

**Internalization of Racial Discourse in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*: A
Socio-Cognitive Analysis****Fatchudin Rosyid¹ ✉, Ruly Indra Darmawan²**^{1,2}English Literature Department, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 21 June 2026 Approved 06 July 2026 Published 31 July 2026	This study aims to analyses the internalization of racial discourse in the novel and to examine how white supremacist ideologies shape the characters' social cognition. Using Teun A. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach in Critical Discourse Analysis and a qualitative descriptive method, the study identifies the discursive patterns that produce anticipatory fear before actual physical discrimination occurs. The results show that racial discourse deeply navigates the characters' mental models, leading to the cognitive dehumanization of the 'Other' and melancholia over lost racial privilege. Moreover, the characters build in-group boundaries and generate apocalyptic paranoia to rationalize victimization. These cognitive manipulations are frequently used to legitimize prejudice and conceal historical guilt. In conclusion, these results reveal how racism works most subtly at the cognitive level, showing that character's experience racial anxiety even in the absence of real conflict, because they view the loss of whiteness as an existential threat rather than a biological phenomenon. Significantly, this study extends CDA research by demonstrating that dismantling white supremacy requires deconstructing not only institutional racism but also the invisible cognitive frameworks that sustain racial hierarchies in everyday life.
Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, racial discourse, socio-cognitive approach, <i>The Last White Man</i> , white supremacy	

© Copyright 2026

INTRODUCTION

Historically, race and skin color functioned as powerful markers used to categorize human beings into unequal social hierarchies. In colonial and postcolonial history, whiteness frequently acts as the standard against which other racial identities are measured and evaluated. Bonds and Inwood (2016) argue that white supremacy is not merely an individual prejudice but a social system that continuously reproduce racial hierarchies through political, cultural, and economic structures. Similarly, Dancy and Saucier (2021) contend that anti-black racism operates beyond explicit discrimination, influencing how Black identities are perceived, valued, and represented in society.

Moreover, Anisa and Sanjaya (2025) demonstrate how white dominance continuous to be reproduced in contemporary media discourse. These racial inequalities are maintained not only by institutions but also through discourse that shapes how people understand social reality.

According to Van Dijk (2011), discourse plays an important role in shaping knowledge, beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes in society. Through discourse, social groups construct meanings about themselves and others, creating divisions between "us" and "them". Staszak (2020) further explains that Otherness is not purely derived from objective differences, but it is constructed through discourse that positions one group as the norm and defines another as different

✉ Corresponding author:
Email: fatchudin33@gmail.com

or inferior. Therefore, racial prejudice can be understood as a discursive and cognitive phenomenon that affects how people perceive, evaluate, and interact with others.

The relationship between race, discourse, and social cognition is explored in contemporary literature, particularly in *The Last White Man* by Mohsin Hamid (2022). The novel tells the story of Anders, a white man who wakes up one day to find his skin turning dark. Rather than the direct racial conflict, Hamid emphasizes the psychological and social implications of racial transformation. As the story continues, characters face fear, alienation, anxiety, and uncertainty, which demonstrates the continuing influence of racial meanings on perception even when physical differences are blurred. Through this speculative premise, the novel exposes the persistence of racial discourse in the loss of racial privilege.

Several studies have examined *The Last White Man* from different perspectives. Murray (2026) investigates the concept of melancholic whiteness and the fear of losing racial privilege, while Shah and Maan (2025) explore racism and power relations within the novel. Other studies focused on postcolonial identity (Ali & Khadim, 2024; Mastoi et al., 2024), racial supremacy (Rehan, 2025; Khokhar et al., 2026), stylistics (Fatima et al., 2025), and identity reconstruction (Özer Taniyan, 2025; Perveen et al., 2025). In the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Mahrukh and Liaqat (2025) utilized the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to examine the politics of language and the historical construction of the 'Other' in the narrative. While these studies provide valuable insights into the structural, historical, and postcolonial effects of racial transformation, they primarily emphasize overt power dynamics and macro-level social contexts. Consequently, a critical research gap remains: previous CDA research has not adequately addressed the underlying socio-cognitive processes through which racial meanings, stereotypes, and fears are internally reproduced. The specific cognitive mechanisms that sustain white supremacy in the absence of physical racial markers remain underexplored.

To address this gap and extend previous CDA research on race and white supremacy in literary texts, this study employs Teun A. Van

Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach. While previous CDA studies on this novel, such as those using the historical approach, focus heavily on institutional discourse and past contexts, this study shifts the analytical lens to the cognitive interface. Tarumingkeng (2025) explains that Critical Discourse Analysis seeks to discover hidden ideologies and unequal power relations embedded in language. Furthermore, Gyollai (2020) discusses how the socio-cognitive approach connects social structures, discourse, and cognition, allowing researchers to investigate how ideologies are internalized and reproduced through mental models. By utilizing this framework, this study extends the understanding of white supremacy by demonstrating that it is not merely a structural or historical artifact, but an enduring cognitive framework. It investigates how white supremacist ideologies govern characters' perceptions, paranoia, and identity crises even when their physical whiteness is lost. By applying Van Dijk's perspective, this study reveals how racial discourse operates deep beneath the surface of social interaction to sustain racial boundaries.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. According to Kholid et al. (2024) citing Sukmadinata, descriptive qualitative research aims to describe and interpret phenomenon in their natural context by emphasizing the characteristics, relationships, and qualities of the object under observation. In line with this perspective, Darmawan et al. (2025) argue that qualitative inquiry derives its data primarily from textual sources, allowing researcher to extract and interpret meanings embedded within written source. This method was selected because the present study does not seek statistical generalizations, instead aims to discover the ideological meanings and racial discourse represented in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* (2022).

The analysis was conducted using Teun A. Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which bridges the micro-level of text, the meso-level of cognition, and the macro-level of society. Data collection and analytical procedures were

carried out systematically through three interconnected steps: inventorying, coding, and interpreting. During the inventorying step, a close reading of the novel was performed to identify textual units—including lexical choices, metaphors, and narrative descriptions—that depicted the characters' psychological and behavioral reactions to racial transformation. Regarding data selection, the excerpts were not chosen randomly; purposive sampling was applied to isolate textual segments that explicitly contained discursive markers of racial anxiety, whiteness privilege, identity crisis, and dehumanization.

In the coding step, the selected textual units were classified according to specific cognitive categories derived from Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework. The identification of these cognitive categories focused primarily on two elements: Mental Models (the characters' subjective, internalized representations of specific events, such as their visceral reactions to seeing dark skin) and Social Cognition (the socially shared beliefs, stereotypes, and ideological assumptions regarding white supremacy and blackness). The textual segments were coded by identifying the specific rhetorical strategies and lexicalizations the characters employed to rationalize their fears and construct in-group/out-group boundaries.

The final analytical procedure, interpreting, involved a critical examination of how these coded expressions functioned as discursive manifestations of the characters' minds. The interpretation was conducted by mapping the micro-level textual evidence (e.g., dehumanizing metaphors) to the meso-level cognitive processes (e.g., the activation of racist mental models) to uncover how they reproduce the macro-level ideological structure of racial hierarchy. This step explains how social ideologies are maintained through discourse.

To illustrate the precision of the data selection and interpretation process, the following excerpt was identified: "...murderous rage. He wanted to kill the colored man who confronted him..." (Hamid, 2022, p.10). This excerpt was selected because its lexical choices ("murderous rage," "kill") directly correspond to the analytical focus of the study. Interpreted through the defined cognitive categories, this reaction is not perceived as mere personal anger. Instead, it demonstrates

the activation of a racialized mental model influenced by a broader social cognition, where blackness is cognitively pre-judged as a threat, thereby triggering an internalized ideological assumption regarding blackness and justifying an anticipatory defense mechanism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of *The Last White Man* reveals that racial discourse operates not merely as a social phenomenon to the characters, but as a cognitive structure that continuously shapes their perceptions, emotions, and social interactions. Through Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, the novel shows how historically embedded racial ideologies are internalized as mental models that mediate the relationship between discourse and social reality. In this research, the researcher saw a pattern that rather than portraying racism through overt discriminative acts, Hamid expose its subtle process within the minds of people who have long inhabited a social order structured by whiteness. As racial boundaries become unstable through the novel's narrative of transformation, the characters' responses discover the discursive mechanism of reproducing prejudice, fear, identity formation, and social hierarchy.

The findings indicate that these mechanisms arise through interconnected discursive patterns. These patterns illustrate how racial discourse influences the construction of racial Other, builds in-group identity boundaries, generates anticipatory paranoia even though there is no real threats exist, collapse established social relations rooted in racial privilege, and eventually produces apocalyptic narratives that legitimize fear and victimization. Taken together, these patterns demonstrate that racism in the novel functions not only a social practice, but also cognitive process that manage how people interpret themselves and others.

The first pattern identified in the novel shows that the characters do not view racial transformation as merely biological phenomenon. Instead, it is interpreted through pre-existing racial beliefs that have long shaped how they understand themselves and others. This is evident when Anders first notices that his skin has turned dark. "...murderous rage. He wanted to kill the colored

man who confronted him...” (Hamid, 2022, p. 10) Rather than being confuse or curious, he reacts with “murderous rage” and desire to kill the “colored man” he sees confronting him. He also views the transformation as a form of victimization, “...he realized that he had been robbed, that he was the victim of a crime...” (Hamid, 2022, p. 11). Similar perception emerges throughout the narrative when he describes his transformed self as “...a sea creature that should not exist” (Hamid, 2022, p. 11) and later views a group of dark-skinned people as “...a group of animals, not like humans...” (Hamid, 2022, p. 25). The same case extends beyond Anders. “...Oona glanced at Anders and reflected in silence that sometimes he looked normal to her and sometimes strange...” (Hamid, 2022, p. 44), while after her own transformation she sees herself as “a stranger” (Hamid, 2022, p. 82). In a similar way, Oona’s mother assumes that “...one of her favorite radio personalities had changed color, and changed brains it felt like too, and what he said now made no sense, as if he was an impostor...” (Hamid, 2022, p. 77).

These reactions can be understood through an Dijk’s (2011) socio-cognitive approach, such contends that people do not directly interpret social reality. Instead, reality is mediated through mental models that shaped by socially shared knowledge, ideologies, and experience. Therefore, perception is never neutral, but filtered through pre-existing cognitive structure that define what is considered normal, acceptable, or threatening. This argument is in line with Bonds and Inwood’s (2016) discussion of whiteness as an invisible normative category that is used to assess and value other identities. Similarly, Shah and Maan (2025) explain that colonial racial discourse created long lasting binaries that portrayed whiteness as civilized and superior, while constructing blackness as inferior and uncivilized.

Viewed through this perspective, Anders’ anger toward his own transformed body reveals more than personal shock, his response demonstrates how deeply racial discourse has been internalized within his cognition. The desire to kill the dark-skinned figure is immediately interpreted through a mental model that connects blackness with danger, loss, and negativity. His perception that he has been “robbed” further confirm this

cognitive process. What has been taken from him is not simply a physical characteristic, but a racial identity that has long functioned as a source of social legitimacy and security. Murray (2026) interprets such reactions as manifestations of melancholic whiteness, a condition in which the anticipated loss of demographic and symbolic dominance is experienced as personal victimization. Anders’ belief that he has been “robbed” illustrates a refusal to relinquish the privileges historically associated with whiteness. As a result, the transformation is interpreted not as biological phenomenon, but as symbolic deprivation of value and status.

Anders’s metaphors provide direct textual evidence of cognitive dehumanization. By referring to his transformed self as “a sea creature that should not exist” (Hamid, 2022, p. 11) and describing a group of dark-skinned people as “like a group of animals, not like humans” (p. 25), Anders’s cognition actively reshapes the limits of humanity. Engaging with Hart and Cap (2014), who argue that metaphors are discursive instruments that validate social evaluations, this study argues that these specific lexical choices are not mere stylistic expressions of shock. Rather, they operate as cognitive defense mechanisms. Extending Tariq et al.’s (2025) discussion on the Self/Other binary, this cognitive dehumanization places blackness entirely outside the category of normal humanity. The transformed body is cognitively exiled into the realm of the abnormal and the non-human, highlighting the lasting effect of colonial hierarchies where whiteness remains the implicit standard of humanity.

The insecurity of these mental models also demonstrates in Oona’s perception of Anders. “...Oona glanced at Anders and reflected in silence that sometimes he looked normal to her and sometimes strange...” (Hamid, 2022, p. 44) Although she knows intellectually and emotionally that he remains the same person, she shifts between seeing him as “normal” and “strange”. This struggle reflects a conflict between personal experiences and socially shared racial knowledge. On one hand, her individual experiences and emotional connection lead to recognition and familiarity. On the other hand, socially shared discourses still seen dark skin as a sign of difference. The result is Anders has cognitive

dissonance of being both a familiar loved one and a racialized Other at the same time. The same mechanism appears when Oona sees herself as “a stranger” after her own transformation. This feeling of alienation is not caused by a change in personality, but rather by the collapse of the visual identity that has long been the basis of self-recognition. This feeling of alienation and identity loss reflects what Ahmad, Rasool, and Noor (2025) identify as one of the main consequences of transformation in *The Last White Man*. Their findings suggest that the disappearance of whiteness additionally remove characters of the previous social privileges, producing profound crisis of self-recognition. Therefore, Oona’s inability to recognize her own reflection goes beyond physical transformation and represents the breakdown of a socially validated identity.

A similar process can be observed in Oona’s mother’s reaction to the transformed radio host. Her assumption that the broadcaster has somehow “change brains”, demonstrates how racial discourse extends beyond physical appearance and influence judgements about intelligence, credibility, and authority. Despite the absence of evidence that the speaker’s thought or abilities have changed, she interprets his words differently once he no longer appears white. This suggests that her evaluation is guided less by the content of the discourse than by the racial framework which she receives it. In the other words, the transformation alters not the speaker himself but the cognitive lens through which he is perceived.

Taken together, these findings reveal that the novel portrays racism as a cognitive process that precedes overt discrimination. The characters repeatedly interpret racial transformation through mental models that have been shaped by historically embedded discourses of whiteness and blackness. When those models are challenged, they trigger responses ranging from fear and dehumanization to alienation and identity loss. The crisis experienced by the characters, therefore, is not fundamentally a crisis of biology but a crisis of perception. By exposing how racial meanings continue to organize thought even when social realities change, *The Last White Man* demonstrates the enduring power of discourse to structure cognition and reproduce racial hierarchies at the level of everyday perception.

The novel further emphasizes that these perceptions are not limited to personal level, even though the previous findings show how racial discourse function through individual cognition, influencing how characters view themselves and others. The internalization of racial meanings gradually develops into forms of identification, characters start to define who belongs inside their social borders and who needs to be positioned outside of them as the result. Consequently, racial discourse served as both mechanism of perception and mechanism of group formation, creating gaps between “us” and “them” that maintain social divisions even in situation where visible racial differences are becoming unstable.

The second pattern identified in the novel concerns the character’s attempts to maintain the sense of group identity in the middle of racial boundaries that collapse. Conversation between Oona and her mother regarding the growing number of people transformed throughout the town. Rather than referring to the population in general, Oona’s mother repeatedly emphasizes the phrase “our people,” indicating difference between those who belong to her imagined community and those who do not. Same evident appears when she speaks of “the plot against their kind, yes their kind” (Hamid, 2022, p. 40-41), and explains her actions being done just “for her people”. Ander’s perception of his transformed reflection as “this other man staring him down, on his phone, in the mirror” (Hamid, 2022, p. 11), is another example of a similar classification.

Van Dijk (2011) argues that discourse is socially constitutive because it actively produces social identities, social relations, and group boundaries. Through discourse, people learn not only how to understand reality, but also how to categorize themselves and others within that reality. Similar to this, Staszak (2020) contends that Otherness is not a natural consequence of difference itself, but it is discursively constructed through the creation of symbolic boundaries that divide a valued Self and devalued Other.

As Oona’s mother said “People are changing,” “What people?” Oona asked. “All over,” she replied, and added with meaning, “our people” (Hamid, 2022, p. 22). The phrase “our people” has far more meaning than just a simple expression of belonging. Within the context of the

novel, the phrase operates as a linguistic marker in the novel, preserving the symbolic exclusivity of whiteness at a time when its physical boundaries are starting to disappear. Oona's mother actively uses language to recreate a social group rather than just describe it. The frequent use of possessive expressions such as "our people" and "their kind" shows an attempt to preserve a shared racial identity even when the physical traits that define it are disappearing. In other words, discourse becomes a substitute for biological difference. When race can no longer be reliably recognized through appearance, it is reproduced through language.

Oona's mother's belief that there is "plot against their kind" (Hamid, 2022, p. 40-41) is a clear example of this process. Importantly, there is no objective evidence from the novel that such a plot exists. Her perception of social reality is the only source of the imagined threat. This finding strongly supports Van Dijk's socio-cognitive perspective, which emphasize that social actors construct mental models through ideological knowledge rather than direct experience. Therefore, by constructing an external enemy, the conspiracy serves as a cognitive narrative that strengthens group unity. The existence of a threatening "them" becomes necessary for maintaining the solidarity of "us." Without an opposing group, the collective identity that Oona's mother attempts to defend loses much of its meaning.

The same mechanism can be observed in Anders's description of his reflection as "this other man." In contrast to Oona's mother, Anders is repeating the logic of othering within himself rather than drawing a line between two separate social groups. The statement indicates that the transformed body is no longer recognized as part of the self, but symbolically moved into the category of Other. The fact that Anders and the figure in the mirror are identical except for the skin color. However, the racial discourse embedded within his mind strong enough to divide a single identity into two opposing categories. The self remains connected with familiarity, legitimacy, and normality, while the transformed body is assigned to the category of strangeness and exclusion.

This finding shows that othering in *The Last White Man* does not depend on objective social differences. Instead, it is maintained by discursive practices that continue to reproduce symbolic distinction between insiders and outsiders. As Staszak (2020) argues, Other emerge because discourse defines and presents it as such, rather than because it exists naturally. As a result, the novel expose how racial identities are maintained through language even when the original biological foundation upon them begin to collapse.

More importantly, the persistence of expressions such as "our people," "their kind," and "this other man" suggest that racial ideology survives the disappearance of race itself. The physical transformation experienced by the characters does not automatically remove racial thinking because the boundaries that uphold racism are cognitive and discursive rather than biological. The mental process that separate society into valued insiders and dangerous outsiders are still intact, even the visible indications of whiteness are fading. Therefore, the novel illustrates that racism is not primarily based on skin color, but on the discursive processes that use binary oppositions to continuously organize social reality. Collective identity is maintained, the boundary between Self and Other is retained, and social distinction is justified through verbal creations, despite the loss of its material foundation.

Another discursive outcome of maintaining a rigid distinction between "us" and "them" is the belief that the Other's presence creates a threat. Characters start to perceive social reality through expectations of danger once racial boundaries have been cognitively established, even in situations when there is no concrete evidence to support these anxieties. Throughout the novel, this anxiety emerges repeatedly in the form of anticipatory paranoia. Oona's mother unexpectedly advises her daughter, "you should get a gun," (Hamid, 2022, p. 23) even there is no a direct threat. Similarly, Anders begins to imagine hostility around him, believing that "...he suspected it was only in his imagination that he saw flickers of hostility..." (Hamid, 2022, p. 12) and feeling of "...he was a stranger to those he could call by name..." (Hamid, 2022, p.24). His anxiety becomes clearer as he avoids eye contact, refusing "...to let his gaze linger

in ways that could be misconstrued...” (Hamid, 2022, p. 25), because he fears that he might one day experience the “...risk being obliterated...” (Hamid, 2022, p. 51). Oona’s mother’s anticipation of a future “...expected a reckoning and when that reckoning did not come, when those who had been white were not hunted down and caged or whipped or killed” (Hamid, 2022, p. 98) shows the same pattern.

Van Dijk’s (2011) socio-cognitive approach, which highlight how discourse reproduce domination by shaping knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and intentions, can help in understanding these responses. Through repeated exposure to particular discourses, people develop mental models that affect how they interpret reality long before they have firsthand experience the real situation. People often react to cognitive representations that have already been formed in their minds rather than respond to objective events or phenomena. In a similar way, Bonds and Inwood (2016) contend that white supremacy serves as a material system that historically normalizes violence, social exclusion, and unequal vulnerability.

Viewed through this perspective, Oona’s mother’s suggestion that her daughter should get a gun is significant because it appears without any supporting evidence. Even though there has not been any violence, the statement shows an anticipatory assumption that it would happen soon. The suggestion to acquire a gun illustrates how racial prejudice can emerge before any direct interaction occurs. Nugroho and Sa’adah (2024) explain that discrimination may begin through stereotyping and racial prejudice at the individual level before becoming structurally embedded within society. Oona’s mother therefore responds not to an actual threat but to a racialized expectation of danger. Therefore, the suggestion reveals how racial discourse has transformed suspicion into common sense. The imagined danger does not observe from reality, but from mental model framework that has long associated blackness to criminality, aggression, and social disorder. As a result, defensive actions become normalized before any actual threat arises. The gun function not merely as a weapon, but as a symbol of a worldview structured around anticipated victimization.

A similar process shapes Ander’s experience after his transformation. He keeps acting as if the threat were real even though he repeatedly realizes that the hostility he perceived may exist only “in his imagination.” This contradiction demonstrates the power of discourse over cognition. Anders is cognitively trapped in racial narratives that have traditionally classified black people as suspicious and dangerous, despite his rational recognition of the lack of proof. Therefore, the collected racist stereotypes associated with dark color are the source of his anxiety rather than social reality itself. The transformation reveals how deeply those meanings have been internalized by making him take on a role that he used to consider from the outside.

This internalization becomes particularly visible in Ander’s self-regulation of behavior. His reluctance to maintain eye contact reflects as attempt to avoid being perceived as threatening. Additionally, no one directly accuses him of being aggressive, but he adapts his behavior in anticipation of possible judgement. This evident illustrates what Van Dijk describes as socially shared mental models. Anders has been presented a discourse in which dark-skinned people are frequently represented as dangerous, and he consequently begins to monitor himself through the same racial lens. As a result, the person engages in a type of anticipatory self-censorship in which he controls his own actions in order to escape an impending punishment.

Ander’s fear of being “obliterated” and Oona’s mother’s anticipation of a violent “reckoning” are the outcome of this paranoia. These anxieties show how historical power relation have significantly shifted. According to Manzoor and Singh (2023), they argue that racism operates as a socially constructed discourse that teaches people to perceive dark-skinned people as inferior and threatening. Ander’s fear is therefore not produced by actual hostility, but by a discourse that has already established blackness as a source of danger within social cognition. Oona’s mother imagines scenarios in which former white people will be hunted, imprisoned, whipped, or killed. Yet the novel consistently shows that there is never any such response. The violence that is expected is merely a projection. This finding is particularly important when viewed alongside Bond and

Inwood's (2016) discussion of white supremacy and racialized vulnerability. Oona's mother fears punishments that are similar to historical acts of brutality against marginalized racial groups. Therefore, her expectation of revenge is a psychological projection based on historical awareness of racial domination rather than an objective evaluation of reality. The dominant subject imagines experiencing the form of oppression that were once normalized against others.

As a result, it is impossible to interpret Ander's and Oona's mother's fear as a reaction to real discrimination. Instead, it is result of a discourse that has made prejudice normal that people see danger even when it does not exist. The novel portrayed that racism does not require a real enemy to survive, but it can operate through anticipation alone. Once racialized fear becomes embedded within social cognition, imagined threats acquire the same emotional impact as real ones. Discourse uses this technique to turn suspicion into common sense, speculation into certainty, and prejudice into a rational response to a danger that has yet to occur-and, in many cases, never occur at all.

The characters' everyday social interactions begin to change as the fear and paranoia become normalized. The novel demonstrates that racial discourse influence people's behavior toward one another in social situations as well as their internal perceptions of others. Once the racial hierarchy that previously structured society starts to collapse, ordinary interactions become filled with discomfort, confusion, and a persistent sense of disorder. This disruption is reflected in a variety of situations throughout the plot of the story. Anders' boss says, "I would have killed myself" (Hamid, 2022, p. 34). Oona's mother notices that "there were dark hosts mixed in with the white hosts, and they were awkward with each other, awkward and unnatural" (Hamid, 2022, p. 77). Similar tensions emerge within intimate relationships. Oona's mother tells her daughter that she "should be ashamed of yourself" (Hamid, 2022, p. 72) for seeing Oona after her transformation, meanwhile Ander's father experiences "...the discomfort at seeing this white girl kiss this dark man, even though the dark man was not a dark man..." (Hamid, 2022, p. 76). At the same time, Anders

starts to notice that the cleaning man at his job is staring at him "in a new way," which makes him think that his previous interactions are nothing or may have been little more that "...it was just treating the cleaning guy like a puppy, a dog, that you give a couple pats to, and call out good boy" (Hamid, 2022, pp. 43–44). In other scenes, Oona's mother, who is still one of the few white people, feels both "dread" and "pride" at her slow transformation and rejects attempts by other to act normally, insisting that "everything had changed."

These reactions can be understood through Van Dijk's (2011) concept of discourse as a fundamentally interactional practice contributes to the construction and maintenance of social order. Social interactions are guided by shared knowledge, expectations, and norms that allow individuals to recognize their positions within society. When these basic structures shift, interactions may become unstable. This perspective is supported by Bonds and Inwood (2016), who argue that whiteness functions not merely as a racial identity, but as an epistemology—a particular way of valuing, organizing, and understanding social life. Tißberger (2024) also assists this observation by explaining whiteness often operates as an invisible hegemonic norm, shaping social interactions while remaining unquestioned by those who occupy it. When the visual marker of whiteness disappears, the characters are forced to confront the instability of a position they had previously perceived as natural and permanent. Consequently, the disappearance of visible racial distinctions threatens not only individual identities, but also the cognitive framework through social relationship that have long been organized.

The novel depicted repetitive feelings of awkwardness and discomfort that the characters are having difficulty in managing a social environment where the norms have become unclear. Ander's discomfort at seeing dark-skinned people is evidence. Nothing real hostile occur; even though, the interaction appears "unnatural" to him. The source of discomfort therefore lies not in the situation itself, but in the breakdown of a familiar racial order. For so long in his life, social relations have been structured by implicit racial hierarchies that distinguished insiders from outsiders and privilege from marginalization. Once

those distinctions become blurred, Anders loses the interpretive framework that let him understand social reality. What appears awkward is not the interaction itself, but the disappearance of the hierarchy that once made such interactions predictable.

This interactional disruption is strongly characterized by a profound melancholia over lost racial privilege. Textual evidence of this melancholia is acutely visible in the reaction of Anders's boss, who states that he "would have killed himself" (Hamid, 2022, p. 34) had he undergone the transformation. This extreme statement reveals the extent to which whiteness is invested with existential value; the loss of racial privilege is cognitively equated with the loss of a life worth living. This melancholic attachment is further evident in Oona's mother, who feels both "dread" and "pride" (p. 89) at being among the last to transform. Engaging critically with Murray (2026), who identifies melancholic whiteness as a fear of losing demographic dominance, and Ahmad et al. (2025), who note the stripping of privilege, this study extends their claims by arguing that this melancholia is deeply cognitive. Oona's mother's refusal to acknowledge everyday interactions as normal is not merely an emotional reaction to change, but a cognitive inability to process social reality without the hegemonic power and privileges that have historically structured her identity.

Perhaps the most significant disruption occurs when Anders realize something about his relationship with the cleaning guy. After experiencing life from a marginalized position, he begins to interpret his previous behavior and recognizes that his kindness may have concealed a paternalistic attitude. His comparison of his treatment before transformed to the cleaning guy is "...like a puppy, a dog, that you give a couple pats to, and call out good boy..." (Hamid, 2022, pp. 43–44), exposes the unequal foundation upon which their relationship had been built. What had once appeared to be generosity is revealed as a form of racial superiority that implicitly positioned the other person as subordinate. This moment of self-recognition is crucial because it discovers the everyday operation of racial discourse beyond overt hostility. As Hart and Lukeš (2007) explain, metaphor are not neutral stylistic devices, but

cognitive instruments that shape how social reality is interpreted and understood. The metaphor of "sea creature" and "animals" as before had been discussed, and "puppy", "dog" therefore function as discursive mechanisms through which racial hierarchies are cognitively reproduced and normalized. The novel suggests that racism is sustained through exclusion, fear, and also seemingly benevolent interactions that mask unequal power relations.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the collapse of racial boundaries reproduce a broader disruption of the interactional order that previously maintained social life. The discomfort, awkwardness, and confusion experience by the characters emerge because the epistemological foundation of whiteness are being challenged. Without the hierarchy that once organized relationships, people struggle to determine how they should perceive, evaluate, and interact with one another. Consequently, the novel shows that the racial discourse functions as more than a system of prejudice; it operates as a social framework that structure everyday interactions. The emotional state experienced by characters such as Anders, his boss, and Oona's mother therefore reflects not merely the loss of racial identity but the loss of an entire social order built upon the privileges and assumptions of whiteness.

The disruption of the social order ultimately culminates in what can be termed apocalyptic paranoia, wherein characters systematically attempt to restore their lost dominance through fabricated discourse. Strong textual evidence of this paranoia is found in the online narratives consumed by Oona's mother, which predict that "the final chaos was approaching," involving "crime and anarchy" and "cannibalism out of hunger" (Hamid, 2022, p. 93). The discourse further imagines a scenario where dark-skinned people "would come for us like predators in the night, taking their prey when their prey was defenseless" (p. 93). Despite the complete absence of factual evidence, Oona's mother consumes tales of "the savagery of the dark people" (p. 94) and claims of "rapes and slaughters and tortures" (p. 94). By uncritically accepting these narratives—believing "their hearts were in the right place" (p. 94)—her cognition transforms speculative fear into absolute certainty. Critically applying Van Dijk's

(2011) theory of narrative and argumentation, this apocalyptic paranoia functions as a discursive strategy to rationalize victimhood. The narratives frame the formerly dominant white group as innocent 'prey' and the emerging dark-skinned majority as violent 'predators'. This cognitive manipulation not only justifies their racial prejudice but actively conceals their own historical guilt and complicity in systemic racism.

The apocalyptic narratives circulating throughout the novel illustrate precisely this process of discursive construction. Predictions of cannibalism, revenge, and the collapse of the society are presented as inevitable outcomes, despite the fact that there is no such events actually occur. The stories derive their persuasive force not from factual accuracy, but from their ability to resonate with pre-existing fears. By repeatedly depicting dark-skinned people as violent predators waiting to attack vulnerable victims, the discourse transforms speculative possibilities into seemingly unquestionable truths. The image of predators hunting down defenseless prey is particularly significant, because it frames social relations through an absolute moral binary that one group is imagined as inherently violent, while the other is positioned as innocent and vulnerable. In this way, discourse creates a reality that exist primarily within cognition rather than within factual social conditions.

The reference to "the savagery of dark people" further reveal how discourse essentializes racial difference. Violence is not portrayed as the action of particular people, but as an inherent characteristic of an entire racial group. Likewise, the claim that "rape, slaughter, and torture" are simply "their way" transforms isolated allegations into collective racial attributes. Such representations reproduce the colonial logic identified by scholars of race and racism, in which non-white populations are depicted as naturally uncivilized, irrational, and dangerous. Through this discursive strategy, racial prejudice acquires the appearance of common sense. The issue is no longer whether specific claims are true but whether they successfully reinforce the existing distinction between a civilized Self and a barbaric Other.

The most revealing statement of this process, however, lies in Oona's mother's unquestioning acceptance of these narratives. Her

conviction that "their hearts were in the right place" demonstrates that credibility is being determined not by evidence but by ideological compatibility. Information is accepted because it confirms an already existing worldview. This finding strongly supports Van Dijk's (2011) argument that discourse plays a crucial role in controlling and reproducing socially shared knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies. The online narratives function as mechanisms of cognitive reinforcement, continually validating fears that have already been internalized. Rather than challenging prejudice, discourse becomes a tool for strengthening it.

More importantly, these narratives highlight a broader victimization process. Throughout the novel, characters who had previously occupied positions of racial privilege increasingly imagine themselves as potential victims of persecution, enslavement, torture, and annihilation. Yet the anticipated violence never occurs. The imagined suffering therefore functions as a prediction of future events than as a reinterpretation of social change itself. Any challenge to existing racial hierarchies is perceived as an attack, while the loss of privilege is reimagined as oppression. In order to maintain moral legitimacy and defend continued prejudice toward others, historically dominant groups symbolically take on the role of the victim through this reversal.

As a result, the novel demonstrates that the final stage of racial discourse is not merely the production of fear but the production of an alternative reality in which prejudice appears rational, victimhood appears justified, and social inequality appears necessary for survival. The apocalyptic narratives consumed by Oona's mother transform speculation into knowledge, stereotypes into evidence, and anxiety into certainty. Through this process, discourse becomes a powerful ideological instrument that not only interprets reality but actively reconstructs it, enabling racial hierarchies to survive even after the visible foundations upon which they were built have begun to disappear.

CONCLUSION

This study examine how racial discourse is represented in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White*

Man through Teun A. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. The results show that racial ideology in the novel operates not only at the level of social institutions or overt discrimination, but more fundamentally, through social cognition. The analysis shows that internalized racial discourses consistently influence the characters' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors, shaping how they understand others and themselves.

Five interconnected discursive patterns are identified. First, dehumanizing mental models that portray the racial Other as abnormal, threatening, and less than complete human are used to cognitively construct blackness. Second, the discourse of in-group identity reproduces binary oppositions between "us" and "them", reinforcing social boundaries despite the gradual disappearance of visible racial indicators. Third, racial discourse creates anticipatory paranoia, causing characters to fear hostility, exclusion, and violence even when there is no real threat exist. Fourth, the collapse of racial hierarchy disrupts settled social relations, exposing the dependence of everyday interactions on white privilege, producing what can be understood as a form of melancholic attachment to whiteness. Finally, the novel shows how victimization and apocalyptic narratives develop and circulate information to justify prejudice and preserve hegemonic power.

These findings support Van Dijk's argument that discourse controls social cognition to maintain power. Within the context of the novel, it is demonstrated that racism is maintained not only through institutional structures but also through mental representations, stereotypes, and ideological assumptions normalized in everyday life. In this research, this is proven by Anders's instinctive reaction of "...murderous rage..." toward his own dark reflection (Hamid, 2022, p. 10), and Oona's mother's fabrication of apocalyptic "savagery" without any factual basis. *The Last White Man* demonstrates the cognitive processes that create racial prejudice through its imagined story, showing that the fear of being black consistently arises before any actual threat or confrontation.

Therefore, while this study's scope is situated within the interpretation of fictional characters, it concludes that *The Last White Man*

functions as a powerful allegorical and discursive space that critically interrogates the persistence of white supremacy in contemporary society. By highlighting the relationship between discourse, cognition, and social inequality, the novel illustrates how racial hierarchies continue to survive through the production of meaning itself. As a result, Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach proves particularly useful for discovering the subtle cognitive processes that sustain racism and demonstrating how literary texts can reveal the ideological foundations of social domination.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, S., Rasool, S., & Noor, A. (2025). Voicing the imprisonment in skin: A critical study of Hamid's *The Last White Man*. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 9(2), 446–454. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2025\(9-ID36](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2025(9-ID36)
- Ali, H., & Khadim, N. (2024). Postcolonialism in Hamid's *The Last White Man*. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(2), 2111–2117. <https://journals.internationalrasd.org/index.php/pihss>
- Anisa, Z. N., & Sanjaya, A. T. (2025). Dominasi ras kulit putih di Amerika dalam berita BBC: Kajian analisis wacana Van Leeuwen. *Lingua Rima: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 14(3). <https://jurnal.umt.ac.id/index.php/lgrm>
- Bonds, A., & Inwood, J. (2015). Beyond white privilege: Geographies of white supremacy and settler colonialism. *Progress in Human Geography*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515613166>
- Dancy, C. L., & Saucier, P. K. (2021). AI and Blackness: Towards moving beyond bias and representation. *IEEE Transactions on Technology and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TTS.2021.3125998>
- Darmawan, R. I., Indriyanto, K., & Mendröfa, M. P. (2025). Exploring ethnobotany as an expression of Balinese culture in Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, pray, love*. *Acta Scientiarum*, 47(1). <https://doi.org/10.4025/actascilangcult.v47i1.7.0096>
- Fatima, F., Faiz, D., & Nadeem, M. A. (2025). Echoes of Bakhtin: Navigating stylistic marvels in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*. *Kashf Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(4). <https://kjm.com.pk>
- Gyollai, D. (2022). The sociocognitive approach in critical discourse studies and the phenomenological sociology of knowledge: Intersections. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive*

- Sciences, 21, 539–558.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-020-09704-z>
- Hart, C., & Cap, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Contemporary critical discourse studies*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hart, C., & Lukeš, D. (Eds.). (2007). *Cognitive linguistics in critical discourse analysis: Application and theory*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Khokhar, M. I., Shaikh, S. N., & Siyal, F. K. (2026). Examining issues of racial perception and white supremacy in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* using a Critical Race Theory perspective. *Academia*, 5(2).
[https://doi.org/10.63056/academia.5.2\(a\).2026.1801](https://doi.org/10.63056/academia.5.2(a).2026.1801)
- Kholid, A. I., Ari, H. D. P., Putri, I. R. R., Cendekia, C. A., Padmarani, K., Utomo, A. P. Y., & Darmawan, R. I. (2024). Analisis tindak tutur ilokusi direktif dalam teks editorial pada "Surat Kabar Kompas" dalam kaitannya dengan pembelajaran bahasa Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, Bahasa, Sastra dan Budaya (MORFOLOGI)*, 2(2), 21–44.
<https://doi.org/10.61132/morfologi.v2i2.396>
- Mahrukh, & Liaqat, H. (2025). Becoming the other: The politics of language and identity in *The Last White Man*. *CJSSR*, 3(4).
<https://doi.org/10.63878/cjssr.v3i4.1482>
- Manzoor, S., & Singh, B. (2023). Interrogating the discourse of racism and identity crisis in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*.
<https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n5.16>
- Mastoi, M., Shaikh, I., & Mughal, M. (2024). Tracing the transformative issues of post-colonial man through Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man". *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 13(2).
<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.2.34>
- Murray, H. L. (2026). Resisting melancholic whiteness in Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man*. *Literature, Critique, and Empire Today*, 61(1), 112–127.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/30333962251414785>
- Nugroho, F. A., & Sa'adah, S. I. (2024). *Analyzing racial discrimination and coping strategies in Mohsin Hamid's The Last White Man*. UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya.
- ÖzerTaniyan, R. (2025). *The Last White Man* of Hamid. *Pamukkale University Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, 71, 317–324.
<https://doi.org/10.30794/pausbed.1732227>
- Perveen, A., Rashid, F., & Aqeel, A. (2025). Speculative fiction or conspicuous discursive space: Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* as poetics of disruption. *Social Sciences Spectrum*, 4(1), 234–243.
<https://doi.org/10.71085/ss.04.01.215>
- Rehan, M. (2025). (Post)Colonial desire for racial supremacy in Hamid's *The Last White Man*. *Advance Social Science Archive Journal*, 3(2), 1095–1104.
<https://assajournal.com>
- Shah, S. A., & Maan, M. F. (2025). Racism and power dynamics in 'The Last White Man': A deconstructive study. *Wah Academia Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(2), 781–792.
<https://doi.org/10.63954/WAJSS.4.2.37.2025>
- Tariq, T., Ullah, K., Laiba, & Rehman, A. (2025). An Orientalist reading: Exploring the "self" in *The Last White Man*. *SRA*, 3(1).
<https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i1.347>
- Tarumingkeng, R. C. (2025). *Critical discourse analysis: Pengertian, teori dan aplikasi*. RUDYCT e-PRESS.
- Tißberger, M. (2024). Critical Whiteness– eine Perspektive hegemonialer Selbstreflexion in der Supervision. *Organisationsberatung, Supervision, Coaching*, 31, 159–174.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11613-024-00880-4>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (Ed.). (2011). *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction (2nd ed.)*. SAGE Publications Ltd.