

The Abject Other: Race, Identity and Transformation in Mohsin Hamid's The Last White Man

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Abstract

This study explores the mechanism of abjection in Mohsin Hamid's novel, *The Last White Man* (2022) using theorist Julia Kristeva's theoretical framework formulated in her ground-breaking research, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. It delves deep into Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject other, examining not only fear and hate against racially altered characters but also toward the sick and the dead, thereby highlighting the Orient–Occident binary. This shift erases the lines between 'self' and 'others'. Different psychological stages have been scrutinized such as pre-acceptance and acceptance of change; however, the last stage of acceptance has an element of hope. This research is significant because it contributes to Kristeva's theory and not only discusses the negative experiences of abjections but also deals with its positive effects highlighting how people are affected sociologically, psychologically, and politically. This study holds critical implications for future studies because in today's world shifts in racial identity is not a fictional metaphor anymore, but an everyday experience especially for diasporas who navigate through hybrid identities on a daily basis. Employing a qualitative approach, it draws upon a textual interpretation of the primary text and other secondary sources. The findings of this study underscore that "*The Last White Man*" masterfully interweaves themes of race, belonging, and psychological horror of racial displacement, illuminated through Kristeva's framework. The exploration reveals that negotiating the abject is not solely a social process but a personal one, destabilizing and reconstructing identity from within.

Keywords: Abjection, Racism, Identity Transformation, Self and Other, Horror

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Introduction

The concept of the "Abject Other," as explored in literature, is a profound lens through which the dynamics of race, identity, and transformation can be better understood. The term "Abject," as defined by Julia Kristeva, refers to that which is cast off or relegated to the margins of society. It includes things that evoke feelings of horror, disgust, or revulsion because they transgress established boundaries and disrupt societal norms. Abjection is a psychological and cultural state that emerges when individuals or groups are perceived as not fitting into the acceptable categories of the social order. According to Kristeva, abjection exists at the point where boundaries between the self and the other become blurred, leading to unease and discomfort.

The social construct of the "other" is extremely imbedded in historical and colonial practices, where distinctions of race, ethnicity, and culture were used to rationalize hierarchies of power and domination. Hamid's *The Last White Man* (2022) reveals that these hierarchies continue to impact societal attitudes in contemporary times. The story presents a world where the racial identity of a white man, Anders, is dramatically transformed, thrusting him into a societal position of degradation. This transformation highlights the fragile construction of identity and the ways in which race informs not only self-perception but also how individuals are perceived and treated by others. At its core, the novel questions the experience of discrimination—both personal and collective—triggered by societal structures that define worth and belonging through rigid racial hierarchies.

Racial otherness is not an inherent or natural condition; rather, it is socially constructed and preserved by societal norms that define which racial groups are confidential and which are marginalized. Grosfoguel (2016) argues that racism works as a global hierarchy that sorts individuals and groups along lines of superiority and inferiority, often justified by race, ethnicity, and culture. This framework is evident in *The Last White Man*, where the transformation of Anders' race upsets the established order and creates an atmosphere of fear and paranoia. Anders' physical transformation from white to brown makes him an abject being within his community, an individual who no longer fits into the dominant racial category. His new skin color makes him "other" to those who previously saw him as part of the norm. This transformation, which disrupts the symbolic order of race, provokes strong reactions from both Anders and those around him. The concept of the "Other" in this context becomes intertwined with abjection, as the transformed

Anders is now regarded as different, alien, and inferior—an individual whose presence encounters the existing racial hierarchies.

The concept of racial transformation, as shown in *The Last White Man*, is a powerful observation on the fluidity of identity and the subjective nature of racial distinctions. Hamid's novel challenges the notion of static racial identities, proposing that race is not an innate characteristic but rather a social construct that can be manipulated and altered. This idea is central to Critical Race Theory, which posits that race is not a biological reality but a social paradigm that obliges to uphold systems of power and oppression.

This study investigates the implications of racial transformation as theorized by Julia Kristeva, whose psychoanalytical framework will serve as the base for analyzing the novel. Kristeva's theory of abjection, which delimits the boundaries between the self and the other, is critical to understanding the emotional and psychological impacts of being cast out from the normative societal order.

The objective of this research is to invite readers into the world of Hamid's narrative, where issues of race, identity, and the abject other are discussed in depth. Kristeva's theory helps to explain the visceral reactions of both Anders and his society in the face of this racial transformation. This study aims to shed light on how race, when altered, affects an individual's standing in society, and how this, in turn, generates crises of identity, belonging, and self-perception. The study will further seek to elaborate how the ideology of abjection shapes personal and collective identity experiences and the way race persists influence on social relationships in contemporary times.

Review of the Literature

The selected literature is written off as thematically to identify the primary developments in the critical discourse about *The Last White Man*. These include studies of race, identity, and transformation—key themes and the theoretical framework that appear from Hamid's work which are central to this study.

Hamid's work bids readers to think on issues of identity and race in his novella. In an interview on Sky News (2022) Hamid recollects about *The Last White Man* saying that it takes readers to an unfamiliar space, inviting him to imagine what is going

on and reflect upon their feelings. In fact, it pushes you gently to discover how these ideas affect you personally. This novel is an open stimulation for the readers to get involved with the story and draw their conclusions which are based only on their will and perception. One can imagine a racism-free world where there is equality and a place where there is no exploitation of subalterns in the guise of civilization. One can deny this optimistic end and remains steadfast with racial discrimination (Hamid, 2022).

In their study, Chaman et al. (2022) analyze *The Last White Man* through the lens of Modernism, using Frantz Fanon's theoretical framework from *Black Skin, White Masks*. The novel talks about the identity issues of modern individuals, particularly those with darker skin. The word "black" suggests lack of confidence, and feelings of inferiority also associated with having fewer opportunities, resources, and recognition socially. The term "black" is metaphorically explored inside itself to emphasize psychological and social perspectives. On the psychological level, it is linked with a lack of confidence, trust, and sense of superiority; on the social level, it is tied with a lack of opportunities, resources, and recognition (Chaman et al., 2022).

The novel through this transformation deals provides the themes of loneliness and alienation and the inferiority that comes with black skin colour. *The Last White Man* deals with magical realism as in Kafka's metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa and *The third Chronicle of Narnia* book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by Lewis Carol's Narnia, in which Eustace awakens and finds himself transformed into a dragon. (Kapur & Naik, 2022).

Manzoor and Singh (2023), in their article *Interrogating the Discourse of Racism and Identity Crisis in Mohsin Hamid's The Last White Man*, use Critical Race Theory to evaluate the novel's exploration of racism as a social construct spread by the dominant white group. The authors argue that the novel critiques how racial discrimination justifies the subjugation of black individuals for the benefit of the dominant majority.

Saad (2023) uses a phenomenological hermeneutic approach to analyze *The Last White Man*, alongside Hamid's *Exit West*. Saad emphasizes that the author uses the first-person narrative style to draw attention to the division of superiority and

inferiority. The aim is to unveil the prejudice that lies behind these divisions and inspect ways to break free from this oppressive system.

A review in *The Guardian* (2022) discusses Hamid's unique writing style for example one paragraph consists of only one sentence. There are layers on layers of clauses and phrases. There is only one full stop in one paragraph. Many paragraphs are of exceptional length. This technique of writing makes Hamid's novel world-famous and memorable for the readers.

Ashraf et al. (2023), in their research article, *A Critical Reading of Hamid's The Last White Man* in the light of Postmodernism, study it through the postmodern lens, which have been highlighted in the novel, including globalization, pluralism or multiculturalism, fragmentation, technology and science. The story reveals the complexities surrounding racial sentiments, showing that although there is stereotyped hatred toward black people in white people's actions, there is also juxtaposition.

In a research article "A Structuralist Narratological Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's novel, *The Last White Man*", Anum et al., (2023) appoint structuralism theory, which sheds light on the novel's construction and the significance of its narrative elements. This novel offers a profound check of modern reality as it explores Hamid's vigilant use of language, character building, and core themes. The novel provides a prism through which to observe the complexities of cultural diversity and the changing relationships between privilege and power. By using this literary lens, the book takes on relevance as it addresses current social issues and invites readers to reflect logically on the complicated interactions that exist between privilege, power, and culture in a world that is changing quickly.

These articles and researches explore this novel from different perspectives including Modernism, Structuralism, Post-Modernism and unique Narratological method. This research is bridging the gap by providing a unique perspective to analyze the novel *The Last White Man* by investigating this fictional text with a psychoanalytical approach to Abjection. This novel has not been dealt with before from this theoretical lens by Julia Kristeva. This research is significant because it invokes academic and literary interests but it also provides an insight into the realistic depiction of the casting off of a person who does not match the standards of normality set by society. This study highlights a global issue of color

discrimination and identity crisis and how it affects people psychologically and socially. This research is also significant because it contributes to Kristeva's theory. It does not only discuss the negative experiences of abjections but also deals with its positive effects. This research can also be analyzed from sociological, psychological, and political perspectives.

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Methodology

This research, "The Abject Other: Race, Identity, and Transformation in Hamid's *The Last White Man*" is written by using qualitative research methods, and techniques of textual analysis are used to evaluate the selected text by using Abjection as a theoretical lens. The textual data of the novel *The Last White Man*, along with the theoretical work, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* by Julia

Kristeva is used to find answers to the research questions. The research also makes use of different qualitative research tools such as textual analysis, explanation, and interpretation to achieve the primary objectives of this research. While the primary source of data collection is the novel, the secondary source is Kristevian theory of Abjection along with various tertiary sources including interviews, research journals, reviews published by acclaimed newspapers, critical books, and authentic websites.

❖ Data Analysis

This study sheds light on the importance of race, identity, and transformation in the process of making a person either acceptable or an outcast from society. The transformation happening in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* has been handled in two ways, first, the white community transforms into black but their set standards also change from extremely racially biased people into normal, without racial discrimination. Many critics and writers have appreciated the novel and supported the glimpse of hope and optimism. This optimistic viewpoint describes some moral aspects as well that there should not be distinction among people based on skin color and race. The hatred and disgust should not be expressed due to physical appearances, some morals should also be considered. These kinds of abject people should be accepted to maintain peace and equality as advocated by Hamid in this novel.

❖ A Ravaging Agony in the Pre-Acceptance Phase of Abjection

Abjection, according to Kristeva, is a reaction of repulsiveness and disgust shown towards someone who does not follow the boundaries and limits. In this novel, Anders gets up one day and gets shocked at looking at his skin color. His color had changed into "deep" and "undeniable brown". Initially, he fails to grasp the situation. First, he thinks that it is someone else who is confronting him and his face becomes red with anger, then he loses his senses and becomes very violent. He feels a sense of great humiliation and contempt for that other colored man who is someone alien and hostile to him.

❖ The Role of Abjection in Identity Transformation

In this section, the disgustful reactions and responses of Anders and other minor characters are discussed in their pre-acceptance phase after becoming an abject being. After the sudden change in skin color Anders cannot comprehend his situation, which affects him psychologically. This chapter further discusses the

reactions of other minor characters, whether they are exhibiting a helpful and comforting response or enhancing his feelings of uncanniness and disgust. Minor but significant characters in this novel are Anders' girlfriend Oona, her mother, his boss at the gym, and his father.

Oona shows an ambiguous reaction towards Anders's racial transformation. Likewise, his father is also doubtful about his son's transformation when Anders tells him about his skin color but becomes supportive as the novel proceeds. Some characters like his boss, and Oona's mother who are color-conscious exhibit repulsive behavior, enhancing the sense of disgust for Anders. This chapter also highlights fragments of his memories in comparison to his new identity, which creates an impression of rootlessness in him because he has not accepted his new identity.

The abject person is neither the subject nor the object but in a liminal space where the meaning collapses. The same is the situation with Anders as he feels that he is somewhat in between dreams and wakefulness. It threatens his identity as a white man. Coming back to reality he rushed toward mirror in bathroom for confirmation. The narrator describes the shabby conditions of his bathroom. It is very dirty and unkempt. The tiles are cracked and dried toothpaste drips on the basin. This uncanny environment creates a feeling of creepiness in the readers' minds however, the more repulsive thing is Anders' skin color.

When Anders sees himself in the mirror, a black man is standing in front of him, and the narrator describes his response as "He wanted to kill that colored man who confronted him here in his home, to extinguish the life animating this other's body" (Hamid, 2022; p.10). This quote highlights the severity of his state that his repulsion from that colored man is at its peak. He wants to murder that man and in this state of mind, he destroys all the things on the shelf. Though somewhere deep down he knows that this person is him his hatred towards him dominates his sense of loss. Then suddenly his anger shifts into a state of horror. He is overtaken by a wave of chillness and he freezes probably thinking of the future consequences of this event on his relationship with Oona, his job, and his status in the color-conscious society. He is trembling with fear and pain of his loss of identity.

❖ Racial Otherness and the Construction of Identity

In the context of racism, the severity of his reaction is very obvious because the colonial history of blacks shows that they were always treated as less than humans. The black slaves were not more than animals. White people treated them very brutally. They were considered inferior, subservient, and in need of saving. According to Edward Said in *Orientalism* “The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said, 1978, p. 13). Said emphasizes that Orientalism not only serves to objectify and dehumanize Eastern nations but also to reinforce Western superiority and control over the East. History shows that the whites are always paranoid of the blacks and feel fear and horror about their existence. Anders himself felt the same but now with role reversal, he was unable to accept his reality and bind himself to his home.

The change in Anders's skin color is intolerable for him so he wants everything to be as normal as before but he cannot help it. He does many things to make confirmations, first, when he gets up, he reverses his phone camera but Anders experiences dissonance as his racial identity visually no longer aligns with his internal self-conception is mocking him. Then, in the mirror, and finally digital algorithm also denies his identity. “[...] a crime that had taken everything from him, that had taken him from him” (Hamid, 2022, p.11). He is chilled with horror at the sight of his colored arms and hands. He is considering himself a victim of robbery which robbed everything from him. Anders experiences too much abhorrence that he thinks he is occupied by the company of a monster “in a tense and hostile company” (Hamid, 2022, p. 11). He wants to forget this day so he does many aimless tasks but remains discomforted.

❖ Race, Identity, and Transformation in “The Last White Man”

The physical description of Anders after his transformation by the narrator inflames filthy sentiments in readers' minds. Imagine a man who was once a white and delicate person changed horribly. The narrator compares him with a sea creature that should not exist on this earth. His appearance is “bizarre, beyond acceptance, like a sea creature that should not exist” (Hamid, 2022, p. 12). The abject causes feelings of distaste and frightens others, for instance, a scene in a horror movie depicting wounds, blood, and spirits brings the audience into a realm where they also doubt themselves. They experience “in between and betwixt” situations. As for Anders, he is also somewhere suspended in a vacuum between whiteness and

darkness. He does not admit his dark complexion psychologically, on the other hand, his apparent whiteness is lost.

According to Kristeva, when we encounter an abject body, we distance ourselves from it. There are many instances in the novel when people show detached behavior with Anders. The most important character Oona gets worried about her future when she comes to know that Anders is not Anders but another man with only his name, also gets worried about herself instead of Anders. She distances herself from him. Although she enjoys his company and likes to spend time with him, his transformation is a huge shock to her. It seems very difficult for her to reassure him. Her act of intimacy does not give her such satisfaction as before. She becomes mentally and physically exhausted. Her act makes her ashamed of herself and creates a sense of betrayal in her. After that day, Oona starts to avoid Anders. She does not respond to his messages. She does not go to see him. She is not mentally prepared to accept Anders as a black man.

Anders works in a gym and he does not visit it for a week. His boss warns him to join as soon as possible otherwise he would be expelled. His boss is also a very significant character because he also shows disgusting behavior. Anders gathers so much courage, that he finally goes to the gym. His boss' reaction after watching him is "I would have killed myself [...] if it was me" (Hamid, 2022, p. 31). This extremist response shows that his boss is feeling abhorrence toward him. This quote highlights the hatred of white people for blacks. Blacks, according to Europeans are ignorant people like animals. White people prefer death instead of getting a dark complexion. The same idea is also presented by Joseph Conrad in the *Heart of Darkness*, in *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, and in *A Passage to India* by E.M. Foster.

The abject, according to Kristeva, "disrupts identity, system, and rules—the one who violates the boundaries, positions, and rules" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 4). In the novel, most people change and their identity transforms. This change causes an identity crisis for everyone who transforms in this nameless town most probably somewhere in the West because the harsh reactions of white militants confirm that it is a white-dominated society. This transformation causes identity loss for Anders. "People who knew him no longer knew him" (Hamid, 2022, p. 24). Reactions of all characters associated with Anders are causing him to fail to accept his new identity. He

continuously looks back into his past and remembers his golden days when he and his friends walked in front of high school. He wants these days to come back.

So, the people, Anders representing them all disrupt the social system. There is an anarchy everywhere. People become violent, there are riots, and people kill themselves as well as are killed by militants. For instance, “a white man had indeed shot a dark man, but also that the dark man and the white man were same” (Hamid, 2022, p. 39). An unnamed white man kills himself in front of his home because he cannot withstand his black color. The narrator portrays this incident as a white man who did not commit suicide but killed a black man who was an intruder and threatened his identity.

The peaceful environment is disturbed by riots in the city distorting the system badly. The streets became abandoned, and the store shelves were bare. This happens only because people are not in a position to accept this new identity. So the social system shatters and becomes a victim of violence. The abject signifies the fragility of law and rules. As the novel proceeds, more individuals change more militants become active. They carry weapons and ammunition to control. They are managing to separate black from white but fail to do.

In the process of abjection, there is also disgust for the discharge of bodily fluids like blood and vomit, etc. Likewise, there is an incident in the novel in chapter seven, a scene of a quarrel between two men, one dark and the other pale. They start punching each other, and the quarrel is so severe that one breaks the other’s arm. “softly liquid and bone breaking at the same time, such a visceral, disturbing sound that it made Anders turn away” (Hamid, 2022, p. 57). The sound of bone breaking is so visceral that Anders could not dare to look at it. He simultaneously turns back and it makes him uncomfortable the whole night.

The fundamental question in the context of abjection is that the abject one asks himself “Where am I?” because of the ambiguity of the liminal space. In the novel, Anders struggles with an identity crisis. His abjection makes him an alien to the rest of society. He continuously thinks about others and what others think of him. He does not dare to bear the world with his black face due to his heightened consciousness about black inferiority. Moreover, blacks are also considered to be dangerous which is why he thinks that people would get paranoid about his presence around them. At the start of the novel, Anders refuses to go outside of his home. But he gets short of food items which demands him to deal at least with the

clerk at the grocery store but opposite to his expectations, the clerk does not even look at him. “[...] he saw flickers of hostility and distaste” (Hamid, 2022, p. 13). This behavior also provokes in readers' minds that the matter is reversed. Whites do not respect blacks as if they do not exist and at this stage, Anders faces an opposite reaction. He is over conscious that all men around him are staring at him but they do not even notice his presence. Throughout his stay at the grocery store, he thinks about what the others think about him. He assumes that they surely perceive him as an ugly guy.

On his way back, he stops at the traffic signal. He starts looking desperately in the rear mirror to find any marks of whiteness on his face. He sinks into his thoughts when he realizes that the signal is green and there are lots of horns behind him. A woman overtakes him and passes a curse upon him but he does not do anything to harm her because of an underlying inferiority complex. A week passes but Anders remains conscious of being observed by others. A feeling of paranoia sets in and, he thinks that he will get harmed so he does everything to hide his appearance. He wears a hoodie to make his face invisible from the sides. He also wants to wear gloves but the temperature is quite high. It would seem so ridiculous to wear gloves so he keeps his hands in jeans pockets. On the sidewalks, he gives extra room to others and others also behave in the same manner. Nobody causes any harm to him but he continuously feels to be threatened.

The case is not similar when he meets a black guy at the gym. He does not express any contempt or repulsion for him but normal eye contact. He also experiences the weird behavior of men at the gym. Before his transformation, he was quite popular at his workplace. He is renowned as a doctor because he sorts many problems like muscle cramps and he used to read a lot. When he rejoins the gym, there are quick evasive stares at him causing a very awkward situation. All these events make Anders so hopeless that he wants to undo his life. He feds up with strange conduct of people and wants everything to be normal. He imagines “[...] a return to his old role as possible, to his old centrality, or if not centrality, then at least to a role better than this peripheral one” (Hamid, 2022, p. 40). He compares himself to a supporting character enacting on the stage of life. He does not call him a hero or a villain because both are important characters. Hero is at the border of righteousness while the villain is at the evil border. Anders calls him neither a hero nor a villain but somewhere in between them. This quote shifts attention toward subaltern theory where blacks are marginalized while whites belong to the center.

Oona's mother also shows abhorrence when she witnesses a physical intimacy between her white daughter and a black man. "she doubled over and vomited on the carpet, heaving with her eyes wet and her nose wet until her stomach was empty" (Hamid, 2022, p. 89). It seems very dreadful to her. She could not stand it, feeling sick she rushed towards the doorway but failed to reach the bathroom in time and vomited on the carpet.

Kristeva in her essay, *Powers of Horror*, also mentions that an aged body is also an abject because it threatens our body integrity and reminds us of our mortality and physical vulnerability. It is a source of repulsiveness and pity. In the novel, Anders' aging father and dead mother also provoke dismay in readers as well as in Anders' mind. His father was once a stout person but his son's new identity punched him so strong that it was unbearable for him. His illness parches all freshness out of his face and becomes a mark of mortality for Anders. Likewise, Oona's sick mother is also an abject individual causing Oona to suffer from pre-acceptance phase. She regularly checks her blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, depression, and anxiety. All these diseases make her life questionable. It seems hard to look after a person who is a constant reminder of death.

Oona's late twin brother can also be seen from an abjection lens. Oona is tormented after the death of her father and brother and she is not in a state to accept this reality. She memorizes her past days spent with her brother when they used to collect tadpoles from the pond in their childhood. She also recreates in her mind her school days walking on the footpath in front of the high school. But all these days gone are reminders of the meaninglessness of life. The narrator draws imagery of an arc made by Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars around the Moon. Jupiter shines bright, Saturn is dim, and Oona fails to locate Mars because it is hidden behind trees. "[...] not seeing Mars made her think of how frigid space was, how inhuman, a lifeless void, dead, like her father and like her brother who had followed him" (Hamid, 2022, p. 30). This triggers in the reader's mind "Desert Places" by Robert Frost in which he says that his mind has more emptiness than this universe and it creates horror in him and frightens him. Here Jupiter is most probably a metaphor for Oona because she is young and full of life, while the faded Saturn is her aging mother and invisible Mars is her deceased brother who is absent from their lives. His death endlessly haunts her and reminds her of death, difficulty, sickness, and repulsion from old age. This section focuses on the horrible and disgusting reactions as result of identity change broadly studied under the domain of racism and abjection.

❖ Hope in Post-Acceptance Phase of Abjection

In this section, different causes and actions are discussed which prompt all these characters to embrace their new identities. Moreover, it discusses the change that happened in their lives after this acceptance. In this novel, almost all characters are somehow positively accepting their reality and coping with this unsettling change and this leads them to create a utopian society where there are no racial prejudices except for Oona's mother who remains in a liminal space, she does not fully admit her black skin while her blackness does not hurt her enough as it hurts before. Common people who continue to transform also exhibit a positive attitude.

The protagonist, Anders, starts acknowledging his existence as a black man, unlike his earlier reactions towards his transition. Although this acceptance is gradual two specific incidents provide stimuli for this. During the riots in the town the militants started separating black from the white community. So Anders has been forced to leave his home and seek shelter in his father's house. He hesitates to go there but there is no other option left. His father however, does not give him a warm welcome but fully supports him. He provides him with a rifle for his protection. This rifle seems to be a validation of security but one question troubles him a lot. Anders meditates on the existence of man in this world and existential questions about life's worth trouble his mind leading to one important question which is, his willingness to live.

There can be an intense emotional liberation associated with accepting one's filths, affiliated to catharsis. This acceptance can lead to a sense of renewal, as the energy previously spent on denying these aspects of the self is enlightened, potentially leading to greater mental elasticity and openness. As Anders starts thinking of other people who are also dealing with this same dilemma. He wonders how others are coping with their situation whether they are killing, hiding themselves, or doing anything else. But the need of the hour is to explore his inner self, what he wants and there is a strong inner voice that he wants to live. This sense is overwhelming and diminishes all bleak circumstances. The realization is that people are supportive unless and until one is behaving according to their will, but if one transgresses from expected behavior people leave alone. So, Anders decides not to care about what others think of him rather it is important to be worth himself.

Another incident that leads Anders to accept himself is his meeting with a small black guy at the gym where a connection develops among them. The narrator says that Anders always remains nice to him but after becoming a black man, he

questions his behavior and admits that never treated him more than a puppy. Anders notices a change in his gaze which suggests that he wants to talk to Anders. Likewise, Anders feels something empathetic and confesses that he should learn from him. This also encourages him to accept his new identity.

Due to acceptance of abjection, the hard and clear boundaries established between white and black blur, questioning the established societal norms of what is acceptable and unacceptable. Oona's behavior with black Anders plays a very important role in the process of leading him toward acceptance. In the beginning, she shows repulsive behavior but later she becomes supportive. She does not end her relationship with Anders. This acceptance has a positive effect on his self-perception. There is a sharp contrast in his actions performed in pre-acceptance and post-acceptance phases. As discussed in the previous chapter during pre-acceptance phase he does not want to face the world. He shows a violent reaction and hides himself in his home. But, after these experiences, there is a positive change in his personality. He wants to go outside where he feels fresh. After a long time, he goes outside at midnight without feeling threatened. Likewise, he feels courageous enough to face his boss at the gym who is now also changed.

In post-acceptance phase he does not need any face mask or gloves to hide his black skin. Both Anders and Oona start going outside as in the normal days. Moreover, Anders does not show an awkward reaction to Oona's transformation. He remains calm and says "Wow" which highlights his present state of mind much progressive towards accepting this change.

❖ The Acceptance of Physical Transformation

The acceptance of physical transformation also leads change in others perceptions like Anders bears feelings of abjection when it confirms that his father's death is not far. The day arrives, and there is a strange smell, a smell of death, in his home. According to Kristeva, "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject" (Kristeva 4). When his father dies, he remains silent, tolerating his pain, but he bursts when he calls Oona. There is a less intense reaction by Anders. Instead of leaving this corpse, he remains with the dead body of his father throughout his funeral.

As Ernst Becker in his book *The Denial of Death* theorizes that accepting the inevitability of death can lead to a more meaningful existence, as it encourages

individual to confront their mortality. "The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; [...] activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man" (Becker, 1973, p. X). After his funeral celebrations, Anders decides to spend the rest of his life in this house with his family. He continues to visit the graveyard where his parents rest eternally. This shows that like his own state, he accepts his father's death. May be Anders thinks that his father's state is transformed, from living to dead, like his change from white to a dark man. He and Oona decorate that home for a new start. With the acceptance of abjection, there may be potentials for renewal and creativity.

Like all other characters, Oona bears the agony of losing the delicacy and beauty associated with her whiteness. But it does not grieve her too much. Her acceptance is quite quick and normal. There can be different reasons behind her actions. First, she does not quit her affiliation with Anders. She is not a person to whom appearances bother. It seems that she makes herself prepared for every possibility. Second, more and more people in the town change over time. So Oona is mentally prepared that it would also come to her. For instance, she edits her pictures on her mobile phone and darkens herself but the landscape behind her also changes. Then she found another application in which she could change only her skin color and get the desired result. During this, an idea comes to her mind, she orders a makeup kit for a dark complexion. She puts this dark makeup on her face. "[...] the dark woman that emerged, dark and dashing, there was no other word for it" (Hamid, 2022, p.76). All these actions are proof that she is waiting for her transformation.

When she changes, a sense of melancholy tries to overcome her. She remembers that white girl who spent good days with her father and brother. She ponders that with time, she has never been constant. She changes in every minute, in every second, so there is no use to be sad about this alteration. Instead, she feels lighter, not in the sense of weight but a burden of being perceived as 'other' in the black community. "[...] for lightness was stronger than the melancholy, the sense that she was escaping a prison she desired to escape" (Hamid, 2022, p. 91). This quote illustrates that Oona does not become a victim of abjection but a survivor. She accepts her identity and starts a new life with Anders.

Oona's conversations with her mother also reveal that she does not have any feelings of abhorrence towards changing society. She persistently held this stance that

everything would be sorted out and there would not be any hostility anymore. Hamid skillfully draws a far-fetched comparison between Oona's black look and a snake that sheds its skin yearly. He says Oona's skin change is just like a snake shedding off its old skin and getting ready to grow further. (Hamid, 2022, p. 92) In a notable work, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* by bell hooks, the same idea is presented. In this book, bell acknowledges the abjectness of black race but she says that there is a need for the reimagining and acceptance of black identity.

Oona's mother refuses to accept this change and she continues to resist all these circumstances. She avoids going outside unless it is unavoidable. She is paranoid of black people and feels threatened everywhere. She becomes too afraid of the vehemence that had spread in the town. She is obsessed with killing videos trending on the internet. She also watches videos of those who think this is a contagious disease spreading through physical contact. So, there must be some cure for it and people experiment by taking different medicines. People are "[...] discovering a way to undo the horror" (Hamid, 2022, p. 83). But these produce disastrous results, ending in people getting very sick and even dyeing. One night, there was a mighty explosion due to thundering and lightning but Oona's mother thinks that some superheroes have come to save their town from this calamity. But things eventually turn for the worse than what she expects, causing her to lose hope making her more and more desperate.

❖ Optimism in Post-Acceptance Phase of Abjection

These reactions show that she still suffers from pre-acceptance phase of abjection. Although many citizens change and find out their defense mechanism she fails to cope with her situation. When Oona applies dark makeup on her face and comes to dinner, her mother rebukes her too hard and says that she must be ashamed of herself for doing such terrible things. Oona also transforms as time passes, affecting her mother badly. One day before her own transformation Oona sitting at the dining table sinks in thoughts of her daughter's loss. She remembers her whiteness, beauty, and fragility. "[...] she did her very best to keep it all inside her, and to stay at that table, but it was a struggle, an impossible struggle" (Hamid, 2022, p. 96). At breakfast, her mother tries her best to control her repugnance for Oona's black skin but she fails. She leaves her breakfast without finishing, and goes up to her room, spitting the residue of food remaining in her mouth.

With time there is change in her behavior which is much more apparent and comes with the realization, that it was a crisis the whole town is facing not just her dear ones. The only way to tackle this situation is to adjust to it. She interrogates her motherhood and what should an ideal mother do in such difficult times. She understands that her supportive behavior would prove fruitful for both of them. By accepting their current situation, they would be able to come out of their trauma. Oona's mother is the last one to change, in the town. She remains quiet for some days.

Oona stays with her mother, not wanting to leave her alone, because of the threat that she will do something aggressive to harm herself. Instead, she was relieved that there were no signs of anything like this. Her transformation does not grieve her much. She starts evaluating all the facts and the presuppositions about the black race. She reads about the savagery of dark nations and their brutality over history. "[...] she found that she did not detest being out among people, no different from the others, not identified as being of one tribe rather than another" (Hamid, 2022, p. 116). She does not stop scrolling social media venues but lessens it. She finds a sharp contrast between reality and what is portrayed online. When there is complete change, she relaxes and a sense of threat fades. At the novel's end, she wants to tell about her whiteness to her pure black granddaughter. This indicates her character's evolution, first, she rejects her blackness, but later she overcomes her sense of loss. Anders' father also toils with his moral dilemma which proves constructive. He deeply moves when Anders decides to take shelter refuge in his father's home. So, the best reaction on the part of his father is to accept his son irrespective of his skin color. He also defeats his feelings of abjection, making his life, as well of others, easy.

Accepting one's abject aspects can modify how one unites with society. Since abjection often links what culture and society dictate as unacceptable, but there is a change in social interactions to new forms of social unity with others who are similarly marginalized or who have embraced their abjection. In the novel, there is an overall positive change in the attitude of the whole city. Nearly in the middle of the novel, many people transform but the disturbance persists. The narrator says that "town was going back to normal, or if not going back to normal, at least stopping increasingly abnormal" (Hamid, 2022, p. 79). There are mixed, black and white, anchor persons hosting their TV shows leaving an impression that nothing has been changed at all. Shops, restaurants, and bars reopen according to their normal schedules after a long time. People under the process of relearning about

their identities, they were no longer abject others for one another. This physical transformation leads to mental transformation, when people realize that the repugnance and the hatred they feel for the black nation is not more than mere working of their minds. The gloominess in the atmosphere vanishes and beautiful spring comes scattering newness and cleanliness everywhere.

Conclusion

This research has analyzed the novel, *The Last White Man* (2022) in the light of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Kristeva, the great psychoanalyst, highlighted the importance of disgustful reactions towards one who does not respect the boundaries between self and others resulting in the casting off of that individual. This research has discussed different dimensions of racism and identity transformation, these two domains have been dealt with in combination with the process of abjection. Kristeva points out that the abject is neither 'subject' nor 'object' but lies on the borderline between self and others, becoming a stimulus of horror and repulsion. In the novel, all the transformed characters have suffered a lot due to changes in their identity.

In the novel, the idea of abjection is combined with racial prejudices and identity transformation. It has dealt with white supremacy and the black inferiority complex. The notion of brutality and savagery linked with the black race marks as a persisting horror in the minds of the white nation. Although set in an unnamed city, the severity of repulsive reactions has proved that it is a place where racism prevails at a very high level. The novel elucidates the psychological dilemmas based on the colour of the skin of both "Black" and "White" characters. The transformed people are over-conscious of their blackness, failing to accept their reality. This ambiguity takes them into a liminal space where the meanings collapse. On the other hand, white characters like Oona's mother and militants are overwhelmed with fear because of their assumption that the black race is violent, horrible, and destructive. There has been an outbreak of violence in the town, and the white militants are themselves the source of disturbance rather than blacks.

The research particularly focuses on the different phases of abjection. The one is pre-acceptance while the second one is the post-acceptance phase. In the first, all major characters have gone through a racial transition. They have suffered from mental torture. Their identity has become blurry, neither do they belong to a white nation nor mentally prepared to grasp their new identity. The second phase has

some positivity because all the characters have changed and there is a sort of equality in the atmosphere. They have built the courage to embrace their new identity. This acceptance has led to hope and optimism. The novel challenges the Eurocentric standards that if one possesses white skin color then one is civilized, delicate and beautiful but if one's skin is black then he is considered barbaric, ugly, disgusting, and uncivilized. Hamid has shifted these power dynamics by portraying blacks as more content with their skin than whites who create disturbance to avoid this transformation.

The exploration has also probed deep into the psychological domains of abjection. According to Kristeva, a corpse and a sick person also evoke a strong sense of fear and disgust. In the novel, characters like Oona's sick mother, her dead father and brother, and Anders's dying father, are all considered abject others who have crossed over or going to cross the boundary between life and death. With the death of Anders's father, no white person is left in the town. This research concludes that Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*, sheds light upon the importance of race, identity, and transformation in the process of making a person either acceptable or an outcast from society.

By applying Kristeva's theory of abjection to Hamid's text, this research demonstrates that racial identity operates as both a social construct and a site of psychological turmoil when boundaries are breached. The movement from denial to acceptance of the abject in the novel mirrors the difficulties of contemporary society's slow, uneven transition toward pluralism, directly challenging the false binaries of white/black and self/other. This study thus contributes a nuanced theoretical approach to discussions of race, offering a hopeful vision for collective empathy, inclusion, and the reimagining of social boundaries. Future research might explore comparative analyses with other contemporary texts, deepening understanding of how abjection shapes racial discourse across genres and cultures. Furthermore, in today's world of multicultural coexistence, there is critical need to understand and integrate interdisciplinary perspectives such as psychology, sociology, and literary studies to enrich interpretations of racial identity's fluidity and the ongoing negotiation with societal abjection.

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