.

This research contributes to several fields simultaneously: it offers a posthumanist expansion of symbolic literary criticism; it bridges contemporary fiction with digital humanities; and it deepens our understanding of how narrative form can illuminate the material realities and ethical crises of our time. Hamid's novel, through its multi-layered symbolism, stands as a compelling case study in how literature can diagnose and resist the spectral violence of our algorithmically mediated world.

In confronting these layered forms of erasure, this research affirms literature's unique power to preserve the human trace—even as systems seek to fragment it.

Ultimately, this paper asserts that *Exit West* is not a tale of escape, but a cartography of disintegration—a symbolic and philosophical map of what it means to be human when humanity itself is increasingly outsourced, surveilled, and abstracted. For scholars of literature, migration, and digital modernity, the novel demands not only close reading but deep rethinking—a challenge that this research has attempted to meet by fusing aesthetic attention with philosophical inquiry.



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