

IDENTITY AND TRANSFORMATION: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF MOHSIN HAMID'S THE LAST WHITE MAN (2022)

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ABSTRACT

The study examines Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man" to explore identity in a postcolonial context, focusing on the novel's treatment of racial transformation and its effects on personal and collective identities. It interrogates how the interplay between physical and societal transformations within the narrative engages with postcolonial themes of race, identity, and belonging. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Frantz Fanon, with his focus on the psychological impacts of colonialism on identity, and Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the "third space," the study aims to understand how Hamid's speculative narrative questions and reshapes conventional postcolonial themes of otherness and sameness. The significance of this study lies in its capacity to shed light on the complexities of postcolonial identity formation, challenging the rigidity of racial categories and societal norms that enforce these constructions. The conclusion highlights the novel's contribution to postcolonial discourse, urging a reevaluation of identity beyond binary racial distinctions, towards a more inclusive understanding of human connection.

Keywords: postcolonial identity, racial, transformation, Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, hybridity, third space, Mohsin Hamid, The Last White Man,

INTRODUCTION

The study of identity and transformation within postcolonial contexts presents a compelling exploration into how colonial histories have shaped, and continue to influence, the societies that emerged from colonial rule. This field scrutinizes the dynamics of power, culture, and identity, unfolding how the legacy of colonization impacts the postcolonial identity construction and societal transformations. (Young, 2020). The intricate relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the processes of cultural assimilation, resistance, and hybridity, and the ongoing struggles for decolonization and autonomy are central themes in postcolonial studies.

At the heart of postcolonial studies is the understanding of 'identity'—a multifaceted concept that encompasses the sense of self, community, and belonging. (Nasser, 2019). The term 'identity' finds its etymological roots in the Latin word 'identitas,' which refers to the quality of being oneself or itself,

and not something else. (Kirkeby, 2016). This concept has evolved to encompass individual, collective, and national dimensions, influenced by factors such as culture, language, history, and geography. In the postcolonial context, identity is often marked by a sense of duality or hybridity, reflecting the intertwining of indigenous traditions with colonial legacies. (Ramirez, & Munar, 2022). The transformation of identity in postcolonial societies involves a continuous process of negotiation and re-negotiation of this hybridity, challenging the binaries of colonizer/colonized, traditional/modern, and Western/non-Western. The transformative aspect of postcolonial studies further delves into how societies undergo significant changes in their quest for decolonization and the reclamation of identity. (St-Denis, & Walsh, 2016). This transformation is not merely political or economic but deeply cultural, affecting how communities understand themselves and their place

in the world. It involves a re-evaluation of history, culture, and identity, often leading to a resurgence of indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and practices that were suppressed or marginalized during colonial rule. (Sharma, 2021).

One of the seminal works in postcolonial studies, Edward Said's "Orientalism" (1978), provides a critical analysis of how the West constructed the East as its 'Other,' laying the foundation for a form of knowledge and power that justified colonial domination. Said's work has been instrumental in highlighting the role of discourse in the construction of identity and the mechanisms through which colonial narratives have shaped perceptions of the postcolonial 'Other.' This discourse analysis is crucial in understanding the process of identity transformation, as it unveils the ways in which colonial legacies continue to permeate the consciousness of postcolonial societies. (Mechkarini, et al., 2023).

In addition to Said, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity' offers insight into the complexities of postcolonial identity. Bhabha (1994) argues that cultural production in the postcolonial world is characterized by a hybridization process, where identities are formed at the intersection of different cultures and histories. This hybridity challenges the authenticity and purity of identities, suggesting that postcolonial identities are inherently fluid and negotiated spaces. Bhabha's work emphasizes the transformative potential of hybridity, where the creation of new cultural forms and practices can subvert colonial authority and foster a sense of agency among the colonized.

Furthermore, the role of language in the transformation of postcolonial identities cannot be understated. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in his seminal work "Decolonising the Mind" (1986), discusses the profound impact of language in shaping consciousness and asserts the importance of reclaiming indigenous languages as a means of resisting cultural domination and reasserting identity. Language is not merely a tool for communication but a carrier of culture, history, and identity. In postcolonial societies, the struggle over language often symbolizes the broader struggle for cultural sovereignty and the right to define one's own identity.

The study of identity and transformation in postcolonial contexts thus involves a multidimensional analysis that spans historical,

cultural, and theoretical perspectives. It requires an examination of how colonial legacies are woven into the fabric of postcolonial societies, influencing the way identities are constructed, contested, and transformed. This field of study not only contributes to our understanding of the complexities of postcolonial societies but also highlights the resilience and creativity of communities in redefining their identities and shaping their futures in the aftermath of colonial rule.

1.2 Overview of Mohsin Hamid and *The Last White Man*

Mohsin Hamid is a distinguished Pakistani author known for his innovative narrative techniques and profound exploration of themes such as identity, migration, and the human condition in the context of global socio-political landscapes. His writing, characterized by its conciseness, depth, and often speculative approach, has garnered international acclaim and a wide readership, making him one of the most significant contemporary voices in literature.

"*The Last White Man*," a novel by Mohsin Hamid, continues his exploration of complex themes, this time delving into issues of race, identity, and transformation. In this speculative fiction, Hamid imagines a world where people suddenly begin to transform into a different race, specifically, where white people wake up to find their skin has turned dark. The novel centers around one such individual, Anders, and his experience of waking up one morning to find that his appearance has dramatically changed. This physical transformation triggers a profound existential and societal crisis, leading to a deep introspection and reevaluation of identity at both the personal and community levels.

Through "*The Last White Man*," Hamid addresses the constructs of race and identity, questioning the deep-seated prejudices and societal norms that govern human interactions. The novel is a meditation on the otherness and the fear that comes with being perceived as different, while also exploring the potential for empathy, understanding, and unity in the face of profound changes. Hamid's narrative is a powerful allegory for the contemporary world, challenging readers to reflect on the arbitrary nature of racial identities and the possibilities for a more inclusive understanding of humanity.

The novel is praised for its poignant storytelling, philosophical depth, and the way it seamlessly

weaves individual human experiences with broader societal issues. Hamid's prose is both elegant and accessible, inviting readers into a deeply immersive and thought-provoking exploration of what it means to be human in a world marked by division and change.

"*The Last White Man*" adds to Mohsin Hamid's repertoire of work that includes other critically acclaimed novels such as "Moth Smoke," "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," and "Exit West." Each of these works showcases Hamid's skill in addressing pressing global issues with nuance and empathy, making him a vital voice in contemporary literature. Through "*The Last White Man*," Hamid once again proves his ability to confront uncomfortable truths and open up spaces for reflection and conversation about identity, belonging, and the capacity for transformation in human society.

1.3 Research Questions

- In what ways does "*The Last White Man*" explore the interplay between physical and societal transformation to engage with postcolonial themes of race, identity, and belonging?
- How does Mohsin Hamid's speculative approach in the selected text serve to question and reshape the conventional postcolonial themes of *otherness* and *sameness* in terms of race and identity?
- How does Hamid's "*The Last White Man*" explore the concept of *identity* in a postcolonial context and its impact on personal and collective identities?

1.4 Research Objectives

- To examine the connections between physical changes and societal shifts in the novel, focusing on their implications for postcolonial understandings of race, identity, and belonging.
- To assess the role of speculative fiction in challenging and redefining traditional postcolonial narratives of otherness and sameness within the novel's exploration of race and identity.
- To analyze how "*The Last White Man*" portrays identity transformation in a postcolonial setting and its effects on both personal and collective senses of self.

1.5 Significance of the study

This study holds significant value as it delves into Mohsin Hamid's "*The Last White Man*" to unearth how speculative fiction can serve as a powerful lens for examining and challenging postcolonial themes of identity, race, and belonging. By analyzing the novel's unique portrayal of racial transformation and societal change, the research aims to enrich the discourse on postcolonial studies, offering fresh insights into contemporary issues of race and identity, and contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of otherness and sameness.

1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for a postcolonial study on "Identity and Transformation" draws extensively from the seminal works of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, two towering figures whose contributions to postcolonial theory have illuminated the complexities of identity, culture, and power dynamics in the aftermath of colonialism. This framework integrates their theories to explore the processes through which colonial legacies shape and are reshaped by the identities of the colonized.

Frantz Fanon, a Martinique-born psychiatrist and philosopher, is best known for his analysis of the psychological effects of colonialism on both the colonizer and the colonized. His works, such as "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952) and "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961), provide a critical foundation for understanding the internalization of colonial inferiority and the path towards psychological liberation and the construction of a new identity (Fanon, 1952; Fanon, 1961). Fanon's theory of identity is rooted in the notion of 'negritude', a conscious awakening and embrace of African culture and heritage as a form of resistance against the imposed values and identities of the colonizers. He argued that the colonial condition is characterized by a violent dichotomy that traps the colonized in a perpetual struggle for recognition and authenticity, which can only be resolved through the decolonization of the mind and the assertion of a self-defined identity.

Homi K. Bhabha, on the other hand, introduces the concept of "hybridity" as a critical element in understanding postcolonial identity (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha's work focuses on the cultural interactions between the colonizer and the colonized, leading to the emergence of new identities that are neither fully

original nor entirely imposed but are instead hybrid, fluid, and dynamic. He argues that this interstitial space, which he terms "the third space," allows for the negotiation of cultural identity beyond binary oppositions, enabling the creation of new forms of identity that challenge the authenticity and authority of colonial narratives (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity complements Fanon's analysis of psychological liberation, offering a nuanced understanding of how identities are continuously shaped and reshaped in the context of cultural exchange and conflict.

Integrating Fanon's and Bhabha's theories, the theoretical framework for studying "Identity and Transformation" in a postcolonial context emphasizes the intricate processes of identity formation that occur in the aftermath of colonialism. This framework acknowledges the psychological impact of colonialism, as outlined by Fanon, while also embracing Bhabha's concept of hybridity to explore the fluid and evolving nature of postcolonial identities. Through this lens, the study seeks to understand how individuals and communities navigate the legacies of colonialism, negotiate their cultural identities, and articulate new forms of selfhood and agency in a changing world.

Fanon's and Bhabha's theories on the lived experiences of postcolonial subjects. By synthesizing Fanon's emphasis on decolonization of the psyche and Bhabha's articulation of hybrid identities, the framework suggests that identity in postcolonial societies is an ongoing negotiation of past traumas, present realities, and future aspirations. This negotiation is inherently complex, as it involves reconciling the historical narratives imposed by colonial powers with the emergent narratives that individuals and communities construct in their quest for autonomy and self-definition.

Fanon's insights into the mechanisms of colonial oppression and the path towards liberation highlight the importance of acknowledging and confronting the psychological scars left by colonialism. His analysis suggests that the colonized subject's journey towards a coherent identity must pass through the recognition of their dehumanization under colonial rule and the active rejection of the inferior status assigned to them. This psychological emancipation is a prerequisite for the development of a new self-concept that is liberated from the constraints of colonial narratives and values.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity further complicates the understanding of postcolonial identity by suggesting that such identities are formed in spaces of ambiguity and contestation. The "third space" that Bhabha describes is not merely a site of cultural mixing but a dynamic field of negotiation where meanings and values are contested and redefined. This perspective challenges the notion of cultural purity and highlights the creative potential of hybrid identities to subvert traditional binaries and forge new pathways of belonging and resistance.

The theoretical framework derived from the works of Fanon and Bhabha illuminates the multi-layered process of identity formation in postcolonial contexts. It underscores the significance of psychological liberation, the inevitability of hybridity, and the transformative potential of cultural negotiation. Through this lens, postcolonial studies can delve into the nuanced ways in which identities are constructed and expressed in a world still grappling with the legacies of colonialism. This approach not only enriches our understanding of postcolonial identities but also offers a critical perspective on the broader questions of power, resistance, and cultural production in the global context.

By employing this framework, scholars and practitioners can better appreciate the intricate interplay between the colonial past and the postcolonial present in shaping identities. This understanding is essential for addressing the challenges and opportunities that arise in the process of identity transformation, enabling individuals and societies to forge paths toward healing, empowerment, and cultural renewal.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework based on Fanon's and Bhabha's contributions offers a comprehensive lens through which to examine the complexities of identity and transformation in postcolonial societies. It highlights the critical role of psychological and cultural negotiation in overcoming colonial legacies and articulating new forms of identity. This framework not only advances academic discourse in postcolonial studies but also has profound implications for the practical pursuit of social justice, cultural affirmation, and collective healing in postcolonial contexts.

2. ANALYSIS

"One morning Anders, a white man, woke up to find he had turned a deep and undeniable brown... the face looking back at him was not his at all" (Hamid, 2022, p. 1)

Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man" presents a profound exploration of identity within a postcolonial context, intertwining themes of racial transformation, identity, and belonging through the lens of speculative fiction. This narrative resonates with Frantz Fanon's and Homi K. Bhabha's theories on race, identity, and postcolonialism, offering a rich ground for discussion on how personal and collective identities are constructed and deconstructed in the face of societal changes.

In "The Last White Man," the sudden and inexplicable transformation of Anders, a white man, into a deep brown-skinned individual serves as a metaphor for the fluidity and constructiveness of racial identity, challenging the binary oppositions that often characterize discussions on race and identity. This transformation echoes Fanon's insights on the psychosocial impacts of racialization and colonial domination, particularly his discussions on the internalization of racial hierarchies and the quest for self-recognition within a colonially imposed identity framework (Fanon, 1952). Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "third space" offers a theoretical lens through which to understand Anders' transformation, as it disrupts established categories of identity and belonging, creating a space where traditional binaries collapse and new forms of identity emerge (Bhabha, 1994).

Hamid's speculative approach, by introducing a physical transformation that mirrors and prompts societal transformation, delves into the interplay between individual identity and societal perceptions of race. This approach not only questions the stability of racial identities but also highlights the role of societal constructs in defining and maintaining these identities. The character's initial horror and subsequent realization of his transformation reflect the deeply ingrained fears and prejudices associated with racial otherness, effectively engaging with postcolonial themes of alienation and belonging. The narrative prompts readers to consider how societal reactions to Anders' new identity mirror broader responses to racial and cultural difference, thereby exploring the mechanisms through which otherness is constructed and contested in a postcolonial world.

Furthermore, Hamid's narrative challenges conventional postcolonial themes of otherness and sameness by presenting a scenario where the boundaries between the self and the other are blurred. Through Anders' transformation, Hamid interrogates the constructs of race and identity, suggesting that these are not innate or fixed but are rather shaped by social, historical, and political forces. This speculative framing allows for a reimagining of postcolonial themes, encouraging a reevaluation of notions of purity, authenticity, and belonging in a world increasingly characterized by hybridity and fluid identities.

The novel utilizes a speculative narrative to explore complex postcolonial themes of race, identity, and belonging. By intertwining the personal transformation of Anders with broader societal shifts, Hamid engages with theories proposed by Fanon and Bhabha, challenging readers to reconsider conventional understandings of racial identity and the binaries that often define postcolonial discourse. This novel serves as a poignant reflection on the ongoing struggles for recognition and belonging in a world marked by colonial legacies and racial hierarchies.

"He was overtaken by emotion, not so much shock, or sorrow, though those things were there too, but above all the face replacing his filled him with anger, or rather, more than anger, an unexpected, murderous rage". (Hamid, 2022, p. 2)

In the novel the protagonist's emotional turmoil upon witnessing his racial transformation—from white to a deep, undeniable brown—delves deeply into the complexities of identity in a postcolonial context. This transformation and the consequent emotional response, characterized not just by shock or sorrow but by an "unexpected, murderous rage," resonate profoundly with the theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, offering a nuanced exploration of the impact of racial transformation on personal and collective identities.

Fanon's work on the psychological effects of colonialism and racial identity, particularly his discussions on the violence inherent in the colonizer-colonized relationship and the internalized racism experienced by black individuals in white-dominated societies, provides a critical lens through which to understand the protagonist's rage (Fanon, 1952). This intense emotional reaction can be seen as emblematic of the broader, often violent, responses to racial and cultural displacement and subjugation detailed in

Fanon's analyses. It speaks to a deep-seated existential and identity crisis, prompted by the sudden and irrevocable change in how the self is perceived and valued within the societal hierarchy. Similarly, Bhabha's concept of the "third space" of hybridity—where cultural, national, and racial identities intersect and interact—offers insight into the interplay between physical transformation and societal reactions in "The Last White Man" (Bhabha, 1994). The protagonist's transformation disrupts traditional binaries of race and identity, creating a space where established norms and perceptions are questioned and redefined. This speculative narrative device, therefore, serves as a means of engaging with postcolonial themes of race, identity, and belonging, challenging the reader to reconsider the fixedness of these concepts and the social structures that support them.

Hamid's speculative approach, using the metaphor of racial transformation to explore themes of otherness and sameness, directly engages with and challenges conventional postcolonial themes. By presenting a scenario in which the boundaries between the self and the other are not just blurred but completely overturned, Hamid prompts a reevaluation of the constructs of race and identity. This not only questions the stability and permanence of these constructs but also highlights the role of societal perceptions and reactions in their formation and maintenance. Through the protagonist's emotional journey and the societal response to his transformation, Hamid explores the violence of identity reconstruction in a postcolonial world, where the remnants of colonial hierarchies and racial categorizations continue to exert a powerful influence on personal and collective identities.

In essence, the novel through its exploration of racial transformation and its profound impact on the protagonist, serves as a poignant narrative reflection on the constructs of race and identity in a postcolonial context. Engaging with the theories of Fanon and Bhabha, the novel invites a critical examination of the mechanisms through which societies construct and deconstruct racial and cultural identities, and the often violent emotional and existential crises that accompany these processes.

"he had been robbed, that he was the victim of a crime, the horror of which only grew, a crime that had taken everything from him, that had taken him from him, for how could

he say he was Anders now, be Anders now", (Hamid, 2022, p.2)

The excerpt delves into the profound impact of racial transformation on personal and collective identities through the lens of speculative fiction, resonating with the postcolonial theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha. The protagonist's sensation of having been robbed of his identity, feeling like a victim of a crime that has "taken him from him," encapsulates the existential crisis induced by the sudden, unexplained change in his racial appearance. This narrative choice reflects Fanon's exploration of the colonized individual's psychological landscape, where the imposition of a racial identity by the colonizer leads to a profound identity crisis and alienation (Fanon, 1952). Similarly, it engages with Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the "third space," where traditional identities are deconstructed and reimagined, challenging the binary oppositions of colonizer/colonized, self/other (Bhabha, 1994).

Hamid's narrative strategy employs the protagonist's transformation to explore the complex interplay between physical appearance and societal perceptions of identity. This transformation acts as a catalyst for societal change, forcing characters within the novel to confront their preconceived notions of race, identity, and belonging. Through this, Hamid addresses the postcolonial themes of race and identity, suggesting that identity is not a static, inherent trait but a construct influenced by societal norms and interactions.

Hamid's speculative approach serves to question and reshape conventional postcolonial themes of otherness and sameness. By rendering the protagonist's racial transformation as a metaphor for the fluidity of identity, Hamid challenges the notion of fixed racial identities and the binary distinctions that often define postcolonial discourse. This speculative element allows for a reevaluation of the concepts of otherness and sameness, proposing that identity is multifaceted and continually shaped by social, historical, and personal factors.

"The Last White Man" uses a speculative narrative to engage with and expand upon postcolonial theories of identity, race, and belonging. Through the protagonist's experience, Hamid reflects on the constructed nature of racial identities and the societal mechanisms that enforce these constructs, aligning with and contributing to the ongoing discourse in postcolonial studies as explored by theorists like Fanon and Bhabha.

"He did not know what they were thinking, if they were thinking anything, and he suspected it was only in his imagination that he saw flickers of hostility or distaste."(Hamid, 2022, p.4)

In *"The Last White Man"*, Mohsin Hamid intricately weaves the protagonist's uncertainty about the perceptions of others towards his sudden racial transformation into a broader discussion on identity, belonging, and the postcolonial condition. This exploration is deeply resonant with the theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, who each dissect the complexities of identity formation and negotiation in contexts shaped by colonial histories. Fanon's analysis of the colonized individual's internal conflict, as outlined in *"Black Skin, White Masks"* (1952), sheds light on the protagonist's introspection and perceived external judgments. Fanon suggests that the colonized body is often subjected to a distorted, reductive perception by the colonizer, leading to an internalized sense of inferiority and alienation. The protagonist's suspicion of hostility or distaste, even if imagined, reflects Fanon's notion of the psychological battle waged within individuals who are forced to navigate their identities within the gaze of a racially prejudiced society. This internalized anxiety highlights the ongoing struggle for self-definition in the face of societal preconceptions and the legacy of colonialist thought patterns.

Bhabha's concept of the "third space" of hybridity, where cultural and identity negotiation occurs, is also relevant here. Bhabha argues in *"The Location of Culture"* (1994) that this space allows for the emergence of new, hybrid identities that can challenge and destabilize fixed notions of self and other. Hamid's narrative, through the lens of the protagonist's racial transformation, engages with this "third space," suggesting that identity is not a fixed attribute but a fluid construct shaped by social interaction and perception. The protagonist's experience forces a reevaluation of established categories of race and identity, illustrating Bhabha's theory that cultural and identity hybridity can undermine authoritative narratives and create possibilities for new forms of understanding and belonging.

Hamid uses the speculative element of racial transformation in *"The Last White Man"* to question and reshape conventional postcolonial themes of otherness and sameness. By depicting a world where

racial identities can suddenly change, Hamid challenges the permanence of racial categories and the social hierarchies they support. This speculative approach not only provides a unique lens through which to explore the fluidity of identity but also critiques the societal constructs that define and confine it. The protagonist's concern over perceived negative judgments underscores the powerful role of societal perception in shaping individual identity, highlighting the continuous interplay between self-perception and external validation in the construction of identity.

The novel engages with Fanon's and Bhabha's postcolonial theories by exploring the impact of racial transformation on identity through the protagonist's speculative experience. This approach allows Hamid to dissect the constructed nature of racial identities and the societal forces that shape perceptions of self and other, contributing to a broader discussion on the fluidity of identity and the potential for hybridity and change within postcolonial contexts. *"Anders had not yet seen anyone since he had changed, and he was not keen to see anyone, but he was out of milk"*(Hamid, 2022, p. 3)

In novel the protagonist Anders' reluctance to encounter anyone post-transformation poignantly captures the complexities of identity and the anxieties surrounding societal acceptance in a postcolonial context. This moment of hesitation, rooted in a profound uncertainty about his new racial identity, encapsulates the struggle for personal and collective identity renegotiation, resonating with the theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha.

Fanon, in *"Black Skin, White Masks"* (1952), delves into the psychological impacts of colonialism on black individuals, highlighting how racial identity is constructed and perceived within a racially stratified society. Anders' apprehension about being seen in public reflects Fanon's insights into the colonized individual's consciousness, where the internalization of the colonizer's gaze leads to a fragmented self-image. This fragmentation is not just personal but extends to how collective identities are negotiated within societal structures that privilege certain racial identities over others.

Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the "third space," as discussed in *"The Location of Culture"* (1994), offers a lens through which to understand Anders' transformation and its societal implications. Bhabha suggests that cultural and identity hybridity can

subvert traditional binaries of identity, creating spaces for new forms of identification and belonging. Anders' new racial identity positions him within this "third space," where fixed notions of race and identity are challenged, prompting a reevaluation of what it means to belong to a community.

Hamid's speculative approach, by focusing on a sudden and inexplicable racial transformation, questions the rigidity of racial identities and the societal norms that enforce them. This transformation acts as a metaphor for the fluidity of identity, challenging conventional postcolonial themes of otherness and sameness. Through Anders' experience, Hamid explores how societal perceptions of race shape individual and collective identities, underscoring the ongoing negotiation between self-perception and external categorization.

"Why did the new way he looked at Anders bother Anders... he would talk to him and see what he had to say". (Hamid, 2022, p. 27)

The quote presents a profound examination of the dynamics of identity, race, and interpersonal relations within a postcolonial framework, particularly through the lens of Anders' intention to alter his interactions with the cleaning guy. This shift in Anders' approach, motivated by his own transformative experience, resonates with the postcolonial theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, offering a nuanced exploration of identity in the context of racial transformation and societal perception.

Fanon, in his seminal work "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952), discusses the psychological effects of colonialism on both the colonizer and the colonized, highlighting how dehumanizing perceptions can internalize inferiority in the latter. Anders' realization that his previous behaviour towards the cleaning guy was not genuinely nice but rather patronizing reflects Fanon's critique of colonial relationships, where superficial niceties mask deeper inequalities and a lack of genuine human connection. This insight into Anders' thought process underscores a moment of self-awareness and a desire to break free from the condescending patterns of interaction that are reminiscent of colonial attitudes.

Bhabha's concept of the "third space," a theoretical framework for understanding the complexities of cultural identity and interaction, further illuminates Anders' decision to engage more authentically with the cleaning guy (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha argues that

cultural interaction in the postcolonial world is characterized by hybridity and the negotiation of identities in spaces that do not adhere to traditional binaries. Anders' choice to initiate a real conversation symbolizes a step into this "third space," where identities can be more fluid and where interactions are not predetermined by social hierarchies or racial categorizations.

Hamid's speculative approach, which uses racial transformation as a narrative device, serves to question and critically examine conventional themes of otherness and sameness within the context of race and identity. By depicting Anders' change in physical appearance and subsequent shift in perspective towards interpersonal relationships, Hamid explores how external changes can provoke internal reflections on identity, equality, and genuine human connection. This narrative strategy challenges the reader to consider the artificiality of racial and social distinctions and the potential for empathy and understanding to transcend these divisions.

Through Anders' evolving relationship with the cleaning guy, Hamid illustrates the potential for personal transformation to foster a deeper understanding of the other and to challenge the entrenched behaviors and perceptions that perpetuate inequality. This exploration aligns with the theories of Fanon and Bhabha, offering a compelling critique of postcolonial identity and the possibility of moving beyond the legacies of colonialism towards more authentic and equitable human connections.

"Anders did not normally mind being alone but as he was just then it was as if he was not alone, was rather in tense and hostile company". (Hamid, 2022, p.3).

This excerpt delves into the complexities of identity in a postcolonial context through the narrative of Anders, whose experience of racial transformation becomes a catalyst for exploring themes of alienation, self-perception, and the social construction of identity. This narrative resonates with the theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, offering a nuanced examination of the impact of racial transformation on personal and collective identities.

Fanon, in works such as "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952), articulates the psychological distress and alienation experienced by individuals in colonial and postcolonial societies, where the imposed racial hierarchy deeply affects personal identity and self-perception. Anders' feeling of being in "tense and hostile company" despite being alone mirrors

Fanon's observations about the internalization of colonial attitudes, suggesting that the transformation has thrust Anders into a confrontation with the internalized otherness that Fanon describes as a hallmark of colonial domination. This sense of alienation from oneself, a key theme in Fanon's work, highlights the disjunction between the self and the societal reflections of identity.

Bhabha's concept of the "third space" offers a framework for understanding the interplay between Anders' physical transformation and societal perceptions. According to Bhabha (1994), cultural identity is formed and transformed in the intersection of different cultures and histories, creating spaces where traditional binaries are disrupted and new forms of identity can emerge. Anders' transformation and his subsequent feelings of alienation and internal hostility can be seen as a manifestation of this "third space," where his identity is no longer fixed but is in a state of flux, challenging the established notions of race, identity, and belonging.

Hamid's speculative approach, by employing a physical transformation as a metaphor, engages deeply with postcolonial themes of otherness and sameness. It compels readers to question how societal and internalized perceptions of race shape identity and belonging. The protagonist's transformation and his ensuing emotional turmoil serve as a critique of the rigid constructions of racial identity and the impact of these constructions on individual and collective identities. By highlighting Anders' internal conflict, Hamid critiques the binary oppositions that often underpin discussions of race and identity, advocating instead for a more fluid understanding of identity that accommodates the complexities of individual experiences.

The novel uses the speculative narrative of racial transformation to critically engage with and expand upon postcolonial theories of identity, alienation, and the construction of selfhood. Through Anders' experiences, Hamid explores the societal and internal challenges of navigating identity in a world marked by racial hierarchies, aligning with and contributing to the discourse initiated by theorists like Fanon and Bhabha.

"The gym filled as the day progressed... sort of on edge".(Hamid, 2022, p.18)

In "The Last White Man," Mohsin Hamid captures the nuances of identity transformation and societal reaction through the experiences of Anders in the familiar yet suddenly alienating environment of his

gym. This narrative moment reflects the theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, offering a rich exploration of identity in a postcolonial context, particularly through the lens of racial transformation and its impact on both personal and collective identities.

Fanon's work, especially "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952), delves into the psychological effects of colonization and the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, focusing on the alienation and identity crisis experienced by those navigating postcolonial societies. The stares and changed behaviours Anders encounters in the gym, once a place of comfort and respect, mirror Fanon's concept of epidermalization, the embodiment of racial difference inscribed on the skin that subjects individuals to the dehumanizing gaze of others. This transformation prompts an internal and external crisis of identity for Anders, reflecting Fanon's assertion that racial identity is both a societal imposition and a source of internal conflict.

Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity and the "third space," articulated in "The Location of Culture" (1994), further illuminates the narrative. Bhabha posits that identity is formed in the interstices between cultures, challenging binary distinctions and allowing for the emergence of complex, hybrid identities. Anders' situation in the gym—where his physical transformation disrupts the established social dynamics—embodies this "third space," where his identity is renegotiated in the face of societal perceptions and expectations. This space becomes a site of tension but also potential, where the fixed identities and roles prescribed by the gym's culture are questioned and could be redefined.

Hamid's speculative approach serves to question and reshape the conventional postcolonial themes of otherness and sameness. By placing Anders in a situation where his racial identity changes, Hamid highlights the constructed nature of racial categories and challenges the societal norms that enforce these constructions. This transformation not only affects Anders personally but also the collective identity of the gym community, as it forces members to confront their preconceptions and biases. Through this, Hamid critiques the simplicity of binary racial identities and underscores the fluidity and complexity of individual identity within a societal context.

Thus, "The Last White Man" utilizes Anders' transformative experience to explore the themes of race, identity, and belonging in a postcolonial world,

echoing the theoretical contributions of Fanon and Bhabha. By focusing on the interplay between physical and societal transformation, Hamid delves into the complexities of navigating identity in spaces marked by historical and cultural legacies of colonialism, offering a nuanced critique of the forces that shape our understanding of self and others.

"Anders prepared breakfast... they were pretty good"
.(Hamid, 2022, p. 38)

This passage offers a deeply personal glimpse into Anders' life, focusing on the intimate moment shared with Oona and highlighting the complexities of individual identity beyond the external transformations. This narrative segment, while not directly addressing racial transformation or its societal impacts, subtly contributes to the novel's exploration of identity in a postcolonial context through the lens of personal relationships and daily rituals. It underscores the notion that identity encompasses much more than physical appearance or racial categorization; it is also shaped by one's actions, focus, and the way one engages with the world and with others.

The passage can be analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha to further understand the novel's exploration of identity. Fanon's work, particularly "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952), delves into the psychological impacts of colonialism and racial discrimination on personal identity, emphasizing how these external pressures can internalize and influence one's self-perception and behavior. In the context of this passage, although Fanon's focus on racial dynamics and colonial legacies is not overtly present, the attention to Anders' personal habits and Oona's observations highlights the depth and complexity of individual identity beyond societal labels or physical attributes.

Homi K. Bhabha's theories, especially those related to cultural hybridity and the "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), offer a lens to understand the nuances of identity as depicted in Hamid's narrative. Bhabha's concept suggests that identities are not fixed or static but are instead formed and reformed in the spaces between cultures, practices, and interactions. The detailed description of Anders' methodical approach to cooking and engaging with Oona illustrates this fluidity and multiplicity of identity, suggesting that personal identity is a hybrid construct, influenced by a myriad of factors beyond just race or ethnicity.

Hamid's speculative approach in the novel, particularly the focus on racial transformation, serves to question and challenge the conventional postcolonial themes of otherness and sameness. By delving into the minutiae of Anders' life and his interactions with Oona, the narrative suggests that identity is complex and multifaceted, shaped by individual characteristics, relationships, and experiences as much as by societal constructs of race. This approach invites readers to consider the limitations of viewing identity solely through the lens of race or physical appearance, encouraging a broader understanding of what constitutes the self in a postcolonial world.

In essence, through the intimate lens of personal relationships and daily life, "The Last White Man" contributes to the postcolonial discourse by underscoring the complexity of identity beyond racial categorization. This narrative strategy aligns with the theories of Fanon and Bhabha, offering a nuanced critique of the ways in which personal and collective identities are constructed and perceived within the context of societal and cultural transformations.

3. CONCLUSION

Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man" provides a profound exploration of identity within a postcolonial framework, employing a speculative narrative to delve into the complexities of racial transformation and its ramifications on personal and collective identities. Through the experiences of Anders and his interactions within his community, the novel navigates the turbulent waters of race, identity, and belonging, invoking the theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha to illuminate the nuanced ways in which individuals and societies navigate the postcolonial landscape.

Anders' unexpected racial transformation sparks the novel's exploration of racial identities' fluidity and construction. This physical change symbolises deeper, often unsettling questions about who we are and how others see us. It mirrors Fanon's analysis of the colonised psyche, showing how people forced to accept societal identity struggle internally. Fanon's "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952) helps explain Anders' psychological turmoil by showing how racial identity can cause deep psychological distress in a society with colonial legacies and racial hierarchies. Simultaneously, the narrative embodies Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "third space," where

identity is negotiated beyond binary oppositions, allowing for a more complex and fluid understanding of self. Bhabha's theories help frame the novel's depiction of societal transformation following Anders' change, highlighting how identity is continuously formed and reformed in the interstices of cultural and societal interactions. This "third space" becomes a site of potential for challenging and redefining established notions of race and identity, offering a glimpse into the transformative possibilities of hybridity in reshaping postcolonial discourse.

Hamid's narrative strategy meticulously examines the interplay between physical transformation and societal perception, using Anders' experience as a prism through which to explore the broader societal reactions to racial and cultural differences. The novel meticulously unfolds the layers of identity, from the deeply personal to the broadly societal, showcasing how the external manifestations of race impact one's position within the community and one's sense of belonging. This exploration is particularly poignant in the depiction of Anders' interactions within familiar spaces—his home, the gym, and his relationship with Oona—where his transformation prompts a reevaluation of previously unexamined aspects of his identity and relationships.

Furthermore, the novel's focus on the minutiae of daily life, as exemplified in the intimate moments shared between Anders and Oona, extends the discussion of identity beyond the realms of racial transformation to encompass the broader, more intricate aspects of what it means to be an individual in a postcolonial world. These moments of introspection and interaction serve to underscore the argument that identity cannot be reduced to physical appearance or racial categorization but is a complex amalgamation of personal habits, relationships, and subjective experiences.

"The Last White Man" thus stands as a compelling critique of conventional postcolonial themes of otherness and sameness, questioning the rigidity of racial categories and the societal norms that enforce these constructions. By delving into the personal and collective challenges of navigating identity in a world still haunted by the specters of colonialism and racial prejudice, Hamid invites readers to consider the possibilities for empathy, understanding, and transformation in the face of entrenched societal divisions.

Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man" is a nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of postcolonial identity, utilizing a speculative narrative to interrogate the complexities of race, identity, and belonging. Through the lens of Anders' transformative experience, the novel engages with the theories of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, offering a rich analysis of the construction and negotiation of identity in a postcolonial context. By blending personal introspection with societal critique, Hamid challenges readers to reconsider the foundations of identity and the potential for hybridity and change in reshaping our understanding of self and other. In doing so, "The Last White Man" contributes to the ongoing discourse on postcolonialism, urging a reevaluation of the binaries that have long-defined discussions of race and identity, and highlighting the potential for a more inclusive and fluid understanding of human connection in the postcolonial era.

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