Exploring Racial Dynamics and Counter narratives in the Last White Man: Application of Critical Race Theory

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ABSTRACT

Through the application of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this study focuses on the analysis of the thematic aspect of race relations and counter narrative in Mohsin Hamid's work, The Last White Man. Though each work of Hamid is located in a speculative now – now of a world where people wake up one day without their racial identifiers – the key to a new reality lies in an understanding of the figure of the 'threatening Other.' Applying CRT in the analysis of the selected novel, the paper aims at analysing that the narrative subverts the discourses of whiteness, privilege, and racism. It examines the way Hamid breaks down racial categorisations and offers counter-stories to the prevailing ones. The results reveal that the processes occurring within the characters, the studied work shows that the novel calls for the rejection of the idea of racial difference and ponder upon the evolution of identity toward equal and racism-free society. The study contributes to the methodological and theoretical literature as it relates to raced subjectivity and transformative possibilities of narratives.

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INTRODUCTION

This idea is seen as something like the plot of *The Last White Man*, a story that takes a radical view of where Race can go when everyone wakes up one day to be racially different. However, the present paper aims to identify the broader consequences of such a radical change, discuss the way it affects people's racial attitudes, shapes social policies, and implications at the interpersonal and communal levels. By reflecting on the situation through the prism of the fictional story, the text raises questions about the stability and the essence of Race and racialization, thus encouraging the reader to reconsider the issues of racism and prejudice.

Issues of Race and ethnicity remain fundamental in social sciences in general and across disciplines such as sociology, literary studies, psychology, and cultural studies in particular. Sociologists learn that managers create and preserve racial divides and ethnic stratification. In

contrast, narrow-minded scholars investigate how stories are written and appreciated in literature and the way literature reflects and affects society's approach to races (Go, 2018). From a psychological perspective, researchers investigate the influence of racial identity on the self-identity and psychological well-being of the person: a cultural approach focuses on the Race that is depicted in media and mass culture (Yip, 2018). These concepts afford a holistic understanding of the issues around Race and identity within the disciplines.

This article applies three theoretical frameworks to analyse *The Last White Man:* CRT, Post colonialism, and Intersectionality as the theoretical underpinnings for analysing and understanding the experiences of racially marginalized persons. CRT assists in illuminating racism as systemic and uncovering counter stories and oppressive narratives deeply embedded within the text and visualization. However, from Postcolonial Theory, the researchers learn about the further effects of colonialism on the present race relations between colonial and ex-colonial countries and about the new self and other formations in postcolonial societies. Intersectionality as a theory focuses on the aspect of Race and the way it works with other societal constructs, including gender, class, and sexual orientation, to both oppress and privilege.

Summary of *the Last White Man*

The Last White Man is a story – one fiction – that unfolds in contemporary society based on which skin colour suddenly changes and becomes magical in an enigmatic way. It is focused mainly on the white man Anders, whose skin colour suddenly changes to black one morning. Being the excellent scientist Anders is, he cannot explain what is happening to him, and he realizes that others are transforming in similar ways worldwide. This change of skin colour breaches social relations and undermines the established order and self-esteemed proclivities. The novel's central ideas are identity, white privilege, and the blurring of racial divides, as well as that the citizens and the community adapt to the possibilities of such transformation. In deciphering Anders' focus and the responses of other characters in the novel, the text observes and questions the process of building and dismantling racial classifications, thereby unearthing the consequences for individual and communal subjects.

Problem Statement

Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* offers quite an unusual setting for its plot, setting the reader into 'playing the race card' and twisting the roles of a white man, Anders, who suddenly becomes a man of colour. This transformation and all its implications provide a framework through which the researchers examine the presence of race in today's society. However, there is still a notable lack of focus on the critical approaches toward the analysis of the relation between literature and race as well as the impact of literature on race representation in society. Integration of CRT in this novel means that this approach will help to analyse the process of construction, experience and fight against racial constructs. This paper aims at examining the literary work titled *The Last White Man* engulfs an indication of one's stand concerning the racial issue and the existence of counter-stories.

Research Questions

1) How does *The Last White Man by* Mohsin Hamid portray the social construction of race through the protagonist's transformation for understanding racial identity?
2) In what ways does *The Last White Man* depict the everyday experiences of racism and micro aggressions and how do these experiences align with the tenets of Critical Race Theory?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Race and identity remain a significant area of controversy in the current society as they are closely associated with histories and social-political systems of society. This narrative has emerged as a postcolonial entanglement, a post-slavery struggle, a product of civil rights activism, a story of globalization, and a victim of identity politics in the age of globalization. Knowledge of this context is essential in order to be able to perceive the modern processes of crossing the divisions based on Race and identity.

The arrival of Europeans on the mainland in the early 15th century became one of the foundational cornerstones in the building of Race. European colonies required it to support their mercantilist agenda and seek more territory so they could claim they were superior to blacks as part of dividing them into a racial hierarchy that favoured the white Race. The transatlantic slave trade, a significant element of this period, deprived millions of Africans of their freedom and brought them to the Americas. This did not only offer employment to the expanding colonial economies but also cemented Race where blacks were equals enslaved, and whites were free and superior kind (Kalmar, 2023). For instance, in colonial Virginia there were legislatively enforced codes of race slavery through which racist laws were established to maintain the hegemonic order of racist natural order. The system was supported by social theories that divided people into different races, scientifically explaining these inequalities in reality (DiTomaso, 2024). The following theories included one of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's human races based on physical characteristics that provided more ammunition to theories highlighting white superiority and the inferiority of all other races (Jablonski, 2020).

The Age of Enlightenment witnessed influence, especially after the slave trade was abolished in the 19th century. In the United States, the equivalent abolition of the institution of slavery took place legally through a series of steps that included the signing by the President of the United States of America in 1863 of the emancipation declaration as well as the legal and formal abolishment of slavery through ratification of the thirteenth amendment to the constitution of the United States of America in 1865. Thus, it is essential to understand that with the abolition of slavery, racism was not eradicated but only a structure of race relationships (Perrone, 2015). They stipulated the integration of freed individuals into society as full-fledged citizens. However, this period faced much opposition, and the worst was the appearance of what is known today as the 'Jim Crow laws' in the southern part of America. These laws thus writ large the racial discrimination and vote suppression, which anchored whiteness to its position of superiority and power. Nonetheless, the Reconstruction period provided a basis for substantial legal decisions and created rights to be defended by African American organizations and many other organizations. However, black equality was still far off (Gosse & Waldstreicher, 2020).

The 1950s, especially the middle of the 20th century, was a significant phase in the fight against discrimination with America's Civil Rights Movement. This movement was marked by civil rights demonstrations, court cases, boycotts, and nonviolent protests by leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks. The Civil Rights Movement was indeed progressive; it helped address racism within institutions and changed the laws that banned discrimination in 1964 and the right to vote in 1965. These acts tore down most elements of legalized racism and prejudice, leaving other movements worldwide with a standard to meet (Andrews & Gaby, 2015). For instance, the civil rights movement that captured the American South inspired the anti-apartheid movement spearheaded by Nelson Mandela and delivered success in dismantling apartheid in South Africa. This period was

very significant as it proved the strength of the groups and that the legal propositions are very significant in addressing the inequality in society (Tournadre, 2018).

After WWII, major demographic shifts forced migration and a new influx of populations, altering the racial and ethnic profiles of many Western countries. People from former colonies moved within territories to their colonizing countries like the Caribbean to the United Kingdom, or Algerian or Moroccan people to France. This forced migration disrupted the existing racial relations of supremacy and made way for multi ethnic societies. In Western states, political authorities introduced measures to enhance multiculturalism and integration as policies were received with varying responses, some of which include (Gabaccia et al., 2023). For instance, the United Kingdom passed the Race Relations Act in 1965 that aimed at tackling racism and ensuring equal opportunities, but animosity and ACTUP continued. Coming with multiculturalism post World War II was also a double-edged sword for communities and societies because the hardships of equal integration had to be faced while dealing with inequality and prejudice (Solomos, 2022).

The late twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century involve globalization and the forces of postmodernism, adding new layers to the debates on Race and identity. Science and communication technology have taken marginalized group narratives to the mainstream by supporting global attention mechanisms such as Black Lives Matter. Minnesota, a state in the United States, was brought to the world stage in 2020 when a police officer killed George Floyd, a clear indicator of systematic racism in the world (Clark, 2019). Even in the area of invective and hate speech, it is notable that social networks have become an effective means of organizing demonstrations and raising awareness, which is evidence that technology can be an instrument for the struggle against racial discrimination. It is also worth explaining that this period has become more sensitive to race problems, requires global changes, and demands justice on the international level (Mundt, Ross, and Burnett, 2018).

Over the past few decades, Race and identity have been discussed, with identity politics as a significant facet of those discussions. This approach is essential as it engages students in eliciting and fostering understanding of other social groups' difficulties. One that has received significant attention is Kimberlé Crenshaw, who popularized Intersectionality, the process through which Race interacts with other forms of social categorization, including gender, social class, and sexual orientation, to produce multiple articulations of oppression and privilege (Harris and Leonardo, 2018). For instance, the struggles of black women cannot be viewed individually by colour and gender, but together, it is a combination of the two factors. This understanding has expanded the discourse regarding Race and identity, which is beneficial in moving toward a better conception of and pursuit of social justice (Rosette et al., 2018). However, it has also led to controversies and conflicts especially in the political domain relevant to Race, ethnicity, and privilege.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used as a theoretical framework for decoding *The Last White Man*, but it also instructively addresses race and power in the book. CRT pushes the assertion that racism is a reality of the legal and social world and not just white people's notion. As has been established in the novel, the shift that Anders takes is parodying racism's primary structure, which harms in horrifying ways. Since Anders is white, he gets all the benefits of white privilege and goes through life addicted to all its glorious amenities. Then, gradually, he tans his skin, changing an eligible young man into a spikey-eyed stereotype.

The latter is seen with CRT's critique of 'Interest Convergence,' an image that suggests that racial attitudes only evolve if they bow to the advantage of the dominant race.

Transformations occurring in the course of the story put the society in front of racism as the main characters are turning one into the other, causing the races mixture. According to Hawkins, their instability provokes characters to reconsider race and privilege. For example, if ordinary people like Anders used to interact or be associated with the racists, then today the former colleagues and acquaintances get an adverse reaction and become aggressive when meeting, showing that racism influences small talk and power dynamics.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thus, reading *The Last White Man* one receives the essential experience of being an African with an uncertain racial identity and its effect on his community. The narrative demystifies the Montagovian concept of racial classification by describing the way people wake up one day in a specially selected settlement with different skin colours the readers are expected to contemplate Race, its importance, and its creation. This change in perception significantly impacts a society's ability to look at and understand the concept of Race.

The concept of Race is depicted as fluid and socially constructed throughout the novel, as is evident from the case of Daria and other characters in the novel. When superheroes, who would have been stereotypically 'white,' undergo a skin complexion transformation to be darker, their existence and social status also transform entirely. This proves that these people did not have to be racially defined as what they imposed upon them was a product of the social standards of other people. In presenting these constructs, the narrative also invites their reconsideration and the reconsideration of Race regarding identification and social fragmentation.

These questions raise a legitimate concern with conceptualizations of Race and ethnicity, considered in *The Last White Man* and bear significant ramifications to social policy formation. If society adopted such a view of racial identity, this would bring a new shift in policies which are adopted and enforced in society. A critical implication arising from the critique of the Normal Approach is its potential impact in forcing a rethink of the traditional race essentialism constituting present-day policies (Wolfson, 2023).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines the ways in which race and racism intersect with other areas:

"One morning, Anders, a white man, woke to find he had turned a deep and undeniable brown"(22:1)

This opening line sets the stage for exploring the novel's central theme: the sharp and violent change in the status of a white man to that of a man of colour. Such a change undermines the established social race/identity paradigms and reveals that the given race divisions are entirely man-made and rather unstable. The application of "deep and undeniable brown' is used to indicate the change as lasting and conspicuous that is in direct violation of the existing social, personal transformation through race forcing both Anders and the reader to deal with it. This change is a general phenomenon that proves that the concept of race is more social than biological. Thus, CRT postulates that race is a social, economic, and political construction. Moreover, at the beginning of the film, Anders was a privileged subject – being a white man. His change of behaviour challenges these privileges as he is made to see the systems of privileges that existed and that he benefitted from.

CRT examines the ways in which race and racism intersect with Reactions from Society:

"People stared at him on the street, their eyes lingering a moment longer than he was accustomed to, their expressions shifting subtly"(22:102)

This works well to depict the micro-aggression that people of colour go through in society, as Anders transforms into an object of stares and uneasiness in public establishments. Gazes and frowns are the observation of micro aggression, thus far familiar to any worker of colour and often trivialized in society. This is especially true to CRT which views racism as normal, being present in every day social interactions.

CRT examines the ways in which race and racism intersect with Family and Personal Relationships:

"Anders' mother refused to see him, saying she didn't recognize the man who stood before her" (22:78)

With reference to skin colour, it implies that Anders' change of skin colour interferes with his relations including the family. There the author defined that racism is estrange even family members when his mother completely ignored him. This reaction is also be explained by internalized racism, the phenomenon that often racist attitudes of the society are adopted by individuals belonging to a certain race. Thus, it draws attention to the everydayness of infrastructures of racial thought.

CRT examines the ways in which race and racism intersect with Anders' Internal Struggle

"He wondered if he had become someone else entirely and if his thoughts and feelings would change along with his skin" (2022:45)

The internal struggle that Anders exhibits is psychological as it touches on the issue of race and the manner in which it influences one's identity. The fact that he is not sure of his identity after the transformation is a classic illustration of the way that the issue of racial categorization impacts one's personality. Such internal conflict prompts readers to question the extent to which people's identity depends on race and the social perceptions shape the self.

CRT examines the ways in which race and racism intersect with Forming Alliances:

"He found solace among others who had changed, forming a community that understood his plight"(2022:123)

Thus, the creation of the group of like-minded people who have experienced such a change serves as an effective response to the norms shaping society. This collective affirms and makes sense of the world in ways that mainstream society and its institutions deny and exclude. CRT also deals with the ability of the oppressed to establish their territories and their own stories. Thus, this community creates a form of resistance and empowers people to defy the loneliness enacted by the strategies of a racialized society.

Considering CRT, the analysis of author's *The Last White Man* is aimed at the exposure of the racial identities' fragmentation and the omnipresence of racism. Thus, the transformation of Anders is a powerful instrument that reflects the readers upon the fictitious and discursive nature of race. Thus, recognising the societal reactions, interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal conflicts of the protagonist, the novel brings to the foreground the realistic aspects of racism and the necessity of the antiracial discourses. Thus, this analysis not only serves to enhance the comprehension of the current novel but also enhances the global discourse on race, identity and resistance in contemporary literature.

DISCUSSION

The research also indicates that one of the themes the novel pokes at is the manner in which race is socially imagined. Anders' change to a black man from a white man makes the protagonist and the society and around him to realize that race is a social construction that does not have any real meaning. This correlates with CRT in its tenet that race is not a real thing as it is inherently in the blood stream but a social construct that has severe ramifications on one's existence. The revealed analysis of the novel proves that the society has been judging and treating people based on their racial appearance; thus, the novel is the evidence of the racial identity categories being a constructed concept.

In the movie In the flesh, Anders wake up with dark skin afterward; his whole outlook of life and even his interaction with society changes, and this portrays the way people's perception of race is just skin deep. This transformation raises the issue to the reader and makes him/her doubt on the existence and stability of racism.

Racism is brought out in the novel in a way that warns the reader that people of colour are bound to suffer racism under normal circumstances. Micro aggressions and racism are illustrated by Anders' experience after he transforms into a black man, showing how racism is a constant social issue that affects minorities. This will justify CRT's assertion that racism is in fact normal and is present in the daily social reality of people.

The change in people's body language and the growing attention paid to Anders once outside the home can be observed as simple racisms, which are present daily in the lives of people of colour. All these interactions depict how racist theories have permeated the society and people which have made racism a standard affair of their everyday lives.

The aspect of racial identity and the way it influences relationships within families and individuals is portrayed in the novel. This is very evident in the way that, despite having a qualitative change in appearance, Anders' mother could not accept him and their relationship anymore because of racism. This implies that the understanding of societal racial norms is deeply rooted in relation and even within members of a family, where racist discourse and racial prejudice are part of people's ordinary experiences.

The rejection of Anders' mother means that even the closest relations are defined by the racial framework and the subjects' perceptions of it. The internalized racism within the family is consistent with the CRT's assertion that the race is a constant aspect, from governing the social relations to dominating the inner circle of human rights.

The given examples of racial categorisation affects a person's identity make it clear that psychological changes are possible. Such changes in the black female's status describe the consequence of a new race-oriented identity and capture how the perception of others impacts their individualism. This makes up the core of CRT since it deals with the psychological aspects of race and the mental struggles that are brought by existence in a racial hierarchy.

The implication of whether Anders' thoughts and feels might shift together with skin tone proves that race and self-identity are intertwined. This inner strife is an important indication of the cost of racial typing and the expectations from the different racial groups that are implicit in the social system.

The creation of an identity among people who have gone through the similar changes presents a strong opposition to various cultural discourses. This collective offers solidarity, power and oppression against racism and detainees and limits free social mixtures that the

dominant race puts into practice. This finding is also consistent with CRT's call for the counter-stories that help to amplify the stance of oppressed voices and disrupt the status quo.

The discussion of CRT with reference to *The Last White Man* indicates the text's critical response to the issues of race and the developments of the counter-stories. Thus by showing that the race is socially constructed, it is normalized, and it intrudes into individual relationships with the process of racial identification that can distort one's psychology, and supportive people of colour form their social groups this novel offers a comprehensible space for the contestation of dominant racial discourses. So, these discoveries do not only add to the interpretation of the novel but also enrich the further discussion of race, identity, and resistance in contemporary literature.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the frameworks of Critical Race Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Interse functionality, *The Last White Man* is a good way of explicating the meanings of Race. In using CRT, we expose the enduring problem of racism as well as examine the importance of counter narratives as approaches to fighting racist thinking and domination. What is more, Postcolonial reveals the prolonged effects of colonialism and the production of a new racial mixture, which destabilizes the binary division between Black and White; meanwhile, Intersectionality raises awareness of Race as a category intertwines with the other forms, thus producing complex differential effects of power. In this regard, these theoretical perspectives support further debates and analysis of the race issue as a topical theme in both literature and, more broadly in society as a whole. Such discussions are crucial in removing racial bias and in establishing a social atmosphere that is fair to everyone. With *The Last White Man*, Mohsin Hamid demonstrates that literature can approach social issues and provide contemplations to make people examine the problem of Race more closely.

Further research includes cross-disciplinary research incorporating sociology, psychology, literature, and cultural studies to focus on racial relations. In the same way, exploring that the Race is portrayed in the media and digital technology that has extended its prejudice with expanding the knowledge about Race as a particular trend in the modern world. These research lines are generated more profound and diverse understandings of how and why identity, power, and change work in the ways revealed.

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