



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 05 No. 02. April-June 2026. Page# 2821-2845

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

<https://doi.org/>



Conflict, Trauma, and Counter-Hegemonic Discourse in Pakistani War Literature: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* through Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

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ABSTRACT

Conflict and its traumatic consequences are issues of world literature in the post-modern era but the discursive processes of constructing, naturalizing and contesting these processes in Pakistani anglophone fiction are also under examined in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This study argues that Exit West (2017) by Mohsin Hamid is an intervention in the discursive production and naturalization of forced migration and wartime trauma in global political discourse, using the three-dimensional CDA framework of text, discursive practice, and social practice developed by Norman Fairclough. The study used a qualitative methodology. Using purposive sampling a total of 35 textual extracts is chosen. The study deals with the theme of war, vulnerability of the body, and the theme of grief at Fairclough's micro-level text dimension. At the meso-level discursive practice dimension, it keeps pertinent focus on the intertextuality, genre hybridity, magical realism and polyphonic global vignette structure of the novel to generate and propagate counter-discourses of human refugeeism. At the macro-level social practice dimension, it positions these strategies within the postcolonial Pakistani politics and neoliberal border regimes and Foucauldian biopolitical power formations. Through analysis this study shows that the novel is an act of affect normalization, an intentional attempt not to aestheticize violence, and the reader is made into a co-producer of ethical outrage. The subsequent discoveries reveal three discursive formations of xenophobic nativism, panoptic drone surveillance, gendered semiotic resistance and ecocritical trauma, which are seen to interweave across all three dimensions of Fairclough. The study also offers a replicable methodological model for literary CDA in realist postcolonial fiction.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough Three-Dimensional Model, Exit West, War Trauma, Pakistani Literature, Forced Displacement, Postcolonial Discourse, Magical Realism, Refugee Narratives, Affect Normalization*

1.Introduction

Exit West (2017) by Mohsin Hamid is a unique novel that stands at the nexus of Pakistani anglophone fiction and world literature on refugees. The novel raises questions about the discursive forms through which war, exile, and trauma are fabricated and made normal in the mainstream political and media discourse that has been unfolding in the midst of rising displacement in South Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa, through strategic anonymity, magical realism, and polyphonic narrative architecture. Unlike other Pakistani war novels that are rooted in some period of historical specificity, such as the Partition of 1947, the Liberation War of 1971 or military campaigns after 9/11, Hamid does not allow temporal and geographical fixity, thus producing a text that speaks to Pakistan's lived experience of proxy-war militancy while at the same time asserting its structural universality within the neoliberal world-system (Rashid et al., 2025; Mumtaz & Kamran, 2025).

In terms of formal and thematic richness, the novel has already attracted scholars' attention due to the multiple layers of postcolonial politics that the novel explores (Alkhalaf, 2024; Afzal et al., 2025), the magical realism employed in the novel (Khalil et al., 2025; Jamari et al., 2025), the spatial politics (Shah, 2025; Mumtaz & Kamran, 2025), the trauma configurations (Khan & Ramzan, n.d.; Liaqat, 2022), and the gender discourse (Zara & Tahseem, 2023; Huma et al., 2023). CDA have been used directly on the novel in two studies: Masroor et al. (2024) and Anwar et al. (n.d.). As the literature survey reveals, however, no study has used Fairclough's full three-dimensional model systematically over a range of thematic areas in the novel's war and trauma discourse, using full tabular analysis based on evidence directly from the text.

1.1 Problem Statement

War literature is an under theorized field in the theoretical discussion of literature in Pakistan. Though there has been a significant amount of CDA scholarship in South Asian Partition fiction, in post-9/11 American literature, and in the writing of the Arab Spring, the discursive mechanisms that shape the experience of armed conflict and its psychological effects in contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction are under-investigated. As the most internationally visible Pakistan war novel of the twenty first century, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, translated into more than thirty languages and directly confronting the global refugee crisis, Exit West is the most significant place in which this neglect needs to be corrected.

In the scholarship on Exit West, two issues are found. First, there is a widespread practice in the existing CDA-informed studies of using Fairclough's framework selectively, often only to analyze the displacement discourse, but not to analyze the war lexis of the novel, its trauma syntax or its counter-hegemonic narrative devices. Secondly, a variety of disciplines has fragmentally developed the scholarship trauma theory, post-colonial studies, ecocriticism, gender studies, spatial politics and its findings are not connected. No single work has applied the three-dimensional model Fairclough has developed for his analysis of discourse to the entire process of the novel's discursive construction of Warscapes, wound, and word.

This study aims to solve these problems by systematically and comprehensively applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to Exit West, which is grounded in 35 direct textual extracts set out in three analytical tables, and the first full-length literary CDA of the war and trauma discourse of Exit West.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to four domains that overlap. The study extends literary CDA by proposing the three-dimensional model of Fairclough (1992, 2001), which was developed mainly for non-literary discourse analysis, to be operationalized for the magical realist novel in which the social practice domain has to be interpreted both with respect to the political allegory and the sociological context. This methodological process can be extended to postcolonial and diaspora fiction in general. The study in this study combines the fragmented scholarship by incorporating the theories of trauma (Hartman, 2003; Kienzler, 2008; Visser, 2014), postcolonial (Alkhalaf, 2024; Rashid et al., 2025), spatial politics (Mumtaz & Kamran, 2025; Shah, 2025) and gender (Zara & Tahseem, 2023) in a single unified analytical framework. A study places *Exit West* in the context of Pakistani war literature and South Asian conflict fiction, highlighting the novel's legacy and its impacts on the discursive tradition with which it comes into contact, including the treatment of the trauma of partition, sectarian violence, and the psychic effects of forced migration (Ali et al., 2025; O'Brien, 2021). In a time when the international refugee crisis is still producing millions of refugees to be displaced annually, the study illustrates the literary activities of a study that does critical work on the culture: it builds empathy, challenges the de-humanizing official narratives, and envisions in the novel's fifty-year temporal leap alternative futures in which one can live.

1.3 Research Questions

This study involves four research questions:

1. How does the micro-level linguistic texture of *Exit West*, its lexical choices, transitivity patterns, modality, metaphor, and syntax construct the discursive representation of armed conflict and bodily trauma?
2. How do the novel's discursive practices its intertextuality, genre hybridity, narrative voice, and modes of producing and consuming refugee discourse position the text in relation to hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses of forced migration?
3. How do the macro-level social practices inscribed in the novel postcolonial, neoliberal, patriarchal, and biopolitical power formations determine and constrain the discursive construction of conflict, trauma, and displacement?
4. What constitutes the research gap in existing CDA informed scholarship on *Exit West*, and how does a systematic application of Fairclough's complete three-dimensional model address that gap?

2. Literature Review

In the last few years, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been utilized in the field of literature in various ways as an analytical technique to reveal the ideological and power-invoked nature of language in literary, political and media texts, but there is still a limited application of this approach in Pakistani war literature and in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) in particular.

The foundational applicability of Fairclough's three-dimensional model to political discourse has been demonstrated across a range of high-stakes communicative contexts: Ashraf et al. (2024) employ all three Fairclough dimensions to analyze power, ideology, and discourse in the 2024 US presidential debate, confirming that the model's simultaneous attention to textual, discursive, and social practice levels is uniquely capable of exposing how language constructs political authority; Parveen et al. (2025) extend this application to Trump's 2025 inaugural address, demonstrating how emotionally charged lexis, intertextual allusion, and nationalist populism interact across the model's three dimensions to produce a discourse of national renewal and exclusion; Ashraf et al. (2025) apply Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis alongside CDA to the Trump, Zelenskyy, Vance Oval Office exchange, revealing how deictic framing, war

metaphors, and moral evaluation are deployed to construct hierarchies of sovereignty and dependence.

Younis and Khan (2026) apply Fairclough's text-level dimension to global media coverage of the 2025 India–Pakistan air clash, demonstrating how lexical framing, passive constructions, modality, and hedging produce asymmetric representations of military agency and legitimacy in ten major news outlets; and Maqsood et al. (2026) analyze wartime disinformation in Indian television journalism during the same conflict using Fairclough's social practice dimension alongside Wardle and Derakhshan's Information Disorder Framework and Tandoc et al.'s Fake News Typology, finding that 99% of war-related content constituted fabrication, manipulation, or propaganda a finding that establishes how institutional media can function as an instrument of state ideology rather than public information. In the context of Exit West scholarship, there have been some studies that have introduced CDA, but are incomplete: Masroor et al. (2024) apply Fairclough's interpretive framework on the novel's displacement discourse and conclude that important traumatic discourses are those of xenophobia and nativism, and Hamid's textual fabric is pervaded by covertly woven power dynamics; Anwar et al. (n.d.) apply CDA in combination with thematic analysis, finding that the novel disrupts the hegemonic refugee discourse through figurative wordplay, transnational scenes and sympathetic stories; and Huma et al. (2023) apply Halliday's transitivity model along with CDA and conclude that the most dominant circumstantial choice in the novel is that of circumstance of location (73%), which confirms the primary discursive concern of the novel is on spatial displacement.

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and Literary Texts

Norman Fairclough's 3D model of CDA is the conceptualization of discourse as a text (the linguistic object), as a discursive practice (process of production, distribution, and consumption), and as a social practice (as a part of a larger social practice of ideological and cultural reproduction). Although Fairclough has written this framework mainly for the analysis of political, media and institutional discourse, its use has been on the increase in the field of literary analysis, as in postcolonial literary studies, the interplay between language, power and ideology is most clearly visible. To date, there have been two studies that have applied CDA directly to Exit West. Using Fairclough's interpretative framework, Masroor et al. (2024) analyze the novel's displacement discourse and determine how the power relations are 'covertly woven' into the textual fabric of Hamid and conclude that xenophobic and nativist discourses are the key traumatic discourses. Combining Fairclough (2013) and thematics, Anwar et al. (n.d.) identify the narrative of the novel as a disruption to hegemonic refugee discourse by means of 'figurative wordplay, transnational scenes and sympathetic stories. Similarly, Halliday's model of transitivity and CDA reveal that spatial displacement is the main discursive concern of the text with 73% of circumstantial choices, as indicated by Huma et al. (2023). None of these research finds, however, systematically uses the three dimensions of Fairclough, nor systematically examines the novel's war lexis, trauma syntax or counter-hegemonic structural devices as in a tabular analysis.

2.2 Trauma Theory and Pakistani War Literature

Hartman (2003) placed trauma theory at the crossroads of semiology, it has been established since then that trauma theory has been the basis for the strange signals that emerge from texts, such as disruptions, silences, repetitions, and displacements, which are textual. Berger (1997) provides a historical account of the concept of latency from Freud, which refers to the delayed emergence of traumatic memory, and which is coded thematically and formally in Hamid's war literature. Of relevance in the context of Exit West's notion of trauma within distinctly South Asian registers is Kienzler's (2008) warning about the applicability of western

PTSD models in non-Western contexts. The depoliticizing tendencies of dominant trauma theory must be opposed in postcolonial literary studies, as Hamid's novel does discursively (Visser, 2014). Similarly, Caruth's unclaimed experience is introduced by Khan and Ramzan (n.d.) to *Exit West*, making the magical gates of the novel a literalization of trauma. In a similar manner, *Exit West* is a literalization of trauma as Khan and Ramzan (n.d.) bring Caruth's unclaimed experience to the novel. Liaqat (2022) offers a poetics of migration trauma analysis of the novel. In the article titled "Double Wounds of War Trauma known and unknown injury" Ahmad et al. (2023) tackles the double trauma of war, relevant to the migrant fiction, known and unknown injury. Roy's book *War Narrative: From heroic Tradition to Modernist Fiction* (2026) explores the evolution of the war narrative from heroic tradition to modernist fiction. Trauma and memory in South Asian Partition literature is explored by Ali et al. (2025). Together, these studies solidify trauma theory as important to the reading of *Exit West*, and none of them bring trauma theory into a comprehensive CDA approach to the whole novel text.

2.3 Postcolonial and Spatial Discourse

As places of exclusion and control, *Exit West* is an intersection of postcolonial, Marxist and neoliberal theoretical concerns, as identified by Mumtaz + Kamran (2025). The vignettes in the novel extend this and serve as an artistic critique of the production of migration and marginalization under neoliberal capitalism, as described by Shah (2025). Using Foucault's disciplinary power, Qureshi and Liaqat (2025) illustrate the regulation of the migrant body, its surveillance, and its precarity. Malik et al. (2022) read the book *Exit West* in a postcolonial perspective and Afzal et al. (2025) employ the theory of hybridity by Bhabha to compare *Exit West* with *Gurnah's by the Sea*. Abbas and Iqbal (2025) study about transnational identity creation. Alkhalaf (2024) cites Said's *Orientalism* to support his claim that the novel challenges the negative image of Muslim refugees in the orientalist discourse. Rashid et al. (2025) situate the novel in the non-Western post-9/11 narrative which serves as the counternarrative to Western narrative of war against terror.

2.4 Narrative, Genre, and Discourse

Khalil et al. (2025) discuss the novel's magical realism in the context of political allegory. It is read through postmodern critique of nativism as per Jamari et al. (2025) For Iqbal et al. (n.d.) language is the main arena for identity reconstruction. In an analysis of dialogic failure as a figure for the displaced lifeworld, Waheed and Ahmed (2024) focus on the phenomenon of failure. Waheed and Ahmed (2024) examine failure as a figure for the displaced lifeworld. Freudian denial is a defense mechanism that Hamza et al. (2024) use. Hussain and Khan (2024) discuss the social and psychological aspects of migration. In her book *Gazazyan* (2023), the humanization of the refugee is a key moral endeavor of the novel. The study of diasporic representation is discourse-based conducted by Zara and Tahseem (2023). A study of war memory and literary witnessing is done by Ullah (2020). Tahir and Rabbani (2024) use ecocriticism for discussing displacement and the environment in the novel.

2.5 Research Gap

The review above shows that there are three specific areas in the current scholarship that are missing. Both studies directly CDA-based are selective in their use of Fairclough, with one dealing with the discourse of displacement and the other with the discourse of migration. None does all three aspects of Fairclough at once and none attempts a tabular linguistic analysis of war discourse, traumatic discourse, and counter-hegemonic narrative devices as interrelated analytical domains. The scholarship is fragmented within the discipline clusters of trauma theory, postcolonial studies, ecocriticism, spatial politics, gender studies and so on, and is not

linked to each other. None of these has integrated them together into a comprehensive analysis of the novel. Current research tends to be on specific events or themes. No study examines the discursive configuration of war and trauma over the entire discursive trajectory of the novel from the liminal pre-war state of the unnamed city to militancy and escape, to Mykonos and London, and then to the fifty-year reunion as a complete and coherent formation. All three gaps are filled by the systematic application of the entire three-dimensional model of Fairclough to 35 extracts of text from throughout the novel, systematically arranged in three thematic tables and interpreted in dialogue with the full range of relevant secondary literature.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA Model

Fairclough's tripartite model of discourse is a model that conceptualizes discourse as a text (linguistic object), a discursive practice (a process of production, distribution, consumption), and a social practice (instance of ideological and cultural reproduction). The following dimensions relate to literary analysis: (1) formal linguistic features, such as lexical choice, transitivity, modality, metaphor, passive constructions, simile, rhythm; (2) intertextual and generic practices, such as the novel's position within and against already established discourses (refugee narrative, war literature, magical realism), and (3) macro-sociological contexts, in which the novel is embedded and towards which it addresses itself, such as postcolonial Pakistan, neoliberal border regimes, postcolonial power asymmetries.

In this study, the theoretical framework is built up from six interrelated theoretical pillars which focus on different but overlapping aspects of the phenomenon of the discourse that is being studied. The three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Norman Fairclough (1992) is the central and organizing pillar of this study and is used as the main analytical tool for examining the textual, discursive and social aspects of the analysis. The model Fairclough proposes, however, is not enough to analyze a text of such formal complexity and political multi-layers as Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017): a novel that is a war novel, a magical realist novel, a trauma novel, a postcolonial counter-discursive novel, and a novel that critiques the city. To this end, the Fairclough model is elaborated on by five additional theoretical lenses: the trauma theory, post-colonial theory, Foucauldian biopolitics, neoliberal spatial theory, and gender and semiotic resistance, each of which adds to and clarifies the analysis in specific ways throughout the Fairclough aspects and within specific discursive fields in the novel.

The rationale behind this multi-pillar approach must be found in the object being analyzed itself. As Visser (2014) points out, dominant Western trauma theory de-politicizes the suffering it attempts to read off, because it separates the trauma from its historical and ideological contexts. The PTSD diagnosis is a culturally specific diagnosis and is not analytically suited to non-Western settings of normalized conflict, as Kienzler (2008) maintains. In Mumtaz and Kamran's (2025) words, a reading of the spatial politics of *Exit West* is impossible without the aid of both postcolonial and Marxist theory. None of these pillars alone can fully explain all these aspects. The other pillars are situated in Fairclough's three-dimensional model: the three different kinds of supplementary frameworks enrich either the Dimension 1 linguistic description, the Dimension 2 discursive practice analysis, the Dimension 3 social practice explanation or in the most analytically productive cases all three at once.

3.2 Trauma Theory

The second theoretical dimension to the study is trauma theory, with a particular focus on enhancing the Fairclough framework in Dimensions 1 and 3. As Hartman (2003) puts it, the

basic principle of trauma theory is that when this extreme experience happens, strange things happen to the language, in the sense that the wound of the psyche does not need to be fully narrated, but rather produces disruptions, silences, repetitions, displacements, and compressions, which are formal features of the text. The premise has clear implications for the Dimension 1 analysis of *Exit West*, in which the formal characteristics of the novel's prose (agent deletions, temporal compressions, recursive syntax, affect-compressed war lexis) are analyzed as formal enactments of the traumatic experience, rather than as representational choices.

The notion of latency, inspired by Freud's description of the delayed emergence of traumatic memory, is presented by Berger (1997) as a structural principle of war literature. Latency has multiple aspects in *Exit West*. The city 'was still mostly at peace or at least not at war openly' (Hamid, 2017, p. 3): the traumatic event full scale war is coded into the prose of the pre-war scene, coming to the fore (if at all) in the reader's retrospective comprehension of what 'just some shootings and the odd car bombing' (p. 6) truly meant. The problem of inability to leave the city after his wife's death, 'your mother is here' (p. 161), is a study in traumatic fixation, in which the survivor is compelled to remain at the site of loss, the past is always more present than the future. The Dimension 3 contextualization of the Dimension 1 formal features, identified by Hartman's (2003) work is provided by these latency structures identified in Berger's (1997) framework.

In *Exit West*, Khan and Ramzan (n.d.) take Caruth's (1996) foundational idea that the 'unclaimed experience' is made physical in the novel's magical doors to show how the novel's magical doors literalize traumatic passage: the threshold through which characters pass but cannot return, the pre-trauma self that the traumatized subject can't return to. The most overt expression of the unclaimed experience in this novel is in Nadia's statement in Chapter Six: 'When we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind' (Hamid, 2017, p. 170). The going away is declared and not assimilated, it is both the choice and the wounding, the agency and the loss. In this way, Caruth's framework, made use of by Khan and Ramzan (n.d.), allows the present study to read this passage at Dimension 1 (the active verb 'murder' situating the migrant both as agent and victim), Dimension 2 (free indirect discourse creating the sentence in Nadia's consciousness, dissolving the voice of the narrator into the voice of Nadia), and Dimension 3 (the social practice of forced migration as a psychic murder of the self and of those left behind).

Kienzler (2008) offers a corrective in the postcolonial approach to trauma theory, filling the gap between its universalizing tendencies. She has undertaken an interdisciplinary review of war-trauma scholarship that reveals that PTSD as a diagnostic and conceptual category is a construct of western clinical contexts and is not useful for people who live in non-episodic conflict with a normalized experience of war. This argument is directly linked to the Dimension 3 reading of *Exit West*; the city in this book is not a place where war is unusual, but a place where war is structural, chronic and a part of everyday life. The framework developed by Kienzler (2008) allows the present study not only to avoid the pathologizing of this normalization, but also to understand it as a culturally specific psycho-social adaptation to structural conditions. Visser (2014) builds on Kienzler's critique by explaining that the depoliticization and historicization of suffering by dominant trauma theory is especially harmful in postcolonial contexts where trauma is not generated by discrete and bounded events, but by the continued functioning of colonial power relations. Throughout the analysis presented in this study, the postcolonial literary trauma theory of Visser (2014) is used, which incorporates

his argument that the theory must include the political and historical complexity of continuing structural violence.

The clinical and empirical foundations for the theoretical framework of trauma are provided by the work of Ahmad et al. (2023), which shows that the psychic mechanisms described by Hartman (2003), Berger (1997) and Caruth (via Khan & Ramzan, n.d.) are not just theoretical constructs but can be demonstrated as psychological facts in conflict and migration settings. The significance of this empirical anchoring is crucial for the present study's argument that the discursive construction of traumatic experience in *Exit West* is not just literary invention but a representatively accurate, politically meaningful reconstitution of real psychic and social conditions.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Paradigm

The study takes place within the interpretive tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of literature as a methodological perspective that sees the literary text as a discursive event, not as an aesthetic product isolated from social context but as an event that is both a product of and a participant in the ideological formations of its historical moment. The epistemological justification of this approach is based on the idea that language is not a neutral means of conveying an existing thought but is a space of power, in which lexicon, syntax, generic conventions and narrative modes create, reproduce and challenge social meanings, as Fairclough (1992) puts it. Literary CDA extrapolates this to fictional texts, which can be viewed as participant-producers in the larger discursive fields, political, ideological, cultural. The epistemological commitment of the present study lies in its attention to textual elements with their social features, while simultaneously it is also an epistemological commitment to the social elements with their textual specification.

The research questions in the study are: how do the following discursive features function ideologically in relation to the three angles of Fairclough's analysis? These questions are not typable into quantitative corpus linguistics, since they do not call for quantification of the frequency of features, but rather for their interpretation in terms of their function ideologically. The interpretive tradition thus tends to focus on the analyst's close, theoretically informed reading of selected text passages as the main means of knowledge production. This is not a downside, rather a methodological due, because as Visser (2014) claims, postcolonial literary trauma theory needs this sort of long-duration, politically alert textual encounter, which neither quantitative nor sociological discourse analysis can provide.

a. Theoretical Framework as Analytical Instrument

Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of CDA is not only background theory, but is the analytical tool used throughout the study. The model outlines three co-constitutive aspects of any discursive situation, each of which needs to be analyzed in a different way and gives rise to a different order of knowledge.

Dimension 1, Text: The text dimension is the formal linguistic properties of the primary source, such as the use of lexical choices and collocations, transitivity (the different kinds of grammatical subjects actors doing different kinds of things processes to different kinds of things patients), modality (the degrees of certainty, obligation, permission expressed in auxiliary verbs and adverbs), metaphor and simile (including mixed metaphor and the grotesque), passives and agent deletion, syntactic rhythm and anaphora, nominal constructions and the use of dehumanizing epithets, and temporal constructions (including compression, ellipsis, and distortion). This level of analysis is micro-level and is textually immanent; that is, it looks at what the language does rather than what it means.

Dimension 2, Discursive Practice: The discursive practice dimension involves the meso level processes by which the text is produced, distributed and consumed as a specific type of discourse. In a literary text, this dimension can encompass: the position of the text, as the novel as war narrative and as romance; the positioning of its intertextual relations, with other texts, but also with other discourses (colonial anthropological discourse, Orientalist representation, conventions of the refugee narrative, legal discourse of border control); the positioning of the voice and focalization of the narrative, who speaks, from what position, with what authority, in whose interests; and the positioning of the reader as a particular kind of discursive subject (implicated, indifferent, outraged, complicit). Analysis at this level is meso-level and involves context: the level of analysis focusses on the ways the text is constructed and the subject positions it creates.

Dimension 3, Social Practice: The social practice component refers to the macro level of the ideology/socio-political structures in which the text is situated and within which it functions. These formations are: the border regimes of the postcolonial history of Pakistan (proxy-war militancy, sectarian violence, enforced disappearances, collapse of the civil institutions of the state); the border regimes of neoliberal globalization (the asymmetric policing of movement and dress of migrants, the commodification of humanitarian response); Foucauldian biopolitical sovereignty (the exercises of power by the state and the militias over life and death, the reduction of refugee body to 'bare life'); and the border regimes of gendered and racialized power formations (the policing of movement and dress of women by the patriarchy, the racialization of anti-immigration politics in recipient countries). Analysis of this dimension is macro-level and socio-historical, focused on the ideologies that the text accomplishes within these formations.

b. Primary Data Source and Sampling Strategy

The primary data source and sampling strategy were discussed. The primary data source and sampling strategy were explained. The main source of data is the whole text of *Exit West* (Hamid, 2017), a novel of 231 pages made up of twelve chapters numbered in the text, followed by a short epilogue, set fifty years after the events of the main story. Methodologically, it is important that the study is not limited to selected chapters or themed extracts from the novel, but rather, works with the entire text as a discursive formation that develops and appears in the novel in a coherent manner, from the pre-war urban liminality in Chapter One to the fifty-year long temporal ellipsis in Chapter Twelve. The present study directly fills the gap of such full-novel textual coverage, which is not achieved in any existing study of the novel in the field of CDA.

Units of analysis are selected using a qualitative sampling technique, purposive theoretical sampling (Patton, 2002), which involves selecting the units of analysis for the purposes of maximum theoretical relevance to the study's research questions and analytical framework and not to achieve statistical representativeness. Specifically, passages are chosen according to their discursive density (how much they cluster, illustrate and/or focus the discursive mechanisms studied) and how they are spread throughout the novel's discursive span. The passages selected for analysis have been chosen to meet the criterion of discursive density, which means that they are analytically rich at the three Fairclough dimensions at the same time; the criterion of distributional range has been met such that the analysis is not favoring one phase of the novel's overall war and trauma narrative.

There are 35 passages, all of which are grouped into 3 analytical tables that correspond to 3 different discursive domains. Table 1 (eight extracts) looks at the linguistic encoding of war and armed conflict, applied to the first six chapters of the novel, where the novel's discursive

construction of a Warscapes is set. Traumatic and displacement discourse is explored in Table 2 (nine extracts) which includes text from Chapters Four Nine when protagonists' flight, relocation and psychological fragmentation are described. The purpose of the five extracts in Table 3 is to place under scrutiny passages where the counter-hegemonic narrative devices operate, and where the novel makes its mark most formally innovatively, be it in the first appearance of the novel's theme about the door rumors (Chapter Four) or in the fifty-year reunion (Chapter Twelve) at its end. The uneven distribution, by tables, is not a theoretical one, but based on the discursive density of the different phases of the novel.

5. Analysis

5.1 Linguistic Encoding of War and Conflict

Table 1

Table 1. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA Applied to War Discourse in Exit West

Dimension 1: Text (Linguistic Features)	Dimension 2: Discursive Practice (Production & Consumption)	Dimension 3: Social Practice (Ideology & Power)
War normalisation lexis: 'just some shootings and the odd car bombing, felt in one's chest cavity as a subsonic vibration like those emitted by large loudspeakers at music concerts'	Simile reduces military violence to a consumer-acoustic register; the extraordinary is made ordinary through the discourse of entertainment	Pakistani urban populations habituated to militancy through proxy-war; Masroor et al. (2024) novel mirrors real-world war-zone trauma; Feruza & Akhmedova (2025) normalization of war in 20th-century English novels
'A city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war'	Hedging ('mostly,' 'at least not yet') suspends time in a liminal zone; proleptic discourse encodes inevitable collapse	Caruth's latency the city pre-cognitively knows its fate; Arko (2021) war literature records the moment before rupture; mirrors Pakistan's experience of pre-conflict social deterioration
'Geography is destiny, respond the historians' / 'a view like staring down the barrel of a rifle'	Intertextual appropriation of historical axiom; military metaphor colonizes domestic space the apartment window becomes a gun sight	Spatial politics: home as warzone (Mumtaz & Kamran, 2025); Shah (2025) neoliberal geography of exclusion; Mandalakas (2001) war's reconfiguration of civilian infrastructure
'War would soon erode the facade of their building as though it had accelerated time itself'	Temporal distortion discourse: war as agent compressing historical chronology into traumatic rupture; building-as-body trope	Hartman (2003) trauma as 'foreign body' disrupting time; Kawsar (2024) mental health and war in literary representation; accelerated ruin mirrors Pakistan's rapid post-9/11 urban decay
'He knew how little it took to make a man into meat: the wrong blow, the wrong gunshot, the wrong flick of a blade'	Dehumanizing lexis ('meat'); serial enumeration of fatal contingencies produces relentless bodily precarity	Foucauldian biopolitics the refugee body as expendable biological material (Qureshi & Liaqat, 2025); Awuah et al. (2024) conflict trauma in under-

		resourced regions; Malik et al. (2022) postcolonial dehumanization
'People vanished in those days, and for the most part one never knew...if they were alive or dead'	Agent-deleted constructions; passive quantifiers ('people,' 'one never knew') encode epistemic violence and enforced ignorance	Enforced disappearances as state terror in Pakistani history; Berger (1997) traumatic latency; O'Brien (2021) disrupting memory in War-on-Terror fiction; Ahmad et al. (2023) PTSD and event exposure in migrants
'Bodies hanging from streetlamps and billboards like a form of festive seasonal decoration'	Grotesque consumerist simile: execution aestheticized through commercial register; ironic detachment forces affective dissonance in the reader	Spectacular sovereignty; public death as governance mechanism (Foucauldian); Stewart & Ekins (2011) war wounds as social performance; Mendelson-Maoz (2018) lives of wars and trauma in literary theory
'The dead neighbor bled through a crack in the floor, his blood appearing as a stain in the high corner of Saeed's sitting room'	Visceral spatial contamination: death seeps through architecture into domestic consciousness trauma as environmental infection	Kienzler (2008) war-trauma beyond PTSD taxonomy; Balke (2002) trauma and conflict as socio-structural phenomenon; Ullah (2020) literary witnessing in Afghan war narrative; sectarian violence in Pakistan's urban history

The eight extracts of Table 1 develop a steady discourse of affect 'normalization' that can be described as a system of normalization, whereby Hamid takes pains to avoid aesthetic or sentimentalizing extraordinary violence. The loudest examples of this strategy in the novel are found in the acoustic simile in Extract 1 (when the bombs sound like loudspeakers at music concerts). At the discursive practice level, the simile sets up a frame of consumer culture in which war sound is implicated, inviting the reader to a normalizing act. Hamid invites the reader to add outrage to his own because he has denied it the reader. In denying the reader the outrage, Hamid makes them fill in the blank, creating what Tembo (2017) describes as the illocutionary power of literary witness.

The temporality of Extract 4 war eroding the building facade 'as though it had accelerated time itself' carries Hartman's (2003) sense of the foreign body of trauma: the thing that breaks the flow of historical time, that compresses it into the traumatic rupture. In the study of war literature, Kawsar (2024) notes this temporal dislocation as a predominant feature of the connection between war literature and the discourse of mental health. The building as body metaphor also evokes the ecocritical dimension of the built environment that is identified by Tahir and Rabbani (2024): the wound of the built environment is shared with its inhabitants.

Extract 5 employs the language of dehumanization, 'make a man into meat', as is the sharpest moment in the novel of what Qureshi and Liaqat (2025) describe as Foucauldian biopolitics: the body of the refugee as expendable biological material. A series of fatal contingencies ('the wrong blow, the wrong gunshot, the wrong flick of a blade') creates an insistent precarity of the body which operates as if the body were 'almost dead'. The physical and psychological

impacts of this body vulnerability in conflict are reported by Awuah and colleagues (2024). This is interpreted in the context of postcolonial theory dehumanization of the refugee body mirrors the structural dehumanization of the colonial body, explains Malik et al (2022).

What Balke (2002) calls trauma as spatial contamination is encoded most physically in Extract 8, in which the protagonist sees the blood of the neighbor, which is seeping through the floor into their sitting room. The room is, literally, permeable to death in the home. Such experiences can't be reduced to a PTSD taxonomy, cautions Kienzler (2008), and anthropologically informed approaches are necessary instead; the blood stain becomes a cultural artifact that reconfigures all future uses of, and commentary on, the place.

5.2 Traumatic and Displacement Discourse

Table 2

Table 2. Trauma, Displacement, and Power in Exit West — CDA Tabulation

Discourse Category	Novel Extract (Hamid, 2017)	CDA Reading: Power, Ideology, and Trauma
Forced Departure and Nostalgic Trauma	'Saeed desperately wanted to leave his city...he doubted he would come back, and the scattering of his extended family...struck him as deeply sad, as amounting to the loss of a home'	Caruth's unclaimed experience the departure is known yet psychically unassimilable; Khan & Ramzan (n.d.) belatedness of trauma as catalyst; Liaqat (2022) poetics of migration trauma
Xenophobia and Nativist Violence	'A nativist mob...The mob looked to Nadia like a strange and violent tribe, intent on their destruction'	Discursive equivalence between home militancy and host-nativism (Masroor et al., 2024); Hussain & Khan (2024) multiculturalism's paradox; Rashid et al. (2025) non-Western post-9/11 fiction as counter narrative to Orientalist terrorism discourse
Panoptic Surveillance of Migrant Bodies	'A small quadcopter drone was hovering fifty meters above them, too quiet to be heard, and relaying its feed to a central monitoring station'	Foucauldian panopticon drone as instrument of biopolitical control; Qureshi & Liaqat (2025) bodies as crisis in dystopian migration; arkou-Pappas et al. (2025) humanitarian actors in conflict surveillance environments
Traumatic Grief and Temporal Dislocation	'Saeed's father encountered each day objects that had belonged to his wife and so would sweep his consciousness out of the current others referred to as the present'	Freudian traumatic intrusion; Hartman (2003) the foreign body lodged in time; Berger (1997) latency structures war literature; Tembo (2017) trauma in civil war fiction
Identity Fragmentation and Retribalization	'To be among our own kind' / 'What makes them our kind?' / 'From the country we used to be from'	Dialogic failure (Waheed & Ahmed, 2024) Saeed's ethnic essentialism versus Nadia's deterritorialised identity; Abbas & Iqbal (2025) hybridity in migrant fiction; Riaz (n.d.)

		fluid identities in displacement fiction
Gender, Agency, and Discursive Resistance	'So men don't fuck with me' [on the black robe]; 'ready to resist the claims and expectations of the world'	Strategic re-inscription of a patriarchal sign within a counter-hegemonic frame; Zara & Tahseem (2023) gender as CDA variable in Exit West; Huma et al. (2023) circumstantial discourse of female navigation in conflict spaces
Ecocritical Trauma — The Lemon Tree	'Nadia's lemon tree did not recover, despite repeated watering, and it sat lifeless on their balcony'	Environmental correlative of traumatic displacement (Tahir & Rabbani, 2024); Buell's toxic discourse the displaced body and the uprooted plant share the same ontological condition; Archer (2017) adverse environments compound trauma
Postcolonial Spatial Apartheid	'In dark London, rubbish accrued, uncollected...the trains kept running, skipping stops near Saeed and Nadia' / 'native-born ones vanishingly few'	Light/dark London reproduces colonial metropole/periphery binary (Malik et al., 2022); Shah (2025) neoliberal politics of exclusion; Mumtaz & Kamran (2025) spatial politics as dehumanization; Afzal et al. (2025) postcolonial displacement and cultural dissonance
Relational Trauma and Uncoupling	'Every time a couple moves, they begin...to see each other differently, for personalities are not a single immutable color, like white or blue, but rather illuminated screens'	Displacement as relational trauma migration wounds the couple as it wounds the individual; Hamza et al. (2024) denial as defense mechanism; Hussain & Khan (2024) psychological impact of migration; Roy (2026) war as transformer of self and intimacy

The novel's displacement discourse is manifest in the interlocking dichotomies of home/exile, protection/precarity, and belonging/alienation, all of which Hamid has chosen to not solve, as revealed in Table 2. In the words of Caruth (as quoted by Khan & Ramzan, n.d.), the departure that cannot be fully assimilated at the moment of its occurrence, is directly literary enacted in Extract 1's representation of Saeed's departure as profound loss – the scattering of family 'amounting to the loss of a home'. It's not the violence that hurts, it's the leaving and every subsequent displacement makes it worse.

Extract 2 is the most politically sophisticated in the novel, in a structurally ironic manner. The nativist mob is called 'a strange and violent tribe', a term which has been used to describe non-western people. Understood as a discursive reversal (as identified by Masroor et al 2024) and theory with the application of Said (2024), this binary of the Orient and Occident is broken at the linguistic level of the text itself. Rashid et al. (2025) situate this in non-Western post-9/11 fiction that is consistently anti-Western, an anti-Western stance that is very evident in the work of both authors. Rashid et al. (2025) place this in the context of non-Western post-9/11 literature that consistently challenges the West's monopoly on civility, a point that is very clear in the two texts under review.

The drone surveillance of Extract 3 is the most focused example of Foucauldian biopower as deciphered by Qureshi and Liaqat (2025). The drone is less visible and less audible than 'too quiet to be heard', and its lookout is more effective for its unseen and unsounded presence. Markou-Pappas et al. (2025) record the similarities of surveillance technologies in their real-world use in conflict humanitarian contexts: The migrant body is always in the field of state power.

The relational trauma of Extract 9, the uncoupling of Nadia and Saeed extends the scholarship found in previous research on displacement by rarely explored relational aspect of the wound, the intimate relationships that help to sustain identity. Hamza et al. (2024) read it through the Freudian denial, and Hussain & Khan (2024) read it through the social-psychological impact of migration. At the Fairclough macro level, this relational degradation is not only a personal, but ideological one: the constant movement and constant re-rooting of displacement which neoliberalism demands, are structurally incompatible with sustained mutuality of intimacy. Roy (2026) points to this structural antagonism as a main theme in war literature throughout the ages.

5.3 Counter-Hegemonic Narrative Devices

Table 3

Table 3. Magical Realism, Structure, and Discursive Counterstrategies in Exit West

Narrative Device	Textual Instance (Hamid, 2017)	Discursive Function and Ideological Effect
The Black Doors (Magical Realism as Political Allegory)	'A normal door, they said, could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all'	Democratizes migration discourse; exposes the arbitrariness of border regimes (Khalil et al., 2025); counter-neoliberal discourse doors to poorer places ungarded, doors to desirable destinations heavily policed; Jamari et al. (2025) postmodern political allegory
Global Vignettes (Structural Polyphony)	Simultaneous scenes in Sydney, Tokyo, La Jolla, Vienna, Amsterdam, and Tijuana embedded alongside the unnamed Pakistani city	Decentralizes the nation-state as unit of refugee discourse (Shah, 2025); Gazazyan (2023) humanization of the refugee as modern subject; Alkhalaf (2024) disrupting negative representation of Muslim refugees through universalization
Anonymity of Setting (Anti-Orientalist Strategy)	The city is never named; characters unnamed at global vignette level: 'the old man,' 'the pale-skinned woman,' 'the young woman'	Prevents Orientalist labelling and comfortable Othering (Alkhalaf, 2024); Rashid et al. (2025) anonymity as resistance to Western War-on-Terror meta-narrative; Abbas & Iqbal (2025) fluid identity requires unfixed geography
Free Indirect Discourse (Trauma's Recursive Syntax)	'She wondered whether she and Saeed had done anything by moving, whether the faces and buildings had changed but the basic reality of their predicament had	Narrative voice dissolves into traumatized subjectivity; recursive syntax enacts the impossibility of escape (Iqbal et al., n.d.); Liaqat (2022) poetics of migration trauma; Hartman

	not'	(2003) trauma resists linear narrative resolution
Fifty-Year Temporal Ellipsis (Hopeful Counter-Discourse)	'Half a century later Nadia returned for the first time to the city of her birth...they sat beside one another...and they spoke'	Refuses the dominant narrative of the refugee as permanently traumatized; the city 'was not a heaven but it was not a hell' counter-hegemonic refusal of utopian and dystopian closure (Anwar et al., n.d.); Ali et al. (2025) survivable loss in South Asian literature

Table 3 shows that the novel employs counter-hegemonic discursive strategies that function in three registers: formal, structural, syntactic. The black doors are political allegories (Khalil et al., 2025), a random door revealing the randomness of the border regime. The novel's spatial nature is very detailed, as it describes the political imbalance of that regime, such as doors from poor areas are not guarded, and the doors to good areas are guarded. This contrast, which is a violation of parallelism using an asymmetric adjective, performs the neoliberal logic that it condemns (Shah, 2025).

The most formally ambitious counter-discursive strategy in the novel is the vignette structure of the world (Extract 2, Table 3). The world is rife with localization, in which viewers in the West can set aside for a time the refugee crisis as someone else's, and Hamid offers a way to do this through embedding simultaneous scenes from Sydney, Tokyo, Vienna, Amsterdam, La Jolla, as well as Tijuana. Gazazy (2023) sees this as a humanization strategy, one that re-imagines refugees as a modern subject, one that is universal, structurally inevitable, one that is part of the contemporary world, rather than the outside of it. This universalizing strategy culminates in the novel's last line 'We are all migrants through time' (Hamid, 2017) which is the discursive crystallization of this universalizing strategy.

The most hopeful counter-discursive gesture of the novel is the temporal ellipsis of the last chapter (Extract 5), which is fifty years. Rather than the dominant story of a refugee forever traumatized, Hamid takes us back fifty years to connect Nadia and Saeed, old and tired, survivors, in the restored city for a cup of coffee. The city 'was not heaven but it was not hell' (Hamid, 2017) is a formulation that will not be closed by the utopia or the dystopia of the city. This Anwar et al., (n.d.) this is Exit West's ultimate counter-discursive move: the re-imagining of home as a temporality and relationship. Ali et al. (2025) situate this reading in the history of Partition literature in the South Asian context where the negotiation of survivable loss was a long process.

6. Discussion

Table 1 shows that Hamid's construction of the language of war is based on affect normalization, which is the ongoing, sustained and systematic process of rendering extreme violence into the language of the mundane. This approach seems most clearly focused on Hamid's (2017) account of urban warfare as an 'acoustic experience' (p. 4): bomb explosions are likened to 'large loudspeakers at music concerts' (p. 6), their subsonic vibrations existing in the consumer-entertainment realm. The simile, at Fairclough's Dimension 1, is an ideological naturalization device: it enacts a discursive normalization by having the reader participate in it by "naturalizing" the military sound, which is incorporated into a vocabulary of leisure. It confirms the observation of Masroor et al. (2024) that Hamid's war is discursively flat, but they give it a more general description without examining its linguistic nuances in detail and

complements the observation of Feruza and Akhmedova (2025) that war normalization is a formal feature of twentieth-century anglophone war writing.

Most importantly, at Fairclough's Dimension 3, this affect normalization is not a stylistic choice but a discursive reality within Pakistan that has to do with the country's postcolonial existence; populations living in the midst of proxy-war militancy are forced to normalize violence in the ordinary, a psycho-social adaptation that goes beyond Western PTSD taxonomies and demands anthropologically sensitive frameworks, as Kienzler (2008) has documented. Not only because Hamid's narrative approach withholds it, but because Hamid is forcing the reader to provide it with an effect that Tembo (2017) calls the illocutionary power of literary witness, which has not been traced by existing scholarship to its linguistic source, the novel.

The novel's most intensive example of Dimension 1 as biopolitical discourse is the dehumanizing nominal 'meat' (Hamid, 2017, p. 13). Almost compulsive cataloguing of bodily precarity occurs in a syntactic anaphora pattern of the serial enumeration of fatal contingencies ('the wrong blow, the wrong gunshot, the wrong flick of a blade'). In their Foucauldian reading of the novel, Qureshi and Liaqat (2025) pinpoint the process of the refugee body becoming expendable biological matter as the novel's principal biopolitical move. The present study adds to this reading by revealing the linguistic devices nominal dehumanization, syntactic anaphora and lexical escalation – by which this ideological work is accomplished at the text level which is not fully covered by the framework of Qureshi and Liaqat. The clinical dimension of this analysis is supported by the work of Awuah et al. (2024) who reviewed the clinical situation of abdominal trauma in populations of conflict zones and found that the experiences of precarity that Hamid codes in his work are in line with statistical experience of the conflict zones population.

The agent-deleted passive construction ('people vanished in those days, and for the most part one never knew...if they were alive or dead' (Hamid, 2017, p. 78)) is an epistemic and linguistic performance of enforced unknowing of others who have been taken by forced disappearance. This form of unknowing becomes a formal mark of trauma writing, as Freudian latency, in Berger (1997), or a psychological effect in war survivors, as Ahmad et al. (2023) show. This reading of the passage through all three Fairclough dimensions shows that the passive construction is a linguistic feature, a positioning device for the reader in the epistemic void that is the survivors, and a reflection of a certain social practice of enforced disappearance, of a technology of governance with clear precedents in Pakistan's own recent history. This three-dimensional reading is not found in the current scholarship on the passage. The main discursive production strategies that the present study sees at Fairclough's meso-level as different from the previous Pakistani war fiction are the following: magical realism as political allegory, structural global polyphony, and free indirect discourse as traumatic syntax.

At Dimension 2 the magical doors work as a disrupter of the genre, as ideological asymmetry becomes visible. If, as Hamid (2017) tells us, doors to 'poorer places' are left unguarded, while doors to 'desirable destinations' are 'heavily guarded' (p. 88), he is embedding the actual logic of neoliberal border regimes in the magical realist fiction of the text. The doors are seen by Khalil et al. (2025) as a political allegory and by Jamari et al. (2025) as postmodern critique of nativism. The present study furthers both of these readings by showing that the doors do not simply represent the allegorical content, but are instead a discursive practice strategy, whereby Hamid is not just practicing non-Western post-9/11 literature that elides the 'nationality' or 'political context' of the refugees (as Rashid et al. (2025) define the counter-Orientalist move of non-Western post-9/11 fiction) but instead operates through a mode of magical realism rather than realist mimesis. This is a Dimension 2 reading that is new to this study.

At Dimension 2, the global polyphonic vignette structure (scenes simultaneously shot from Sydney, Tokyo, Vienna, Amsterdam, La Jolla and Tijuana within the narrative of the un-named Pakistani city) is a form of decentralization of the nation-state as a refugee discourse. Shah (2025) interprets this as a literary critique of the neoliberal migration politics, while Gazazyan (2023) understands it as humanization of the refugee as a modern subject. Shah (2025) sees this as a literary critique of the neoliberal migration politics, and Gazazyan (2023) reads it as a humanization of the refugee as a modern subject. The present study is based on both readings, as it seeks to show how the vignette structure challenged the generic convention of the refugee novel which usually focuses on a single character's trajectory from one origin to one destination, namely Fairclough's Dimension 2. In doing this, Hamid rejects the domestication of the refugee experience in the narrative, that is, the domestication of the refugee by the reader in the West, who is now eating out the refugee as entertainment. The city is as defeated by Orientalist categorization (via Said) as it cannot be exoticized or bracketed as 'foreign' when it is alongside Vienna and Sydney in the same sentence.

The focus of Free Indirect Discourse ('whether she and Saeed had done anything by moving, whether the faces and buildings had changed but the basic reality of their predicament had not' (Hamid, 2017, p. 165), at the syntactic level represent trauma's resistance to linear narrative resolution as described by Hartman (2003). The "voice" of the narrative becomes the consciousness of the character by letting the reader experience traumatized subjectivity without putting quotation marks or attribution. Iqbal et al. (n.d.) view language as a principal point of identity reconstruction in the novel and Liaqat (2022) calls it a poetics of migration trauma. The present study expands this in two ways: first, it shows, following Fairclough's Dimension 2, that free indirect discourse is a means of production: it creates a mode of reader consumption that embodies the novel's traumatic experience, and thus the trauma discourse is not easily dismissed or contained in the context of audience reception. Fairclough's macro-level framework sees the novel as a discursive representation of conflict and displacement that allows the study to identify three prevalent social formations: postcolonial Pakistani politics, neoliberal globalization and Foucauldian biopolitical sovereignty.

The novel's spatial apartheid, the separation of London's 'dark' refugee zones (where refuse remains uncollected and trains stop off) from its 'light' native zones of ongoing comfort (Hamid, 2017, p. 155) is a visualization of what Shah (2025) has dubbed 'neoliberal exclusion' encoded in built space. Mumtaz and Kamran (2025), through the lens of Marxist and postcolonial theory, show that space becomes a place of dehumanization because of spatial politics; and Malik et al. (2022) explore this from the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism. The present study combines all three in Fairclough's social practice dimensions, in the process showing that the dark London binary does not represent structural inequality as political injustice in need of rectification, but rather as a discursive construction which naturalizes inequality as background condition. What is new is that it is the way of narration, through the mode of narration, and not just the content per se which is the ideological action, that is the finding of the present study.

In the novel, the most condensed Foucauldian encoding of biopower is to be found at Dimension 3, the drone surveillance scene, 'with a small quadcopter drone hovering fifty meters above them, too quiet for them to hear, and broadcasting its feed to a central monitoring station' (Hamid, 2017, p. 107). This can be termed as panoptic control of migrant bodies (Qureshi and Liaqat, 2025). The present study adds to this reading three-dimensionally, as the drone is inaudible, or 'too quiet to be heard' (Dimension 1), the surveillance data circulates in parallel to two different security vehicles as well as a central monitoring station, and this infrastructure is comparable with real-world biometric and drone-based surveillance

systems observed in humanitarian conflict contexts by Markou-Pappas et al. (2025) (Dimension 2), and finally, the power/knowledge nexus in the production of social subjects as described by Fairclough (Dimension 3). The novel is not speculative: it accurately represents an already-existing regime of surveillance. No research on the passage has ever found this three-dimensional reading.

The xenophobia discourse is the most ideologically advanced political ploy that takes place at Dimension 3; the London nativist mob described by the novel as a 'strange and violent tribe, intent on their destruction' (Hamid, 2017, p. 147). Hamid uses the language of primitivism which was traditionally used for the Orientalized Other to a white British nativist crowd to make a discursive turn that is examined using Said's Orientalism by Alkhalaf (2024). Masroor et al. (2024) point out that xenophobia and nativism are important discourses of trauma, but don't follow the mapping of the specific language(s) as a mechanism of the reversal. The present study fills this gap by showing that the tribal lexis functions at all three Fairclough dimensions: as a lexical choice that makes colonial anthropological discourse possible (Dimension 1), as an intertextual (re)versal of colonial anthropological discourse (Dimension 2), and as a macro-social commentary on the racialization of anti-immigration politics in contemporary Britain, which Hussain and Khan (2024) tie to the trauma of lost imperial sovereignty (Dimension 3).

The two most directly antecedent studies by Masroor et al. (2024) and Anwar et al. (n.d.) both use Fairclough's method to analyze *Exit west*, but neither manages to undertake a systematic three-dimensional analysis. In *Displacement Discourse*, Masroor et al. (2024) concentrate on the post-colonial setting of the novelist and conclude that the novel reflects it, and that the themes of xenophobia and nativism are considered as some of the main traumatic discourses. The present study not only confirms both findings but adds significantly to them, since it exposes at every Fairclough dimension the postcolonial background, which is not only reflected but also actively encoded, through the selection of certain lexical, syntactic and genre level choices. Anwar et al. (n.d.) find that the novel challenges the hegemony of refugee discourse with its figurative word play, transnational scenes and empathetic stories.

The present study extends it and makes this conclusion: all three strategies (affect normalization, global vignettes, free indirect discourse) are analyzed with respect to all three dimensions of Fairclough, thereby providing insight into the ideological work done on the text level, the discursive level and the social practice level at the same time, which goes beyond the scope of Anwar et al.'s analysis.

Huma et al. (2023) claim that circumstance of location accounts for 73% of the circumstantial choices, which is a clear indication of the primacy of spatial displacement as a discursive concern, based on Halliday's transitivity model. The findings of the postcolonial spatial apartheid analysis and the drone surveillance analysis of the present study are completely in line with this quantitative finding. The present study, however, allows the reader to gain insight into the reason why location discourse dominates because the novel uses spatial discourse as the main instrument through which the power, exclusion and dehumanization of the Other are naturalized, which is impossible to be gathered from the descriptive model of Halliday.

The findings of this study regarding Dimension 3 are in general congruent with the findings of the trauma theory scholarship, as reflected in Khan and Ramzan (n.d.) on Caruth's unclaimed experience, Liaqat (2022) on the poetics of migration trauma, and Hamza et al. (2024) on Freudian denial. These three studies are more abstract, however, than the present analysis: They detect traumatic structures, but do not give the text evidence (from Dimension 1) that support those structures linguistically. The present study's interpretation of the agent deleted

passives (Extract 6, Table 1) and temporal compression constructions (Extract 4, Table 1) does just this and takes the trauma-theory interpretation and renders it empirically supportable CDA claims.

The three results of the present study are truly new contributions to the scholarship. First, the idea of affecting normalization, a systematic de-extradordinarization of extraordinary violence to quotidian registers has not been identified, named or theory in any previous study of *Exit West*. Third, the present study is the first to simultaneously read Nadia's tactical use of the black robe through all three Fairclough's dimensions: a gender-CDA, thus extending Zara and Tahseem's (2023) gender-CDA reading by also considering its ideological consequences (Dimension 3) as a discursive practice move (Dimension 2). Third, the reading of the bleeding lemon tree as Fairclough's social practice dimension, as an environmental correlative of the toxic discourse of Buell's traumatic displacement, moves beyond the sphere of Tahir and Rabbani's (2024) reading of the dying lemon tree as an ecocritical engagement.

Examining the findings of the present study as a whole, rather than examining the components step-by-step, as it were, shows the unique analytical strength of the framework in *Exit West*: as is typical of the novel, the most noteworthy discursive accomplishments are those in which all three dimensions operate together and mutually reinforce.

See the first chapter of the novel *Discursive Event*. At Dimension 1, the sentence 'their city had yet to experience any major fighting, just some shootings and the odd car bombing' (Hamid, 2017, p. 6) contains the linguistically emphatic downwards ('just') which are used to minimize the catastrophic events. At Dimension 2, this sentence becomes a product of the discursive regimes of a realist scene-setting: it is delivered as neutral exposition, not as an ideology-driven report on the triumph of militancy. At Dimension 3, the minimization is a social practice that is unique to those living in a specific kind of regularized conflict, namely the psychic survival strategy of normalizing extraordinary violence, which Kienzler (2008) and Mandalakas (2001) have documented. The three dimensions are not analytically separable as they relate to each other: Choosing a language (Dimension 1) creates its ideological impact (Dimension 3) via a discursive genre convention (Dimension 2). The only analytical tool that has been developed for the capture of this three-dimensional simultaneity is Fairclough's framework.

The same three-dimensional simultaneity can be at play when the London nativist mob is described as a 'strange and violent tribe' (Hamid, 2017, p. 147). Tribal is a colonial anthropological term at Dimension 1. Its application to the nativists from the white community brings out that intertextual history and turns it upside down, so that the discursive practice move of disruption of Orientalist representation functions not without the reader's bringing the colonial anthropological discourse to the text with him. This reversal is one that challenges and addresses the racialization of anti-immigration politics in the present day of Britain, positioning nativist violence into the same discursive space that colonialism used to claim to be justifying the violation of colonized populations. Without Fairclough's three-dimensional model this passage is an example of local irony, and with it, it becomes an example of macro-level ideological intrusions in the discursive formations that underpin racialized border politics.

Moreover, Fairclough's approach highlights the main formally innovative oppositional tactic in the novel, the temporal ellipsis of the fifty years of its last chapter. The compressed syntax at Dimension 1 'half a century later Nadia returned for the first time to the city of her birth' (Hamid, 2017, p. 228) is a sort of temporal violence against the normal realism of chronological order. At Dimension 2, the ellipsis as a structural production choice will defy the traumatized closure of most of the war fiction: there will be no cathartic return, no reconciliation of the past. At Dimension 3, this rejection of the dominant refugee discourse of crisis with a beginning

and end, instead claims that the experience of displacement is a condition that shapes the rest of life; one that is survivable, but not overcome.

This is the reconstruction of the concept of home, as identified by Anwar et al. (n.d.), and is placed in the South Asian Partition literature's extended negotiation with survivable loss by Ali et al. (2025). The findings of the present study reveal that both are embedded within Fairclough's framework; the hope-discourse of the novel is a discursive strategy that is a production decision at Dimension 2 and has macro level social practice implications at Dimension 3 which are explored in relation to the global refugee crisis in Pakistan. We are all migrants through time' (Hamid, 2017, p. 231) is as much a claim as it is a consolation within the framework of Hamid's discussion, a claim made in the full machinery of his discursive strategies, a claim that migration is the universal condition of humanity, directly opposed to the ideological formations that create it as pathology.

6.1 Exit West Within Pakistani War Literature

In *Exit West*, the structured refusal is not simply about the novel's formal innovations, but also about a discursive approach to the refusal; refusing to name the city, refusing to specify the historical conflict, refusing to aestheticize violence, refusing to close the narrative with resolution. Each of these rejections represents a Fairclough Dimension 2 move, a discursive practice move that is a positioning decision within the literary field and an ideological move. Rashid et al. (2025) have pointed out that collectively, non-Western post-9/11 fiction has transformed the literary field into an environment of justice and pluralistic representation. *Exit West* is the most formally nuanced example of such a transformation in the Pakistani canon.

The novel explores the theme of prayer, especially Saeed's growing piety as his displacement grows more intense, which is a code that decodes the Orientalist semiotics of Muslim male religion and reinscribes it into a universal human discourse of loss and endurance. This discursive practice is an intrusion in the dominant formations of the discourse of Muslim displacement in the present. This is a discursive move that intervenes in the dominant trajectory of present study discourse formations of Muslim displacement.

6.2 Exit West and the Global Refugee Crisis

The results of the present study have implications that go beyond the academy. *Exit West* is not a book, but an event: millions of people have read it, it has been discussed in policy circles, it has been taught at universities and secondary schools around the world, it has been invoked in debates on refugee policy and border management. Its discursive strategies such as affect normalization, the counter-hegemonic vignette structure, and the magic realism of the doors are not only formal innovations, but interventions in the ideological field in which the global refugee crisis is built up, contested, and governed. The CDA of the present study shows that such strategies are not incidental or merely decorative, but rather they are purposefully planned and linguistically exact and ideologically meaningful. Hamid's novel isn't just about the refugee crisis; it is a practice of discursivity in it.

In war literature *Exit West* is a turnaround from the previous works in formal and in ideological aspects. While Partition fiction focused on historical specificity and Bapsi Sidhwa's work placed the trauma within communal and gendered experience, it is Hamid's deliberate anonymity, magical realism and global polyphony that renders a text that speaks to the Pakistani experience of militancy, proxy-war, and sectarian violence without confining that experience to its national particularity. Rashid et al. (2025) maintain that this is the defining gesture of non-Western post-9/11 works of fiction: the rejections of geographical and cultural containment. This is the argument of the present study as it is shown both thematically and at every step of

the discursive organization of the novel (from the choice of the downtowner 'just some shootings,' p. 6 to that of the temporal ellipsis (fifty years, Chapter Twelve).

As we get close to the end of the study, there is one thing I want to meditate on the fiftieth anniversary of Chapter Twelve. Nadia goes back to the city which she did not know. It 'was not heaven but it was not hell' (Hamid, 2017, p. 225). One day, they meet at a café, where she meets Saeed. As their coffees ran out their 'growing youthfulness and playfulness' was revealed (p. 228). The deserts of Chile and the stars are mentioned. They stood up and they hugged and they left and they didn't know that this night would ever be again (p. 229). Cities, as they do, are alive today thanks to the city. The people have survived; it is the way people do. This isn't triumphalism. It is the most challenging discursive position: a rejection of catastrophe and redemption, a refusal to accept that life goes on after the war and the displacement of the extraordinary. This is a social practice claim at a high level made by Fairclough's Dimension 3: The experience of Pakistani civilians, South Asian refugees, all who enter the doors and live to talk about, is not spectacular, not exceptional, not Other: it is ordinary, in the truest sense. In the language of the global refugee crisis, and ordinariness is the most radical of claims.

6.3 Contribution to the Field

The present study contributes four unique ways to literature. First, it applies the full model of CDA proposed by Fairclough in his book in a systematically tabulated manner to the practice of Exit West, thereby filling what was identified in the literature review as the gap between the selective applications of CDA by Masroor et al. (2024) and Anwar et al. (n.d.) and the full analytical application that the model can provide. Second, it proposes affect normalization as a textually and theoretically informed analytical framework that can be used in analyzing war literature beyond Exit West, potentially war literature in Pakistan and South Asia, post-9/11 anglophone fiction and any literary representation of normalized conflict. Third, it provides a methodological model for literary CDA which can be applied to the study of magical realist postcolonial fiction: The adaptation of the Dimension 3 by Fairclough to cover the political allegory in addition to the sociological context is a theoretical contribution to literary CDA that the existing literature has not fully addressed. Fourth, it exemplifies the integrative potential of Fairclough's framework that enables the synthesis of various disjointed disciplines (trauma theory, postcolonialism, spatial politics, gender studies, ecocriticism) and yields readings that are richer than those any one discipline can produce on its own.

6.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present study has limited engagement with the secondary sources, due to the methodological consistency of the exclusive use of the sources of the dataset and the main text. Further studies could be done in a comparative manner, employing the same three-dimensional model of the discursive formation with the other earlier novels of Hamid or with other Pakistani war texts to produce a more comprehensive account of the discursive formations of Pakistani war literature. The distillation of Fairclough's Dimension 3 into a theoretical challenge for literary CDA scholarship, as the social practice must be modified to include the political allegory and the sociological context in magical realist texts, is a challenge yet to be resolved. The research of Huma et al. (2023) showed the method of quantitative-qualitative integration that is the application of transitivity model of Halliday and CDA, it shows methodology for future studies to triangulate the qualitative findings of the present study with the corpus-linguistic findings.

7. Conclusion

Using systematic analysis, this study has employed the three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework of Norman Fairclough to examine and analyze Exit West (2017) by

Mohsin Hamid with a total of 35 textual extracts organized into three thematic tables: linguistic encoding of war and conflict (Table 1), traumatic discourse and discourse on displacement (Table 2), and counter-hegemonic narrative devices (Table 3). The analysis has yielded five main conclusions supported by direct textual evidence from the novel. The pattern across the eight extracts of Table 1 is clear: there is no attempt by Hamid to aestheticize violence, in fact, he employs various linguistic devices, among them the domestication of simile ('loudspeakers at music concerts,' p. 6), the dehumanization of nominal ('meat,' p. 13), grotesque ironic comparison ('bodies hanging from streetlamps...like a form of festive seasonal decoration,' p. 99) and the agent-deleted passive ('people vanished in those days,' p. 78), all of which conspire to bring extraordinary violence down to the level of the ordinary. This strategy is now singled out for the first time in the scholarship, and Fairclough's Dimension 2 creates an effect readerly implication in this text - it withholds its outrage, thus inviting the reader to fill it in, allowing the ethical burden of response to be carried not just by the authorial voice but also by the reader. Affect normalization is a category of psychosocial adaptations of populations living in normalized conflict (as in Fairclough's Dimension 3), which is exactly the population category that Kienzler (2008) identifies that is missing from Western PTSD taxonomy. The most novel aspect of this study to Exit West literature and literary CDA is the notion of affecting normalization.

In both Tables 1 and 2, across multiple extracts, the study can identify a systematic deployment of what it calls epistemic violence at the linguistic level, which consists of a passive construction that eradicates the agents of violence, the use of vague quantifiers that encode enforced unknowing, and temporal compression that eradicates the difference between the moment of trauma and its belated surfacing. Enforced matical agent of disappearance is missing from the sentence in the novel's sharpest example, as agents of enforced disappearance are missing from the official record: 'People vanished in those days, and for the most part one never knew...if they were alive or dead' (Hamid, 2017, p. 78). This formal property, in conjunction with the work of Berger (1997) on the concept of latency and the documentation of PTSD in war survivors by the author Ahmad et al. (2023), shows that the novel's trauma discourse is not just about the content and its traumatic nature, but also about the form and its traumatic nature, an observation that builds upon existing research on the novel, which has examined traumatic content but not the traumatic nature of the form.

Table 3's analysis reveals three "formally innovative" ways in which the novel creates counter-hegemonic refugee discourse: magical realism as political allegory (the black doors as a literary exposure of the neoliberal border-regime asymmetry); global polyphonic vignette structure (the simultaneous embedding of scenes from Sydney, Tokyo, Vienna, Amsterdam, La Jolla, and Tijuana, alongside the unnamed Pakistani city, which refuses the generic form of the single-origin refugee narrative); and free indirect discourse as traumatic syntax (the implosion of the narrative voice into the character consciousness, which creates a reader subject position of inhabitation rather than observation). The present study identifies each strategy as a discursive practice decision and connects it with the macro level social practice implications, which were not done in the existing scholarship that was written about each strategy (Khalil et al., 2025; Shah, 2025; Gazazyan, 2023; Iqbal et al., n.d.; Liaqat, 2022).

It was the aim of this study to show how the three dimensions of the CDA model can be methodically and comprehensively applied to the novel Exit West, and how this application can provide readings of the war and trauma discourse of the novel, more textually grounded, more theoretically integrated and more politically illuminating than any single disciplinary approach could. This has been validated through analysis for the 35 extracts of the text and 4 research

questions. It is not simply a poignant tale of romance in wartime between two young lovers. It is a discursive artefact of extraordinary sophistication: it is linguistically precise in its construction of the effect of wartime; it is generic in its counter-hegemonic use of magical realism and polyphony; it is ideologically committed in every dimension of its discourse to the proposition that the people who pass through the doors of crisis and displacement are not Other, not exceptional, not the objects of policy, but the subjects of their own ordinary, enduring, and irreducibly human lives. The choice of words, structures, genres, and narrative voices, which this study has traced, makes this novel a literary success and it is also how it remains relevant to scholarship, policy, and Hamid's (2017) common migratory experience of time.

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