

The Mimicked Other in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract

Critics of postcolonial studies have argued that African American texts are not suitable texts of postcolonial literature. They contend that because of their long history of slavery which slowly transcends to racial disparity which currently holds sway in the United State of America, literary texts from this region are not fit for postcolonial analysis. However, the American Pan Africanist, W. E. B. Dubois, theorised that the identity politics of the post-slavery era in America has been largely influential on a great but many postcolonial theorists around the world. He went on to state that the end of slavery is to be celebrated, but an equal level of gravity is needed to attend to the permanence of the racialised world. Toni Morrison may have heeded Dubois' advice as she wrote most of her stories, depicting the evils of slavery as well as the after effects of slavery. The themes of racial disparities, subjugation of black women by white and black men, the oppressive categorisation of African American women, are issues mostly featured in her novels. With this knowledge as the foreground to this study, this paper examines Morrison's *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* via the postcolonial concept of mimicry. By the end of this analysis, the study discusses the characters in both texts as poor mimic entities. These characters could not have established definite identities because they see themselves in the "Other", hence the eventual fragmentation of their consciousness.

Keywords: Mimicry, Postcolonial, African American, Racialised World, & The Other.

The Introduction

Virtually all Postcolonial critics of their former enslavers and colonialist lords is often represented in Black literature. Frantz Fanon³ identifies racial discrimination of the black race due to their physical features as a determining factor for the cruel treatment meted on black people by white colonialists. Even after the abolition of slavery and the disbandment of violent attack people against black folks, subtle and stereotypical discrimination of the black race along the lines of skin colour, hair type, and cultural practices alien to white formations still hold sway directly bringing to the fore the need to decolonising the minds of white supremacist nations and governments.

As a result of Western nations evasive attitude towards enforcing the postcolonial theory or studies, African and Asian countries have given utmost attention to imperialist and colonial administration/thoughts instituted in these continents which has adversely affected their cultures, lives and identity. According to the trio of Parvin Ghasemi, Samira Sasani and FaterehNemati,⁴ the postcolonial theory is a complex construct arising from a history of oppression, subjugation and inhumanity. They quote Lazare S. Rukundwa and Andries G. van Aarde, in their study of the postcolonial theory here stated: “postcolonial theory is a product of what the West saw as antislavery activists and anti-colonialists.”⁵ Explaining this notion, Ghesemi at al, are agreed that postcolonial thoughts is mostly focused on “identity, sex, gender, race, and language of the colonized generation.”⁶ Bill Ashcroft in his article “Caliban’s Voice: Writing in the Third Space”⁷ looks at the space of colonialism in relation to cultural identity and he asserts that there is always a transformation of the ruled and the ruler who exist in a given space such that both the ruled (colonised) and the ruler (colonialist) eventually assume new identities due to their interactions.

This new identity for both the colonised and the coloniser has made postcolonial theorists to question the study of African American literature via the postcolonial theory because of the fact that African Americans were moved from their places of birth to a whole new space and enslaved for centuries. African Americans according to Francis Toni,⁸ still have ties to slavery and so slave thoughts, identities and cultures were not severed in the same manner as those of the colonies of the vast empires of the colonial period. Instead, slavery in America, continues to gradually ease away; at times violently rejected, yet often latently existing in the bureaucracies and in the everyday mundane realities of postcolonial America. Hence the effects of slavery are still present in the vastly acclaimed “free world”.

A postcolonial critique of American texts therefore demands an understanding of the present in light of the past. It demands a memory of slavery that brings with it a recognition of the

ways in which things are much the same despite America's abolition of slavery. In addition, it demands an agenda that insists on change which allows blacks to co relate with whites as equals.

The Pan Africanist, W.E.B. Du Bois in his work entitled *The Souls of Black Folks* captured the complex nature of being a black man in America. Du Bois in this book, strive to understand "the strange meaning of being black" and thus he conceptualises double consciousness thus:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only let him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a particular sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.⁹

This "twoness" or "double consciousness" is the merging of two positive identities of black and American without the harmful negation from the outside world.¹⁰ But instead of merging blackness and American, the black American is constantly trying to attain a self-consciousness by merging his double self "into a better and truer self."¹¹

Toni Morrison explains the Du Boisian concept in literary works of black men here:

"...African American male writers justifiably write books about their oppression...confronting their oppressor who is white male or white woman. And the person who defines you under those circumstances is a white mind-tells you whether you are worthy or what have you..."¹²Morrison went on to contrast Du Bois's double consciousness to her own approach which is "to take away the gaze of the white male. Once you take that out, the whole world opens up."¹³

From the perspective of Du Bois and other nationalist writers on double consciousness, it is thus cumbersome to analyse African American text with the postcolonial theory or postcolonial concepts such as mimicry. However, According to Francis Toni "The postcolonial memory of slavery is central to much of the postcolonial work being done in America and often considered the quintessential postcolony, as in many ways it has presented itself as the globalised model of decolonisation."¹⁴ Moreover, the harsh realities of the enslavement of African Americans in foreign lands, the hybridisation of their cultures, the relocation of space to accommodate their personhood and the struggle to have identities that are not based on the other gaze are also similarly experienced by colonised Africans. It is this similarity that this paper's discourse will attempt a further study of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* via the postcolonial concept of Mimicry.

Theoretical Framework

“Colonial Mimicry”

Generally, mimicry is a term in biological sciences and is used to interpret the relationship between certain species of animals or organisms. In evolutionary biology, mimicry is an evolved resemblance between an organism and another object, often an organism of another species. Again, Nature Research (2020) explains mimicry as the resemblance of one organism to another, usually as the result of evolution in response to selective advantage.¹⁵

However, in literary studies mimicry assumes the modality based on the rulers and the ruled in a constant relationship within an authorized space. The Oxford Reference therefore describes mimicry as a term used in postcolonial studies to describe the paradoxical (or doubly articulated) state of affairs in colonial countries such that the colonial powers resident in colonized states desire the total subjugation of the indigenous population of the occupied country.¹⁶ While Richey Wyver¹⁷ explains “mimicry” as an effective tool of colonial discipline because the mimic is continually in a split state of not being like the colonised and not having an identity as a colonised self, Pedro Rodriguez defines mimicry as “part of the ambivalence that defines the relation between coloniser and colonised.”¹⁸

Homi Bhabha opines that mimicry can be traced to the works of Rudyard Kipling, Edward Morgan Forster, George Orwell and V. S. Naipaul and can be explained as a “flawed colonial mimesis in which to be anglicized is emphatically not to be English.”¹⁹ In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha went on to posit that colonialism is not just an oppressive ideal but one that draws power and authority from fascism. To Bhabha, low mimetic literary effects are as a result of high ideals of colonial imagination which provokes the emerging of mimicry as an effective and elusive strategy of colonial power and knowledge.²⁰ Furthermore, Bhabha opines that colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed and recognisable other of a subject of difference who is not quite the same as the original. Thus in his exact words, Bhabha states that “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference”²¹.

Bhabha argued that mimicry “emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the other as it visualises power.”²² In “Colonial Mimicry” Bhabha introduces mimicry as an anxiety while the colonised uses it as a resistance strategy. Colonial mimicry or “sly civility” as he calls it later, is defined as “the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite”²³.

In their article entitled “A Study of Third Space, Hybridity, and Colonial Mimicry in Athol Fugard’s *My Children! My Africa!*” Parvin Ghasemi et al, referred to Bhabha’s “Colonial Mimicry” acknowledging the fact that Bhabha uses Fanon’s psychoanalytical postulations in *Black Skin, White Mask* to reveal the doubling of identity in which a black man in a colonized setting is always questioning his identity.²⁴ Citing Bhabha profusely, they declare that:

Because of the power that the colonizer feels he has as the superior agent, he conveys this feeling to the colonized and consequently makes the colonized internalize the inferiority and makes him mimic him. At the same time, the thought of having a double makes him anxious. So, the colonizer tries to make the other the same, but with a slight difference. This process "fixed the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" (123). By "partial" Bhabha means "incomplete" and "virtual". This desire "articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority" (126).²⁵

Ghasemi et al, further postulate that mimicry is an anxiety which the colonised uses as a resistance strategy- a means that produces continued "slippage" and a "representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the other as it visualises power."²⁶ It is therefore not far-fetched that mimicry is an attempt to make the colonised same as the coloniser but not quite such that the colonised continually sees himself as inferior to the "superior" white coloniser.

Samira Sasani states that "[s]ince becoming quite the same means that the coloniser's authentic identity is paradoxically imitable, so the coloniser is troubled by the colonised or the coloniser's double."²⁷ David Huddart believes that Bhabha emphasised "the agency of the colonized" and "the anxiety of the coloniser"; Huddart explained mimicry as "an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas. This exaggeration means that mimicry is repetition with difference, and so it is not evidence of the colonised's servitude."²⁸ According to the previously established assumptions, the coloniser's power is not imitable. Therefore, colonial mimicry denotes a desire and an anxiety, simultaneously.

According to Torrey Seland, mimicry emerges as a difference, a representation of a process of disavowal. He went on to posit that even though the colonised is encouraged to mimic the coloniser, the action of "mimicking" the coloniser is actually a strategy that colonised subjects can use to survive or "conquer the culture of the coloniser by enlarging on common aspects."²⁹ Seland explained the Greco-Roman General, Philo, as an "acculturated" person who was not assimilated into the culture of the Romans. Philo is thus studied by Seland to be a "blurred and threatening copy" of Roman colonisers of Greeks.³⁰ This situation of being a threatening copy results to the phenomenon of hybridity whereby mimicked persons like Philo, imbibe a new transcultural lifestyle that is developed from the interaction between the colonizer and the colonised.

Ashcroft et al, sees the inability of colonial authority to destabilise itself due to the impossibility of a perfect replication of colonial hegemonies as a crack and a mockery as stated thus:

By adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. Mimicry therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behavior of the colonized.³¹

Again, Sanjiv Kumar agrees with Bill Ashcroft's contention of a destabilising effect of postcolonial mimicry and its ability to locate "an area of considerable political and cultural uncertainty in the structure of imperial dominance."³² Kumar notes that Ashcroft's conception of mimicry contradicts Bhabha's opinion of culture being pure and dynamic and always absorbing and producing. Furthermore, Kumar reads Ashcroft as one who condemns cultural purity noting that both the coloniser and colonised are changed by the cultural interactions between them.³³

Moreover, Dimple Godiwala contends that the case of Richard Burton, an English man who passed himself off as a native in India and other British colonies, is one of the best examples of cross-cultural impersonation through mimicry. According to Godiwala, Burton's act of mimicry is a deliberate subversive attempt to regularly warn colonial powers against insurgency, rebellion and underground anti-colonial mobilization and this cannot be equated to Bhabha's notion of mimicry by an Indian. Godiwala thus declared that Burton's "fluency in several languages and easy ability to consort with natives led him to adopt indigenous dress"³⁴ which he used to perfect his espionage activities against the colonised. Godiwala notes that while the Indian mimicking English values and attitudes is subversive, Burton's mimicry is oppressive and dangerous to the Indian empire because of his role as a spy endowed with the power to uproot the Indian empire.³⁵

Parama Roy agrees with Godiwala on mimicry being an espionage tool of the coloniser. Equally citing the Burton's example, he notes that Burton is a "reverse mimicry" empowered as an authority over native subjects thus having the power to "penetrate[d] and participate[d] in every forbidden mystery."³⁶ Mimicry in this instance is used as camouflage which enables the coloniser to dissipate into the background or "go native" while still being the privileged oppressive other. Hence, the potential to reverse the gaze is a situation which comes from mimicking the colonized in order to overcome the power of the coloniser, this makes colonial identities on both sides to be "unstable, agonized and in constant flux."³⁷

Bhabha quotes from Ralph Singh's apostasy in Naipaul's *The Mimic Man* noting that mimic men pretend to be real, copying and learning from their colonisers in order to prepare themselves for a life in the new world, especially living like their colonisers. Hence, the wish to be authentic copies of the coloniser [white man] through mimicry (by writing and repetition) can be said to be the final irony of partial representation. Bhabha explains this situation further:

...the black man stops being an actional person for only the white man can represent his self-esteem. Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask: it is not what Césaire describe as 'colonisationthingnification' behind which there stands the essence of the *presence Africane*. The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object. (88).³⁸

The question of the representation of difference is therefore always also a problem of authority. The desire of colonial mimicry therefore is an interdictory desire, that is a strategic difference that Bhabha calls “metonymy difference”. Metonymy of difference here means “the identity between stereotypes which through repetition, also become different; the discriminatory identities constructed across traditional cultural norms and classifications, the Simian Black, the Lying Asiatic”³⁹.

The Relation Between African American Studies and Postcolonial Studies

While African American studies/ literature and history can be said to be very different from postcolonial studies of indigenous African literature, both share a goal of destabilizing racial hierarchies. Issues relating to power interactions between the coloniser and the colonized are similar to issues bordering slavery and the relationship between masters and slaves.

Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmid explaining Said’s Orientalism opine writers all over the world have been able to unmask imperialist formations that aids the recognition of marginality across borders, they then contend that:

...the domain of postcolonial studies includes a consideration of diasporic populations from the former colonies and the related issues of mimicry, complicity and hybridity that this global phenomenon has generated. The work of many U.S. studies scholars—such as Henry Louis Gates, Bell Hooks, Ketu Katrak, AbdulJanMohamed, Barbara Christian, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Sara Suleri, Gauri Viswanathan, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Satya Mohanty, David Lloyd, Robert Elliot Fox, Carol Boyce Davies, Anthony Appiah, Lisa Lowe, Hazel Carby, Jose David Saldívar, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan—who have in recent decades focused their scholarship on race, immigration, ethnicity, or challenges to bourgeois white feminism, also manifests a postcolonial awareness: an alertness to issues of otherness and creolization in global and transnational contexts—pointing to a confluence of ideas and paradigms between postcolonial studies and ethnic U.S. studies that is at the heart of this volume.⁴⁰

These feelings of alienation, and displacement that comes with mimicking the colonizer according to Singh and Schmidt is what has given birth to issues like nationality, partitioning, and economic regeneration all themes that are replicated in post-slavery African American literature.

Singh and Schmidt contend that nativism is central to African American literature and it is a concept that links postcolonial studies to black American literature⁴¹. Nativism is built in different forms such as the Afrocentric tendencies to purity and racial solidarity, hence Appiah in his essay titled “In My Father’s House” attest that with the adoption of the language of the empire, cultures and identities, all subjects and colonies of imperialism “are all contaminated by

each other.”⁴² Concepts such as hybridity, mimicry and other postcolonial terms are the result of this “contamination”.

Finally, the black feminist Bell Hooks states that: “...black experience has been and continues to be one internal colonialism,⁴³ this statement is reflected in the daily demands of equal rights by African Americans who are still being oppressed and subjugated by their former slave masters. Since Afro Americans have been “contaminated” they constantly subsume their identities in the “other gaze” hence postcolonial concepts such as mimicry, hybridity, nativism, neocolonialism, racism etc. can be applied as an analytical tool for a better understanding of African American struggles with oppression and subjectivity.

Mimicry, the Colonised and Mimic Identities in *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*

In his essay, “Of Mimicry and Man”, HomiBhabha (1994) admonishes that the colonial discourse prizes itself for transforming the colonised into “a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (86).⁴⁴ In other words, the coloniser actually masquerades his concepts as the perfect attributes to be adopted by the colonised. Feminist critics such as Kimberly Devlin (1994)⁴⁵ say that mimicry comprises the vulnerability of internalising the mask of the dominant culture. In Morrison’s *Sula*, Helene Wright is a vulnerable “other” who internalises the mask of being a copy by adopting the ways of her former enslaver. Her subconscious registers the fact that she is “somehow flawed” yet she is organised, reserved, never reveals her emotions in public and even forces her daughter Nel to always put a peg on her nose in an attempt to help her daughter achieve a straight nose which is a feature of the white man. Helene’s misery in trying to be like the oppressors comes out from her repressed fear of being subjugated by overwhelming imperialist power which she grew to both avow and despise. This we see when she confronts the white conductor:

The conductor let his eyes travel over the pale yellow woman and then stuck his little finger into his ear, jiggling it free of wax. “What you think you doin’, gal?” Helene looked up at him. All the old vulnerabilities, all the old fears of being somehow flawed gathered in her stomach and made her hands tremble. She had heard only that one word; it dangled above her wide-brimmed hat, which had slipped, in her exertion, from its carefully leveled placement and was now tilted in a bit of a jaunt over her eye. Thinking he wanted her tickets, she quickly dropped both the cowhide suitcase and the straw one in order to search for them in her purse. An eagerness to please and an apology for living met in her voice.⁴⁶

From the excerpt, it is observed that Helene who is addressed as a “gal” is a “contaminated other”, a woman who is not a perfect copy and so must be reprimanded like a child caught doing a wrong act. In the white conductor’s authorised molestation of the “powerless copy” is a failed mimicked other and a mockery to both the white race and the black race.

Again, the conception of a failed mimic or a mockery, that is, the one who assumes the mask of the dominant culture without absorbing its values is the character of Morrison’s Helene Wright in *Sula*. Despite her hatred of coming from a racially mixed lineage, Helene carries on as a woman of character with no flaws by being an upright middle class woman that also exudes the qualities of white, married women as can be observed from the following: “It was Helene who

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never turned her head in church when latecomers arrived; Helene who established the practice of seasonal altar flowers; Helene who introduced the giving of banquets of welcome to returning Negro veterans.” (30).⁴⁷ To hide her perceived flaws of being the daughter of a prostitute and an unknown white imperialist father, Helene acts so perfectly in public but her true self is hidden in her attempt to be not too white and not too black which makes her a “mimicadottee in constant slippage between her exalted, privileged position of being almost white and her problematic position as an almost non-white person.”⁴⁸

Likewise, in *The Bluest Eye*, Geraldine is a mimic woman who warns her son not to play with “niggers”. Having inherited her light skin colour from her mixed raced parents, Geraldine behaves more like whites. She prizes herself for being different but acknowledges that she is not quite white as can be noted here:

She had explained to him[her son] the difference between colored people and niggers. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud. He belonged to the former group: he wore white shirts and blue trousers; his hair was cut close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool, the part was etched into his hair by the barber. In winter his mother put Jergens Lotion on her face to keep the skin from becoming ashen...The line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant. (87).⁴⁹

Geraldine’s obsession to be more white than black further drives her to have a cat which she devoted her attention to more than her son. Geraldine did everything a white woman did. She “straighten [t]he[i]r hair with Dixie Peach, and part it on the side...and learn how to do the white man’s work with refinement.” (82-83).⁵⁰ Geraldine in becoming more like the mimic man(woman) exposes her vulnerability and becomes a bad copy of the white man, whom she desperately copies to perfection yet she is still not accepted by her racist imperialist other as she lives away from the white man and also isolates herself from blacks hence she is a mask representation of her former enslavers. In other words, Geraldine is a “problemised transnational difference.”⁵¹

In mimicking the white culture of being independent, Sula camouflages her loneliness by recklessly having sexual relationships with all the men in Bottom community. She tries to locate a soulmate in her search for an identity only to find that she is embroiled deep in identity crisis:

She went to bed with men as frequently as she could. It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow. She had not always been aware that it was sadness that she yearned for. Lovemaking seemed to her, at first, the creation of a special kind of joy...During the lovemaking she found and needed to find the cutting edge. (169).⁵²

The absence of a unique identity that does not cringe under white domination, is superimposed on Sula as a grave difference which is visible in her need to away from people. With her desire to be self-actualised by having “a mind of her own”, staying single and exploring sexual aesthetics with all kinds of men, Sula has encapsulated the stereotypical view of white men against black women as being uncontrolled commodities readily available to anyone white or black, who could

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pay the price.⁵³ At the same time however, Sula cannot be identified with her black sisters because she does not conform to the traditional role of being a good black woman that stays married to one man despite all the odds. According to Bell Hooks, Sula represents “fallen womanhood”, hence she is enmeshed between adopting the stereotypical conception of being rapped by conventional notions of sexuality and desirability⁵⁴ by the dominant racist other and the imposing discriminatory gender roles of her black community which results to Sula trying to overcome her struggles with identity crisis.

Pecola sees or visualises power in the white man’s skin colour, his eye colour and even his straight long hair and decides that she must have these qualities for her to be seen and loved. Her being very dark and black traumatizes her to the extent that she prefers loneliness to fraternizing with friends. Hence in her disappointment at being born black and ugly, Pecola always walks alone, with her head held down: “She kept her head down as she walked. He had seen her many times before, standing alone, always alone, at recess. Nobody ever played with her. Probably, he thought because she was ugly.” (88).⁵⁵ Pal Ahluwaila opines that children who grow up in cultures and societies that are problematized by racial difference get depressed in their efforts to mimic the coloniser or the racist imperialist.⁵⁶ This is the case with Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola’s loneliness and lack of confidence in herself stems from the fact that she is a poor representation of her racist oppressors.

In her struggle to be herself in a racially biased community, Pecola confronts racism which challenges her conception of self as she tries hard to be a mimic copy of Shirley Temple by taking more time to drink milk: “We knew she [Pecola] was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley’s face.”⁵⁷ Bhabha’s argument that “Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask” is reflected in Pecola’s obsessive desire to be like Shirley Temple, have white skin, orange hair and blue eyes. This failed attempt to copy her oppressors becomes a “mockery” in which Pecola is fixated at attaining “double articulation” whereby her desire for blue eyes envelopes her mentality up to the point of her eventual madness.

Furthermore, the presence of mimicry in Morrison’s texts brings to the fore the intimidating awareness of binary opposition of black and white. Both Sula and Pecola are more aware of the polarised social construct as they both adopt the mask of whiteness. While Sula maintains a good body structure at her age of twenty-nine, her counterparts who do not adopt the white man’s tradition of finding an identity for themselves are ugly in their disfigured body all due to years of bearing children, being worn out by their husbands and work of keeping their homes as narrated thus: “She could not say to those old acquaintances, Hey, girl, you looking good, when she saw how the years had dusted their bronze with ash...The narrower their lives, the wider their hips.”⁵⁸

Pecola on the other hand, is filled with the trauma of not being wanted unlike “Maureen Peal. A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair...[who] never searched had to search for anybody to eat with in the cafeteria-they flocked to the table of her choice.”⁵⁹ “A high-yellow dream child...” means a mulatto, that is a racially mixed child who cannot have sameness with either of her black and white parents. The Binary opposition of blacks and whites ensures the enslavement

of the coloured blacks to the standard of beauty of the dominant white man. According to Amritjit and Schmidt, “the context of U.S. nationality, Boehmer’s “double vision of the colonized” and DuBois’ concept of “double consciousness” themselves become masked, or, more appropriately, expand themselves to accommodate the vast amalgam that they attempt to empower.”⁶⁰Therefore, in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, the desire of black women to be slim, pretty and have white (or light skins and coloured eyes) in order to be powerful is the process of translation in which these women attempt to achieve control and dominance.

Robert Young argues that “[t]ranslation becomes part of the process of domination, of achieving control, a violence carried out on the language, culture, and people being translated.”⁶¹It could be argued that the women in *The Bluest Eye* who like Maureen Peal seems to have “sameness” with the imperialist, can literally make men/boys fall over them because of their dominance/power acculturated from being a “contaminated” other. The categorisation of a mulatto as “not too white” or “not too black” internalises more the inferiority which blacks are forced to feel at the hand of their racial other, thus they (the racially mixed persons) are treated more like demi gods rather than the equals of ethnic blacks. Maureen, although a mulatto, is treated more like a white girl because she is rich and has almost all the qualities of a white woman and so she excites the whole school by drawing preferential treatment to herself as stated in the following:

She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn’t trip her in halls; white boys didn’t stone her, white girls didn’t suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls’ toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids. (62).⁶²

Just as Maureen Peal’s dazzling appearance could stop black boys from molesting three black girls, so also Sula’s thin and fine structure could draw more attention and attraction from black and white men. Sula and Maureen bears more resemblance to a white woman (the imperialist other) because they adopt the coloniser’s standard of beauty and end up as “imitable/double” copies.

The stereotypical conception of white being beautiful further expands the gulf between blacks and whites in both *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*. For instance, all the women of Bottom are intimidated by Sula’s fine structure hence they discuss her seemingly good structure in an envious and discriminatory way: “...Sula did not look her age. She was near thirty and, unlike them, had lost no teeth, suffered no bruises, develop no ring of fat at the waist or pocket at the

back of her neck.” (159).⁶³ And Pauline (Pecola’s mother in *The Bluest Eye*) just like her daughter revered the white woman’s beauty and so she goes to “fix[ed] her hair up like I’d seen hers on a magazine...There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow.” (123).⁶⁴

The myth of whiteness ensures that the Bottom community as described in *Sula*, is wary of any union of white and black people. The social segregation of the two races is observed both by the whites and the blacks, with the black people of Bottom taking racism a step further. They make sure that social communication with the Caucasian race is avoided as much as possible and so they guard their traditions as much as they could. Children who put their old ones in old people

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homes are conceived to be wicked and callous. Sula who has adopted this act puts Eva away in an old people home where there are lots of old white people. This act is considered “mean or wicked” by Nel and we get to also understand that White people do not “fret” when they put their old ones away (226).⁶⁵ The hegemony of this cultural ideology of putting away old loved ones is alien to the blacks and further escalates the binary construct between whites and blacks.

Equally too, the culture of a father not being there for their children is brought to the fore in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. Cholly who was raised without his father transferred his anger to his children by not caring for them. His hatred all those years moved him to rape his own daughter: “The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear...Again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her.” (163).⁶⁶ The unfulfilled adoption of love for family members makes Cholly a fixed man who is a mimic of his coloniser but not quite, because he wrongly conceived the act of love as that which is guilty, forceful and a show of pittance. Even when he is conscious that sleeping

with his daughter is abominable, Cholly defiled his eleven-year-old daughter to express his exasperation at having her love him as her father despite his refusal to take good care of her. Conscious of his irresponsibility towards his household, Cholly is haunted by Pecola’s “unburdeness”(161).⁶⁷ And the “confused mixture of the memories of Pauline and [the] doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him” (162)⁶⁸ towards actualising his doubleness-an imperfect white man who loves violence against blacks and at the same time hates the presence of blacks.

Morrison narrates how both parents play important roles in shaping the identity of their children in *Sula*. Nel had a father that is always at sea. Being a sailor, Wiley Wright was never at home and his wife, Helene had to bear his long absence. (29).⁶⁹ Nel’s constant loneliness is linked to having a mother who “has a colonial identity that is unstable, agonised and in constant flux”⁷⁰ which does not bring about a unified self. Hence Helene accentuates the coloniser’s culture, traditions and thoughts by enforcing the coloniser’s life of orderliness and standard of beauty. Nel is overwhelmed by her mother’s “incredible orderliness, neatness and instructions on always pulling her nose” (75)⁷¹ and this drove her to befriend Sula even though her mother had warned her against having Sula as a friend. Nel and Sula both had “incomprehensible fathers” (76)⁷² which further fragmented their identities. Nel grows up to be more white than black because of her mother’s adoption of the coloniser’s ideologies such as staying quiet, given flower banquets to strangers in church, instilling docility and teaching her daughter to be sexually unavailable as a means of curbing promiscuity that is most prone to be exhibited by the colonised.

Also, Bhabha’s definition of the mimic as a figure that “thrives to be culturally ‘seen...’” (85)⁷³ is not far-fetched in *Sula* as well as in *The Bluest Eye*. Sula adopts the mask of the dominant culture in her quest to be culturally recognised and her mimicry is self-destructive rather than productive. In wanting to live a free life like the colonisers (white men), Sula sleeps with the husbands of most women in Bottom community and discards them like trash after she is done with them but she ends up isolated up till her death. The women who are firmly grounded in black cultural traditions and beliefs, conjure up activities that can eliminate Sula’s “witchcraft” practices on their men. For to them, no normal woman would take up neighbourly husbands, used them and then dump them like trash. Sula’s sexual appetite confuses them and they all put

efforts together to isolate her: “So they laid broomsticks across their doors at night and sprinkled salt on porch steps...As always the black people looked at evil stony-eyed and let it run.” (156-7).⁷⁴

Likewise, Pecola also gets cast out of the life of her family, friends and society for being a “paradoxical imitable” copy of the coloniser. Having suffered rejection from her family, friends and society, Pecola is traumatised and lives a sad life, isolating herself from everyone. Pecola’s fragmented identity cracks even further when she is raped by her own father who impregnates her in the process. Her mother does not believe her when she finally tells her what happened and she taunts Pecola for secretly having a sexual relationship with her father. Engulf with the need to be accepted in her community, as a mimic figure, Pecola “thrives to be culturally seen” which elicits a visit to Soaphead Church, a spiritualist from whom she demands blue eyes: “I can’t go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me...My eyes. ‘What about your eyes?’ I want them blue.” (174).⁷⁵

Ahluwalia points out the similarity of transnational or racial adoption and mimicry and expressively states that

...[T]ransracial adoptees grow up in cultures and societies that problematize their very difference... these children grow up thinking and trying to be the same as everyone else, only to be confronted by racism which challenges their conception of self. As ‘mimic children’, these adoptees are the same but not quite.⁷⁶

Ahluwalia’s disposition is exactly the situation in which Pecola and Sula find themselves. Both Pecola and Sula are ignored and finally rejected by their communities, one because of her promiscuity and the other because of her ugliness and eventual pregnancy by her irresponsible father. They become problems to their societies because of their desire to be different but the challenges they encounter as they try to establish self, further escalates their identity crisis.

Invariably, Sula and Pecola attempt to be free of the coloniser’s identity which they both willingly adopt but end up being “fake” copies of the real deal-the powerful white coloniser. The failed attempt of “the impossibility of replicating the coloniser perfectly”,⁷⁷ transforms both girls’ trauma to disdain such that they both wanted to be left alone and die lonely deaths. In her loneliness and illness, Sula willed her death, in fact she is even happy to die knowing that her mimicry is not accepted in the community. Yet Sula hopes that after her demise, women who wear the mask of the oppressor would in the near future not suffer identity crisis like she did as stated thus:

Oh they will love me all right. It will take time, but they’ll love me...After all the old women have lain with the teen-agers; when all the young girls have slept with their old uncles; after all the black men fuck all the white ones; when the white women kiss all the black ones; when the guards have raped all the jailbirds and after all the whores make love to their grannies...⁷⁸

It is ironic to note that Sula is discriminated against, condemned and finally isolated up to her death in a community where they claim to be victims of racist ideologies of the white man. The so called victims of racist subjugation are the same people who could not tolerate a person that

has worn the mask of the oppressor. Having rebelled against the customs of her people, Sula is left to die a lonely death and also not given a befitting burial as a punishment to deter others from trying to be a mimicked copy of her former white enslavers. In their rejection of Sula's individuality, they refuse to bury her, hence, this refusal to bury one of their own is a show of imperfect emulation of the culture of subjugating the oppressed or the colonised.

Interestingly too, Pecola is also abandoned at the peak of her need for love, kindness and human company. She is blamed for allowing her father to rape her; her mother who was supposed to believe and shield her from ridicule and abuse, utterly rejected her and the society forced Pecola to the streets because according to their standard of beauty, she is too ugly to be liked. Driven out by her mother because of her pregnancy and avoided by the society, Pecola had the baby too soon and it died. The tragedy of losing everything she loved culminated to a total derangement of her mentality:

She [Pecola], however stepped over into madness, a madness which protected her from us simply because it bored us in the end...And Cholly loved her. I'm sure he did. He at any rate was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelope her, give her something of himself to her. But his touch was fatal, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death. (206).⁷⁹

Claudia who is the narrator of this story, tells us of how Pecola's desperate need to mimic the coloniser eventually brought about her tragic end. Ashcroft et al, say "by adopting the coloniser's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the coloniser that can be quite threatening." (155).⁸⁰ This is what happens to Pecola. Pecola is psychologically fragmented as a result of transforming into a "blurred copy" of herself; in her mind, she has blue eyes that enables her a place in her former colonisers' world but physically she is a masked representation of the colonizer -one that is neither here nor there (a bad threatening copy).

In conclusion, the narratives of *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* can be said to be an attempt to warn readers against the risks of imbibing the norms of an alien ideology, culture or traditions. Instead of mimicking the models of a society that encourages asserting one's identity, the characters in the novels embraced the culture of the oppressor and instead are caught in the web of identity crisis. Sula's quest to live a solitary life devoid of all responsibilities makes her a psychological slave to the oppressive white ideologies. Pecola's threatening need to have blue eyes results to her seeing herself in the "other gaze." Her subconscious is unstable and soon her psychological frame is disoriented which culminates into a total breakdown of her mentality. And Sula's adoption of the coloniser's self-actualisation mentality alienates her from her black community where communal living is the order of the day. She ends up a masked personality without the satisfaction of being a proper copy of the coloniser. Both protagonists never achieve individuation and maturity, instead they are "contaminated copies" still not like American enough and also not African enough.

Both Sula and Pecola's communities also imbibe mimicked ideologies, like discouraging the union of a white man and woman which they conceive to be rape and a taboo to the black race; they oppress and humiliate members of their community who go contrary to their rules; they are hostile to change of any kind that may be connected to white ideologies and so, they humiliate anyone that seems to fall short of the standard of beauty which they copied from their colonisers. These empirical disjoints that exist in both Sula and Pecola's communities, escalates the domination of structures put up by the colonised. Morrison, tactically brings to the fore, the disconnection of African American legacies/histories when they are bound by subjugating transnational forms of identity. In sum, in challenging racial biases, African Americans must be ready to confront racial biases without succumbing to oppressive ideals of the white majority. Identities built on disunity, mistrusts, and condemnation can lead to identity crisis which are the result of mimicking the dominant other as can be read in Morrison's *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*.

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