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Conceptual Metaphors of Racial Transformation and Identity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*

1. **Shaheen Ashraf,** Government College University Faisalabad, Department of English Literature**.** Email: ashrafshaheen531@gmail.com
2. **Kiran Rabbani, (Corresponding Author)** Government College University Faisalabad, Department of English Literature. Email:Kiran.rabbani@gcuf.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This article examines how conceptual metaphor organizes the representation of racial transformation and identity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* (2022). Critics have read the novel as allegory, a Fanonian study of alienation, or a critique of racist discourse, but they have not described the linguistic mechanism through which the novel builds and then dismantles the value attached to whiteness. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the study applies the Metaphor Identification Procedure (Pragglejaz Group, 2007) and codes 85 metaphorical expressions in MAXQDA as structural (40, 47.1%), ontological (33, 38.8%) or orientational (12, 14.1%). The novel opens with mappings of theft, considerable substance and confinement, in which whiteness is possessed property, and closes with mappings of lifted weight, shed skin and flowing water, in which identity is movement. Metaphor use also differs by speaker. Anders frames the change as dispossession and imprisonment, Oona through bodily experience and release, and Oona's mother through vertical decline and ecological ruin. The article claims that Hamid literalizes conventional racial metaphors so their entailments become visible in the plot. It also sets out the limits of the analysis, including single-coder judgment, the small coded set, and the strain of applying a procedure designed for non-fictional discourse to speculative fiction.

***Keywords**:* Conceptual Metaphor Theory, whiteness, racial transformation, Mohsin Hamid, *The Last White Man*, metaphorical literalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* (2022) begins with a simple idea. A white man named Anders wakes one morning to find that his skin has turned dark. Over the following months, the same change spreads through his unnamed town until no white people remain. The novel follows Anders, his partner Oona, Oona's mother and Anders's dying father, and it records the violence of armed militants who see the change as an attack on their people. Its lack of place names, dates, and explanations has led critics to call it a fable (Gunaratne, 2022) and has also drawn the charge that it avoids the concrete social history of race (Mahajan, 2023). This article investigates how the novel makes racial change thinkable in language. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) holds that people understand abstract domains such as identity, status, and belonging through concrete domains such as possession, weight, space, and the body (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Everyday talk about race already relies on such mappings. People speak of belonging to a group, of losing one's place, of a community being diluted, and of status as high or low. Because these expressions are conventional, they are rarely noticed, and Goatly (2007) argues that this invisibility is what lets conventional metaphor carry ideology unchallenged.

The Last White Man takes these metaphors at their word. When whiteness is treated as something a person owns, a man wakes up and finds it gone. When racial status is treated as

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height, characters feel lowered. This article calls the technique *metaphorical literalization*, in which a conventional conceptual metaphor becomes a literal event in the story world, so that the reasoning it normally carries in silence becomes visible as plot. It differs from dead metaphor, which names a figure worn out by use. Literalization revives a mapping by making its source domain physically real. The premise raises a methodological problem. The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) was designed for non-fictional discourse (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). In Hamid's novel, words that would normally be figurative, such as skin being shed or whiteness being taken, describe events that literally happen. The position taken here is that MIP still works, because it compares the basic and contextual meanings of a word, not the reality of the narrated event. Literalization is treated as a second layer of interpretation built on word-level identification.

Criticism of Hamid has concentrated on migration, globalization, and post-9/11 politics, mostly in relation to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hartnell, 2010; Ilott, 2014; Morey, 2011; Munos, 2012). The few academic readings of *The Last White Man* draw on Fanon (Baqar et al., 2024) and Foucault (Manzoor & Singh, 2023). They agree that the novel exposes race as a construct but do not describe, in a checkable way, the figurative structures through which that construction is carried out. Meanwhile, CMT has been applied widely to political discourse on race (Charteris-Black, 2006; Santa Ana, 2002) and to canonical literature (Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Semino, 2008), but rarely to contemporary fiction that addresses race through the body. Three research questions follow.

RQ1. What type of conceptual metaphors are utilized in *The Last White Man*?

RQ2. How do these metaphors construct the reader's sense of identity, whiteness, and bodily transformation, and how do they shift across the novel's characters and perspectives?

RQ3. How do these conceptual metaphors, read through theoretical perspectives on race, whiteness, and embodiment, construct the novel's ideological position on identity?

The article posits that the novel's metaphors frame the reader's perception of the change, vary systematically by speaker, and move from a property/defending vocabulary to a releasing/flooding vocabulary. It also suggests that the abstractness of the novel and the fact that its protagonists are white make what such an analysis can say of the novel questionable. The literature review is provided in Section 2, the framework in Section 3, the method in Section 4, the analysis in Section 5, the discussion in Section 6, and the conclusion in Section 7.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual metaphor and literary language

Before the cognitive turn, metaphor was studied mainly as a feature of sentences. Richards (1936) described it as an interaction between tenor and vehicle, and Black (1954, 1962) developed this interaction view, but both still located metaphor in language. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) moved it to the level of thought, arguing that expressions such as attacking a position or defending a claim are traces of an underlying mapping, ARGUMENT IS WAR, that shapes reasoning and action. Johnson (1987) grounded such mappings in image schemas derived from bodily experience, such as Container, Path, and Up-Down.

Lakoff and Turner (1989) showed that poets rarely invent mappings from nothing. They extend, question, or combine conventional mappings already present in ordinary language. This

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insight became central to cognitive poetics, developed by Tsur (1992), Turner (1996), and Stockwell (2002), and Semino (2008) modeled how metaphors pattern across whole texts. Kövecses (2000, 2005, 2010) showed how emotion concepts are structured metaphorically and how metaphors vary across cultures, and Steen (2010) separated deliberate metaphors, which readers are invited to notice, from those that pass unnoticed.

Two limits of this tradition matter here. The foundational literary applications draw mostly on canonical British and American texts, and many identify metaphors by intuition, which makes selection hard to check. MIP was proposed partly to address the second problem (Pragglejaz Group, 2007), and Steen et al. (2010) extended it into MIPVU, which also identifies explicitly signaled comparisons as direct metaphor. Literary studies have been slow to adopt such procedures.

2.2 Metaphor, ideology and race

In the public repertoire is the vocabulary of dispossession, decline, and invasion with which the militants in *The Last White Man* appeal to us. What they do not account for, however, is what might happen if a repertoire were to be turned back toward its users; that is, a literary text. The data they use are speeches or press reports, in which it is assumed that the speaker is endorsing the metaphor. A metaphor may be voiced, ironized, or contradicted in a novel, and the voice of the speaker thus becomes part of the meaning of the metaphor.

2.3 Criticism of Hamid's fiction

Criticism of Hamid has centered on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Hartnell (2010) read it in terms of race, place and resistance in post-9/11 America, Morey (2011) placed it within post-9/11 fiction, and Ilott (2014) examined its generic frameworks and the active reader they demand. Munos (2012), closest to the present concern, read the protagonist's relation to America through the idea of being possessed by whiteness. Chambers (2011) interviewed Hamid among other British Muslim writers, and Jay (2010) offers a framework for the transnational turn within which such fiction is often placed. This work is thematically rich but says little about the linguistic means of Hamid's arguments.

Responses to *The Last White Man* have been mostly evaluative and thematic. Gunaratne (2022) called it a hypnotic race fable. Mahajan (2023) argued that by setting the story in an unnamed white country and turning everyone brown, Hamid produced a deracinated book that sidesteps interracial conflict and gives almost no attention to the town's existing dark-skinned residents. Baqar et al. (2024) read the novel as a Fanonian study of racial alienation, and Manzoor and Singh (2023) used Foucault's notion of discourse to show racism as constructed knowledge serving dominant groups. Neither study explains how the novel's language produces the effects it describes.

2.4 The gap

The review points to a double gap. CMT-based literary analysis has paid little attention to contemporary postcolonial fiction about race, although such fiction engages directly with the metaphors that Critical Metaphor Analysis has documented in political speech. Criticism of Hamid has recognized that *The Last White Man* treats race as constructed but has not traced the mappings, entailments and speaker differences through which that construction is staged. This article does not claim that CMT replaces thematic or postcolonial readings. It aims to give a more precise account of the mechanism those readings take for granted.

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3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Mapping, entailment, highlighting and hiding

In CMT, a conceptual metaphor is a systematic set of correspondences between a concrete source domain and an abstract target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The mapping carries inferences, or entailments, from source to target. If whiteness is understood as a substance, it can be possessed, measured, and lost, and its loss requires a cause. Every mapping also highlights some features of the target and hides others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 10). A theft frame highlights injury and ownership but hides whether the thing taken was ever rightfully held. What a metaphor hides are often as significant as what it shows.

3.2 The tripartite typology

Structural metaphors organize one concept in terms of another, more clearly delineated one, as in Argument Is War. In the novel, Transformation Is Theft carries a whole scenario with roles and sequence. Ontological metaphors treat abstract experiences as entities, substances, or containers, with personification as a special case. Whiteness becomes a substance with weight, the body a container for the self, and a rifle a speaker. Orientational metaphors organize concepts along spatial axes such as up and down, in and out, or center and periphery, grounded in the experience of an upright body (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 14, 56–57). High Status Is Up is presented as experientially motivated, but the link between verticality and race is a cultural and historical construction, and Kövecses (2005) provides the means to separate shared embodied mappings from culture-specific ones. The three types overlap. A reification of whiteness as treasure presupposes a container, and containers are often personified. The analysis therefore treats the types as dominant functions, not exclusive boxes.

3.3 Conventionality and literalization

CMT places metaphors on a continuum from conventional, which are no longer felt as figurative, to novel, which extend or break conventional mappings (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Hamid's racial metaphors sit near the conventional end. That race is something one has, that a community can be diluted, and that status is high or low all read as description. The novel's distinctive move is to literalize these mappings. A speaker who says a group is losing its place does not expect anyone to look for the place. Anders looks in the mirror for the whiteness he has lost, and the entailments of the conventional mapping become concrete and open to inspection.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Design and text

The study follows a qualitative, interpretivist design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), on the assumption that figurative meaning in a literary text depends on context and cannot be reduced to measurement. The sample is purposive and consists of one text, *The Last White Man* (Hamid, 2022), chosen because its central event is a bodily transformation that bears on racial identity. The whole novel was read, from Anders's transformation through the period of violence to the later period in which the change becomes general. Quotations are cited by page number from the edition used for coding.

4.2 Identification

Candidate expressions were tested with MIP (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). For each lexical unit, the analyst established its contextual meaning, checked whether it had a more basic

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meaning (more concrete, more bodily, or historically older), and marked it as metaphorical if the two meanings contrasted but could be understood by comparison. Expressions were then grouped into utterances realizing a single mapping, and the utterance was the unit of coding.

Two procedural points need comment. First, in speculative fiction, some figurative-sounding descriptions are literally true within the story. Since MIP compares meanings at the level of the word, literalization was handled at the interpretive stage, not at the identification stage. Second, several revealing expressions are explicit comparisons introduced by *like*, *as if*, or *as though*, which MIP, as originally formulated, does not cover. They are retained where they realize a mapping under study and are treated, following Steen et al. (2010), as direct metaphors in which the source domain is expressed openly. Section 6 returns to this decision.

4.3 Coding

Utterances were coded in MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2021) under the three families of the Lakoff and Johnson (1980) typology, with sub-codes developed partly in advance and partly during reading. The structural family included Structural, Entailment, Cross-Domain Mapping, and Highlighting and Hiding. The ontological family included Container, Reification, Personification, and Quantifying. The orientational family included Center-Periphery, Vertical Hierarchy, and Embodied Grounding. Cross-Domain Mapping was used for mappings that carry a whole evaluative hierarchy, such as predator over prey, into the domain of race. Since every conceptual metaphor is in principle cross-domain, this is a working label rather than a theoretical type

Each utterance was also assigned to Anders, Oona, Oona's Mother, a joint Anders and Oona category for metaphors built in dialogue, or Narrator for passages that cannot be assigned to one character. Because Hamid relies heavily on free indirect discourse, assignment followed whose perception or speech the passage renders.

4.4 Frequencies and trustworthiness

The coding produced 85 utterances. Frequencies describe patterns already identified through close reading, a practice Sandelowski (2001) calls quantizing, and are not used for statistical inference. Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Explicit MIP decisions and page-referenced quotations let readers check each interpretation, and the coding scheme is described in full. All coding was done by a single researcher without a formal inter-coder reliability test, so boundary cases could reasonably have been coded differently by another analyst.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Structural metaphors

The biggest family in the coded set of metaphors is that of the structural metaphors. Of these, the most fruitful ones revolve around the transformation itself and share one aspect. They all borrow a source domain for which loss is already an accepted experience, like crime, debt, collapsing bridge, foreign language, and so on, and apply this vocabulary to describing an experience in the source domain with which the characters are not yet familiar.

Transformation is theft

We see the criminal mapping of Anders's change in the first mapping of the novel. The first morning, "Anders knew he had been robbed, that he was a victim of a crime, one that had taken everything from him, and that the horror just continued. The morning came, and Anders

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realized he had been robbed, that he was a victim of a crime, that the horror continued and continued and continued" (Hamid, 2022, p. 2). Theft scenario roles are completely defined. Anders is the victim, the stolen property is whiteness, and the change is an offence. The entailments are followed immediately thereafter. A theft requires an owner who has the right to the property, a thief who is potentially identifiable, and restitution. The third of these is achieved right away since "waited for an undoing, an undoing that did not come" (Hamid, 2022, p. 2). The frame's emphasis is on injury and ownership. What it conceals is the novel's own question, which is at issue later on: Was whiteness something that the white possessed, or was it something that was given to the white?

The mapping returns in collective form when militants gather near Anders's house. The narration reports their view that he was "trying to rob them, they who had been robbed already and had nothing left, just their whiteness, the worth of it, and they would not let him take that, not him nor anyone else" (Hamid, 2022, p. 42). Here the private metaphor of the first chapter becomes a public justification for violence. The phrase "the worth of it" makes the property logic explicit, since whiteness is now an asset with a value. The passage also reverses the roles of the first scene. Anders, the victim of a theft, is recast as a thief. This is consistent with what Charteris-Black (2006) found in British political discourse on immigration, where majority groups are invited to feel dispossessed of something they are assumed to own by right. Hamid's contribution is to show the same reasoning producing contradictory results. If whiteness is property, then a man who has lost it can be both robbed and a robber at once.

Whiteness as a weighty substance

A related mapping treats whiteness as a physical substance that should be locatable. Studying his face, Anders "[looks] for the whiteness there, for it must be somewhere, maybe in his expression, but he could not see it, and the more he looked the less white he seemed" (Hamid, 2022, p. 4). He concludes that "there was no hiding from the full weight of this" (Hamid, 2022, p. 4). The scene depends on the conventional mapping KNOWING IS SEEING, which Kövecses (2010) lists among the most widespread conceptual metaphors in English. If knowledge requires sight, a quality that cannot be seen in the mirror becomes doubtful in its very existence. The scene is also a literalization. Ordinary speech treats whiteness as a substance a person has, but no one expects to find it by inspecting a face. Anders does exactly that, and the search fails. The failure exposes the substance metaphor as a metaphor.

Conviction as solid material and truth as manufactured sound

Oona's mother suggests that the changes are part of a scheme, to which Oona seconds her response, with the first part of the sentence being accepted "as it is said without falseness, the voice solid with conviction"; the response is repeated, but "a moment later" Oona must "fabricate the sound of truth in her tone as she repeated herself" (Hamid, 2022, p. 10). Conviction is a hard thing to sustain, and sincerity is a sound to make. The entailed thing is that a person can state what she feels she should believe without the inner conviction. The mapping applies to Oona, not to her mother, whose claims are presented in a way that does not feature this kind of mapping. In the case of the liberal character, the asymmetry introduces uncertainty into surety, and in the case of the conspiratorial character, it introduces doubt into belief. This is a useful point to make on the nature of belief in the face of pressure, as the asymmetry suggests that it is the liberal character (certainty in doubt) and the conspiratorial character (doubt in certainty) that doubt themselves.

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Life as a rope bridge with a trapdoor

Speaking with Anders about her father's sudden death, Oona remembers feeling "there was a trapdoor under each of us, a trapdoor that could open at any second" (Hamid, 2022, p. 35). She extends the image to her family as a whole. "We were walking on a bridge of ropes and planks, swaying high above a canyon, and some of the planks were rotten" (Hamid, 2022, p. 35). The mapping draws on LIFE IS A JOURNEY, one of the most frequently cited conventional metaphors in the CMT literature (Kövecses, 2010). Travelers are people, the planks are the conditions of daily life, and a rotten plank is an unforeseen danger. Oona then carries the image into an account of her brother, who "stomped on the planks, harder and harder, as though he was fine with breaking them" (Hamid, 2022, p. 35). The extension is systematic in the sense Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe, since each new detail is drawn from the same source domain. The variation lies in how the danger is placed. In the conventional journey metaphor, difficulties are obstacles a traveller meets. In Oona's version, the danger is built into the ground she walks on, and her brother's self-destruction becomes an act performed on that ground.

Emotional ability as a monetary tool

After Anders's change, Oona phones him for the first time, and she isn't prepared to "have much to spend on this new development" (Hamid, 2022, p. 6) as she is "cashed out, emotional". The source domain(s) are Cash and Debt, and the target domain(s) are emotional energy. The mapping is based on the idea that time and effort are understood as money, and in the English pattern, that mapping is. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 7–9). Its conclusion is that there is only a limited amount of care and it can be used up. "Deep into debt" also means that there is an obligation. Oona's bereavement regarding her brother puts her further in debt than she can meet, and when Anders's new problem comes along, it's an empty account.

Identity adjustment is like speaking a foreign language

During a conversation with his partner, Anders notices the way people treat him; that alters his perspective on himself, and thus who he is and what he is (Hamid, 2022, p. 25). To Oona, that's an analogy. Attempts to speak a foreign language have erased "a sense of humor" from them: "No matter how much they tried, they couldn't be funny like they used to be" (Hamid, 2022, p. 25). It is assumed that identity and linguistic competence go together, as do transformation and translation. In humorism, there is a part of the self which does not go on the journey: The same type of experiences is documented in research on bilingualism as are those for bilinguals who feel less like themselves in a second language (Grosjean, 2010). Mapping is important as it considers identity as a performance and an audience of listeners, who share the code of their identity. There's no change in Anders inside. His code of reading has changed, and through that code others read him.

Racial difference as botanical variety

Late in the novel, when almost everyone has changed, Oona begins to notice "finer gradations in the texture of someone's skin and the shape of their cheekbones and the nature of their hair, like people were suddenly trees, all trees, and no one was anything else" (Hamid, 2022, p. 63). People are distinguished by "their branches and their bark and their leaves and their height" (Hamid, 2022, p. 63). The tree simile contrasts sharply with the animal and cargo mappings discussed in Section 5.4. In terms of the Great Chain of Being described by Lakoff and Turner (1989), plants stand below animals, so the image does not raise people in any simple sense. What it changes is the logic of difference. All trees belong to one category, and variation

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among them carries no rank. The image therefore replaces a vertical hierarchy with a horizontal taxonomy. A critical reader may also note what the image hides. Trees have no history, and the botanical frame removes from view the centuries of racial classification that the novel elsewhere takes for granted.

Alternative lives as parallel railway tracks

With the person who was the boyfriend of her now-dead brother, it seems as though no time has passed; that they are living in parallel lives, one parallel to the other, "no time had passed, as if they were living on tracks shunted from but alongside the old tracks" (Hamid, 2022, p. 76). In the exchange, the brother's sense of "almost alive, almost still alive" (Hamid, 2022, p. 76) is evident. The decision to use the railway tracks instead of the roads characterizes the image with a mechanical quality. A train is not "chosen," and the mapping is consistent with Oona's feeling that her brother's "downfall" wasn't a choice to make but one that had long been made.

5.2 Ontological metaphors

A metaphor that is ontological brings abstractions to life (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 25). Whiteness, identity, and death become entities, they are mentioned, can be counted, and can be used as the cause. The novel has four sub-types: these are containers, reifications, personifications, and quantifying metaphors. The most frequently occurring of these are reification (12 ontological codes), containers (10), personification (7), and quantification (4).

Containers: body, house, and town

There are several levels on which the Container schema operates. Hamid ranks his colleagues at Anders's gym as "specializing in treating him differently, in treating him as outsider, looked at by those who were in" (2022, p. 18). The chilling of work relations is, however, a slow process in reality. The container schema renders it a stark separation of inside/outside, and predicts the later, physical segregation of dark-skinned people from certain areas of town. Similarly, Oona's mother imagines the future of her people as a "field of no shoots, no saplings, no life, a desert, covered in sand" (Hamid, 2022, p. 23), which extends to Oona's own country. The image is moving from an enclosed space to an empty space. It also has an ecological mapping, RACIAL CHANGE IS DESERTIFICATION, which amalgamates the container schema and a story of loss.

The container schema continues to be more intense at later ages. So that the world is visible through "cracks of light," and up and down and narrow, "like the bars of a cell" to him, inside his father's curtained house, Ander sees the outside world (Hamid, 2022, p. 50). He feels himself "prisoner, prisoner, prisoner / imprisoned in his skin, imprisoned in this house, imprisoned in his town" (Hamid, 2022, p. 50). The three enclosures of skin, house, and town are so closed that there is no escape. The most straightforward rendition in the novel of the traditional perception that one's race is a prison is in the work of SKIN IS A PRISON. The most literalization is in the novel SKIN IS A PRISON, which acts as a prison for him. This is not a point the novel Prophets of the Grain will imply. It gives a glimpse of the feeling of being trapped, which a white person never had before, for a person who experienced the freedom of non-categorization. It depicts the experience of being confined for someone who had never been confined; it depicts the first time that a Black person feels confined, never freed from confinement.

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In Oona's version, the opposite direction occurs; that is, where she lives, amounts of money increase as the moon's distance from Earth decreases. Once she sees her own skin change, she thinks of how unfettered, unconfined, she could grow, like a snake sheds its skin, not violently, not even in a cold manner, but instead to leave the afflictions of the past behind and to grow as she never grew before (Hamid, 2022, p. 57). It remains unaltered, a container, but it can be discarded. Molting is an image of resignation to death but which has an ancient precedent of renewal. Anders's containers capture him, and Oona's container has outgrown. Thus, the same source domain has reverse entailments for the two characters, the patterns of which are illustrated in their overall metaphor profiles by Section 5.5.

Whiteness, emotion, and status as entities

Reification turns abstract states into bounded objects. Anders's unease becomes a substance in which he might be caught, a "strumming anxiety, which he knew from experience he had better smoke through, so as not to get stuck in it" (Hamid, 2022, p. 4). His loss of status at work is reified as a change of role. He feels "recast as a supporting character on the set of the television show where his life was being enacted" (Hamid, 2022, p. 22), "hoping for a return to his old centrality" (Hamid, 2022, p. 22). The image recalls Goffman's (1959) account of social life as performance, with a difference. In Goffman, actors manage their own performances. Anders is recast without his consent. The metaphor shows privilege as a lead role he did not know he was playing until it was taken away, which is close to Dyer's (1997) description of whiteness as a position that becomes visible only when it is lost.

The most important reification is the second mapping of whiteness. When Oona changes, she does not experience theft. She feels "lighter in a way, darker, yes, but also lighter, less weighty", "as though the mass of the planet had changed subtly, and there was less gravity for people to contend with" (Hamid, 2022, p. 56). Whiteness is still a substance, but its entailment is now a burden rather than a treasure. A stolen object should be returned to its owner. A weight that is lifted creates no such claim. The parallel with McIntosh's (1988) invisible knapsack is clear, with one difference. McIntosh's knapsack has to be consciously unpacked. In Oona's experience, the weight simply falls away.

Another passage registers the persistence of the old classification even after the change. When Anders and Oona kiss in his father's house, the narration registers "the discomfort at seeing this white girl kiss this dark man, even though the dark man was not a dark man, even though the dark man was Anders" (Hamid, 2022, p. 50). The repetition enacts the struggle between two ways of seeing. The racial category "dark man" competes with the personal identity "Anders", and the sentence has to correct itself twice to restore the person.

Personification

The use of personification increases in the face of the breakdown of the social order. A friend, the rifle that Anders receives from his father, becomes an interlocutor. To Anders, it "murmured a soft question, a question that demanded to be answered, and which was: How much do you want to live?" (Hamid, 2022, p. 39). That thing becomes a speaker – it forces a decision between passive and armed self-defense. A firearm, when personalized, as in this case, seems to make a demand of its owner in a social context where it is emblematized as a gift of inheritance and protection.

Social violence is manifested as a living phenomenon outside the house. It was a cold night when Anders could "feel the ancient horrors awakening, could feel the 'almost forgotten

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savagery' on which his town was founded – all of it gathering outside, pulling on his windows with the breeze" (Hamid, 2022, p. 38). This is the shortest sentence with a historical focus in the coded set. It speaks of the violence at the origins of the town that the novel keeps silent about, and it makes it a serviceable trope for the novel's portrayal of the home as a container being intruded upon by the violence. The sentence addresses the allegation of the novel's disregard of history (Mahajan, 2023) not directly, but in one stroke of the pen.

There are two personifications with regard to the dead. Oona is feeling a sense of "expectation" in her mother's voice: "all the ghosts were returning . . . ghosts returning to each town and to each house . . . ghosts returning to her mother, and compensating her for her loss" (Hamid, 2022, p. 40); and Oona feels even "more bereft" (Hamid, 2022, p. 40). It is the mother who is consoled by the ghosts and not the daughter. The focus on the consolation that can only be provided by a conspiracy narrative means that the picture has an ironic flavor, as the mother's needs are being met in a way that is contradictory to the actual facts. The novel implies that these emotions must be satisfied by a story and not by facts. When gazing at the stars at night, Oona considers what had happened to them, to her, "how can it take us all, obliterating us, the nothingness that had taken them" (Hamid, 2022, p. 16). Death is a taking agent. The mapping of the novel has its equivalent when in the end of the novel Oona says, "I was alive, their life could be snapped from my throat" (Hamid, 2022, p. 76). Both death and life are the means by which the novel is captured, and the balance created in the treatment of death provides symmetry within the novel.

Upon her brother, Anders's father's death, two additional mappings of his brothers appear. After Anders shares his feelings with her in the beginning, Oona sits by his side, understanding her love as though she never could have known it if she hadn't tested it and determined if it would hold up, but now it did, as she says, "Oona recognized her love as though she couldn't have known it without testing it and seeing if it carried her weight and now, it did" (Hamid, 2022, p. 67). Love takes the form of a load-bearing structure, an extension of traditional mappings to which relationships are buildings (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The funeral is described as a ceremony "to make real what had happened and to weave Anders and those others left behind into a shared web of what they had lost" (Hamid, 2022, p. 68). Grief becomes a woven fabric that binds mourners, and the passage connects private loss to collective mourning. The same scene explains the novel's title. The father is "the only pale person present, the only pale person left in the entire town", "the last white man, and after that, after him, there were none" (Hamid, 2022, p. 68). The phrase reifies whiteness one final time as a property that ends with the last person who holds it, and it attaches that ending to an act of communal mourning rather than to an act of violence.

Quantifying metaphors

Anticipating his father's death, Anders reflects that most children believe such a loss "is years away, and between every year there are months, and between every month there are days, and between every day there are hours, and between every hour there are seconds" (Hamid, 2022, p. 31). Time is divided into ever smaller units, as though more of it could be found by measuring more finely. The mapping draws on TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 7–9). As elsewhere in the novel, Hamid takes a highly conventional mapping and places it at a moment of emotional intensity, where its familiarity makes the loss more rather than less painful.

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5.3 Orientational metaphors

Orientational metaphors are the smallest family (12 instances), but they carry the most explicit evaluations. They structure concepts in one spatial dimension (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 14) and in this novel, they are center-periphery and up-down.

Center and periphery

When it is Oona's turn to drive to Anders's house late at night, she is described as "off center, jangled" (Hamid, 2022, p. 20). Agitation involves "restive" movement away from a stable center. Her experience of meditation is also influenced by the same schema; in the desire to meditate, she "briefly crested the wave of one's thoughts" but, "in desiring at all, one was slipping, losing one's buoyancy" (Hamid, 2022, p. 6). The centered position is safe; motion away from the centered position is perceived as a fall. The schema also organizes Anders's social position at work, which he reverts to, rather than "a peripheral role" (Hamid, 2022, p. 22). For Anders, the center is social status. For Oona, it's a mental leveling. The schema is the same, but it is aimed at different characters.

Lowering and obliteration

Oona's mother is politically using the vertical axis. She feels that the changes are intentional; that "now" (Hamid, 2022, p. 40) they were converting and lowering us, and that meant something. Losing whiteness is a downward move, and the downward move in the scorer is the indication of the plan. The evaluative hierarchy is made clear in the mapping, with whiteness on top, and its lack on the bottom. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 22) state that orientational metaphors are based on tangible and cultural experience. Happy Is Up, Healthy Is Up, both of which clearly have a plausible body basis in posture. This is not the case with White Is Up. A historical construction, and novel achievement too, in putting it in the mouth of a character for whom it is no less arbitrary than it is in our own. Gravity and good posture

The vertical axis also structures fear. Explaining why Anders avoids appearing armed, the narration says he "had this sense that it was essential not to be seen as a threat, for to be seen as a threat, as dark as he was, was to risk one day being obliterated" (Hamid, 2022, p. 31). Darkness makes a person visible as a target, and the end point of lowering is erasure. Placed beside the mother's sentence, this passage shows the two sides of a single mapping. One group experience decline and responds with pre-emptive hostility. The other group experiences the hostility as a threat of destruction. Charteris-Black (2006) documents the same pairing of felt decline and pre-emptive defense in political discourse.

Upright posture and gravity

Chapters later, the vertical axis takes on a more positive connotation in embodied experience. Anders sees Oona walk toward the graveyard where his parents were buried and wonders if she walks "somehow taller than she was, her posture the sort of posture that created an illusion of height, not stiff, but rather long and high-chinned, limber and pulled upwards" (Hamid, 2022, p. 70). He believes she enjoyed herself as she kept on being "upright, carrying all the load" (Hamid, 2022, p. 70). In the face of grief, uprightness turns to dignity. On the day that the gym opens with nightly all-new darks there, Hamid (2022, p. 78) says, "we lifters defy the gravity the world imposes on all of us who walk on it, gravity that seems to impose somewhat of the same gravity upon us, but not quite, not at all." The gravity is not the same at all the different locations, reflecting social inequality. This is a purely evaluative verticality of the mother's

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speech that is returned to the body, and it puts in words what the mappings suggest. Weight is not distributed across people, and it is not distributed naturally, but socially. This is an imposed heaviness: Fanon's (1952/2008) description of the racialized body under the white gaze can be applied to this kind of gymnasium, where there is a literal physicality.

5.4 Dehumanizing mappings and the closing image of water

More than one mapping occurs in the novel, some of which have more than one scenario or spatial axis. They invest a full value chain of evaluation – for example, human superiority over animal, predator over prey – in the realm of race. They were all used for coding as Cross-Domain Mapping.

The first appears early. Watching laborers in the back of a pickup truck, Anders thinks the crew looks "like a group of animals, not like humans, being transported from one task, one site, to the next" (Hamid, 2022, p. 12). The sentence is a simile, but it realizes a familiar racialized mapping, Dark Skinned Workers Are Animals, and the verb "transported" adds the frame of cargo. The moment is pointed because Anders has already changed. The mapping operates below the level of his stated beliefs. He does not hold that these men are less than human, yet the conventional association surfaces in his perception. This illustrates the CMT claim that conventional metaphors work largely without conscious endorsement (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

The same source domain soon turns on Anders himself. Moving through town in his changed body, he goes "hesitantly, pausing and observing at intersections, like a herbivore, out of an instinct for self-preservation" (Hamid, 2022, p. 29). The man who saw other dark men as animals now feels himself to be prey. The two passages form a pair. The animal domain is not abandoned when Anders changes. He simply moves from the position of observer to the position of the observed.

A passage of free indirect discourse that makes the fears of Oona's mother and the online content she consumes can be said to be the idealization of the predator-prey hierarchy. In the following, the narration is in a collective, first-person present.

> We were no safer for being dark; they could tell the difference, they still knew who we were, what we were, and they would come for us now, now that we were blind . . . like predators in the night, taking their prey when their prey was defenseless (Hamid, 2022, p. 69)

The roles of predator and prey are already established in the mapping, without an action taking place. Fear is made into perception, not belief, and that's how it can be used as an excuse to be violent. The passage is attributed to the Narrator since this passage cannot be attached to any character. Its collective "we" sounds like common sense and not the anxiety of one, or rhetoric in any sense in public discourse (Santa Ana, 2002).

The novel ends with a different kind of mapping. Years later, in the life of Anders and Oona's daughter, "memories of whiteness receded", although "memories of whiteness lingered too" (Hamid, 2022, p. 80). The daughter thinks of her forebears as "the people she flowed from" (Hamid, 2022, p. 80). Memory becomes a tide, and lineage becomes a river. This closing image reverses the logic of the opening chapters. Theft, substance, and obliteration all imply something solid that must be defended or recovered. Water implies continuity without fixed form. Hamid's

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final mapping places whiteness inside such a current. It does not vanish. It becomes part of what flows into the next generation.

5.5 Distribution of metaphor by speaker

The distribution of all coded metaphors is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of Coded Conceptual Metaphors by Speaker and Family

Speaker	Structural	Ontological	Orientational	Total	Share of all codes
Anders	19	15	3	37	43.5%
Oona	9	14	7	30	35.3%
Oona's Mother	4	1	2	7	8.2%
Anders and Oona (joint)	4	2	0	6	7.1%
Narrator	4	1	0	5	5.9%
Total	40	33	12	85	100%

Three patterns stand out. First, Anders dominates the structural family, accounting for 19 of its 40 instances (47.5%). Eight of his structural codes are Cross-Domain Mapping, eight are Structural, and three are Entailment. These are the mappings of theft, dehumanization, and imprisonment, through which he understands the change as something done to him by others. His orientational codes are few (3 of 12). Anders processes the transformation as an external and social crisis.

Second, Oona leads the orientational family with 7 of 12 instances (58.3%), spread across Center-Periphery (2), Embodied Grounding (2) and Vertical Hierarchy (3), and she holds the single largest ontological sub-code, with 6 of the 12 Reification instances. Her metaphors ask what the change feels like from inside a body, while Anders's metaphors ask what it means when others read it. Her metaphors also move toward release, as the shed skin and lifted gravity show.

Third, Oona's mother has the smallest named profile (7 instances), but her metaphors are the most explicitly ideological. They concern vertical lowering, conversion, and desertification, and they speak for a group rather than for herself. Her vocabulary does not change even when her relationship with her daughter softens. She makes an exception for her daughter without revising her schema for "her people". This persistence illustrates how entrenched conceptual metaphors resist revision even when personal experience contradicts them.

The Narrator and joint categories are small but different in kind. The joint category captures metaphors built in dialogue, such as the foreign-language analogy. The Narrator category captures metaphors that belong to no single character, such as the besieging horrors and the predator passage. Because they are not anchored to a person, these metaphors read as the shared assumptions of the town.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 From property to flow

Read in sequence, the coded metaphors describe an arc. The early chapters are dominated by hard, defensible things, such as stolen property, a substance that should be visible in the mirror, a prison of skin, house and town, and a vertical order in which loss means lowering. All

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imply that something valuable has been taken and must be restored or defended. The later chapters bring mappings of release and movement, such as a weight lifted, a skin shed, a web of shared grief and a river of descent. The contrasts between Anders's prison and Oona's molting skin, and between his theft and her lifted gravity, show the turn most sharply, since the same source domains receive opposite entailments.

The opening metaphors mark it, making whiteness something that can be owned, weighed, located, and lost, and so reveal what the characters had assumed it to be. The closing metaphors deny it the status of property, since a weight that falls away cannot be stolen. In CMT terms, the move works through highlighting and hiding (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 10). The theft frame highlights injury and hides the question of entitlement, while the gravity frame highlights burden and hides ownership altogether. Literalization makes this possible. Anders looks for his whiteness and does not find it, the militants defend it with guns, and Oona feels it lift. Each outcome tests the metaphor and exposes a different consequence of treating a social category as a material thing.

6.2 Metaphor as a narrative engine

The mapping is also used to further explain the plot. Theft is associated with restitution, but restitution doesn't come, so there's no way to address the grievance. Lowering his voice and desertification, voiced by Oona's mother and the militants, are picked up by the mappings. There's one significant difference between these and theft. There are no natural limits to a decline, except where the stolen property is returned, in which case it is considered a theft. This gives some idea as to why the violence spirals out of control but does not lead to a solution. Once the social reality of the town becomes the dialogue of decline, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 156) would put it, so do the actions. The resolution does not result from a change in the facts, it's a change in the metaphor that guides the governing. The crisis, which is constructed through the use of a set of metaphors, can never be solved within the frame of these metaphors.

6.3 When metaphors fail

Some mappings are not coherent, and the failures are instructive. Describing how Anders now looks to her, Oona compares him to "a blank television screen, a screen showing static" (Hamid, 2022, p. 26), withdraws the comparison, "or no, not quite like that" (Hamid, 2022, p. 26), and then tries the image of milk that has gone off yet still tastes fine. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) treat systematicity as a defining property of conceptual metaphor while accepting that one target can draw on several sources. Oona's hesitation shows something less comfortable. Seeing a familiar person under a new racial category fits none of the available sources, and the reader watches her try to reject them. The novel's metaphor system is therefore also a record of the strain a new experience places on an inherited conceptual system.

6.4 Limits of the reading

The first limit lies in the novel's own focus. Mahajan (2023) objects that the book gives almost no voice to the town's existing dark-skinned residents, and the data reproduce this imbalance. All the named speakers in Table 1 are white at the start of the novel, and none of the 85 utterances belong to a character who was dark before the change. The analysis therefore describes how white characters conceptualize the loss of whiteness, not how the novel represents those who were never white. The claim that the novel turns a racialized vocabulary from the

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racial other onto whiteness must be qualified, because the animal and cargo images in Section 5.4 are still applied to dark bodies. The novel exposes these mappings but does not escape them.

The second restriction relates to the typology. A reification of whiteness as treasure has to assume that there is a container; a prison of skin is a container, and a structural scenario; and family assignments are based on judgments another analyst might make differently. No, the Cross-Domain Mapping code refers to a type of mapping which is evaluative and not a fourth type. Families are not intended to provide accurate measurement; rather, they are indicative of dominant function.

The third limit concerns identification. Several key instances, including the trees, the herbivore, the snake, and the lifted gravity, are explicit comparisons. They were treated as direct metaphors in the sense of Steen et al. (2010), but a strict application of MIP would exclude them and change the totals in Table 1. A study using the full MIPVU protocol would give more comparable results.

The fourth constraint has to do with reliability and scale. One researcher also coded without a reliability measure, and 85 utterances is a small sample size for the development of a novel based on long figurative sentences. The set is not exhaustive, but shows expressions which were deemed most relevant for transformation and identity. The distribution by speaker can also be influenced by narrative space, as that of Anders and Oona is not just significantly larger, but they also exert disproportionate dominance relative to the other speakers as the narrative voice, or as assignment in FID is a process of interpretation.

The findings do not negate these limits, but are contained within them, as they are based upon quotations which can be verified against the text. The study demonstrates the metaphoric construction and breaking of whiteness value in a novel. It does not demonstrate that the same patterns pertain to Hamid's other fiction or to speculative fiction about race in general or to readers' reactions.

7. CONCLUSION

The number of metaphorical utterances in *The Last White Man* identified was 85, of which 40 were structural, 33 ontological, and 12 orientational. The middle ones are Transformation Is A Theft, Whiteness Is A Substance, Skin Is A Prison, High Status Is Up, Dark-Skinned People Are Animals, Whiteness Is A Weight, and Lineage Is Flowing Water. They are different for each speaker. Anders sees the change as dispossession, confinement, and threat; Oona sees it through her body as balance and release, Oona's mother sees it as vertical decline and ecological devastation for a community and ownerless metaphors like the besieging horrors as the community's assumption. Throughout the novel, the metaphors of property and defense are replaced by those of burden lifted and current flowing: the language of the novel's argument that whiteness is a historically contingent category and not a possession.

The main theoretical contribution is the concept of metaphorical literalization. Hamid does not invent a new figurative system for race. He makes the conventional one literally true, so that its entailments can be observed as consequences. Methodologically, combining MIP with explicit coding of source, target, entailment, and speaker allows others to check and contest each interpretation.

However, the novel's abstraction (which makes it so well suited for analysis via metaphor) also limits the metaphor to white perspectives; the analysis follows that limitation, as

well. Future research might focus on comparing the novel to *Exit West,* Conceptual Metaphor Theory to the numerous explicit comparisons, use full MIPVU with a second coder, and/or investigate actual readers' responses.

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