Analyzing Racial Discrimination and Coping Strategies in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*

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Abstract:

Coping refers to the actions individuals undertake in order to minimize the adverse effects of stressful circumstances, term include both cognitive and actions in order to manage specific circumstances that are perceived as either burdens or exceed the individual's resources. This study is about racial discrimination and coping strategies in Mohsin Hamid's The Last White Man. The objective of this study is to describe the forms of racial discrimination and to investigate coping strategies employed by the main character. This study used the descriptive qualitative method as the research method. To analyze forms of racial discrimination, the researchers use Fred L. Pincus's theory. Lazarus and Folkman's coping strategies theory is used to analyze the coping strategies utilized by the main character in the novel. The result found two types of racial discrimination that occur; individual and structural discrimination. Individual discrimination includes stereotyping and racial prejudice, while structural discrimination occurs in the context of a community. Furthermore, the main character employed both coping strategies, emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. The first is emotion-focused coping, with the main character utilizing confrontative coping and seeking social support strategies. The second is problem-focused coping, the main character utilizing self-controlling strategies.

Keywords: racial discrimination; coping strategies; individual discrimination; structural discrimination; the last white man

Abstrak:

Coping mengacu pada tindakan yang dilakukan individu untuk mengurangi dampak buruk dari keadaan yang penuh tekanan, istilah ini mencakup tindakan kognitif dan tindakan untuk mengelola keadaan tertentu yang dianggap sebagai beban atau melebihi sumber daya individu. Penelitian ini membahas tentang diskriminasi rasial dan strategi coping dalam novel The Last White Man karya Mohsin Hamid. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan bentuk-bentuk diskriminasi rasial dan untuk menyelidiki strategi coping yang digunakan oleh karakter utama. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif sebagai metode penelitian. Untuk menganalisis bentuk-bentuk diskriminasi rasial, peneliti menggunakan teori Fred L. Pincus. Teori strategi coping Lazarus dan Folkman digunakan untuk menganalisis strategi coping yang digunakan oleh karakter utama dalam novel. Hasil penelitian menemukan dua jenis diskriminasi rasial yang terjadi, yaitu diskriminasi individual dan struktural. Diskriminasi individu meliputi stereotip dan prasangka rasial, sedangkan diskriminasi struktural terjadi dalam konteks komunitas. Lebih lanjut, tokoh utama menggunakan kedua strategi coping, yaitu emotion-focused coping dan problem-focused coping. Yang pertama adalah coping yang berfokus pada emosi, dengan karakter utama menggunakan coping konfrontatif dan mencari strategi

dukungan sosial. Yang kedua adalah coping yang berfokus pada masalah, karakter utama menggunakan strategi pengendalian diri.

Kata kunci: diskriminasi ras; strategi coping; diskriminasi individu, diskriminasi struktural; the last white man

INTRODUCTION

The western world is frequently regarded as a pioneer in the promotion of human rights, democracy, and social equality in the twenty-first century. However, discrimination—defined as actions that result in unequal treatment for individuals who are perceived to belong to a particular social group (Pincus and Ehrlich, 1999)—persist as a pervasive issue. This term is essential to an understanding of race and ethnic relations. These activities, in practice, are undertaken by majority groups who hold greater power over minority groups who are in a more disadvantaged position. In the U.S., the white population holds both a powerful position as well as a numerical majority (Pincus & Ehrlich, 1999). Ardinang and Rahayu (2023) argue that refusing to engage with, conduct business with, or share resources with persons from a specific group exemplifies discriminatory behavior. Moreover, they stated that legislation; policies that foster racial segregation, unequal law enforcement, and unfair provision of resources are all examples of how governments may participate in overt forms of discrimination.

As the number of new studies examining this term on its negative aspect, Lippert-Rasmussen, (2006) argues that in other contexts, the term discrimination is neutral; to say that someone discriminating is simply to say that they are making a difference or distinction, which leaves open the question of whether such action has a negative or positive impact. Moreover, Kite and Whitley Jr. (2014) argues that while the term "discrimination" is often viewed negatively, it should be recognized that it is not, in and of itself, an unfavorable concept. It would appear that discrimination is rooten in normal psychological process, particularly when these processes are used to make differential decisions regarding the selection of individual for educational institutions, graduate schools, occupations, and also in the context of social relationships. For example, it would be unreasonable to criticise an individual who is undergoing surgical treatment and has selected a medical practitioner with a greater level of experience than a less experienced one. Simimlarly, when educators differentiate their students' academic achievements and

assign them grades from A to F, the practice would likely regarded as acceptable (Sue, 2003, p. 30).

On the other hand, racial discrimination is referred as "any actions that differentially treats individuals or groups of color based on prejudice" (Sue, 2003, p. 29). Meanwhile, Blank et al.,(2004, p. 40) defines racial discrimination based on "an individual's race or some other factor that results in a differential racial outcome". According to Small and Pager (2020), in the field of sociology, the term racial discrimination is generally understood by sociologists to refer to unequal treatment based on an individual's race. These action — whether intentional or unintentional — may or may not be driven by prejudice. Most people think that this type of discrimination

Born in Pakistan, Mohsin Hamid is author of five novels and a book of essays, *Discontent and Its Civilization*. His writing can be found in more than forty languages, as well as featuring on bestseller lists, cinematic adaptations, and plethora of accolades. Additionally, he has been nominated for the Booker Prize on two occacions (Hamid, 2024). His career as an author began with the success of his first novel, *Moth Smoke* (2000), and he has continued to produce works of fiction, including *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, *Exit West*, *The Last White Man* (Chambers, 2011). .

Mohsin Hamid's 2022 novel, *The Last White Man*, presents a thought-provoking examination of racial dscrimination and its psychological implications through the character of Anders, a white man who experences a sudden transformation in his skin color. Beginning the novel, Hamid evokes Kafka's 1915 work *The Metamorphosis* in the opening sentence of The Last White Man; "One morning Anders, a white man, woke up to find he had turned to a deep and undeniable brown" (Hamid, 2022). The sudden transformation results in Anders being confronted with an unfamiliar social reality, where he is forced to confront racial prejudice, fear and estrangement from his community and even from himself. Anders' transformation serves to highlight the ways in which deeply rooted racial hierarchies and societal discrimination shape personal and collective identities. In response to his new reality, Anders shows a range of behaviours, including denial, anger and cautios adaptation. His initial disbelief and rage give way to attempts both to disguise his appereance and to blend intro his former identity. This reflects both internalised racial tensions and his desire to preserve his former social previlege.

Through his relationships with his father and his partner, Oona, Anders comes to recognise the reality of his transformation and learns to ccope with the psychological effects of racial discrimination. The personal coping mechanism he undertakes highlight the various layers of self-redefinition that racialised individuals often experience in racially discriminatory environments. In addition to exploring the individual impact of racial prejudice, the book offers a critique of societal structures that categorise individuals according to their racial identity. This encourages the reader ro engage with the complexities of identity formation ;within reacially divided societies. The narrative provides insights into the ways in which marginalised individuals cope with the challenges they face, making it a significant contribution to the discourse on race, identity, and coping strategies in the context of discrimination.

The complex themes explored in *The Last White Man*, encompassing issues of race, identity, and transformation, have led many researchers to undertake studies on this novel. In the scope of postcolonialism, studies have been conducted by some researchers; Baqar et al. (2024), Mastoi et al. (2024), (Tehseem et al., 2024) Rasheed et al. (2024), Wafa et al. (2024). Most of them utilizing Bhabha and Fanon's post colonial theoritical framework to examine the intrinsic element such character, plot, language style. Additional research has been conducted on this novel from the persoectives of discourse on racism Manzoor & Singh (2023), racial metamorphosis Kapur & Naik (2022), physical transformation Clement John et al. (2023), racial reconfiguration Ahsen et al. (2024), identity crisis Ijaz et al. (2023) and magical realism Amir et al. (2024)

In addition to the subject of racial discrimination, a considerable body of research has been conducted by numerous scholars on this topic. In a study conducted by Ardinang & Rahayu (2023), the authors aimed to describe the various forms and consequences of racial discrimination experienced by Ta-Nehisi Coates and other black individuals in the novel *Between The World and Me*. The study identified two forms of racial discrimination; individual and institutional discrimination. It is also identified two impacts experienced by the victims subjected to racial discrimination; impact on mental health and physical health.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Coping

Derived from the Latin "*colpus*", the term "cope" means "to alter". According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, this term defined as "to deal with and attempt to overcome problems and difficulties" (*Cope Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster*, n.d.). In the scope of psychology, the term "coping" has been used as a "heuristic" in several other disciplines; as a thinking process, a characteristic of personality, and in a social context. In the scope of psychology, the term "coping" has been used as a "heuristic" in several other disciplines; as a thinking process, a characteristic of personality, and in a Social context (Lazarus & Folkman, 2017). As a psychological discipline, coping shows how people handle stressful situations and manage emotions.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping refers to the actions individuals undertake in order to minimize the adverse effects of stressful circumstances. This term encompasses the wide range of an individual's capabilities, including changes in behaviour, cognitive processes such as thoughts, feeling, and ways of processing information, as well as learning, recollection, and other related functions (Haber & Runyon, 1984). Thus, Pearlin and Schooler (1978) consider coping to be closely intertwined with the life challenges that individuals encounter and the state of emotional well-being in which they find themselves. Coping strategies are essentials to show how individuals explain and describe manage stress in the stress-adjustment connection. In their book, Lazarus and Folkman (1984: p. 141) argues this term include both cognitive and actions that an individual undertakes in order to manage specific circumstances that are perceived as either burdens or exceed the individual's resources.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) propose a two-category classification of coping strategies; emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping refers to the action "aimed at regulating the emotions tied to the stress situation" (Lazarus, 1999). One such action might be to avoid thinking about the threat, or to reappraise it. The crucial point to note is that this is done in a way that does not change the reality of the stressfull situation. Meanwhile, problem-focused coping is a direct action of stress management that involves gathering information about the stressor and taking action to alter the impact of the stressor itself (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 150).

Discrimination

Although discriminatory practices directed towards members of minority groups are not as overtly evident as they were during the civil rights era of the 1960, they are

nevertheless a persistent phenomenon (Kite & Whitley Jr., 2014, p. 370). Pincus (1996) suggest that the culture of denial among white Americans, who believe that anti-minority discrimination is not a major problem, is one of the causes of the persistence of descrimination in the 1990s. Despite the implementation of significant legislation and government programmes aimed at creating a safer and more equal environment, the opportunities available to white Americans remain relatively higher than those available to other ethnic groups.

The concept of racial discrimination is wide-ranging and manifest invarious forms at different social level; individual, institutional, and structural discrimination (Pincus & Ehrlich, 1999). Individual discrimination refers to actions of an individual belonging to a particular racial or ethnic group that have a discriminatory or negative impact on members of a different racial or ethnic group. This from of discrimination may manifest in a number of ways; "may be direct and face-to-face, indirect and personal, or indirect but personal" (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995). Institutional discrimination, on the other hand, defined as the policies of the majority institution that have the effect of differentiating or disadvantaging minority groups. According to Jones (1972), blatant practices which restrict an individual's choices, rights, mobility, or acces to information, recources or other people, thereby conferring a particular advantage upon a group over another, can be considered examples of institutional discrimination. Finally, structural discrimination refers to the policies of majority institutions, as well as the behaviour of the pople implementing and controlling them, were intended to be race-neutral but had a different and harmful impact on the minority groups (Pincus & Ehrlich, 1999, p. 122)

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is conducted using qualitative method that describes in detail about events, characters, stories which will be examined using suitable literary theories. The researcher used a qualitative methodology because it is suitable to study human issues by acquiring literature that supports them. This method is used to analyze, describe, interpret, and explain the work of literature that will be analyzed. The researcher applies Fred L. Pincus' theory to analyze the form of racial discrimination, as well as Lazarus and Folkman's coping mechanism theory to analyze the coping mechanism undertaken by the main character.

There are various ways to approach analyzing qualitative data. Acording to Denscombe (2007, p. 288), preparing and organizing qualitative data before analysis is essential. Thus, the researcher took the following steps in collecting data to be more specific on this article at the time of the research conducted. At first, the researcher closely read and understood the novel *The Last White Man*. Anders character in the story was also comprehended by the researcher. As secondary data, the researcher analyzes previous studies that have the same discussion, which the type of racial discrimination and coping menchanism. Then, the researcher provides the required data as supporting information. Lastly, the researcher reviews that the data collected is correct.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an investigation into the forms of racial discrimination presented in the novel and the coping strategies employed by the main character. The racial discrimination depicted in the novel is contextualised within the theoritical framework proposed by Fred L. Pincuss. Additionally, the coping strategies undertaken by the main character are examined through Lazarus and Folkman's coping strategies theory. There are two forms of racial discrimination; individual and structural. The discussion also addresses the coping strategies undertaken by Anders.

The Forms of Racial Discrimination in *The Last White Man*

The novel presents two forms of racial discrimination; individual and structural. Individual discrimination occurs when an individual or a small group of people act in a way that disadvantages another person or members of a different group on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or gender. Structural discrimination, on the other hand, refers to the policies of majority institutions, as well as the actions of those responsible for implementing and controlling them. These policies and behaviours are intended to be race-neutral but have a different and harmful impact on minority groups.

Individual discrimination presented in The Last White Man

Individual discrimination refers to actions of an individual belonging to a particular racial or ethnic group that have a discriminatory or negative impact on members of a different racial or ethnic group. This form of discrimination may be manifested in various ways, including direct and face-to-face, indirect yet personal, or indirect yet affecting individuals personally. Example of individual discrimination is prejudice, stereotyping,

and violence which have a direct impact on others. The novel's portrayal of prejudice is exemplified by the harsh words uttered by Anders' workplace boss upon their eventual meeting, a week after Ander's disappearance. "...his boss looked him over and said, "I would have killed myself." (Hamid, 2022, p. 26). The treatment Anders received from his boss is regarded as individual discrimination, as although it was no explicitly related to Anders; physical appearance, it was nevertheless a personal attack. Furthermore, stereotyping is also part of individual discrimination. In the novel, stereotyping is shown when Anders returns to the gym after a one-week absence. As his physical appereance becomes dark, he is subjected to disapproving stares from other individuals within the gym. "... and Anders did not want to, but he started to notice stares, quick, evasive stares, as word spread, that he, this dark guy, was Anders ..." (Hamid, 2022, p. 27).

Structural discrimination presented in *The Last White Man*

The term structural discrimination is used to describe the policies of majority institutions, as well as the behaviour of those responsible for implementing and controlling them. These policies and behaviours are intended to be race-neutral, but they have a different and harmful impact on minority groups. The essential aspect of structural discrimination is not the intention behind it, but rather the impact of maintaining minority groups in a position of subordination. The novel depicts structural discrimination in the form of a direct threat to the protagonist, Anders, by a group of white millitants who have assumed power in the city. As the number of dark-skinned people in the city increased, the white militant group became overly controlling and oppressing the people of colour. They started to patrolling through the city, forcing the dark-skinned people to leave the town, including Anders. "They spoke, and Anders listened, and in the end the men said he had better be gone when they got back ..." (Hamid, 2022, p. 56). They asked and even forced Anders and Oona, to leave the city before they returned to Anders' house. The actions in question result in minority group, people of colour, remaining in a subordinate position is illustrating the structural discrimination.

Coping strategies undertaken by the main character

The term coping is used to describe the actions that individuals undertake in order to minimise the adverse effects of stressfull circumstances. This term encompasses a wide range of individual's capabilities, including changes in behaviour, cognitive process such as thoughts, feeling, and ways of processing informantion, as well as learning, recollection

and other related functions. Lazarus and Folkman put forth a two-category classification of coping strategies, namely emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping.

Emotion-focused Coping

Emotion-focused coping refers to action directed at managing the emotions associated with the stressor. One such action might be to avoid thinking about the threat, or to reappraise it. It is crucial to note that this done in a way that does not alter the reality of the stressful situation. The scene in the novel in which the protagonist undertaken emotion-focused coping is when Anders comes to realise that he has undergone a transformation into a dark-skinned individual. In this state, he responds by hitting the mirror where he sees a reflection of himself who is no longer defined by the racial category of "white". "One morning Anders, a white man, woke up to find he had turned a deep and undeniable brown ... , and he slammed the side of his fist into the face, cracking it slightly, and causing the whole fitting, cabinet, mirror, and all, to skew, like a painting after an earthquake has passed." (Hamid, 2022, p. 11). In response to the sudden change in his skin color, Anders employed an emotion-focused coping strategy by striking the mirror in front of him, which reflected his own appearance. Other evidence of Anders utilising this coping strategy is when his father died. After months of devoted care for his ailing father, Anders tragically witnessed the moment of his father's life drawing its final breath. " Anders's father died on a crisp, clear morning, ... Anders did not cry at first, he simply sat, ... and Oona, who answered, could not understand him, but she understood what had happened, what must have happened ..." (Hamid, 2022, p. 80). Initially, he did not weep; he merely sat in silent contemplation before his deceased father. When he opened his phone and was about to call Oona, Anders was unable to control his emotions and began to sob. In response to the loss of a loved one, his father, Anders' action of calling Oona can be defined as a form of emotion-focused coping, specifically seeking social support. As the researchers mentioned before, this form of coping strategy does not change the reality of the stressful situation.

Problem-focused Coping

Problem-focused coping is a direct action of stress management that involves gathering information about the stressor and taking action to change the impact of the stressor itself. This type of coping in this novel is demonstrated when Anders chooses not to be affected by the "evasive" stares of people in the gym, that bother him. Upon

recognizing Anders as white, people were confronted with a striking contrast when they saw a dark-skinned version of Anders. "The gym filled as the day progressed, and Anders did not want to, but he started to notice stares, quick, evasive stares, as word spread, that he, this dark guy, was Anders, had been Anders, and Anders tried to ignore it … maybe he was being paranoid, sort of on edge" (Hamid, 2022). Anders' response to the stares of others indicates that he is employing a problem-focused coping strategy. In accordance with how problem-focused coping works, Anders took direct action to change the effects of the stressful situation.

CONCLUSION

The results of the discussion allow us to conclude that two forms of discrimination can be identified; individual and structural discrimination. Individual discrimination involves racial prejudice and streotyping, whereas structural discrimination manifests in institutional contexts. Individual discrimination in the form of racial prejudice manifests as the utterance of harsh words by white individual directed towards people of color. Although the statement was not explicitly related to Anders, it represented a personal attack on his physical appearance. Meanchile, individual discrimination in the form of stereothyping occurs when the main character is subjected to unwelcoming and disapproving stares fro the people in the gym. In *The Last White Man*, it is observed that the protagonist employs both problem-focused emotion-focused coping strategies. The first coping strategy employed by the protagonist is emotion-focused coping. This is demonstrated when the character realises a sudden transformation in his skin colour which making him in the state of full of rage, and when he experiences the death of his father which later he is seeking social support to his girlfriend. The second is problem-focused coping, which is employed by the main character when he decides to ignore the uncomfortable stares from people in the gym.

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