

Racism and Power Dynamics in ‘*The Last White Man*’: A Deconstructive Study

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Abstract

Ethnicity and race are identity markers that associate or identify a person with a specific race or ethnicity based on certain values and characteristics. However, colonization led to the creation of binaries between races: colonizers, who were white, as superior, and colonized peoples as inferior. This division gave rise to racism and discrimination; whites were considered superior, while other races, especially blacks, were considered inferior and uncivilized. This paper aims to highlight the restructured and internalized racial discrimination and the elements that support it reflected by Mohsin Hamid in ‘The Last White Man’. This paper analyzes Mohsin Hamid’s latest novel, “The Last White Man,” through the lens of Critical Race Theory to highlight racism in a racially integrated society and how power dynamics promote and sustain it. Critical race theory rejects the notion of a racially integrated color-blind society as a way to eliminate racism; rather, it utilizes power dynamics to promote racism.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, The Last White Man, Color-blindness, racially integrated society, Racism, Power dynamics

Introduction

The historical record of human life shows that humans have traditionally lived in clusters or groups, and ethnic groups have always been a subset of these larger groups. However, there was no solid stratification; members of any ethnic group could adopt the values of another ethnic group and gain membership in that particular ethnicity. Those ethnic groups were established to classify people based on skin color or physical features; rather, they were based on values and language, and were used as an identity marker. In the 18th century, a new mode emerged in

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American colonies and spread in other western colonizing countries to structure people that were known as “Race”, although the term “Race” existed in the English language that have been used since 16th century to refer to humans occasionally but was used rarely for slaves in term of their breed or type. When the Europeans were exploring the world, they discovered people who were different from them, leading to religious and political debates about the origin of humans. Ultimately, they distinguished Europeans as “Children of God’ from the rest of people. In the US, according to Omi and Winant (2014), race has become a “template of both differences and inequality”. They further argued that in the US, whites are considered as a “pure” category. This led to Marvin Harris’s (1964) concept of “Hypo-decent,” which is a principle that anyone with Negro ancestor is a Negro. Omi and Winnt (2014) argue that race is utilized to know a person, which led to “racial etiquette” in societies like the US. Racial etiquette acts as a principle through which the white present themselves and perceive others. In the contemporary world, race is a social construct woven into the fabric of society to stratify people on the arbitrary criteria of skin color and other physical features. Post-colonial worldview argues that a racially integrated society is an effective way to eradicate the notion of racism, which will ultimately lead to a color-blind society. However, racism is the combination of racial prejudices, irrational fears, and institutional power dynamics, which cannot be solved by merely adopting a color-blind stance. Disregarding race and color means ignoring the injustices that are caused and upheld by the racial hierarchies in our society. Mohsin Hamid, through ‘The Last White Man’, reflects the racial discrimination and prejudice towards black people in Western societies. Adner’s journey in the novel depicts the ineffectiveness of color-blind societies and the internalized notion of others among whites. Hamid further reflects the role of power dynamics in promoting racism in the color-blind integrated societies through the institution of the police. Critical race theorists question the concept of a racially integrated and color-blind society. They argue that being color-blind means not seeing races, and not seeing or believing in races does not solve the issue of racism; rather, it ignores the actual issue. Critical race theory believes that racism is ordinary, which means that those in power are racist and they do not see themselves as racist or their actions being racist but normal (Rocco & Gallagher, 2004). Racism is not just about what we see, but also about how we perceive it and how we are taught to respond to it. Human instances have always found their home in literature, and that is why literature is considered to be the reflection of society. Literature records each aspect of life and society; the issues of racism and its impact on the lives of marginalized people have been recorded by various writers. Literary theories

are utilized to highlight and provide detailed insight into the emerging issues in the society or those recorded in literature. Similarly, the text that I have selected to analyze is Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man", which provides various instances of racism and how it is related to power dynamics in a racially integrated society. This paper will utilize Critical Race Theory to highlight these issues of racism in a racially integrated society and the ineffectiveness of a color-blind society by analyzing the instances from the novel. Furthermore, it will analyze the element of power-dynamics in the novel to highlight their role in promoting racism in a color-blind racially integrated society.

In a postcolonial world, it is believed that color-blindness and racial integration prevent racial discrimination. However, this is a nuanced issue and there are more aspects to it. This study will explore how "The Last white man" by Mohsin Hamid (2020) presents several issues, challenges, and problems faced by people of color in a racially integrated society. Furthermore, this study also aims to highlight the role of power dynamics in promoting racism and its impacts on people of various races.

Review of the Literature

Race is one of the identity markers of human beings that has been woven into the fabric of society. Several perspectives, ranging from the Islamic point of view to the perspective of social theorists, view race and ethnicity as a division based on certain differences for the sake of identity, for instance, linguistic differences, etc. However, during the colonization, colonizers portrayed themselves as the civilized and superior race, which ultimately led to the issue of racism, which means some races are superior while others are considered savage and inferior. Many writers have written on the topics of identity and Racism; some of these renowned writers include Mohsin Hamid, Ngugi, Derek Walcott, etc. Hamid (2007) explores the issue of identity and racism faced by people of color or people who belong to a minority in a white supremacist society. Akhtar (2021) argues that in the prevailing age of globalization, people face multiple issues, but the issue of identity is of significance. When people migrate to other countries, they have already constructed an identity that clashes with the prevailing construction of identity. The prevailing construct of identity is considered superior, which leads to the problem of racism and identity crisis. Akhtar, while analyzing the issue of identity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, says that "In his attempt to gain an identity, he encounters such challenges that put his identity at stake" (Akhtar 2021). This statement could be

analyzed from the perspective of racism that the dominant race tries to marginalize and discriminate against all other races and ethnicities, and as a result, people of minority groups try to adopt the dominant construct of identity. However, if marginalized and dominant identities negotiate, they may enter a “Third Space” producing hybridity in identity and culture (Nagendra 2022).

Mohsin Hamid’s works revolve around a variety of themes, including identity, imperialism, ethnic and racial discrimination, Islamophobia, etc. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflects the issues of Islamophobia in post-9/11 western society. After 9/11, hostility towards Muslims was raised in western society, a public announcement was made by US Advertising Council ten days after 9/11, claiming “fearing a possible backlash against Arab Americans and other ethnic groups after the attacks” (Hartnell 2010). Hartnell (2010) argues that this novel portrays “The post-9/11 escalation of inter-ethnic tensions” that Changez faces as he says “I flew to New York uncomfortable in my face” (74).

Hamid’s works have been analyzed for identity crisis, Islamophobia, postcolonial trauma, gender discrimination, etc. Various scholars have analyzed his last Novel for multiple themes. *The Last White Man* depicts postcolonial trauma through the transformation of Anders. Rasheed et al. (2024) explored the themes of postcolonial trauma and identity in *The Last White Man*. Racism has a strong impact on the characters, especially Anders, who transforms into a black person overnight. The transformation of Anders impacts his emotions, thoughts, and experiences. Anders faces isolation in his own society among his own people after turning black. He struggles with an identity crisis and cannot escape racial prejudice. Rashid et al. (2024) highlight the social isolation, identity crisis, and socioeconomic challenges of people of color in postcolonial societies.

Zahra et al. (2024) explore the themes of cultural hybridity and identity crisis in *The Last White Man*. Anders belongs to the privileged community: The White. However, Anders transforms from a white person to a person of color overnight. After the transformation, Anders goes through an identity crisis, reflecting the difficulties of brown people in Western societies. Anders loses his identity with the transformation and struggles to adapt to the new culture. Zahra et al. (2024) highlight the hybrid identities and marginalization of people of color through the journey of Anders.

Wahab et al. (2025) explore the psychological and sociological impacts of racism in *The Last White Man*. The study explores aspects like anger, frustration, grief, guilt, etc., of the characters. Along with this, it also explores the portrayal of Pakistani writers towards communities of color like African Americans. Wahab et al. (2025) utilize Critical Race Theory; however, their focus is on analyzing the sentences and passages that reflect racism. Moreover, their data includes other sources like books, articles, and research papers, along with the novel. Thus, the main focus is on the sentences and passages that align with racism and social injustice. The current study utilizes Critical Race Theory to highlight the ineffectiveness of the color-blind, racially integrated society and the role of power dynamics in promoting racism.

Mohsin Hamid, in his recent novel "The Last White Man," reflects the themes of racism in a racially integrated and color-blind society. The post-colonial world believes that the issues of racism can be solved by wearing color-blind lenses in a racially integrated society. However, this stance has been criticized by critical race theorists. They advocate that in a society where race is an identity marker, being color-blind will ignore the actual problems of racism rather than addressing and solving them. Gary Peller (2015), in his book "Critical Race Consciousness," quotes Stokely Carmichael. Carmichael argues about integration that "Integration as a goal speaks to the problem of blackness not only in the most realistic way but also in a despicable way". Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man" provides various instances of racism in a racially integrated and color-blind society. This novel has not been analyzed from this perspective. This study analyzes *The Last White Man* through the lens of Critical Race Theory, which criticizes the idea of a color-blind and racially integrated society as a solution for racism.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts a qualitative research methodology to analyze the data, which is "The Last White Man" by Mohsin Hamid. This research falls under the interpretivist paradigm, which is based on the premise that reality is socially constructed, thus reality is subjective rather than a single objective reality. The theoretical framework I will use to analyze the novel is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT has its roots in Critical Law Studies, which advocates that law is subjective; the law is objective, especially when it comes to race and color. CRT paved its way into other aspects of society, such as education and literature, because human instances have always found their home in literature, which is why literature is called a reflection of

society. Daniel Solórzano has highlighted the tenets of CRT in the field of education; the educational system contains some of the most compelling examples of how racism has been reproduced through systems. Solórzano (2000) argues that both in social and academic space, “microaggressions” exist in the collegiate environment. Racism is not just confined to the law or education system; it prevails in the whole fabric of society, which is why one of the key tenets of CRT is that racism is “ordinary and pervasive” (Brown et al 2009). The ordinary aspect of racism means that people of privilege and power are racist, and they consider their view as normal and part of the status quo (Rocco & Gallagher, 2004).

Magdaleno (2021) presents the key tenets outlined by scholar Khiara Bridges as follows:

Recognition that race is not biologically real but is socially constructed and socially significant. It recognizes that science (as demonstrated in the Human Genome Project) refutes the idea of biological racial differences. According to scholars Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, race is the product of social thought and is not connected to biological reality

Rejection of popular understandings about racism, such as arguments that confine racism to a few “bad apples.” CRT recognizes that racism is codified in law, embedded in structures, and woven into public policy. CRT rejects claims of meritocracy or “colorblindness.” CRT recognizes that it is the systemic nature of racism that bears primary responsibility for reproducing racial inequality. (Magdaleno. 3)

Critical race theorists advocate that racism has been woven into the fabric of society, and being color-blind in a racially integrated society does not solve the problem; instead, it ignores the actual problem of racism. Crenshaw (1998) argues that in a culture where identifiable groups have historically experienced unequal treatment and where the repercussions of this unequal treatment have persisted into the present, the belief in color blindness and equal treatment would make no sense at all. In a racially integrated society, color blindness does not solve racism, and power dynamics play a vital role in exploiting people of color and promoting racism. Crenshaw (1995), in her book *Critical Race Theory The Key Writings That Formed The Movement* explains that A radical tradition of race consciousness among African Americans and other people of color was abandoned when integration, assimilation, and the idea of colorblindness were adopted as the official norms of

radical enlightenment. Critical race theory, with its explicit embrace of race consciousness, reexamines the terms by which race and racism have been negotiated in the American consciousness. Critical Race Theorists have a strong reservation and deep satisfaction with the notion of color-blindness and traditional civil rights discourse. This research paper will utilize the lenses of Critical Race theory to analyze "The Last White Man" in light of the above-mentioned tenets.

Analysis and Discussion

Hamid, in "The Last White Man", narrates the story of an unknown town where people suddenly transform black. The story depicts the internalized notion of racism and the deeply rooted prejudice of white people against people of color. The novel could be summarized as follows: Young Anders, a white male, awakens one morning to find he has turned deep and undeniable brown. Anders, a gym employee, is violently angry because he is no longer white: "He wanted to kill the colored man who confronted him here in his home, to extinguish the life animating this other's body, to leave nothing standing but himself, as he was before." (2002. 10) But when Anders hears that there is a pandemic of changelings, he becomes less agitated. The formerly white individuals soon include Oona, an old school friend, her prejudiced mother, and everyone who was born white, as Oona's mother laments that "our people" are changing.

Mohsin Hamid, through his novel, provides insight into a racially integrated society where white people are turning black, and through this, he depicts the struggles and prejudices black people face in a white-dominant society. This paper analyzes the text through the lenses of Critical Race Theory to highlight the internalized racism in a racially integrated and color-blind society, and how power dynamics and privilege promote racism. The novel begins with the sudden transformation of Anders, the protagonist, who is terrified by the transformation of his color from pale to black. Ander feels this an optical illusion but ultimately accept the fact that he has turned into a black person that he describes as "therefore bizarre, beyond acceptance, like a sea creature that should not exist" (2022. 7). Although Ander has turned black, his consciousness is still white, and his remarks about his appearance shows how white consciousness has reduced black people and considers them "creature that should not exist".

The notion of race is deeply woven into the fabric of society. White people considered themselves chosen by God to differentiate themselves from others. This notion justified the inferior treatment of blacks. Postcolonial societies developed the notion of a color-blind society to abolish the established binaries; however, Critical Race Theory objects to this notion because an integrated society does not abolish racism as it is deeply rooted in the minds of White. Hamid depicts this through the transformation of Anders from white to black, and Oona, who is his close friend, is reluctant to give assurance to Anders. Oona is also a white woman, and when she comes to know about his transformation, she already feels disconnected. She “did try to reassure him, to be kind and supportive, but her heart was not really in it, a detachment had settled upon her, for as he was speaking, she was thinking mainly, and increasingly, of herself” (2022. 14). Oona goes to Anders’s place and meets him occasionally, but her attachment to Anders started to fade slowly since Anders turned black. The color of his skin started to become a hurdle in their attachment, as the narrator narrates “she could tell he was desperate for reassurance, but she was reluctant to provide” (2022. 17). Anders becomes a totally different person for Oona because of his skin color as she tells Anders that he looks like a “different kind of person, utterly different...” (2022. 17). These instances from the novels depict how white consciousness perceives black people, as different creature and different people.

The character of Oona’s mother depicts the consciousness of white supremacy. Omi and Winant (2014) argue that white societies like the US utilize “racial etiquette” as a principle to perceive others and act accordingly. Oona’s mother’s behavior towards blacks reflects racial etiquette. She is a conservative white supremacist and makes a clear distinction between whites and blacks. When she gets to know about the transformation of people, she gets worried about her people (white people) and tells Oona that people are changing, “our people” (2022. 21). This depicts how in a racially integrated society; the dominant whites have the concept of “Us versus Them” that leads to internalized racism and prejudices against black people. Mohsin Hamid, through this novel, reflects the internalized hate in white consciousness and the prejudices that are internalized in the white consciousness. When Anders goes to the gym where he works, and his boss sees him, he says if that I would had turned black “I would have killed myself” (2022. 35). This instance is reflective of the stance that Critical Race Theorists take, that racial integration and color-blindness are not the solutions to racism because of the internalized nature of racism. Critical Race Theory advocates that, despite of being living in a racially integrated and color-blind

society, there are prejudices in the dominant white consciousness against the black race. The Last White Man reflects this aspect when a white man turned black, he shot himself but people only heard a gunshot and thought of it as an act of home defense, but when they find out the body of a black person, they assumed “the dark body lying there an intruder, shot with his own gun after a struggle” (2022. 47). This instance highlights the fragile claim of color-blind, racially integrated societies. Hamid, through this instance, highlights the internalized prejudice of the whites against the blacks. This instance also underscores Omi and Winant's (2014) claim that whites utilize skin color to justify the distinct treatment of others.

The post-colonial notion of the world suggests that when a society is racially integrated, it would lead to color-blindness, and ultimately, it will root out racism from the society. However, Critical Race Theorists argue that there is another element that plays a vital role in promoting racism, and that is power dynamics; unequal power dynamics assist and promote racism because the dominant race holds a power that they utilize to suppress and marginalize the minority race. Thus, underscoring the ineffectiveness of color-blind societies. Hamid in “The Last White Man” provides insight into unequal power dynamics in a racially integrated society and how it assists racism. Law and order maintenance institutions hold legitimate power in society; however, Hamid shows that even the police take no precautions to stop the violence, which means they are playing their role to assist racism. This shoulder the Critical Race Theorists claim that power dynamics promote racism. This could be seen in the novel, as Hamid unfolds, “as for the police, the police made no real effort to stop them. This could be seen furthermore in the novel when there is riots and chaos in the city, and the militants are going after the black people, but the police, who have the legitimate power to stop it, let it happen, for instance, in the novel, the narrator says “Oona expected to hear sirens, from police cars and fire trucks and ambulances, but she did not hear them, and it was strange, she could hear only one siren, lonesome...” (2022. 79). It shows the institutionalized racism. This reflects the internalized and institutionalized racism and prejudice among the whites.

Moreover, Hamid utilizes the white supremacist militants as a symbol to depict the rooted racism and prejudice in a color-blind, integrated society. Hamid narrates “militants had begun to appear on the streets, pale-skinned militants. Some dressed almost like soldiers... other dressed like hunters” (2022. 61). Another example of power dynamics and white dominance role in racism can be highlighted in the novel

when the narrator says, “Anders had heard that militants had begun to clear people out, dark people, running them out of the town...” (2022. 90). These lines show how power dynamics shoulder racism in a racially integrated society as these white supremacist militants are out there to hunt the black people because they are not ready to accept the turned black people. They also show that racism is internalized in the consciousness of whites, and in a color-blind and racially integrated society, racism will still prevail because of its internalization; therefore, a color-blind and racially integrated society is ineffective in neutralizing racism, as there are other forces like power dynamics and internalized racism. These militants held prejudice only against black people, as shown in the novel, “These militants did not confront Oona when, on occasion, she ran into them... possibly because was white” (2022. 61). Oona's mother, who represents white supremacy and racism, “seemed positively jolly” on the rise of these militants’ groups which shows the internalized racism in the consciousness of whites even in a racially integrated society.

Critical Race Theory argues that the oppression faced by blacks in a racially integrated society that the dominant race is white because they have always portrayed their race as superior and civilized, and this leads to the oppression of other races, especially the black race. A small black boy is working in the gym, Anders just like others, does not even know his name and never had any conversation with him, he is there at the gym, but unnoticed, as Anders says “that he did not even know his last name” (2022. 84). Similarly, when Anders go to the gym after his transformation, he feels like being surrounded by predators, the narrator says” Anders found himself thinking of a bird perched next to lines... except that this bird could not fly” (2022. 72). These lines reflect the marginalized and suppressed state of the black community in a racially integrated society. Moreover, as the Critical Race Theory argues that in a racially integrated society, people of color, especially black race, are marginalized, and the white race enjoys the dominance, because racism is internalized in their consciousness, this could be seen in *The Last White Man* when there is chaos and riots are happening anywhere people are turning black, Oona’s street, which is white populated is quiet and peaceful, as the narrator says, “Her street was quiet. Peaceful.” (2022. 80). Critical Race Theorists argue that whites who are in power are usually racist but they do not consider their views as racist but rather normal as per the status quo. This aspect can be seen in Oona’s mother’s view about the violence, as the narrator says “Oona’s mother resisted the notion that violence was happening, or that substantial violence was happening, and said that if there was violence it was because there were paid

aggressors on the other side” (2022. 87). The above premise could be further seen in her remarks about the militants and the black community, as she says “it was not that we were better than them, although we were better than them, how could you deny it” (2022. 88). Furthermore, she says “and the dark people could have their own place, and there they could do their own dark things” (2022. 88). Hamid throws light on the aspect that how unwelcomed black community is in a racially integrated society and how power dynamics legitimize and shoulder racism in a color-blind society. Racism has been internalized and institutionalized for a long time, which has made it part of human consciousness; it is the reason that merely being color-blind does not solve the problem of racism. Each race must be recognized and valued, whether it is related to identifying with or perceiving any race.

Conclusion

To conclude, this article utilizes the postulates of Critical Race Theory to analyze the novel “The Last White Man,” which presents a racially integrated society where white people start turning black one by one. This research paper explores the struggles and oppression faced by the black community, and how white supremacists consider their racist beliefs as normal and part of the status quo, in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Last White Man*. Hamid sheds light on the instances of a racially integrated society and shows how power dynamics play a vital role in promoting racism which is reflected in his novel “The Last White Man”. The white race has always been portrayed as civilized and superior, and this has been internalized in the consciousness of each race, which makes it hard for a racially integrated, color-blind society to solve the issue of racism. The article highlights that the notion of a racially integrated society is ineffective in neutralizing racism because of the historical division, marginalization of races, and internalization of racism. Furthermore, white supremacy utilizes power dynamics to promote racism according to the principle of rational etiquette. The effective way to deal with racism is the recognition of races and considering the values of each race. The notion of a racially integrated, color-blind society is a fragile attempt to eliminate racism; however, this approach undermines the historical and internalized aspect of racism, which considers people of color as inferior beings. In the contemporary, racially diverse world, people need to break the lenses of binaries and accept the spectrum of values associated with each race and ethnicity.

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Article Information:

Received	10-Oct-2025
Revised	28-Nov-2025
Accepted	11-Dec-2025
Published	15-Dec-2025

Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- All authors **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions. Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

• **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

• **Funding Sources:** NIL

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