

Magic Realism and Oppression among Black Teenagers in Randi Pink's *Into White*

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Abstract

*Magic Realism is a literary mode rather than a distinguishable genre. It is 'paradoxical' as it reflects an opposition between magic and reality. It is highly attributed to the marginalized people, especially the African-Americans, who perceive it as an outlet for expressing their thoughts and their repressed dreams. The analysis will focus on the role of magical realism in displaying the dominant racial discourses which shape African-American identities in America. The aim of this research paper is to explore the aspects of magic realism and its types in Randi Pink's *Into White* (2016). Pink uses magical realism to shed light on the oppressive forces of the African-American society. Oppression is among the forces that lead the marginalized people to use magic realism. Through this mode, she is able to criticize the social problems of the black teens that are related to race and identity in young adult literature. Randi Pink's *Into White* is considered a striking illustration of African-American magic realism.*

Keywords: Identity, Magic realism, Oppression, Randi Pink, Young adult literature.

المستخلص

الواقعية السحرية والاضطهاد العنصري بين المراهقين السود في رواية *نحو الأبيض* للكاتبة راندي بينك

ان الواقعية السحرية هي أسلوب أدبي وليس نوعاً مميزاً من الادب. ويعكس هذا المفهوم تعارضاً بين السحر والحياة الواقعية. وهو ينسب بشكل كبير إلى المهمشين ، وخاصة الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي ، الذين يعتبرونه منفذاً للتعبير عن أفكارهم وأحلامهم المكبوتة. ويهدف هذا البحث الى لقاء الضوء على دور الواقعية السحرية في تحليل الادب الافروامريكي الذي يشكل جزء كبير منه الهوية الثقافية للافارقة الامريكيين . لذلك فإن هذه الورقة البحثية تسعى الى تناول سمات الواقعية السحرية وأنواعها الثلاثة في رواية *Into White* (٢٠١٦) للكاتبة الافروامريكية راندي بينك. تستخدم الكاتبة الواقعية السحرية لإلقاء الضوء على القوى القهرية التي يتعرض لها المراهقون السود في المجتمع الأمريكي حتى الان. ويعتبر الظلم والاضطهاد من اهم الدوافع التي تجبر المهمشين على استخدام الواقعية السحرية. وبهذه الطريقة يمكن للكاتبة انتقاد المشاكل الاجتماعية للمراهقين السود المتعلقة بالعرق والهوية في أدب الشباب. تعتبر رواية *Into White* للكاتبة راندي بينك مثلاً واضحاً على استخدام الواقعية السحرية في الادب الافروامريكي في عالمنا المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية ، الواقعية السحرية ، الاضطهاد العنصري ، راندي بينك ، أدب الشباب.

Magic Realism and Oppression among Black Teenagers in Randi Pink's *Into White*

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Magic realism is a literary mode that was used first in arts then emerged in the postcolonial narratives as “a defining moment for a literary form that rejects Eurocentric paradigms” (Hammer 2006, p.1). Originally, the term magic realism was coined in the early twentieth century to describe the new realistic painting style in Germany; specifically in relation to the painting of the Weimar Republic that tried to capture the mystery of life. Then the term was applied in 1940s to Latin American arts and literature as an expression of the mixture of realist and magical views of life in the context of the different cultures. Now the term is used more broadly to refer to all narrative fiction that includes magical happenings in a realist-of-fact narrative (Bowers 2004, p. 2). Faris remarks that magic realism has become an important mode of expression especially in postcolonial cultures because “it has provided the literary ground for significant cultural work” (2004, p.1). Magic realism serves the purposes and needs of minorities including race, class and gender. Hence it has served as an effective “decolonizing agent” (Faris 2004, p. 1). In fact, it has been used as a resistant tool against hegemonic power. Therefore, magic realism plays a significant role in subaltern writings.

The aim of this research paper is to explore the aspects of magic realism and its types in Randi Pink's *Into White* (2016) using Wendy Faris and William Spindler concepts of magic realism. The textual analysis will shed light on the role of magic realism in illustrating the racial discourses that shape the African- American identity among the black teenagers. Through this mode, Pink can criticize the social problems of black teens that are related to race and identity formation in young adult literature. The types of magic realism, according to William Spindler, are also highlighted namely: *metaphysical*, *anthropological*, and *ontological* (1993, p.79). Pink's novel is classified as *ontological* magic realism in which the supernatural elements are presented as a matter-of-fact way that does not contradict reason. Its importance lies in its connection to the black identity and folklore. Pink wants to raise black teens' awareness towards their black identity and their African-American culture.

Magic realism is defined by Christopher Warnes as “a mode of narration that normalizes the supernatural” in which the magical and the real “are coherently represented in a state of equivalence” (2009, p.3). Similarly, Zamora and Faris content that the magical elements are fused with the real world to become “... an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence— admitted, accepted and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism” (1995, p.3). The Oxford English Dictionary also defines magic realism as any imaginative or particularly literary style in which realistic methods are mixed with strange or dreamlike elements. According to Bowers, in magic realist works of art, magic can be “a synonym for mystery, an extraordinary happening, or the supernatural and can be influenced by European Christianity as much as by, for instance, Native American indigenous beliefs” (2004, p.4). It enables the writer to explore the creative mind of the characters and their imaginative abilities. It gives space to escape reality and its burden. It is considered an important tool in changing the fantastic into reality. Zamora and Faris elaborate by saying that magic realism emerges as:

A mode suited to exploring- and transgressing-boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic. Magical realism often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. (1995, p.5-6)

Thus, the reader and the characters in the novel accept the supernatural as if it is real. Faris outlines the defining features of magical realism as follows: first as a text contains an irreducible element of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile the two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity (2004, P.7). According to Latham, the characteristics of magic realism serve to question the values and ideologies of adult society. It focuses on the fluidity of the identity formation of the characters (2007, p. 60). Within this context, Baldick points out the characteristic features of the genre including the mixture of reality and unreality, the use of the folktale, myth, and fables. He defines Magic realism as follows:

A kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the ‘reliable’ tone of objective realistic report, designating a tendency of the modern novel to reach beyond the confines of realism and draw upon the energies of fable, folk tale, and myth while maintaining a

strong contemporary social relevance. The fantastic attributes given to characters in such novels-levitation, flight, telepathy, telekinesis-are among the means that magic realism adopts in order to encompass the often-phantasmagoric political realities of the 20th century. (2008, p.146)

Magic realism has become a popular narrative mode because it enables writers to criticize the power structures and systems of their societies. They can discuss topics openly, especially those related to politics or social taboos. Bowers explains that magic realism is a means through which writers who wish to write against totalitarian regimes can attack these systems (2004, p. 4). In other words, magic realism offers a way of attacking power structures and social injustices in disguise. In fact, the term has an anti-colonial history. It is a means through which writers encourage people towards social change. Most of the magic realist novelists “use realistic events that are blocked or erased through political or social injustice then recreated again in a fantastic or magical atmosphere, incorporating at the same time elements of myths, folk tales, or the world of dreams” (Mahmoud 2022, p. 28).

It is also important to consider that many writers who employ magic realism in their texts reject the application of the term to their work because of the term's negative connotations. Bowers points out that “magical realism is often criticized for relying on a European viewpoint that assumes that magic and the irrational belong to indigenous and non-European cultures, whereas rationality and a true sense of reality belong to a European perspective” (Bowers 2004, p. 84). This means that a Eurocentric worldview is being imposed on such texts in a way that undermines and trivializes the culture of the marginalized people (Jansen 2013, p.7).

African-American writers have used magic realism to transcend the limits of the fantastic and highlight the social problems within the black culture. Among the black writers who have employed magic realism in their fiction is Randi Pink. She elucidates the social problems of race, class and gender through the use of magic realism in *Into White* (2016). This text manifests some features that are typical of magic realist mode. However, it redefines the concept of magic by employing it as a marker for the characters' extraordinary belief in the supernatural realm. It is considered a unique feature of the African-American experience. Magic realism is used to cure historical wounds of slavery in the black community. According to Spindler's classification of the types of magic realism and the researchers' points of view, *Into White* is considered an *ontological* magic realism in which Pink succeeds in weaving the story of

the black teens and the psychological impact of slavery in America with the issues of gender and race through the lives of Black women. The analysis of the novel proves the impact of magic realism on African-American fiction. *Into White* is Pink's literary 'tour de force' which underscores the true values and challenges of the black community. Spindler asserts that the strength of magic realism lies in the 'periphery' in which the collective myths acquire greater importance in the creation of national identities (1993, p.82).

Young adult literature, a genre that is meant for readers between the ages of 12 to 20, has gained much attention in the last years. It has become "a powerful literary category rich with diverse genres and cross-generational appeal" (Girandi and Scheg 2018, p.1). Baxley and Boston believe that, as a dynamic and ever-evolving term, young adult literature "has come to be defined as realistic fiction that examines contemporary, real-world problems common to young readers" (2014, p. 4). African-American authors have published books that "reflect America's diverse culture and give voice to those who previously had been greatly underrepresented in young adult literature" (Baxley and Boston 2014, p. 5). Thus, the racially marginalized and ex-centric groups are given voice in this literature. Ethnic authors of young adult literature write books that represent the teen culture. Some of the main issues of this literature include identity problems, racism, bullying, drug addiction, homelessness, sex, alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, peer pressure and homosexuality.

In fact, the use of magic realism in the context of young adult literature is very suitable to engage the teens in ethical issues. Don Latham observes that magic realism is an "appropriate narrative mode for depicting the complexity of contradictions and conflicts that characterize the young adult experience" (2007, p.61). Like adolescence itself which is a stage between childhood and adulthood, magic realism is neither reality nor fantasy. It combines two realms: the magical and the real. Latham remarks that magical realism mirrors the "in-betweenness of adolescence itself- a state that is no longer childhood and not yet adulthood" (2007, p. 59). It aims at exploring "the liminal zone between the two categories, a zone where boundaries are blurred, where the two distinct currents mix and flow into each other" (Saxena 2011, p. 43).

Closely related to the magic realist mode and social inequality is oppression. It refers to systems of domination and subordination. It is defined by Suzanne Pharr as "the exertion of power and control over individuals and groups through discrimination, scapegoating, and violence, resulting in the denial of civil and human rights and the

imposition of psychological violence” (1996, p.16). It occurs when one group has more access to privilege, domination and power than the other group. Thus, oppression creates and sustains social inequality through the unjust exercise of power by one group over another. In order to maintain or justify the system of oppression, “the marginalized group is often framed as inferior or less than the group in power. In the context of race in the United States, Whites are in positions of power and people of color are marginalized” (Banks and Stephens 2018, p. 92).

Hardiman and Jackson agree that social oppression is the result of the control of the dominant groups over the ideological systems as well as the social institutions and resources of the society. They define social oppression as “a system of ideological control as well as domination and control of the social institutions and resources of the society, resulting in a condition of privilege for the agent group relative to the disenfranchisement and exploitation of the target group” (1997, p.17).

Social oppression is also defined as a “state of domination where the oppressed suffer the consequences of deprivation, exclusion, discrimination, and exploitation” (Prilleltensky and Gonick 1996, p. 129). They integrate the elements of state and process, with the psychological and political dimensions of oppression. They define oppression as:

a state of asymmetric power relations characterized by domination, subordination, and resistance, where the dominating persons or groups exercise their power by restricting access to material resources and by implanting in the subordinated persons or groups fear or self-deprecating views about themselves. (1996, p. 129-130).

Moreover, oppression connotes the “systematic mistreatment of the members of one group by the members of another group or by the society as a whole” (Sean Ruth 1998, p. 434). It is important to consider the word “systematic” which differentiates oppression from the regular mistreatments of people. This means that oppression is not random nor it happens by chance. The systematic nature of oppression can be reflected in “the education process, the legal process, the mass media, social customs, etc.” (Sean Ruth 1998, p. 434). Inspired by the work of social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Young defines oppression as:

institutionalized processes, which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people’s ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen (1990, p. 38).

It is important to note that oppression operates both externally and internally. According to Bartky, when we describe a people as oppressed, what we have in mind most often is an oppression that is economic and political in character. But recent liberation movements have brought to light forms of oppression that are not immediately economic or political. It is possible to be oppressed in ways that neither refer to deprivation, legal inequality, nor economic exploitation; one can be oppressed psychologically—the ‘psychic alienation’ of which Fanon speaks. To be psychologically oppressed is to be weighed down in your mind; it is to have a harsh dominion exercised over your self-esteem. The psychologically oppressed become their own oppressors; they come to exercise dominion over their own self-esteem. Differently put, psychological oppression can be regarded as the “internalization of intimations of inferiority (1990, p. 22).

In fact, Bartky points to the very insidious form of oppression; namely internalized oppression. When oppressed groups internalize the ideas and behaviors of their oppressors, the result is internalized oppression. In this case, victims of internalized oppression view themselves through the eyes of dominant groups. They view themselves as inferior subjects, less human and unimportant. Victims of oppression could internalize oppression in relation to their race, sex, ability, or gender. Undoubtedly, this oppression has “substantial negative social, economic, political, and psychological consequences for members of oppressed or stigmatized groups” (Crocker and Major 1989, p. 609).

Into White (2016) is a young adult novel that reflects the elements of magic realism and internalized racial oppression in the portrayal of the characters and the events as well. Latoya Williams, the protagonist of the novel, is fictionalized as an oppressed African-American teenager who is fascinated by the life of the white people. Through the power of magic, she is given the opportunity to experience the life she has always dreamt of. Her transformation to the white Katarina helps her to view her black identity differently. After transformation, she can realize the superficiality of the white people. In addition, Toya’s psychological transformation from self-hatred to self-acceptance and then to the assertion of her black identity is depicted through the power of magic.

Among the aspects of magic realism that is clear in the novel is the setting which is a real place in Montgomery, Alabama. In “Elements of Magical Realism,” Michelle Witte states that place is a crucial component of tales with magic Realism. It can reasonably take place in any real-world locale, especially small towns and rural areas. “It is the sense of place, or

rather the atmosphere and overtone of the location, that gives the setting a magical, yet realist feeling (2013, p.4).

Latoya Williams lives in Montgomery, Alabama “where black was a disease” (*Into White* 2016, p. 2). The setting of the novel reflects the racial discrimination in which the whites occupy most of the place. Hence the rules and beliefs of the white society will be predominant. African-Americans are among the minority groups in Alabama who suffer from oppression and humiliation in this white-dominated society.

Consequently, an important aspect of magic realism is the continuous tension between two opposing spheres: that's the margin and the center, the marginalized and the mainstream, the oppressed and the oppressor. In the African- American literature, magic realism is associated with the experience of slavery and the uprooting of the African people. The legacies of slavery and racial discrimination have remained for centuries affecting the psychological mindset of the blacks. Zamora and Faris note that magic realist texts “encourage resistance to monologic political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women” (1995, p.6).

Maria Sanchez contends that African-American writers “write from a tradition of dislocation and trauma caused by slavery which places them in a unique position in American literature. Their use of magic realism is linked to their attempt to recover traditions originated in the African continent” (2000, p. 24). In her novel, Pink employs magic realism as “the voice of the oppressed... to represent women who are typically considered as the other” (Al-Badaren 2019, p.21). The novel deals with the issue of racism and its impact on the identity formation of the African-American teens represented by Latoya who tries to find a place in her society. Pink aims at revealing the inequalities people of color suffer from in the mainstream white society.

According to Saxena, one of the defining features of magic realism is “the way it resonates with the postmodern concern with the peripheries and margins” (2011, p.1). In other words, magic realism is “a dialogue between the center and the margins, the dominant and the repressed” (Saxena 2011, p. 3). *Into White* narrates the story of a family that lives on the margin, and whose members are invisible. In fact, Toya used to be the subject of racial oppression from the white society and from the members of her own race as well. She lives with her black family who are considered “the other” by the white society of Montgomery, Alabama. Toya's family is oppressed through the cultural norms, values, and practices of the white society. The whole family suffers from racial

oppression in the white society. They are insulted and humiliated. Toya recalls:

When I was in kindergarten, a pigtailed little girl called me by that name (nigger). I didn't know what it meant; I just knew that it stung worse than a yellow jacket. When I told Aunt Evelyn, she said, get used to it, little girl. I was called a nigger so much as a child, I thought it was my name. (*Into White* 2016, p. 80-81)

Therefore, Toya used to be verbally abused and insulted as a nigger and a loser for being black. According to Randall L. Kennedy, words of insult such as nigger are hurtful and abusive in meaning. They can be “deployed as weapons of racial insult” (1999, p. 86). Nigger became “a slut when users of the term became aware that it is a mispronunciation of Negro and decided to continue using the mispronunciation as a signal of contempt” (1999, p. 86). The term is:

key in the “lexicon of race relations and thus an important term in American politics... nigger is such an important term that to be ignorant of its functions, connotations, effects, and even of the way it might be confused with similar sounding but unrelated words, such as “niggardly”, is to make oneself vulnerable to all manner of peril- the loss of one's equilibrium, one's reputation, one's job, even one's life. (Kennedy 1999, p. 86)

Similarly, Baker observes that the word nigger “represents a strong connection to centuries of slavery, the Jim Crow era, discrimination, racism and oppression” (2021, p.1). Therefore, the word is associated with hate and hostility. Toya's family is used to be humiliated and hated due to their blackness. They are insulted because of their skin color. In fact, all blacks are suffering due to their race, especially the dark-skinned ones. Also, Toya's mother has experienced severe racism in the Montgomery education system. Toya narrates:

As a child, our mother experienced unimaginable racism in the Montgomery education system. Mom was the only black kid in her graduating class, and she was terrorized for it – locker vandalized on a weekly basis, gym clothes frequently stolen, and enough racial slurs to last a lifetime. As a result, she'd dreamed of homeschooling Alex and me since KinderCare. The year before we moved to the empty castle, she typed up a full curriculum and everything. I can't remember most of it, but I do recall her plans to teach from the Bible twice daily. Homeschooling would have been her way of shielding us from Montgomery's notorious prejudice. (*Into White* 2016, p. 13)

Therefore, racism is an integral part of the life of Toya's family in the white American society. Though Toya's mother wants to protect her children from the racial oppression of the white society, there is no escape from it.

Toya experiences multiple facets of oppression. Firstly, she is oppressed by the white community due to her race. She attends a high school occupied mainly by white students where she feels inferior and disrespectful. She is always despised, belittled and insulted. She is weak and unable to stand against those who ridicule and humiliate her. She used to face racism which "was just as rampant as before; only cleverly hidden" (*Into White* 2016, p.66). She is hated by her white classmates. Thus, this binary opposition between black and white, superior and inferior is persistent in the society Toya lives in.

Secondly, Toya is oppressed for being poor. Although Toya's parents work at the Police Dispatch Centre and own a six-bedroom McMansion near the white people, they don't have enough money to live comfortably. Her father doesn't have enough money to furnish this big house. They do not have enough food. Hence both Toya and her brother feel ashamed of their poverty. They are also ashamed of their old-fashioned car (1967 Fiat) through which they are attacked by Deante, their black schoolmate. He calls Toya and Alex "The Edgewood High Mechanics" (*Into White* 2016, p.18). Whenever Toya's dad turns the ignition, the air-conditioner vents kick four puffs of black smoke into their faces. The family always feels oppressed due to their residence near the white community. Latoya and her brother, Alex, are always belittled for being black and poor. In school, she must take her lunch alone because she has no friends. Moreover, Toya is oppressed from the black boys who describe her as "the weakest black girl ...Edgewood ain't no place for the weak" (*Into White* 2016, p. 2-3). She faces racial discrimination mostly from her rich black classmate, Deanté, who is considered the cruelest boy in school. Deanté and his friends used to make fun of her and her brother for their poverty.

At the beginning of the novel when her cheap plastic strap of her bookbag breaks, the books drop onto "Deanté's spanking-new Air Jordan basketball sneakers" (*Into White* 2016, p. 1). He is infuriated because the sneakers got dented. As a result, he asks her to buff out the dent on his sneakers. She feels humiliated when she bows forward to pick up her books and fix the sneakers. Being black and poor, Toya does not have any self-confidence. She is sure that if she were white no one would dare to force her to do so. She remarks "I hated him-more than the insults and the ridicule. I hated that he dropped his g's and added extra syllables to words

that didn't deserve them. I hated his dark skin and bad hair. I hated everything about him that reminded me of myself" (*Into White* 2016, p. 2)

As a black girl, Toya's experience with oppression is part of the oppression many black girls generally experience not only from the white society but also from the members of their own race. This form of oppression is called intra-racial oppression. Susan Bryant comments "Not only are black women negatively categorized by society for both their gender and race, but they can also be subjugated within their own communities" (2019, p. 88-89). Rodney Clark et al. assert that "intragroup racism have persisted and continued to exert a significant effect on the well-being of many African-Americans" (1999, p. 806).

Intra-racial oppression is a form of oppression which involves "discrimination by a member of one race against a member of the same race" (Robson 1990, p. 984). The intra-racial oppression can be linked to what Neelam Bhardwaj calls "The cycle of oppression" which is defined as:

a complex phenomenon that affects all people who are touched by oppressive systems, whether they are assigned the role of oppressor or oppressed. The child is oppressed and because she/he is a child, she/he is unable to combat or resist her/his oppression. She/he is taught to react to injustice and hurts with different kinds of disempowered responses - silence, self-abuse, depression, and rage. When the child grows up in this oppressive system, her/his position often shifts and she/he assumes the role of the oppressor. This cycle is especially clear when seen in the oppression of children, but it is also visible in the oppression of groups of people based on their ethnic identity. (2016, p.103)

As a result, those who play the role of oppressed and oppressors simultaneously have also experienced oppression that they later on act like those who oppress them. Bhardwaj argues that "people are not born with the tendency to hurt other people; instead, they are taught to do so when they themselves are hurt" (2016, p.103). As such when they are oppressed, people of color turn this oppression upon themselves and those surrounding them.

This form of oppression is obvious in the novel when Toya perceives the black-black oppression as more severe than the oppression she experiences from the whites. When Deante rescues Toya from the sexual harassment and rape trial that she faces from the most handsome white schoolmate, Joshua Anderson, she blames him for betraying the whole black race. He keeps on oppressing her emotionally for being poor and weak. She tells him that he is a hypocrite because he is crueler to her and her brother than the white people. He is one of the reasons for hating the

black race. He keeps on humiliating the black people in order to be accepted by the white boys in school. He laughs at them like they are 'jokes'. In Toya's point of view, this act of belittling the black students is worse than racism because it is considered a betrayal to the whole race. In response to her accusation, Deante admits that it is better to be a hypocrite than to be lost and confused like her. The only difference between them is that he is rich and she is poor. However, being black makes him "a bottom-feeder just like a nigga from the hood" (*Into White* 2016, p.135). Thus, members of the same ethnic group may play the role of both oppressed and oppressor. Toya remarks "And in Montgomery, Alabama, black is a thread, even to other black people" (*Into White* 2016, p. 164).

These multiple forms of oppression negatively complicate the life of Toya. She finds herself living a miserable life. Accordingly, magic realism suits texts dealing with racial oppression which is the focal theme of Pink's narrative. Toya hates her black race. She wonders:

Of all the races in the world, why did God put me in the only one that didn't stick up for one another? No, worse, the one that fights members of its own army: dark-skinned against light-skinned, uppity against inner city, good hair against bad hair; Deanté against Toya (*Into White*, p. 2).

In "Magic Realism: A Typology," William Splinder classifies magical realism into three types: metaphysical magical realism, anthropological magical realism and ontological magical realism (1993, p.79-85). The first type, which corresponds with Franz Roh's concept of magical realism as an art category, is common in painting in which the artist presents artistic work from an unusual perspective. The artistic work produces a magical effect and induces a sense of unreality in the viewer. In literature, this type of magical realism does not deal with the supernatural explicitly, but the text produces a sense of unreality in the reader where a familiar thing is presented as something unknown and new (1993, p.79-85).

The second type of magical realism is the anthropological magical realism in which there are two voices for the narrator. The writer may present events from a natural point of view or from the point of view of the believer in magic. Therefore, the writer may refer to the myth or the cultural background of a particular social or ethnic group (Splinder 1993, p.79-85).

The third type of magical realism is the ontological magical realism. In this type, the supernatural is presented in a matter-of-fact way as if it is real and does not contradict reason. Moreover, no explanation is provided

for the unreal events in the text. The writer is not occupied with convincing the reader of the unusual occurrences; instead, the narrator presents the supernatural as if it is normal and part of ordinary life (Splinder 1993, p.82).

Into White belongs to the third type of magical realism in which Toya believes in the supernatural which is presented in a matter-of-fact way. Toya accepts rather than questions the logic of the supernatural element which is the appearance of Jesus as her new version is accepted by the community. She is happy with her new identity and is treated much better for being white and beautiful. After her transformation, she becomes very powerful and calls herself Katarina. Amaryll Chanady remarks that the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality is one of the most important characteristics of magic realism (1999, p.21-22). Within this context, Maria Ruth Sanchez asserts that “in magic realist writing, the community accepts and confirms what is commonly regarded as lying outside the parameters of reality in the Western world” (2000, p.33). Moreover, Kristin Luna asserts that the simple definition of magic realism is when a story is set in the real world, but the people in the world accept that some magical elements exist.

In fact, the appearance of Jesus is very functional in Toya’s development of identity and self-realization. Toya used to believe that her blackness is the reason for her suffering and that the life of the white people is amazing. Jesus appears to correct Toya’s perceptions of her identity and of her race as a whole. He gives her the chance to try what she is not. After transformation, she is able to gain better understanding about herself and the world around her. Gradually she can gain maturity and wisdom.

As an *Ontological* magic realist text, the magical elements coexist with that of realism to blur the boundaries between both realms. Ridiculed and bullied for who she is, Latoya wishes to be a white American citizen. She wants to enjoy her life as the other white girls in school who are popular and beautiful. She is dissatisfied with herself to an extent that she prays to Jesus Christ to transform her into a white girl. Due to her invisibility, she develops a feeling of disrespect for her race and contempt for herself which reflect her internalized oppression. She is dissatisfied with her reality, and she wants to change her life. Toya’s devaluing of the black race is expressed in her speech when she says “I can’t take this anymore. This filth. This curse. This ...race” (*Into White* 2016, p.2). She thinks that black skin is filled with so many barriers and so many restrictions. She shouldn’t talk too proper, or she will be accused of talking white. She shouldn’t talk too Ebonic or she will be accused of

talking ghetto (*Into White* 2016, p.77). The oppression and hardship she faces as a marginalized individual are the reason for the miraculous appearance of Jesus Christ. In fact, one of the most common manifestations of magic realism is the use of the supernatural. Since magic realism produced by American authors of color deals with their oppression and traumas, these authors employ the supernatural “to open up space for addressing histories of dispossession, oppression, and discrimination” (Jansen 2013, p. 102).

Consequently, Toya's wish comes true, and the next day she is transformed into a white and a blonde teenager. She narrates: “I woke up that morning as white as a Bing Crosby Christmas” (*Into White* 2016, p. 4). As a result, she calls herself Katarina. She becomes the center of attention of her school mates after being ignored. Those colleagues who used to despise her for who she is, are now her best friends. The novel unravels Latoya's new life and the challenges she will face through her new identity. Latham observes that “it is this merging of magical and the real that serves to socialize the young adult reader by portraying an alternative- and perhaps subversive-view of society” (2007, p.62). Hence the appearance of Jesus and Toya's transformation into a white girl, is a response to the oppression of the American society towards the black people.

An important function of the supernatural element which is evident in *Into White* is that it is used to transform the individual, the community, or both. It can also be used to connect the individual to the community. In Pink's novel, the supernatural element is meant to transform Toya to a new person to help her criticize the oppressive culture. It is also employed to help the protagonist assert her black identity. Jansen emphasizes that the supernatural does not appear out of nothing; rather, it appears “out of a need for change, in hopes of showing living people how necessary transformation is” (2013, p. 103). Toya is in need for change. She needs to view the world around her differently. Therefore, the supernatural element is clear in the appearance of Jesus Christ and his help in transforming her from an ugly black girl into a beautiful white teenager to get rid of her suffering in the oppressive American society. She utters:

Hey, Jesus? I can't take this anymore. This filth. This curse. This race.... I've done everything that you ever asked of me. I've obeyed you. Respected you. Loved you.... You said that if I seek you first, the rest shall be added to me. Well, my *rest* is the power to wake up any race I want. Please, Lord, anything but black. (*Into White* 2016, p.4)

Few days later, Jesus appears to her in her room. “He was much more personable ... He reminded me of a cool English teacher” (*Into White* 2016, p. 14). Jesus tells Toya that He walks this earth as a human, and that He understands the pain and ridicule of those who suffer. Thus, being oppressed from the white society, Toya is in great need of his help. Jesus appears to her informing that everyone will see her as a white teenager except her family. Therefore, Toya is seen and treated as a white citizen by the community of Alabama. Hence, Toya’s life will be changed completely.

Jansen points out that in magic realist texts, the supernatural aspect is used “to call into question some of the dominant culture’s basic assumptions about the nature of what is (ir)rational, (un)known, and (super)natural” (2013, p. 101). Whether they believe in the supernatural or not, magic realist authors employ this aspect literally or metaphorically to inform the reader that the world is dualistic, that there is a distinction between the past and the present, the dead and the living, the natural and the supernatural (Kolmar 1991, p. 237). That’s to say, the use of the supernatural pushes the reader to think deeply about the different dichotomies and binaries of the world. In fact, African-American authors employ supernatural aspects in their texts to reflect their beliefs in the African American culture. The mixture of the natural and the supernatural elements represents a strong force against hegemonic constructions of culture, identity and history.

Another aspect of magic realism is its emphasis on the “questioning of authority” (Latham 2007, p. 60). Magic realism is used to present the point of view of the socially, economically or geographically marginalized groups. It contains some degree of criticism of society. Through magic realism, Pink questions the social and cultural ideologies of the white society. When transformed, Toya is able to see how unjust and unethical the white society is. She finds herself trapped in the superficiality of this oppressed society. The wickedness of the white society is depicted through Joshua Anderson, her white schoolmate, who tries to rape her. It is not his first time to attack the young ladies of his school. However, when Toya reports for this rape trial and sexual harassment, no action is taken against him. On the contrary, the head of school tells her that they cannot accuse Josh of raping her because of his father’s authoritative power and wealth. Joshua is the son of the owner of Anderson Toyota, Jeep, Dodge. Toya’s character has been changed and she becomes courageous for the first time. She reports this incident through her email to Mr. Sam Watson at the Southern Education Desk, which is committed to exploring the challenges and opportunities

confronting education in the twenty-first century. This incident reveals the shortcomings of the American schools in Alabama. She realizes how unfair the white society is because it differentiates between people based on their social class and skin color.

Moreover, this superficiality of the white society is emphasized by the characterization of the twin sisters, Amelia and Amera, when Toya becomes white. The only concern of the twins is to criticize people based on their physical appearance and color. When Toya was black, they used to hate and ridicule her. However, when she transfers into Katarina, the white blonde girl, she becomes their best friend. Ironically, they tell her how much they hate Toya and her brother who are losers and niggers. Toya realizes that they are superficial and hypocrites. They prefer to starve in order not to gain weight. Toya criticizes those white people who hate the blacks only for their dark complexion. On the contrary, they spend a lot of money to get tanned:

Tanning. Another thing I never understood about white people. They go on about how disgusting black people are and then roast like Conecuh sausages in tanning beds. I overheard Heather Hinkle and Sharon Murray in English class fighting over whose tan was the darkest. *I'm darker! No! I'm darker! You're still pasty white compared to me! Hey! I'm so dark I could pass for black! No, you couldn't! I could!* But they knew good and damn well they didn't want to pass for anything except tan white people. If they wanted to be dark so badly, why hate the people who were born that way? (*Into White* 2016, p. 124)

The fifth aspect of magic realism that is clear in the novel is the “depiction of identity as fluid rather than fixed” (Latham 2007, p. 60). In fact, the question of identity is one of the main concerns of young adult literature which magic realism reflects. McCallum remarks that in adolescent literature “preoccupation with personal maturity is commonly articulated in conjunction with a perceived need for children to overcome solipsism and develop inter subjective concepts of personal identity within this world and in relation to others” (2016, p.7). Throughout the novel, Toya's identity has been changed. She has developed from a person who despises her black identity to someone who embraces her cultural identity. Toya's saving from the outright rape incident makes her proud of her cultural identity. When she refuses to have a sexual relationship with Joshua, he claims that she throws herself at him and that she has a Sexually Transmitted Disease. The twin sisters forsake her. At that moment, Katarina realizes that these twins “were the spawn of Satan

and Joshua was Satan himself” (*Into White* 2016, p. 145). She feels estranged, disappointed and oppressed because she is accused of being ‘the slut’ mistakenly. She perceives how her black identity is a shield that protects her against all these challenges and suffering. She asks Jesus again to return back to her true self and to be black. She asserts her black identity when she tells herself: “I am strong. I am able...I am black. I am beautiful. I am me. I am ... Toya”(*Into White* 2016, p.274-5).

A further aspect of magic realism is the juxtaposition of two different realities that appear simultaneously together. Pink fictionalizes two cultures that clash against each other. The white (the West) is represented by the twins Amera and Amelia who uphold negative ideas about the blacks and consider them the other. They feel that they are superior to the blacks. This culture is also represented by the rich Josh Anderson who represents the aristocratic class. On the other hand, the black (the East) is represented by Toya and her poor family. Pink also portrays Toya as having a double identity. Her story revolves around the idea that:

one man being literary two. It could be one person with two different personalities or two persons having the same aspect. The idea of the double is the most potent force in art because it stems from the view that man himself is a double: spiritual and corporal, evil and good, mortal and immortal. (Hanafy p.8)

It is through this doubleness that Toya has managed to negotiate her ethnic identity and achieve self- assertion. Toya uses to hate her black identity and wants “anything but black” (*Into White* 2016, p. 4). On the other hand, Toya enjoys her life as a white girl for some time. However, she realizes at the end that keeping her black identity is the way to real happiness. Through the flexibility of identity, Toya is changed to someone who understands that she does not need to be white in order to be happy. On the contrary, being satisfied with herself is the route to happiness.

The last aspect of magic realism evident in the novel is the use of dreams. They are considered moments of revelation. They can be calls for the awakening of the self. They are considered an outlet expression of reality. They enable characters to reconsider their own reality. (Hanafy p.5). In magic realist texts, dreams are related to the oppressed individuals. They can help oppressed people to achieve their aims. When the protagonist suffers from either sexual harassment or racial oppression, dreams become the means of salvation that free the protagonist from all psychological wounds (Al-Badaren 2019, p. 58).

In Pink’s novel, dreams become very functional and are related to the oppressed individuals like Toya. Because of the attempt of raping, Toya

dreams that she flies out of her bedroom window as if she is a bird with wings covered with feathers. She tries to climb toward the cloud. While she ascends, she sees animals exist in harmony: gazelles, lions, bears, deer and no species try to eat the other. The clouds wet her skin. Then she lands on a grassy place where Jesus appears to her to ask her about her new identity and whether she is satisfied with being Katarina.

Flying is an important and common motif in the magic realist texts. It is part of the African mythology which all Africans believe in. When humiliated, some of the oppressed groups react against oppression by flying, either they fly, or imagine they fly, or dream to fly as in Toya's case. When she faces trouble after Joshua tries to rape her, she dreams she is flying. It is a symbol of self-discovery and freedom because Toya starts to assert her black identity after that dream in which she flies like a bird with wings and feathers. According to Grace Ann Hovert and Barbra Lounsberry "flying implies raising oneself [and suggesting] physical, moral, or spiritual height or superiority... Flight has also been used to suggest the transcendence of growth" (1938, p. 119). Furthermore, flying could mean, as Dorthy Lee suggests, "liberation and transcendence-flight, literal and figurative follow the discovery of self" (1982, p. 70). As such, flying connotes different meanings among which are freedom, resistance and growth.

When Toya wakes up, she feels that the dream haunts her. She is sure that Jesus who appears in her dream has a message for her. Jesus wants to teach her a lesson. What she really needs is to be proud of who she is rather than desiring what she is not. He gives her the opportunity to be white to realize that being white is not better than being black. What is important is to accept herself and to live in peace. Therefore, this dream aims at awakening Toya towards self-realization. After this dream, Toya begins to embrace her black identity. She desires to achieve freedom. She wants to feel free as she used to be before her transformation. She wants to get rid of her new identity which restricts her happiness. Therefore, she asks Jesus to turn her black again. She realizes that the real happiness is not achieved through abandoning her real self. She is immature in asking God to transform her into a white girl. She regrets her desire and wants to turn back to her original black self. The novel ends by Toya changing completely into a mature and wise person who reconciles her conflicted identity.

To sum up, magic realism is a mode of writing that is used by ethnic writers around the world to depict the struggle and dilemma of the oppressed and the subaltern. It is employed to assert their black identity. As an African-American writer, Pink succeeds in employing magic

realism as an anti-oppressive critique. Therefore, she uses magic realism as a vehicle through which she can criticize the oppressive social context and the inequality of the white society of Montgomery, Alabama. Oppression plays an important rôle in supporting social inequality. The paper reveals that oppression and marginalization lead the protagonist to realize her self-assertion and psychological growth by the aid of the supernatural elements. The aspects of magic realism that the paper explore include: the combination between reality and the supernatural, the question of authority and social values of the mainstream white society, the depiction of identity as fluid and flexible, the juxtaposition of different realities and the use of dream and the motif of flying to approach the issues of oppression and identity. In addition, through magic realism, Pink captures the transformation of Toya's self-hatred to self-actualization as well as the development of her identity as an African-American teenager. In reflecting the interests of magical realism, young adult literature seems to be very appropriate to socialize the teens while entertaining the reader. *Into White* can be considered as an example of the African-American resistance literature in which the oppressed Toya resists the power of the mainstream white society and finally asserts her black identity.

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