

BECOMING THE OTHER: THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN *THE LAST WHITE MAN*

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Abstract

Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Last White Man* is a story of racial metamorphosis which highlights various socio-political and personal aspects of racial discrimination, and critiques the prejudicial construction of power hierarchies in the society. This paper attempts to analyse the construction of these hierarchies and the discourses that support them, by studying the language choices of the text. Power and identity are built upon certain ideologies created through discourses, which are constituted by language. This is why a clear understanding of the novel's linguistic strategies will lead to a deeper understanding of the discourses of difference that play an essential role in the politics of identity in the novel. By using Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study aims to explore how language choices and discursive practices participate in the changing power structures in Anders's world and evoke themes such as self-victimisation as a means of justifying racial prejudice. The rationale behind choosing the DHA as the theoretical model to conduct this research lies in the fact that this approach is deeply interested in unjustified discrimination and provides a highly categorical model for the linguistic analysis. It takes into account the historical, cultural and racial dimensions whilst analysing a text, and also integrates an 'insider view' from a victim of such discrimination. The paper will aid fellow researchers in studying how identity informs the power structures in Anders's world, and in studying the inversion of those structures as a result of the physical metamorphosis.

Keywords

Racism; critical discourse analysis; power; politics of identity; Self and Other; Mohsin Hamid

Introduction

The Last White Man is a story of transformation, both external and internal. Anders, the male protagonist of Hamid's short novel, is among the first people in his town whose skin colour changes overnight from light to dark. As more and more people transform, chaos ensues as the entire building of systemic discrimination built upon race collapses, and people are forced to confront their inherent prejudice and fears deeply rooted in the long history of racism. Although Hamid does not name the setting of his novel, calling it simply a 'town', the novel very clearly critiques the facade of Western tolerance of racial difference and cultural diversity. This facade is exposed as the people of the town change, and it becomes harder to distinguish those transformed from those who were originally born with dark skin. As a result, the beliefs that maintained racial disparity become weak and difficult to sustain, especially for characters like Oona's mother, who remembers her days as a white woman with a sense of pride. These beliefs constitute the discourses that not only perpetuate racial discrimination, but also attempt to justify the violence that racial 'Others,' like Anders, are subjected to. Gradually, as a major part of the town transforms, the power dynamic maintained by these discourses of racial difference is upturned. Towards the end, Oona's mother fears violence from the dark skinned people, in a "mass settling of scores" (Hamid 116), presumably to gain vengeance for the racial oppression coloured people have endured for centuries.

This paper firstly aims to analyse the language choices made by Hamid's characters which simultaneously indicate towards and contribute to the discourses of difference in the novel. These discourses are closely tied to themes such as self-victimisation as a justification, stereotyping of racial 'Others', and pride in racial purity. Hamid evokes these themes, amongst others, through the use of certain patterns of language and linguistic techniques, adhering to a

few well-defined lexical fields to narrow down the semantic focus of the narrative on the key issues he has addressed in the text. This paper aims to identify these linguistic choices in order to understand the construction of the novel's discourses.

Secondly, this paper attempts to study the role played by the discourses of difference in the politics of identity, and the issues of identity that all characters are confronted with in the novel. Each character's identity is based upon a set of beliefs and ideologies propagated by discourses prevalent in the society. As the narrative progresses and previously held beliefs become unreliable, the characters face various challenges to their identity. They struggle to come to terms with their new realities, which are characterised by loss and grief. The external transformation of the skin colour causes an internal transformation, and this paper aims to study the nature of this change.

Thirdly, this paper attempts to study the inversion of power structures as a result of new identity relations. In addition to being connected to beliefs and ideologies, each character's identity is also deeply connected to the people around them, and finds support from their relationships with them. As these relationships change, so do the power structures that depend on them, and this categorises people into different factions. Every character, like Anders, changes from 'Self' to 'Other' the moment their skin colour changes from white to dark. This process is completed when Anders's father, the last white man in the town, dies, and there are no more people who can identify themselves as the 'Self.' At this stage, the very definitions of 'Self' and 'Other' have become unstable and obsolete, and this binary needs to be redefined. The discourse of racism loses its foundation when there are no more racial differences to uphold, and the power hierarchies are forced to rearrange to cater to the new world. One prime example of this is the reconciliation between Anders and Oona's mother. This paper tries to analyse more of such examples from the text to understand how identity informs the power dynamics of Anders's world.

The first step towards achieving the research goals of this paper constitutes a rigorous textual analysis of the novel to identify the linguistic choices of the text. A clear emphasis is placed on the study of language because discourse is created, shaped and guided by language. Language is not a neutral, transparent system of labelling but a fundamental part of the way patterns of thinking are established (Goddard and Carey 24-25). The use of certain vocabulary reinforces ideological beliefs which strengthen discourses and allow them to infiltrate deep into a society. In turn, the dissemination of discourses affects the type of language that is used by people in certain situations. In Hamid's novel, verbal communication is one of the very first things that are affected by the physical metamorphosis as Anders finds himself suddenly unable to communicate with people in the way that was normal for him. This is why this paper analyses the language patterns of the novel, as a way of leading to a more informed and deeper understanding of how discourses operate within the text.

Ruth Wodak's model of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which provides a structured and well-guided methodology, has been chosen for the linguistic analysis. Wodak initially used this model, called the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), in her study of post-war Austria which focused on the construction of anti-Semitic stereotyped images (Waugh et al. 81). Wodak states that for the DHA, language is not powerful on its own. It is used as a tool by people to gain power, and how well language is used or manipulated determines how much power people possess. Power is an asymmetric relationship between people, and an unequal power dynamic is established through the use of discourse. The ideologies that fuel these discourses are considered by Wodak as one-sided worldviews that can be based on a set of mental representations and evaluations which may be hegemonic in nature. The DHA thus aims to 'demystify' the hegemony of certain discourses by exposing the underlying ideologies and their functioning (*Critical 4*).

The DHA can be applied to any study that takes the issue of racism as its main subject. As Wodak has emphasised, this model takes into account the historical backdrop of racism when analysing a text, and does not focus solely on the linguistic choices of the text. Instead, the DHA encompasses an interdisciplinary study of the text to allow for a holistic understanding of it, combining linguistic analysis with historical, sociological, and theoretical approaches (Wodak *Critical* 1). This paper borrows the basic model put forth by Wodak which classifies the linguistic elements of a text into three interrelated classes that function together to create and sustain a discourse. As mentioned before, understanding the language of the text is essential for a study of the novel's themes and discourses.

Literature Review

The Last White Man, despite its recent publication, has been the subject of extensive literary research, especially in the area of discourse, racism and identity. Kapur and Naik study the racial metamorphosis and bigotry in Hamid's novel, comparing it to Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' and C.S. Lewis's 'The Voyage of the Dawn Treader'. They contend that Hamid borrows language from both Kafka and Lewis, and writes his novel in the form of a fable adhering to the genre of magical realism. This is done so that the text provides food for reflection, rather than direct and clear teachings (1758-59). The novel shows the struggle of dark-skinned people in contemporary society, using Anders as a representative of the marginalised. Hamid's use of the first person narrative allows for his readers to experience through Anders what it feels like to become 'othered' overnight (1764). Kapur and Naik suggest that the text offers an insight into a post-racial society that emerges once every person in the town changes colour, and whiteness is reduced to a mere memory. According to them, Hamid gives a chance to even the most racist people to change, as the novel ends on an optimistic note (1764-65).

Manzoor and Singh investigate the discourse of racism and identity crisis in Hamid's novel, first presenting detailed insights into what 'discourse' means for various theorists, especially Foucault, and then applying those insights to the novel. They suggest that discourse is a strategy for subjectification, and quote Sara Mills who argues that we are not always aware of the ways discourses structure our understanding (3,5). Discourses of truth are controlled by people with institutional power, according to Foucault, and since power and knowledge go hand in hand, knowledge becomes the means to sanction discourses as either legitimate or chimeric (3). This knowledge creates doctrines which allow for social groups to be formed, and use certain types of utterances to bind or separate individuals, as explained by Foucault. Manzoor and Singh employ these ideas to analyse Anders's alienation after his skin changed, as he finally came to understand what it was like to be a dark-skinned person living in a predominantly white community (5). They suggest that dark-skinned people are always in a state of doubt regarding their existence, and the stereotypes that are associated with skin colour cause Anders to be ashamed of himself (7). He internalises the inferiority assigned to dark-skinned people and limits communication with the people around him (8). Manzoor and Singh conclude that acceptance is the key to avoiding conflict and living in peace, just as Anders accepts his new identity and abandons his whiteness towards the end of the novel (9).

Chaman et al have studied Hamid's novel from a Fanonian perspective and they contend that the text discusses the psycho-social issues of black people and the multiple dimensions of their identity which are connected to passivity and an inferiority complex (1352). Similar to Kapur and Naik, Chaman et al compare the novel to Kafka's 'Metamorphosis', highlighting that both writers dwell on the absurdity of the modern man's lack of control over his own body and circumstances (1353). According to them, Fanon's argument that the only destiny for the black man is to become white is applicable to Anders's situation because he wishes to go back to being white, because his 'whiteness' pivoted his entire identity (1357-58).

Fanon's idea that the dark man is trapped in himself also stands true for Anders because he feels imprisoned in his new skin (1359).

Another Fanonian analysis of the text has been done by Baqar et al, who argue that Anders alienates not only from the people around him, but also from himself, because black people are conditioned to identify with whiteness, as asserted by Fanon. According to them, Hamid portrays a dystopian world through his novel, undercutting issues of racism by reversing racial roles (329). Baqar et al claim that Anders's metamorphosis signals towards the arbitrariness of the colour-based identity, and his story critiques the societal practice of determining one's value by their skin. They suggest that this also prompts Hamid's readers to reflect upon their own ideas and preconceptions regarding race and identity (330).

Anam et al uses Genette's model of narratology for their structuralist narratological analysis of Hamid's novel. They argue that Hamid employs his narratives to challenge the stereotypical perception of people of Pakistani origin, and he uses various narrative techniques to address universal themes. Anam et al analyse the focalisation, narrative voice, and mood, amongst other narrative strategies, to reveal that Hamid's narrative is heterodiegetic and that Anders is the internal focalizer of the story (15-16). Hamid's prose is not economical; instead, he writes in paragraph length sentences to achieve gravitas and a parable-like effect. According to Anam et al, Hamid turns what is familiar into strange, not only for his characters but also for his readers, because he does not seek simplistic resolutions to the highly complex issues he has raised in the novel (20).

Rasheed et al present a post-colonial analysis of Hamid's novel, focussing on how the novel challenges the legacies of colonialism and depicts postcolonial traumas (531). They investigate how Hamid deals with the issue of racism, hybridity, and the psychological traumas that are rooted in a colonial past. They suggest that the novel presents a perspective of racism which shows how it numbs people to the fundamental humanity of others. The study analyses passages from the novel, commenting on the descriptive language Hamid uses and pointing out that he refrains from using the word "black" (541). Rasheed et al conclude that the novel shows that societal frameworks and norms are constructed to benefit a certain class of people. They argue that racism is not just a vestige of the past but a thriving mechanism that is still being used for the oppression of people of colour (547-548).

Research Methodology

Ruth Wodak situates the Discourse-Historical Approach in the field of critical discourse studies, which "investigates language use beyond the sentence-level, as well as other forms of meaning-making such as visuals and sounds" (*Critical 1*). She states "triangulation" as a fundamental methodological principle of this approach, which combines "linguistic analysis with historical and sociological" approaches (1).

Wodak has developed a number of principles which characterise the DHA. She explains that the research incorporates "fieldwork and ethnography," a "study from 'inside'" (*Critical 2*). This article analyses Anders's point of view as the insider's perspective, arguing that Anders becomes a representative of a minority community which is subjected to prejudice.

Wodak asserts that discourse is historically situated. The DHA takes into account the historical dimensions of the discourses of prejudice, because the "historical orientation permits the reconstruction of how recontextualization functions as an important process linking texts and discourses" (2). This study analyses the importance of the historical backdrop of racism in shaping the fears of Oona's mother.

Wodak also emphasizes that "categories and tools are not fixed once and for all" (*Critical 2*). This study employs this principle to integrate a thematic analysis of the primary text to reveal how the linguistic and discursive choices of the text shape its meaning and implications.

Perhaps the most salient feature of the DHA which supports this study is that it “displays an interest in identity construction and in unjustified discrimination” (*Critical* 2). The politics of identity and the role of linguistic and discursive elements in shaping identity are the focal concerns of this study. Identity itself lies at the heart of racist discourses, and this study argues that the sudden prejudice faced by Anders dislodges his identity.

Ruth Wodak’s Discourse-Historical Approach presents not only a theoretical basis on which the text has been analysed, but also provides the methodical principles that guide the analysis. Wodak outlines the following three dimensions of prejudiced language use that are the main focus of DHA (*Genesis* 111):

1. the content of prejudiced remarks,
2. argumentation strategies, and
3. linguistic forms of realisation

This paper takes a qualitative approach to analysing Hamid’s novel by identifying the use of the above three dimensions of language use, and how they generate a discourse of difference and racism. The hermeneutic critical discourse analysis of the primary text has been presented under separate headings corresponding to Wodak’s model of CDA. Where relevant, the historical background has also been incorporated into the discussion to present a holistic trajectory of the development of the novel’s discourse.

Analysis

The first dimension of the DHA, the content of prejudiced remarks, entails the “specific contents or topics of a specific discourse” (Wodak *Critical* 12). This includes the collection of all the racist remarks made by the characters and targeted towards a specific social group, which, in the case of Hamid’s novel, is the group of people who have undergone the physical transformation. These racist remarks are typically based on assumed, artificial inequalities due to some natural differences, and so they vary according to the targeted social group (*Genesis* 111). Wodak quotes Taguieff who states that “racism is an ideology, the hard core of which consists of an asserted inequality” (*Genesis* 112). In *The Last White Man*, this ‘asserted’ inequality - asserted, not real - is manifested in the colour of the skin, which has historically been used to signify the social stature of a person.

One could argue that the transformation alone caused the characters’, especially Anders’s, repulsive response. He is robbed of his identity, and this change is forced upon him without his permission; it is only human that one would be unable to accept such a drastic change. However, Hamid provides a counter to this argument in the character of the “dark-skinned cleaning guy” (44), suggesting that the repulsion is not solely an individual response, but it is deeply connected to the predetermined connotations of being dark-skinned. For example, Anders overtly states his discomfort when he is recognized by someone dark: “sitting in a group that was, he could not help it, that was like a group of animals, not humans” (25). It is significant that Anders ‘could not help’ but refer to them as ‘animals’, because that is how he is conditioned to perceive dark-skinned Others. Of course, part of Anders’s horror stems from being unable to recognize himself; he looks and feels like a completely different man, but the more plausible explanation for the “unexpected, murderous rage” (10) is that it stems from a racist aversion deeply programmed into his mind.

When racist statements like the one made by Anders, are analysed, it is immediately evident that much of the panic and fear resulting from the transformation was grounded in the memory of racism. The history of racism played an essential role in determining the reaction of the people as more and more of them changed. The anger and hatred was almost inherent, and the theme of stereotyping becomes evident due to the characters’ assumption that even people who were previously white were to be hated on account of their dark skin. This highlights the baselessness of this ‘asserted inequality’ which those higher up in the societal

hierarchy exploit to create artificial differences between people. Oona's mother is a staunch believer in these differences, and tries her best to not only uphold them but also to project them onto her daughter. She has no valid reason for believing and fearing that the dark-skinned will gather and raid the town, other than some ancestral misinformation that compels her to believe this. She desperately tries to hold on to her racist beliefs by keeping herself connected with the media which affirmed them. The disturbing element associated with Oona's mother is the pride she feels in distinguishing herself from the dark-skinned, which is alive even years after her own transformation. She remembers her days of being 'white' with a fondness that only re-affirms the inherent nature of racism, suggesting that it is able to thrive even when there is no tangible support to sustain it. So, in *The Last White Man*, racism functions as a mental construct only, and yet it has the power to manifest itself in the drastic safety measures and violence carried out by white people, who were acting in fear of things that never happened, such as the raids feared by Oona's mother.

The people whose skin colour changes begin to fear for their lives, and expect discrimination and violence because they have a lot of historical evidence to support this. The novel begins from the moment Anders discovers that his skin has changed colour, the moment he becomes the Other and can no longer identify him-Self. It is difficult to deduce exactly what his attitude towards dark people was before he became one of them. However, after his transformation, much of his dialogues and thoughts reveal what it felt like to 'be' the Other. He tries very hard not to be noticed because he is "aware of the hazards of being seen"; even though he is not hurt by anyone, he "was not sure where his sense of threat was coming from, but it was there, it was strong" (24). Anders's anxiety arises from a predetermined sense of discrimination which told him to expect to be treated differently because he 'looks' different.

Each group, the white and the dark, fears the other; this fear, logical or illogical, remains unaddressed, and is dealt with through acts of violence which only sustains the racial tension between these groups, and along with it, the discourses of difference. The attribution of skin colour with race, and the superiority or inferiority of race is not even the reason for the discrimination in the novel. When Anders changes from white to dark, his biological race remains the same, and yet he is treated as if his very genetic make-up has turned him into someone inferior. Through this idea, Hamid tries to highlight the utter baselessness of the discourse of racial difference and purity, bringing under focus the problem of assumption of racial superiority based on physical looks. These assumptions form the content of prejudiced remarks in the novel, which are used to constantly assert that the dark-skinned are different from the white-skinned, and they cannot co-exist in harmony.

The second dimension of the DHA is argumentation strategies, which are employed to rationalise racist behaviour. Where the first dimension tells us *what* the prejudice is about, the argumentation strategies help us understand *why* certain groups are prejudiced against others. These strategies can be analysed to explain and link those elements - remarks and actions - in the text which convey racial prejudice and simultaneously disguise it (Wodak *Genesis* 116). For example, the first time Anders goes out to buy groceries after his transformation, the clerk "did not acknowledge Anders's mumbled thanks [...] as though Anders had not spoken at all" (Hamid 13). The extra-lingual communication - the act of ignoring the Other's presence and existence - could be interpreted both as a device of conveying prejudice, by not acknowledging Anders's attempt to interact because he is dark, and also as a device of disguising any discriminatory behaviour: the clerk pays no attention to Anders because he treats white and dark customers in the same way. This connotes that Anders, as an Other, not only no longer has verbal agency, but also that he is being denied the acknowledgement of his physical space, in the grocery store and also when he is driven out of his own home by the militants. There is no way of definitively telling what the reason for the clerk's actions is and this is how racial

discrimination is shown to function in the novel, relying on a constant cycle of affirmation and denial, and thriving in the gray area of doubt.

One openly racist character in the novel is Oona's mother, and most of the argumentation strategies can be extracted from her dialogues and actions. Throughout the novel, she has portrayed a sense of paranoia, and as the cases of people changing skin colour increase in number, so does her wariness. She seeks validation for her racist fears from her daughter, urging her to carry a gun (Hamid 23) and trying to convince her of the "plot that had been building for years, for decades, maybe for centuries" (40). Oona's mother does not voice why she fears violence from the dark-skinned in her immediate context. The only argument she has is of the historical oppression that had been committed against Other communities which would give them a reason to exact vengeance on white people. Oona's mother "read of the savagery of the dark people, how it had been in them from the beginning" and how they had resorted to rape and slaughter of the white people when they overcame them (Hamid 109-110). This is a perpetuation of the colonial discourse of barbarism of the Other, and Oona's mother actively participates in it by waiting and preparing for a barbaric outburst of violence which she believes to be inevitable. This accentuates the theme of 'reverse' prejudice: she justifies her racist attitude to the dark-skinned by suggesting that she is only protecting herself from being harmed, rationalising that the dark people are in fact prejudiced against the white. She internalises this to such an extent that she is unable to withhold her disgust even when she sees her own daughter after she becomes dark. When she changes herself, she remains in a state of denial for quite some time, holding on to a sense of pride that she was amongst those who had resisted the change for the longest period of time, even though the truth is that there was "no sign of success to be found in her lateness" (102).

Oona's mother subscribes to a group identity, which is constructed to reinforce and rationalise the distinctions between 'Self' and 'Other', between the ingroup and the outgroup. Along with that there is an attempt to disguise this discrimination by arguments for self-justification, as has been discussed earlier.. This is connected to the theme of 'reverse' prejudice which draws attention to the discourse of self-victimisation with the argument that white people, or 'militants', are committing acts of violence in order to ensure their own safety. The "reckoning" (Hamid 116) that Oona's mother had expected all along never came, and this underscores the invalidity of the racial discrimination she epitomised.

The third dimension of the DHA consists of linguistic forms of realisation. While the second dimension indicates the intended aims and meanings of the text, the third dimension allows us to analyse the linguistic and rhetorical devices which are employed to realise those meanings. These linguistic realisations can be categorised and studied in three different parts:

1. Linguistic means, which deal with the general patterns of language; these are studied as types, which means that words are analysed and understood independent of any context.
2. Linguistic realisations, which focus on the actual instances of communication; these are studied as tokens, which means that words are studied in relation to the specific context in which they are used in the text.
3. Insider perspective, which consists of people's stories (Wodak *Critical* 12).

Hamid's diction in *The Last White Man* generally borrows words from the lexical fields of crime and violence. It includes words like "murderous rage" (10) and there are frequent references to guns and rifles. This technique of using vocabulary which is regularly employed in the discourse of racism creates links between the story and the extensive history of racial discrimination upon which it builds. Hamid subtly incorporates the dense thread of the history of racism into the narrative through the use of such words as have regularly been associated

with Other communities, drawing attention to the role of language in the perpetuation of racial bigotry.

In the passages where dark-skinned characters are described, the diction is replete with racist and prejudicial connotations. Words such as “throttled,” “hostility,” “distaste,” “menaced,” and “animals,” when examined as types, imply nothing more than their denotative meanings. They can be used in the same sense for both white and dark people because none of these words are exclusive for either. However, in the context of the story, as linguistic tokens, they signify a predetermined sense of inequity between the two, drawing on the implications these words have been imbued with throughout history. When Anders suffered the initial shock of his transformation, he felt as if he was in “tense and hostile company” (Hamid 11) even though he was alone. This phrase signals towards the subconscious programming of Anders’s mind to perceive dark-skinned people as hostile and dangerous, and to constantly be wary of them. The majority of the racist remarks, as analysed in the first dimension of the DHA, function on the assumption that the Other is violent and inferior. Anders’s description of his transformation as “a crime that had taken everything away from him” (11) is consistent with the presumption that a dark-skinned person is very likely to commit a crime. Anders himself is also highly aware that being dark-skinned, he, too, can fall prey to such racist conjecture, and he tries to avoid doing anything that “could be misconstrued” (25) or lead other people to feel threatened by him. Even though he is not harmed, he senses that the body language of the people around him signals an acute wariness on account of his skin colour, and even the people who knew him previously now began to keep their distance.

Similarly, the phrase “mentally deficient” (14) would mean, as a linguistic type, that the person, irrespective of race or ethnicity, has some sort of an intellectual impairment. However, as a linguistic token, in the novel it is used to describe a dark-skinned Anders when the woman curses him angrily and he is unable to respond to her. In this context, the phrase also indicates the colonial idea that the Other is an intellectually inferior being and cannot comprehend or participate in the world as well as white people do. These examples highlight the theme of stigmatisation, and show how negative stereotypes lead to the devaluation of an individual. Like most people belonging to unfairly marginalised communities, Anders internalises the disgrace with which he is treated, and, consequently, avoids interacting with people.

The linguistic techniques employed in the novel illustrate how language is used as a tool to reinforce binary distinctions between white and dark people. Oona’s mother communicates by using vocabulary that would seem vague and impartial, but her toxic belief in upholding racial purity indicates the deep-running partiality implied by her choice of words. She is careful to keep her racist tendencies hidden by using covert ways to express them; for instance, she repeatedly refers to “our people” (22), “her people” (41), and “their kind” (40). These references clearly indicate that Oona’s mother believes in racial distinction and discrimination, and they are also paired with a subtle acknowledgement that ‘her kind’ were the “only people who could not call themselves a people in this country” (41). This is interesting because any overt reference that calls attention to the distinction between white and black is immediately labelled as racist, even if it is used merely as a mark of identification. Even though Hamid does not reveal what country the story is set in, it can be inferred from the events that it is set in the West, where people avoid being labelled as racist, even if they actively subscribe to the ideology. Similarly, Oona’s mother perhaps tries to avoid the label, but does not abandon the idea that she, being white, is different from the dark-skinned, and this difference must be protected. Her attempts to do so are almost frantic, stemming from an illogical fear of the dark people, convinced that they can recognize who was born dark and who transformed from being white, she “[is] no safer for being dark” (109) and it is only a matter

of time until chaos ensues. Her psychological adherence to these constructs is pathological in a sense; physically she cannot do anything to prevent this or to resist the change, and the looming danger renders her unable to act or think rationally.

Conclusion

This paper argues that social and racial hierarchies in Hamid's novel are constructed through prejudiced language use. Biased discursive choices sustain discourses of racism which deepen the rift between characters as they transform from light-skinned to brown-skinned. This study employs Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach to analyse three dimensions of language use, including the content of prejudiced remarks, argumentations strategies, and linguistic forms of realisation. The analysis reveals how racial ideologies hide and function under the guise of self-defence and self-victimisation in Hamid's novel. For example, Oona's mother prepares for an imagined "settling of scores" (Hamid 116) between the two races. This notion and her subsequent preparation for it is informed by her racist outlook of society, which manifests itself in the way she employs language to speak about the matter.

This paper concludes that linguistic and discursive choices play a direct role in shaping and situating the identity of the characters, and in changing the power structures in the novel. As the characters transform, the visual dimension of the discourses of racism become difficult to sustain, since it becomes almost impossible to differentiate between a transformed person and someone who was born with dark skin. Thus, the only thing which continues to sustain racial prejudice is the linguistic dimension, as racist characters such as Oona's mother continue to speak of 'whiteness' with a sense of pride, even after the myth of racial purity is extinguished.

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