

FEAR, VIOLENCE, AND SOCIAL UPHEAVAL: COLLECTIVE RACIAL TRANSFORMATION IN MOHSIN HAMID'S *THE LAST WHITE MAN*

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Abstract

Mohsin Hamid's The Last White Man (2022) offers a profound literary exploration of the collective psychological and social consequences of racial transformation. Through the unprecedented phenomenon of white individuals awakening with dark skin, the novel examines how fear, violence, and institutional instability emerge when historically privileged identities become uncertain. This article investigates the relationship between racial transformation and collective social upheaval by employing Critical Race Theory, theories of collective trauma, and social psychology. Using qualitative textual analysis, the study examines how fear is socially constructed, politically manipulated, and transformed into exclusionary practices that reinforce racial boundaries even during periods of demographic change. The findings demonstrate that Hamid portrays violence not as an inevitable consequence of biological difference but as a product of ideological systems that equate racial identity with security, authority, and national belonging. Simultaneously, the novel explores processes of adaptation, reconciliation, and ethical reconstruction, suggesting that societies confronting historical privilege may gradually develop more inclusive forms of collective identity. By integrating literary analysis with contemporary theories of race and collective trauma, this article contributes to scholarship on speculative fiction, Critical Race Theory, and the social psychology of racial conflict.

Keywords: Collective Trauma, Fear, Violence, Critical Race Theory, Mohsin Hamid, Social Upheaval, Race, Collective Identity, Speculative Fiction

Introduction

Fear has historically functioned as one of the most powerful forces shaping racial politics. Throughout history, societies have frequently constructed racial difference as a source of danger, uncertainty, and instability, thereby legitimizing discrimination, segregation, surveillance, and violence. Such fear rarely emerges from objective biological differences; instead, it is produced through historical narratives, political discourse, institutional practices, and media representation. Contemporary literature increasingly interrogates these mechanisms by exposing the ideological foundations through which fear becomes attached to racial identity. Among recent literary works, Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* provides one of the most compelling examinations of fear as a socially constructed response to changing racial realities. Published in 2022, the novel imagines a world in which white individuals gradually awaken with dark skin. Rather than offering scientific explanations for this extraordinary event, Hamid deliberately focuses on society's emotional, political, and institutional reactions. The transformation destabilizes long-established assumptions concerning race, belonging, citizenship, and privilege, producing widespread uncertainty that extends far beyond individual identity. Communities struggle to interpret unfamiliar realities, governments attempt to preserve social order, media organizations amplify public anxiety, and ordinary citizens confront unprecedented challenges to their understanding of themselves and others.

Unlike traditional narratives of racial discrimination that concentrate primarily upon historically marginalized communities, Hamid reverses conventional perspectives by examining how formerly privileged populations respond to the sudden loss of racial certainty. This narrative reversal enables readers to observe the psychological mechanisms through which fear develops, spreads, and influences collective behavior. The novel thereby transforms speculative fiction into a sophisticated exploration of social psychology, political ideology, and institutional power.

Critical Race Theory provides an important framework for understanding these developments because it conceptualizes racism as a structural rather than merely individual phenomenon. According to CRT, racial inequality is reproduced through ordinary institutional practices, political discourse, educational systems, and cultural narratives that normalize privilege while portraying racialized groups as threats to social stability. Hamid's fictional society reflects these theoretical assumptions by illustrating how fear rapidly becomes institutionalized through surveillance, exclusion, and defensive political responses despite the absence of objective danger.

The concept of **collective trauma** further illuminates the novel's representation of social upheaval. Collective trauma refers to psychological disruption experienced not only by individuals but by entire communities confronting events that challenge shared systems of meaning. In *The Last White Man*, racial transformation destabilizes inherited understandings of identity, history, and social order. The resulting uncertainty generates emotional responses including denial, grief, anxiety, anger, suspicion, and eventually adaptation. Hamid therefore depicts trauma as both a psychological and cultural process affecting entire societies simultaneously.

The novel also explores the relationship between fear and violence. Violence emerges not because transformed individuals become inherently dangerous but because societies interpret unfamiliar bodies through historically established systems of racial meaning. Rumors circulate rapidly, conspiracy theories flourish, public distrust intensifies, and communities increasingly define security through exclusion rather than solidarity. Hamid demonstrates that violence originates primarily within ideological interpretations rather than biological realities.

Although recent scholarship has recognized the novel's engagement with race and identity, comparatively little attention has been devoted to its representation of collective trauma and social upheaval. Existing criticism frequently emphasizes magical realism, migration, globalization, or postcolonial identity while paying less attention to the psychological mechanisms through which fear becomes socially organized. Consequently, the novel's contribution to discussions of collective violence, political fear, and institutional crisis remains insufficiently examined.

This article argues that *The Last White Man* should be understood as an exploration of collective trauma generated by the collapse of racial certainty. By integrating Critical Race Theory with theories of collective trauma and social psychology, the study demonstrates that Hamid critiques ideological systems that transform uncertainty into violence while simultaneously imagining possibilities for ethical reconstruction through empathy and shared vulnerability.

Literature Review

Fear has long occupied a central position within studies of race, politics, and social conflict. Historians and sociologists have repeatedly demonstrated that racial violence rarely originates from objective threats posed by marginalized communities. Instead, dominant groups frequently construct narratives portraying racial others as dangers to national security, cultural identity, economic stability, or social order. These narratives justify discriminatory policies while simultaneously reinforcing existing systems of privilege.

Critical Race Theory contributes significantly to this discussion by arguing that racism functions through institutional practices rather than isolated acts of personal prejudice. Scholars including Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Cheryl Harris emphasize that legal institutions, educational systems, political discourse, and media representation collectively reproduce racial hierarchy by normalizing whiteness and constructing minority populations as objects of suspicion. Fear therefore operates as a political resource sustaining unequal distributions of power.

Parallel developments within social psychology have examined the relationship between uncertainty and collective behavior. Research concerning moral panic, social identity, and intergroup relations demonstrates that periods of rapid social change frequently intensify public anxiety. Communities confronting unfamiliar circumstances often simplify complex realities through stereotypes, conspiracy theories, and binary classifications distinguishing insiders from outsiders. Such psychological mechanisms increase the likelihood of discrimination and collective violence even when objective evidence fails to support perceptions of danger.

The concept of **collective trauma** has likewise become increasingly influential across interdisciplinary scholarship. Unlike individual trauma, collective trauma affects entire communities by disrupting shared narratives concerning identity, history, and social continuity. Cultural theorists argue that traumatic events challenge existing systems of meaning, compelling societies to reconstruct collective identities through new narratives and institutional practices. Trauma therefore possesses not only psychological but also political and cultural dimensions.

Speculative fiction provides particularly valuable opportunities for examining these processes because alternative realities reveal ideological assumptions often hidden within ordinary social experience. Through impossible yet emotionally plausible scenarios, speculative narratives expose mechanisms of fear, exclusion, and power that continue shaping contemporary societies. Hamid's novel exemplifies this literary strategy by presenting racial transformation without scientific explanation, thereby emphasizing society's responses rather than biological causation.

Existing scholarship on *The Last White Man* has generally focused on race, migration, globalization, magical realism, and postcolonial identity. Critics have acknowledged Hamid's critique of whiteness and privilege while exploring the symbolic significance of racial transformation. However, comparatively little research has examined the novel's representation of fear as a collective social process or its portrayal of violence as an ideological rather than biological phenomenon.

Similarly, the relationship between collective trauma and institutional transformation remains underexplored within current literary criticism. Although scholars frequently discuss individual identity crises experienced by characters such as Anders, fewer studies investigate the emotional and political consequences experienced by entire communities. Consequently, important dimensions of Hamid's social critique remain insufficiently developed.

This article addresses these limitations by integrating Critical Race Theory, theories of collective trauma, and social psychology to examine how fear, violence, and institutional instability interact throughout the novel. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study demonstrates that Hamid offers not merely a narrative of racial transformation but a broader reflection on the psychological foundations of social conflict and the ethical possibilities emerging from shared vulnerability.

Research Gap

Current scholarship on *The Last White Man* has primarily concentrated on magical realism, postcolonial identity, migration, and racial transformation. While these approaches illuminate important aspects of the novel, they devote comparatively limited attention to the interconnected themes of collective fear, violence, conspiracy, and social trauma. Existing studies rarely investigate how fear becomes institutionalized through political discourse, media representation, and public responses during periods of racial uncertainty. Furthermore, few analyses combine Critical Race Theory with theories of collective trauma to explain the novel's depiction of societal upheaval. This article addresses these gaps by examining fear and violence as socially constructed processes that shape both institutional behavior and collective identity.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how Mohsin Hamid represents collective fear following racial transformation.
2. To analyze the relationship between fear, violence, and institutional responses through the framework of Critical Race Theory.
3. To investigate the role of collective trauma in reshaping social identities and community relationships.
4. To explore Hamid's vision of ethical reconstruction following widespread social upheaval.

Research Questions

1. How does *The Last White Man* represent fear as a socially constructed response to racial transformation?
2. In what ways do fear and violence reinforce institutional systems of racial exclusion?
3. How does collective trauma influence individual and communal identities in the novel?
4. What possibilities for reconciliation and ethical reconstruction emerge following social upheaval?

Theoretical Framework

This study employs **Critical Race Theory (CRT)** as its principal theoretical framework while integrating concepts from **Collective Trauma Theory** and **Social Identity Theory** to examine the social and psychological consequences of racial transformation in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*. Together, these frameworks provide an interdisciplinary perspective for understanding how fear, violence, institutional instability, and collective identity interact during periods of profound social change.

Critical Race Theory argues that racism is not merely a consequence of individual prejudice but a structural feature embedded within legal systems, political institutions, economic arrangements, educational practices, and cultural discourse. Derrick Bell's principle of the permanence of racism emphasizes that racial inequality continually adapts to changing historical circumstances rather than disappearing entirely. Hamid's fictional society reflects this principle because racial transformation does not automatically eliminate discrimination. Instead, existing systems of fear and exclusion rapidly reorganize themselves around new social realities.

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic further argue that race is socially constructed through political and cultural narratives that assign meaning to physical characteristics. The novel directly illustrates this principle by presenting racial transformation without biological explanation. Characters remain intellectually, emotionally, and morally unchanged, yet public responses alter dramatically because society interprets transformed bodies through inherited racial ideologies. Consequently, fear originates not from objective difference but from socially produced interpretations of difference.

Cheryl Harris's concept of **whiteness as property** also informs this analysis. Harris argues that whiteness has historically functioned as a form of institutional property conferring legal rights, economic opportunities, cultural legitimacy, and social security. In Hamid's novel, the disappearance of whiteness threatens these historically protected advantages, generating widespread anxiety among individuals and institutions accustomed to racial privilege. Fear therefore emerges partly from the perceived loss of symbolic and institutional ownership rather than from any actual danger posed by transformed individuals.

To complement Critical Race Theory, this study incorporates **Collective Trauma Theory**, particularly the work of Kai Erikson and Jeffrey Alexander. Collective trauma refers to events that disrupt shared cultural narratives and destabilize communal understandings of identity, security, and history. Unlike individual trauma, which affects personal psychological functioning, collective trauma transforms social memory and institutional relationships by

challenging the assumptions upon which communities organize themselves. Hamid's narrative portrays racial transformation as precisely such an event. Entire societies experience emotional disorientation because inherited understandings of race, privilege, and belonging become unstable.

Jeffrey Alexander argues that trauma becomes collective only when societies construct shared narratives explaining the meaning of disruptive events. Media institutions, political leaders, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens all participate in defining whether particular experiences become understood as national crises, moral failures, or opportunities for renewal. Hamid reflects this process through competing interpretations of racial transformation. Governments, journalists, families, and communities produce different explanations, illustrating how collective trauma is mediated through discourse rather than emerging automatically from events themselves.

The article also draws upon **Social Identity Theory**, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. According to this perspective, individuals derive important aspects of self-esteem from membership within social groups. Group identities frequently depend upon distinctions between "us" and "them," encouraging individuals to exaggerate differences between in-groups and out-groups. Hamid's novel demonstrates how rapidly these distinctions become unstable when racial boundaries collapse. Formerly secure identities lose coherence, compelling individuals to renegotiate belonging under unfamiliar social conditions.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives enable a multidimensional interpretation of *The Last White Man*. Critical Race Theory explains the institutional organization of racial power; Collective Trauma Theory illuminates the psychological consequences of social disruption; and Social Identity Theory clarifies the emotional processes through which communities reconstruct belonging following the collapse of established racial hierarchies.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology based on close textual analysis. The objective is to examine how Hamid represents fear, violence, trauma, and institutional transformation through narrative structure, symbolism, characterization, dialogue, and thematic development.

The primary data consist of Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* (2022). Passages depicting public fear, collective violence, conspiracy theories, governmental responses, media narratives, interpersonal conflict, and emotional adaptation constitute the principal corpus analyzed in this article. Secondary sources include scholarship on Critical Race Theory, collective trauma, social identity, race studies, and contemporary literary criticism.

The analytical procedure follows four interconnected stages.

First, repeated close readings identify passages illustrating collective emotional responses to racial transformation.

Second, these passages are categorized into thematic groups including fear, violence, conspiracy, trauma, institutional response, and ethical reconstruction.

Third, thematic categories are interpreted through concepts derived from Critical Race Theory, Collective Trauma Theory, and Social Identity Theory.

Finally, individual analyses are synthesized to explain how Hamid critiques racialized systems of fear while imagining possibilities for collective recovery.

Throughout the analysis, interpretation remains grounded in textual evidence while situating the novel within broader interdisciplinary debates concerning race, trauma, and political violence.

Analysis and Discussion

Fear as a Social and Political Discourse

Fear constitutes one of the most powerful organizing principles throughout *The Last White Man*. Rather than emerging naturally from racial transformation itself, fear develops through social interpretation, political discourse, and institutional practices that frame unfamiliar change as existential threat. Hamid repeatedly demonstrates that transformed individuals do not become inherently dangerous; instead, societies construct danger by attaching ideological meanings to changing bodies.

The novel opens with an intensely personal experience as Anders awakens to discover that his skin has become dark overnight. Although the transformation initially affects only his own perception, the emotional response immediately extends beyond individual psychology. Anders anticipates how others might react long before direct confrontation occurs. This anticipation illustrates that fear is socially learned. His anxiety derives not from physical transformation itself but from knowledge of how racialized societies traditionally interpret visible difference.

Critical Race Theory argues that racial fear functions as a political instrument sustaining institutional privilege. Dominant groups frequently portray marginalized populations as threats to justify surveillance, exclusion, and unequal distributions of power. Hamid adapts this historical pattern by reversing its direction. Formerly privileged individuals now experience the vulnerability historically imposed upon racial minorities. Through this reversal, readers perceive fear not as an objective response but as an ideological product of racial hierarchy.

Hamid further demonstrates that fear spreads collectively through communication rather than direct experience. Rumors circulate rapidly, neighbors speculate about the causes of transformation, and uncertainty gradually acquires the status of public knowledge despite the absence of reliable evidence. The speed with which fear travels illustrates the social construction of moral panic. Communities become increasingly convinced that transformation threatens civilization even though no empirical evidence supports such conclusions.

Political authorities contribute significantly to this process. Instead of encouraging reflection or dialogue, official responses often prioritize security and control. Public statements emphasize uncertainty, exceptional measures, and the need for vigilance. Although these interventions appear politically necessary, they simultaneously reinforce public perceptions that transformed individuals represent potential dangers. Hamid thereby illustrates how governments may unintentionally—or deliberately—institutionalize fear through administrative language and emergency policies.

Media narratives further intensify collective anxiety. Continuous coverage transforms isolated experiences into symbols of national crisis. Television broadcasts, digital communication, and public speculation encourage emotional responses that frequently exceed available evidence. Hamid critiques contemporary information cultures in which repetition itself creates credibility. The more frequently frightening possibilities circulate, the more plausible they appear within public consciousness.

Importantly, fear affects both transformed and non-transformed individuals. Those experiencing physical change fear exclusion, violence, and uncertainty, while those whose transformation has not yet occurred fear losing familiar identities and social positions. Fear therefore becomes universal rather than restricted to any single community. Hamid suggests that racial systems ultimately damage everyone because they organize society through perpetual insecurity and division.

Violence, Moral Panic, and Collective Anxiety

As fear intensifies throughout the novel, violence gradually emerges as its institutional and social consequence. Hamid carefully avoids presenting violence as spontaneous irrationality. Instead, violent behavior develops through cumulative processes involving rumor, political

rhetoric, media representation, and collective emotional escalation. Violence therefore appears as the social expression of ideological fear rather than biological hostility.

One of the novel's most significant insights concerns the relationship between uncertainty and aggression. Communities confronting unfamiliar realities frequently seek clear explanations capable of restoring psychological stability. Conspiracy theories, stereotypes, and simplified narratives satisfy this desire by identifying recognizable enemies responsible for social disruption. Hamid portrays this tendency with remarkable nuance, illustrating how ordinary citizens gradually adopt increasingly exclusionary interpretations of racial transformation.

Social Identity Theory explains these developments by emphasizing the human tendency to construct in-groups and out-groups during periods of uncertainty. As familiar racial boundaries dissolve, communities attempt to preserve identity through new symbolic distinctions. Individuals increasingly define themselves against perceived outsiders, even when objective differences have become less meaningful. Hamid thereby demonstrates that group identity depends not only upon shared characteristics but also upon socially constructed boundaries separating "us" from "them."

Violence in the novel frequently remains symbolic before becoming physical. Suspicion, avoidance, verbal hostility, social isolation, and institutional discrimination precede direct confrontation. This progression reflects Critical Race Theory's argument that structural violence often begins through ordinary administrative practices and cultural narratives long before overt physical aggression occurs. Hamid therefore expands conventional understandings of violence by including emotional exclusion, institutional marginalization, and political rhetoric alongside bodily harm.

The novel also illustrates how collective anxiety reshapes everyday social relationships. Neighbors who previously interacted peacefully begin interpreting one another through suspicion. Public spaces become psychologically charged environments where ordinary encounters acquire political significance. Familiar routines lose their reassuring character because uncertainty transforms mundane experiences into potential sites of conflict. Hamid demonstrates that fear alters perception itself, encouraging individuals to reinterpret ordinary behavior as evidence of hidden danger.

Another significant aspect of Hamid's representation concerns the emotional exhaustion produced by prolonged fear. Constant vigilance gradually undermines empathy, patience, and rational judgment. Individuals become increasingly receptive to simplistic explanations promising restored security. Political leaders advocating exclusionary policies gain credibility because they appear capable of reducing uncertainty, even when their proposals reinforce the very divisions generating social conflict. Hamid thereby critiques authoritarian responses to crisis while illustrating the psychological conditions under which such responses become attractive.

Despite these developments, the novel avoids reducing humanity to perpetual violence. Moments of compassion, solidarity, and mutual recognition repeatedly interrupt cycles of fear. Individuals discover unexpected capacities for understanding precisely because shared vulnerability exposes the limitations of inherited racial narratives. Hamid suggests that violence is historically conditioned rather than inevitable. If societies construct fear through discourse, they may also reconstruct relationships through empathy, dialogue, and ethical responsibility.

Conspiracy Theories, Media Narratives, and the Politics of Fear

One of the most significant dimensions of *The Last White Man* is its exploration of how fear becomes socially organized through public narratives. Hamid demonstrates that uncertainty rarely remains an individual experience. Instead, uncertainty circulates through media institutions, political discourse, and interpersonal communication, gradually transforming

private anxiety into collective panic. In this process, conspiracy theories emerge as mechanisms through which societies attempt to explain events that challenge existing systems of meaning. The racial transformation depicted in the novel creates precisely such a crisis of interpretation. Because the phenomenon lacks scientific explanation, communities struggle to assign meaning to rapidly changing realities. Human beings often seek coherent narratives during periods of uncertainty, and conspiracy theories provide emotionally satisfying explanations by identifying clear causes and recognizable enemies. Hamid illustrates that conspiracy narratives do not emerge because evidence supports them; rather, they emerge because uncertainty itself becomes psychologically intolerable.

Collective Trauma Theory offers important insight into this process. Jeffrey Alexander argues that traumatic events become socially meaningful only through narratives constructed by political leaders, media institutions, and communities. These narratives determine whether societies interpret disruption as tragedy, threat, punishment, or opportunity for transformation. Hamid reflects this process by presenting multiple interpretations of racial change rather than a single authoritative explanation. The absence of certainty allows fear to become increasingly vulnerable to ideological manipulation.

Media institutions play a central role in amplifying this uncertainty. Continuous reporting transforms isolated incidents into symbols of civilizational crisis. Information technologies accelerate the circulation of speculation, rumor, and emotional reaction. Repetition itself creates legitimacy, encouraging citizens to interpret hypothetical dangers as established facts. Hamid thereby critiques contemporary media environments in which emotional intensity frequently receives greater attention than empirical evidence.

Critical Race Theory further explains how racialized narratives become attached to fear. Historically, dominant groups have often portrayed racial others as sources of national decline, social disorder, or cultural contamination. Such narratives justify exclusionary policies while preserving existing systems of privilege. In *The Last White Man*, these historical patterns reappear despite the unprecedented nature of transformation. Communities rapidly interpret racial change through inherited assumptions regarding danger and social instability.

Political rhetoric intensifies these dynamics by framing uncertainty through the language of emergency. Governments emphasize security, control, and protection in order to maintain public order. Although such responses may appear pragmatic, they also reinforce perceptions that transformed individuals represent potential threats. Hamid demonstrates that political institutions can unintentionally legitimize fear simply by treating uncertainty as evidence of danger.

Another important aspect of the novel is its depiction of how conspiracy theories provide emotional comfort. By identifying enemies or hidden causes, conspiratorial thinking restores a sense of cognitive control. Individuals may prefer frightening certainty to unresolved ambiguity because certainty offers the illusion of predictability. Hamid thereby illustrates that conspiracy theories satisfy psychological needs even when they lack factual foundation.

However, the novel simultaneously reveals the destructive consequences of these narratives. Conspiracy theories undermine empathy by encouraging individuals to perceive neighbors, colleagues, and family members as symbols of larger political conflicts rather than as human beings. Fear gradually replaces interpersonal trust, making violence and exclusion appear increasingly acceptable. Through this process, Hamid demonstrates that the greatest danger often lies not in social change itself but in the stories societies tell about change.

Ultimately, *The Last White Man* suggests that resisting fear requires critical engagement with public narratives. Ethical societies must learn to tolerate uncertainty without transforming unfamiliar experiences into ideological threats. Hamid therefore critiques not only racism but also the epistemological conditions that enable fear to become politically powerful.

Collective Trauma, Racial Mourning, and Ethical Reconstruction

Beyond fear and violence, Hamid's novel offers a profound meditation on collective trauma and social mourning. The disappearance of whiteness as a stable category generates experiences comparable to grief because individuals and communities confront the loss of identities that previously provided meaning, belonging, and psychological security. The novel therefore portrays racial transformation not merely as political change but as an emotionally disruptive process affecting entire societies.

Collective Trauma Theory argues that trauma emerges when foundational assumptions about the world become unstable. Communities rely upon shared narratives to maintain continuity between past, present, and future. When these narratives collapse, individuals experience emotional disorientation that extends beyond personal suffering. In *The Last White Man*, racial transformation disrupts long-established understandings of identity, privilege, and social order, creating precisely such conditions of collective trauma.

Many characters initially respond through denial. Denial functions as a protective mechanism allowing individuals to preserve familiar realities despite contradictory evidence. However, as transformation becomes increasingly widespread, denial becomes impossible to sustain. Communities must confront the recognition that previously unquestioned systems of meaning no longer provide stability. Hamid thereby portrays trauma as a gradual process of confrontation rather than an instantaneous event.

Grief occupies an equally important place within the narrative. Individuals mourn not only physical appearance but also social identities, historical continuity, and inherited expectations concerning the future. Formerly privileged populations experience the loss of certainty regarding their social position, while transformed individuals mourn the disappearance of familiar relationships and cultural assumptions. Hamid's representation of mourning is therefore complex and multidirectional.

Importantly, the novel does not dismiss these experiences of grief as politically illegitimate. Instead, Hamid acknowledges that social transformation often involves genuine emotional pain. However, he simultaneously distinguishes grief from resentment. Grief can become a pathway toward empathy and ethical reflection, whereas resentment frequently seeks to restore lost privilege through exclusion and hostility. This distinction represents one of the novel's most significant ethical interventions.

Shared vulnerability gradually creates opportunities for collective understanding. As increasing numbers of individuals experience uncertainty, fear, and social dislocation, previously rigid distinctions lose some of their ideological power. People begin recognizing that vulnerability constitutes a universal aspect of human existence rather than a condition affecting only particular groups. Hamid thereby suggests that trauma may generate ethical insight by exposing the fragility underlying systems of domination.

The relationship between Anders and Oona exemplifies this possibility. Their evolving relationship demonstrates that intimacy requires recognition of humanity beyond inherited categories. Love does not erase difference, but it challenges the assumption that difference must determine moral value or social belonging. Through such relationships, Hamid imagines ethical reconstruction as an interpersonal as well as institutional process.

The novel ultimately proposes that collective recovery depends upon the willingness to relinquish hierarchical identities while embracing mutual responsibility. Ethical reconstruction requires neither forgetting history nor denying difference. Instead, it involves acknowledging historical inequalities while refusing to reproduce them in the future. Hamid therefore presents reconciliation not as passive harmony but as an active commitment to empathy, justice, and coexistence.

This emphasis distinguishes *The Last White Man* from simplistic post-racial narratives. The novel does not suggest that racism disappears automatically once visible racial categories become unstable. Rather, it argues that societies must consciously reconstruct relationships and institutions if genuine equality is to emerge. Ethical transformation remains possible, but it requires sustained effort and collective responsibility.

Discussion

The present study demonstrates that *The Last White Man* should be interpreted as a literary exploration of fear, collective trauma, and social reconstruction rather than solely as a narrative of racial transformation. Through speculative fiction, Hamid reveals how uncertainty becomes politically organized through fear, media narratives, institutional responses, and collective identity formation.

One of the article's principal findings concerns the social construction of fear. Fear does not originate from biological difference but from ideological systems that attach danger to particular bodies and identities. Hamid therefore aligns closely with Critical Race Theory's argument that racial hierarchy is maintained through narratives of threat and insecurity rather than objective realities.

The analysis also demonstrates that violence emerges gradually through processes of moral panic, conspiracy, and institutional exclusion. Public anxiety encourages individuals and governments to prioritize security over empathy, thereby legitimizing discriminatory practices that reinforce existing inequalities. Hamid's critique extends beyond interpersonal prejudice to encompass the structural dimensions of fear.

Another important finding concerns collective trauma. The collapse of racial certainty destabilizes inherited narratives concerning identity and belonging, producing grief, denial, and emotional disorientation. However, Hamid simultaneously suggests that shared vulnerability may create opportunities for ethical reconstruction. Trauma becomes not only a source of suffering but also a potential catalyst for empathy and solidarity.

Finally, the novel rejects both deterministic pessimism and naïve optimism. Violence and reconciliation coexist throughout the narrative, reflecting the complexity of social transformation. Ethical futures remain possible, but they require conscious efforts to dismantle inherited systems of hierarchy and exclusion.

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* offers a profound examination of fear, violence, and collective trauma in societies confronting the collapse of racial certainty. Through the extraordinary premise of racial transformation, the novel exposes the ideological foundations through which fear becomes attached to identity and translated into institutional practices of exclusion.

Applying Critical Race Theory, Collective Trauma Theory, and Social Identity Theory demonstrates that Hamid's narrative critiques the social construction of danger rather than racial difference itself. Violence emerges not because transformed individuals become threatening but because societies interpret change through inherited systems of fear and privilege. Media narratives, conspiracy theories, and political discourse further intensify these anxieties by transforming uncertainty into moral panic.

At the same time, the novel imagines possibilities for ethical reconstruction grounded in empathy, vulnerability, and shared humanity. Hamid acknowledges the pain associated with social transformation while insisting that grief need not lead to resentment or exclusion. Instead, collective vulnerability may provide the foundation for more inclusive forms of coexistence.

Ultimately, *The Last White Man* demonstrates literature's enduring capacity to expose ideological assumptions, challenge inherited hierarchies, and imagine alternative futures. By

interrogating the relationship between fear and race, Hamid encourages readers to reconsider the narratives through which societies define belonging, security, and humanity itself.

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