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COLORS CLASH: A FANONIAN PERSPECTIVE OF HAMID'S THE LAST WHITE MAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the complex issues associated with the person(s) having black identity in Hamid's *The Last White Man* utilizing Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the text. The novel is written in the context of the psycho-social issues of the black people. It digs deep into the problems linked with the (un)conscious of the black person(s). There are multiple dimensions of *black* identity which leads to inaction, passivity, confusion, self-denial, and inferiority complex among many other identical issues. These things are explored through the metamorphosis of the different characters in the novel. This transformation uncovers the effects of traumatic experiences and complex identity of the black people. Every action and step taken by these people is an ultimate result of multiple thoughts flash through their minds putting ahead the social context of the society. The facts associated with black people are represented by the writer are universal in their nature. This research shatters the very self-proclaimed notion of post-racial societies as it intersects this discourse.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Mohsin Hamid occupies a distinct position in the international literary academia and contemporary Pakistani diaspora writers. He has produced a plenty of impressive novels which deal with the issues of the modern world and the man. Prominent among his writings are *Exit West* (2017) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) which have bagged multiple national and international awards. *Exit West* deals with the issues linked with emigration, and the problems of the refugees which are the consequences of the civil war

while the other novel's narrative revolves around 9/11, one of the traumatic events in the history of the world. It presents a Muslim perspective on this event where the protagonist, Changez, tells this tale as a narrator of this novel. *The Last White Man* (2022) is a new intervention in the arena of literature by Mohsin Hamid. It deals with the issues of identity of modern man, specifically, the black man. Just as the word *lack* inside the word *black* is suggesting something which is a lack of confidence, trust, and lack of feelings of superiority in psychological sense while lack of opportunities, facilities, and recognition in social sense.

The Last White Man is studied and commented upon by a large number of critics from different perspectives. The novel has a power to revisit the multiple things when we come across it. Once in an interview Hamid said that "fiction has a strange power that enables it to destabilize the collective imaginings we inherit and reproduce" (Gates, August 03, 2022). This is a page turner fiction and explores the various things. Among various other things, central to this fiction is the idea of racism and the problems of colored people. It is a "fantastical exploration of race and privilege and it buzzes with an ironic allusion to the unsettling metamorphosis." (Charles, August 02, 2022). A plenty of absurd elements is also there in this novel as it is described as tale "told from the perspective of a white man who wakes up dark skinned and finds his whole world changed." (Preston, Aug 08, 2022). This is showing the absurd condition of the modern man as he has no control over his body or circumstances. Along with the absurd elements the positive things are also there which are different from the conventional order. It has a very strong message for the modern world as "the possibility of overcoming racial differences and relishing our shared humanity" is in our hands and we can make it possible. (Whitehead, August 29, 2022). According to Oprah Daily there are multiple things we can understand from this novel as it "offers a provocative take on privilege, grief, and transformations both great and small." (Cain, August 01, 2022).

The very issue of identity is explored in this novel through the character of Andres and, later on, through the character of Oona and her mother. Andres experiences a horrible transformation just like the protagonist of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) as "Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed into some kind of monstrous vermin." (translation: Crick, 2009, p. 29). Andres finds himself in the same situation not as a horrible vermin but as a black version of a white man, which is more dangerous, painful, and disgusting transformation in contrast to Gregor Samsa. This is because the black color is associated with sophistication in terms of style and fashion but when it comes to a man having black color then it becomes hard to accept him, even their existence is denied. He has less worth than of a shadow that chases the real one and vanished in the darkness, even in the existence of light. These complicated instances lead to quest for an individual identity which is one of the complicated issues in the contemporary society for the people associated and recognized as black entities. Every person, other than whites, is living in allusion, in search of his identity, in search of self, and desires to be recognize as a white. It is because whiteness is standardized with superiority, intellect, sophistication, civilization,

mannerism, and the center of attention everywhere. When it comes to black population, it becomes more complicated. Dark color is associated with evilness, inferiority, rudeness, brutality, and unsophisticated behaviour. Every man, having black identity, always finds him standing in the labyrinth of illusions where he is unable to move and act because he does not know where to move and what to do. He always finds himself trapped. This is not just because of the social standards but the psychology of these people is also deeply influenced due to these practices based on differences and interests of the white community.

Both conscious and unconscious equally participate in terms of self-recognition and to judge oneself according to the social schema of society. Many of the scholars have participated in order to understand to psychological factors behind the actions where a black man is being trapped by his inner desires and thoughts when he relates himself with the other participants of the society. There is no doubt that the outside forces leave their impact on every individual but the thing which effects more than these external forces is the man himself. The inner forces lead him to self-prepared conclusions which are more dangerous than those fixed by the society for these people. So, in these terms, the cognitive process is more important in order to under the actions of an individual to reach at certain conclusions.

There are multiple debates about the mental situation of the persons of black identity. Many of the authors around the globe have expressed their concerns through their actual and fictional writings. Looking back into the history, we come to know that no such kind of things, like racism, existing in the earlier times but this categorization of the human beings is just a product of colonialism which turned the world into binaries and it is still there with us in the form of differences. People are judged and valued on the basis of their skin color because this is the most apparent thing related to human beings. In a logical sense, this brutal process of colonization still “has economic, political, cultural, and psychological consequences for the people of the world today.” (Thiong’o, 1994, p.2). White people are considered superior and cultured to all the other races and “the effect of a cultural bomb is” used “to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their language, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. (p.3).

The Souls of Black Folks (1903) is one of the notable and earliest known works which deals with the complex cognitive issues of the black persons and their quest for becoming or feeling like a light color participant of the society. He has described the experience of the black people who are the victims of their inner conflicts which result in *double consciousness*. They were “always looking at one’s self through the eyes” of white community and “measuring oneself by the means of a nation that looked back in contempt”. (Du Bois. 1903. p. xiii). Black man stands secondary to the white man and they are still a “subject in relation to white society” in terms of all the bad and derogatory things. (Carmichael & Charles, 1992, p.5). Blackness is described as a “contradictory and complexly textured form of identity” (Campt, 2004, p. 22). Paul Gilroy is among the significant scholars who have contributed much towards this filed of colonialism and psychological issues of the modern

(black) man who is hanged between old and new traditions of the world divided by the colors. He writes that the contemporary man stands between the “two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations. They remained locked in an antagonistic relationship marked out by the symbolism of colours.” (Gilroy, 1993, p.1). There are multiple things beneath the surface of this so called phenomenon of racism as this division of human beings based on “physical features narrowed down to fit specific political purposes.” (Benthencourt, 2013, p.31). Multiple critics have shared their experiences about this phenomenon of racism. Social statuses and privileges are thrust upon those having white identity and these people “get tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people’s home.” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.17). These are the reason Anders is even reluctant to go outside until his circumstances force him to leave his home. The author has presented the situation of the colored people where at multiple occasions these “sensitive spots and though becomes confused.” (Mannoni, 1964, p. 111). Everything is presented in a unique style and the issues attached with the colored people along with these things this novel is a kind of sympathy with the colored people as they are effectively sympathized through the character of Anders.

Black Skin, White Masks as a Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of the analysis of this fiction the theoretical framework is originated from Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. The central idea in this work is that the utmost desire of the black man is to become white, to look like a white man. This is one of the primary writings which talks about the psychological issues of the people having colored identity shaped and transformed by the external social forces and effect the psychological structure of these people. This is a unique work which deals with the issues related to racism, psychological problems, and postcolonial facts at the same time. *The Last White Man* is abundant with multiple interventions on the part of the mind of the characters as they feel alienated from the society and self as well. Fanon uses clinical method in order to understand the deep and complex structure of human psychology. The division of society is based on the binaries between white and colored. This phenomenon of racism is structured on multiple things which lead to certain kind of advantages for the white community.

The primary terms in Fanon’s book which are utilized and implemented for the analysis are *neurosis*, *alienation*, *collective catharsis*, *consciousness*, and *unconsciousness* among the other. *Psychopathology* is suggested as a treatment and a way out of these troubles. *Neurosis*, in general, is referred to instability in mental order which is, according to majority of the psychologists, a result of multiple traumas. It affects the behavior and attitude of the people and plays a vital role in terms of perceptions, judgments, actions, and these people remain unaware of these things. Fanon says that the black man “enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation.” (Fanon, 1993, p. xxvii). Fanon further adds that “black man’s superiority or inferiority complex and

his feeling of equality are conscious. He is consciously making them interact.” (p.116). *Neurosis* is not only related to black man but the white is also a victim of these interventions and equally influenced by these things although both of these move in the opposite directions.

Alienation is another key term used for the analysis of this novel. It is one of the principle concepts in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. It is associated with the feelings of self-strangeness and being alienated from surroundings. The term is used in multiple contexts as Fanon says that alienation defines the ways the colored people identify themselves with their relation to the white people of the society rather than with their black identities. They feel alienated from the mainstream society. These things become a part of their psychology to see themselves with relation to the white participants of the society. Consequently, it leads them “to consider their alienation with reference to psychoanalytic descriptions.” (p.xxxvii). Fanon has exceptionally interwoven these concepts in his masterpiece. He describes the psychological situation of the black man where he unconsciously thinks that “I am a prisoner of the vicious circle. To my horrors, they reject me.” (p.88).

Collective catharsis is another key term in Fanon's psychological model. The word ‘catharsis’ is originated from the Greek word ‘kathairein’ which means to cleanse or purge. It is “the process of releasing strong emotions through a particular activity or experience.” (Cambridge Dictionary). In psychological terms catharsis is the release of negative psychic energy and a process that allows the people to resolve the conflicts of unconscious and help to recover from the traumas of past. Fanon suggests that solution to these widely stretched psychological damages is “collective catharsis” and all the communities around the planet must have platforms through which the “accumulated aggression” of the colored people might be released along with their guilt, anger, agony, and other associated things. (p.112). Fanon suggests that there should be mutual games in the children's institutions. Psychodramas should be used a group therapy. Illustrated magazines could also be useful in this regard. These things might be replaced by the other things within the contexts of different societies. Fanon uses psychopathological method in order to approach and assess the mental disorder or distress. He says that a black man “lives an ambiguity that is extraordinarily neurotic.” (Fanon, 2008. p.148). This is not about a few people but this trauma is associated with every colored person living around the planet. It is a collective unconscious and every man of color faces it in one way or the other, consciously or unconsciously. In short, it is referred to a world view of the colored person(s). He stops behaving like an actual person due to his supposed inferiority and becomes very sensitive. His thoughts fragmented due to confusions and doubts.

In short, *neurosis* is a result of *alienation* from self and society while it can be treated or managed through *collective catharsis* and methodology used for this purpose is *psychopathology*. In this way, all the concepts in Fanon's approach are interconnected to one another and we can understand these concepts collectively rather individually approaching them. Fanon has presented a

unified model in order to understand the psychology of colored man and way out of these crises is also suggested.

Analysis of The Last White Man

With its Kafkaesque opening the narrative begins when “One morning, Anders, a white man, woke up to find he had turned a deep and undeniable brown.” (Hamid, 2022, p.1). He turns brown but not a monster in the brown color, in fact, a brown version of the white man which is more distressing than turning into a monster. He thinks that he is dreaming and it is not possible to be brown. After sometime he realizes that this transformation has taken place in reality. He looks at him by taking a picture in the mobile and shocks to see his face color. When he looks at his replaced face it “filled him with anger, or rather, more than anger, an unexpected, murderous rage.” (p.2). One can imagine the image of colored people living in and around the white people. They are, undoubtedly, unacceptable for the white people due to their physical appearance. Due to dark color of these people they are destined with dark destinies and unfortunateness. These people are kept at the margins in in terms of everything with the least opportunity to even think about coming out of this situation. The novel is loaded with such things through which we can understand the situation of these dark skinned people. They are less apparent due to their skin color and physical features in the society. So, Anders “wanted to kill the colored man who confronted him in his home.” (p.1). In the presence of the colored man Anders feels disturbed although the both man were same. We can understand the meaning of the presence of the colored man around the white man as they are unrecognized and their existence is meaningless. If someone wishes to kill these colored people its normal because they are different than the other people, these white people are the victims of self-claimed-superiority.

There is sense of superiority within the white man as when Anders sees himself in the mirror “he realized that he had been robbed” (p.2). He feels it because the “white man consider themselves superior to black man” (Fanon, 1993, p.3). He is unable to accept his transformed situation and refers it as a bad memory. He tries to eat something although he is not hungry but unable to eat anything, even his favourite dishes. He tries to become “calmer, steadier, and told himself that it would be all right, although he was unconvinced.” (Hamid, 2022, p.3). He feels and acts in this way because the colored people are less recognized in the society and most often they are not accepted. This situation leads to “juxtaposition of white and black races which creates a massive psycho-existential complex” in the society and in the minds of millions of the individuals. (Fanon, 1993, p.5).

As the novel progresses we come to understand that the psychology of the colored man is deeper and darker than the white man just like his color and same in this way more disturbed and complex. They remain in doubts about their existence and just like the same way Anders referred himself to a “sea creature that should not exist” (Hamid, 2022, p.3). Fanon clinical approach to the psychology of the black man reveals that “for the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white.” (Fanon, 1993, p.4). The black man wants to exist

as a white and if it not possible then life is not worth living, especially, when someone is living in or around the white people. Same is the case of Andres and it is merely not a fictional phenomenon but multiple things are associated with white identity. These are the people invited in the parties, ceremonies, celebrations, and at public gatherings where the majority of the black people serve these white people at such kind of occasions.

Hamid's fictional character of Andres is a mouthpiece of the millions of the colored people facing external criticism due to their appearance and fighting against the internal conflicts as a result of external criticism and unfamiliar social behaviours almost every day and in the instances which are even shorter than seconds they take breath. Being a black is not easier to survive and bear in the society which is based on false assumptions and stereotypical mindset. This is the reason Anders feels shame being a black and when he calls his girlfriend Oona after a days of his transformation "she heard the panic and anguish in Anders's voice." (Hamid, 2022, p.4). After talking to him, Oona goes to meet Anders and she surprises herself to see him in his new appearance. She is surprised due to his unfamiliar tone on the phone and "surprised herself even more by actually going". (p.5). It shows it is not easier to accept black people as a partner or friend. It is very hard to continue with such kind of persons. This is the reason Oona returns instantly to her home without talking to Anders. She is reluctant to accept Anders in this transformed version. After some days when she meets Anders again she is reluctant to touch him but when she touches she "discovered a jarring and discomforting satisfaction" which stops her to do so. (p.7). When she goes home she does not pronounce a single word to Anders and move away from there as quick as she can. After that she receives a plenty of messages from Anders and but she does not response the messages. This shows the real attitude of the white people of society when it comes to treat and engage the people of dark skin. Not only Oona but when Anders calls his father and tells the matter his father hangs up the call and it happens first time in their life. Even Anders' family members show unwillingness to accept him as a colored man in the beginning although the situation transforms just like Anders which brings positive outcomes for Anders in terms of acceptance. When he meets his father the Anders sees an unusual discomfort on his father's face "at seeing the dark man, even though the dark man was not a dark man" (Hamid, 2022, p.51-52). Blackness is a fact which disassociates the black people from the white people because darkness and light cannot exist together. In terms of survival the existence of one of them depends upon the absence of the other. They cannot survive together and same is the case with the people of color and this situation creates a lot of troubles and discomforts for the both of participants.

Anders goes through the same process described by Fanon as he says that a sense of inferiority is the part of black man's psychology and whenever he encounters a white man he feels something unusual. Whenever colored Anders meets white Oona's eye he always feels "an unfamiliar weight burdening" him. (Fanon, 1993, p.83). Whenever Anders goes outside he keeps his hands in his pockets and tries to be hidden. He slips his hands out of pockets while opening a door or sliding across a payment. He has become just like "a fish

darting up to the surface and down again, aware of the hazards of being seen.” (Hamid, 2022, p.10). Every time he goes outside of his home he is filled with fear and disgust. Whenever some dark man looks at him and their eyes meet Anders always quickly looks away because he never feels comfortable in this way. He becomes very sensitive after his sudden transformation as a black man. He becomes aware of his surroundings due to fear of stabbing, grabbing, knifed, or shooting although no such kind of things happened to him. He was “not sure where his sense of threat was coming from, but it was there.” (p.10). Fanon terms this kind of situation as ‘supposed inferiority’ as Anders’ body “surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty.” (Fanon, 1993, p.83). It happens because Anders is attached with his past as a white man and his psychology is shaped from this point of view where a black man is equivalent to sin and stands for the bad side of the character while white to virtuousness and purity.

The situation changes and almost everyone goes through a process of transformation as a colored due to an unidentified and unknown phenomenon. A race war looms in the streets and people starts killing the opposites of their color as well. This situation becomes unbearable for the white people and most of the people commit suicide. Anders’s boss says to Anders that “he would killed himself and the following week a man in town did just that.” (Hamid, 2022, p.21). This is the situation Fanon has described as “an inferiority complex is connected with the colour of the skin.” (Fanon, 1993, p.68). It is due to this inferiority complex as people start committing suicide because it is unbearable for them to live a life as a colored man. It is better to embrace death than even thinking about being a black in the society because a white man in the society “never felt inferior in any respect.” (p.68). It is the reason people react strangely after this transformation and it leads to destructive consequences for the both black and white people. It will be more appropriate to say that people of white color and the people of all the colors other than white because colored people are equated with ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality.

A paradoxical situation looms in the mind of the people whether they are black or white. This is described as when a colored man “a white man had indeed shot a dark man, but also that the dark man and the white man were the same.” (Hamid, 2022, p.21). Anders is deeply affected and becomes quieter he used to be and also less sure about his actions because he does not know how these actions will be perceived by the other people around him. Fanon says that a dark man is “imprisoned in himself” and he is not a slave of ideas but of his appearance. (Fanon, 1993, p.57). Anders goes through the same process just described by the Fanon. He “felt imprisoned, doubly, triply imprisoned in his skin, in his house, in his town.” (Hamid, 2022, p.51). People were unable to recognize even their blood relations due to this unfamiliar change and there exist a mixture of black and white people in the gatherings as “there were dark hosts mixed in with the white hosts, and they were awkward with each other, awkward and unnatural.” (p.52). It happens because of self-constructed notions of the white man about black as an anxious man and a symbol of evilness.

In this situation when anarchy loosed upon everywhere, the white people still feel safe and protected under their white skin and these “not hunted down and caged or whipped or killed” by the hunters wandering everywhere who never miss an opportunity to create mess and to kill the people of opposite color. (p.77). Anders uses back roads when going to meet his father and proceeds hesitatingly, stopping with regular intervals, observing every intersection in the way just identical to herbivore which is out of instincts. When he reaches home his father “forced himself to look at his son” to hold him in brown skin against the pale skin. (p.30). The people who knows each other for a long time now ignoring like they do not know them, or worse, feelings of disliking each other present among them. Anders alienates himself from the rest of the society and when thinks he finds himself “like a bird perched next to lions, like a vulture, or not a vulture, may be a crow, belonging to another element.” (p.34). In reality he is “battered down by cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, and racial defects.” (Fanon, 1993, p.84). He encounters numberless difficulties in developing his bodily schema because everything associated with dark color goes in negative direction or shaped in the negative sense. Complexities are the part of human life. They are attached to both white man and the black man but the second one suffers in his skin and body completely different from the white folks. It is more rapid and intense in the man of color in contrast to the white man.

Towards the end of the novel we come to know that both the parents of the central characters, the mother of Oona and father of Anders, have been moved away from this world. Anders accepts his colored identity, Oona also turns black and they decided to live together. They accept this reality as all the people turn black and there remains no man of white color. So, Hamid does not only present the dark side of the racial traumas, disturbed psychic structure, repressed desires, and conflicts but also gives a way out of these crises in form of acceptance in a way of becoming conscious of unconscious which is important in order to live a comfortable life.

A FINAL REMARK

By the way of conclusion we can say that Hamid has rightfully presented both the external and internal psychic conflicts of the colored man which is an ultimate reality of the contemporary world. The psychological facts are based on reality and reside within black man. It is right to say that racism and colorism are not merely constructed phenomenon but still one of the burning issues in the contemporary society. It is still a prevalent form of oppression and justification to the evil deeds of the white man. This phenomenon of racism is invented by the self-claimed civilized white man and then associated with inferiority, fragmentation, conflicts, and devaluation. The black community is the victim of all of these things with addition to multiple others. The most venomous of all of these things is psychological disturbance. A man can fight the external forces because they are visible and limited but it is hard to overcome the internal clashes, conflicts, fragmented thoughts, self-doubting, and traumas. These are the consequences of this socially constructed phenomenon of racism. The novel is a mouthpiece of the black humans who suffer in every instant and Anders is representing these things accurately. In terms of relation of the black-white man it never occurs with an individual of

color that he considers himself superior to the even white minority. Furthermore, the feeling of inferiority of the black man is correlative to the feelings of superiority of the white man. Anders looks at him as a white man and thinks as a black man. Hamid does not only presented these realities but also gives a way out of these things which can be connected with Fanon as he suggests that in order to overcome these things one must be conscious of his unconscious in order overcome hallucination and psychological crises. Secondly, the fact of acceptance is a key to avoid conflicts and to overcome the crises. One must accept his reality in order to live a peaceful life and same happens with Anders at the end of the novel. He embraces his colored identity and abandons his associations with whiteness and it does not trouble more. Everything is all right when one acts as man who questions and thinks logically. This leads Anders to emancipation of these sufferings at the end of the novel.

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