

SHADOWS, MASKS AND POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITIES IN KENJO JUMBAM'S *THE WHITEMAN OF GOD* AND TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS*

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Abstract

The intersection between the concepts of shadows and masks often exemplify the complexities of postcolonial identities which lack a firm sense of self because characters can no longer develop and maintain a strong, fixed and integrated sense of personal identity. The shadow in this paper represents what is hidden, suppressed, marginalised or cast aside by the colonial narrative. It also symbolises the lost part of a colonised's identity as characters move toward Westernization, their traditional self becomes a shadow which is always present but difficult to manifest. With the position of the shadow, which is clearly identified as the problem, the objective of this paper is to use the notion of masks in Kenjo Jumbam's *The White Man of God* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, to disguise and accept other forms of identity that was placed on the postcolonial subject. The mask often represents mimicry which is the effort of the colonised to adopt the language, manners, and values of the coloniser to escape the backwardness associated with their own culture. The paper grounds on the hypothesis that, in the situation of postcolonial identity crisis, the different personalities that individuals wear behind the mask serve as an antidote to shadowed identities when individuals are caught between their indigenous heritage and the imposed culture of the coloniser. Analysis from this paper draws interpretations from the postcolonial theory, particularly, from the works of Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha.

Keywords: colonised, coloniser, hybridity, masks, postcolonial identities, shadows

Introduction

The terms “colonised” and “coloniser” most often depict binaries. They virtually portray the most possible contrast from the colonial era which became stereotypes throughout the study of postcolonial identities. In Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, he defines the colonial situation as represented in terms of a Manichean division along the binary axes of coloniser/colonised, white/black, good/evil, civil/savage, Self /Other, oppressor/oppressed, refined/uncultured and so on. The coloniser did not view all these as difference but as opposites of all that is human and evil and paints the native as a sort of “quintessence of evil” (32). The notion of binarism is very evident in the works under study. Colonialism negates the Other and privileges the Self. The Other becomes antagonistic of the Self and hence, there is long-lasting tension as

individuals negotiate an identity in the postcolonial world.

Identity crisis is a very evident situation in the postcolonial world. When characters are exposed to a new culture, they might lack the ability to negotiate an identity. But it is important and relevant to go down memory lane to be able to understand the concept of colonialism and the building of postcolonial identity. Reflective of the diverse cultural context and pre-history, the colonised enjoyed a strong and complex oral tradition that was demonstrated in many folktales and legends. These intriguing tales represent the lives of the people which was very different from the culture of the coloniser. The colonised believed in deities and sacrifices before the advent of colonial rule. Then the colonisers came. The presence or appearance of a white man in the midst of a black people marks a new beginning. This is

similar to what Elleke Boehmer says; “where the British established a cross, a city or a colony, they proclaimed the start of a new history. Other histories by definition were declared of lesser significance or in certain situations non-existent” (24).

In postcolonial literature, shadows and masks serve as potent metaphors for the fractured identity of the colonised subject. There are many different definitions of the shadow by prominent scholars. For instance, following a Jungian model, the shadow refers to the archetypal gateway of the unconscious that can be translated to the constellation of traits that one hides from themselves because these traits threaten their source of belonging. Looking at the through postcolonial lenses, we can say that the shadow refers to communities that have been marginalised by the colonising force. The mask in this paper is similar to the Jungian persona which can be worn and changed at different social settings to represent different notions of identity. The objective therefore of the paper is to use the mask as an object of mimicry concealing the marginalising colonised identity by mimicking the coloniser to attempt a situation of hybridity in the process.

The colonial subject lived a complex, split existence, torn between loyalty to their traditional cultures and desire to participate in a new, modern culture of their colonial rulers. This situation always leads colonial subjects to accept their own inferiority and live in the peripheries and shadows by cooperating in their own subjugation. In the course of counter discursive strategies, the colonised individual developed alternative ways of identity formation by wearing masks of identity to be able to straddle between the two cultural spaces. This paper is divided into two parts, the first part analyses shadows and the discourse of colonialism while part two looks at the various masks.

Shadows and the Discourse of Colonialism

In postcolonial literature, the shadow is a recurring motif that operates on both a psychological and a political level. It represents the lingering, often haunting presence of the colonial past that continues to darken the present, even after official independence. In this paper, we

will look at the Other as a shadow subjected under the rule of an imposing culture. Colonial discourse often portrays the indigenous population as the shadow of European civilization—dark, irrational, and secondary. Postcolonial writers flip this, using shadows to represent the enduring presence of history and ancestors that cannot be erased by Western light.

In the novels under study, we see the colonised as a shadow in the peripheries and almost silenced like the Spivakian Subaltern. *The White Man of God* is set in the colonial era. Nkar village exemplifies the intrusion of Westernisation or white culture into African or a black traditional society which comes with inevitable changes. In the novel Big Father sees the villagers of Nkar as shadows and almost non-existent as compared to the white Self. They are inconsequential and worthless people in all aspects of life. Indeed, at the very worst, he dismisses them as mad people because he does not think that the African should be taken seriously. Big Father symbolises the colonial views held by the whites. For them, the African is incapable of thinking and is stupid. The attitude towards Africans is responsible for the marginalisation they suffer in all spheres from the hands of the coloniser.

Big Father sees the whole tribe as a bunch of mad people. This reflects the colonial image constructed in the white imagination He sees the Nso people as blind ignorant pagans. He believes like Crusoe that his own Western God is the only true God and anything out of that is pure savage and primitive. Fadda who is the first white man of God to come to Nkar village justifies this by saying, “people of Nkar, I came to bring Christ to you” (60). The white man intends to reform the black and make him civilised.

Big Father shuns African religious practices and labels them primitive. This was very typical in colonial discourse. He does not understand the language of the drums and sees it as a defiance of the better religion he has come to preach. Tansa says that “we had been made to understand that drums were instruments meant for diabolic use or at best for dancing though dances themselves were heathen” (99). Colonialism functioned not just as a discourse or ideology but

also under the assumption that the colonised had an inferior culture and white represented the only course of progress and civilisation.

Citing from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* which is a specimen text for colonial discourse, the main character Crusoe represents the Western European Self which is equated to futurity, vision, civilisation, rationality, language and light. On the other hand, polarised black is associated with pre-history, savagery, cannibalism, silence and darkness. Crusoe assumes the position of king and Friday has to kneel down before talking to him. This is very similar to Big Father in *The White Man of God* who is a reflection of Crusoe, "Pa Matiu walked up to him and bowed before him and spoke to him reverently in the white man's language. The white man of God spoke through his nose and Pa Matiu told everybody to kneel down" (47). Despite the reverence given to him by the blacks, Big Father still curses all the time.

The black image in the white mind is a horrible picture. The colonised were seen as black not only as racially defined but black itself is a metaphor for darkness and all the evils that come with it. Big Father paints the black people of Nkar as dirty and stinking:

You have all refused to make full use of the water God has freely given you. Look at your clothes! Dirty and stinking. Some of them will go to threads before ever being washed for even one time. Yet you have free water. Look at yourselves! Dirty beyond explanation. (84)

Indigenous culture was destroyed not only by cultural values such as language and religion but their style of dressing was also altered. Big Father sees their clothes as dirty because black dressing style differed from white style.

Big Father's insults are not only limited to culture and dressing but he thinks their physical appearance is even worse, "look at yourselves. Dirty beyond explanation. Your hair, your teeth, your whole body. Dirty! Horribly Dirty!" (84) He plays on their psychology and interprets the Bible to suit his point of view. His sermon focuses on the free water God has given to them and if the blacks

do not use that free water to wash their clothes, they will incur the wrath of God. Black epitomises not only darkness but primitivity and savagery. Big Father emphasises on the word black to denigrate the colonies even more. He sees the homes of the Nkar people as caves with, "not even one window in the house' all their homes he believes were just," "black walls, black ceiling, black bed and everything blackened by soot" (85).

Big Father is a total imperialist and sees nothing good in this lazy, backward, ignorant and stupid people of Nkar. Tansa describes him as an unlikeable character who always grunts and growls like an angry dog. Yet he sees himself as a model of hard work even though he exploits their services to build a new church. He makes the blacks worked until their backs ached and their hands get blisters. Big Father is not satisfied with their hard work so he places his eyeglasses on a shrub as an eye to watch the people. Afraid of being watched, they toil without break until the sun sets. This is similar to Crusoe when he assigns Friday and his father to do the dirty and difficult tasks while the Spaniard only watches.

From the depiction of colonial discourse, about Big Father's treatment of the black people, the villagers are expected to suppress their indigenous identity. However, it does not erase the Nso identity but it forces it into a shadowed self into darkness that haunts their conscious performed Christian life. Before Tansa even starts formal education in school, he attends doctrine classes every morning in church where he learns that the black man had been responsible for the death of Jesus. So, God sent His cousin the white man of God to come and redeem them. This justifies the presence of missionaries who came not to "civilise" but to redeem. Tansa confirms that "we had been taught everything about him" (30). They are forced to see a striking resemblance between the white man of God and his cousin Jesus. The white man succeeds to convince the black man of his inferiority and pushes him further into the peripheries and deep into the shadows.

Richard Bjornson expatiates more on Big Father's character, saying that he excoriates the blacks for their pagan practices, impose conformity to European ideas of decorum and

exploits their labour in building a new church. Supremely confident in the rightness of his own world view, Big Father fails to recognise the human values imbedded in the traditional practices. He attacks them fervently that he forgets the essence of the Christian message (403).

Most missionaries' attitudes in *The White Man of God* toward the blacks are most often very harsh. This portrays the violence of whites on the blacks. The blacks are thought to be devoid of feelings and seen as savages and this justifies white tyranny. The founding principle (from the days of slavery) of subjugation is force, which silently threatens the colonised to obedience. This is reflected more in the text when Big Father in his usual fury storms from the pulpit to thrash Tom's father who dares to walk out of church before the end of service. He uses his bunch of keys to inflict a wound on his head and blood spurted out to his clothes. Tom's father does not oppose because he believes in his own inferiority as his wife and son continue going to church. As the Spivakian subaltern, he remains silent because the subaltern is muted beyond redemption.

This action is very similar to that of Fadda's who too is an imperialist. Fadda beats Lukar's mother mercilessly because she coughs in church and he condemns her to hell. The blacks as naive as they are described to be by the coloniser, believe she will for sure go to hell because she has made the cousin of Jesus angry. Some members of the congregation headed by Pa Matiu rush off to Fadda to beg him to revert the curse. To confirm the superiority of the white man, Fadda claims he will ask God to intervene and forgive her.

The views of Daniel Defoe are similar to that of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which is a specimen text that examines colonial discourse and portrays Africa as Europe's abominable other. Africa is seen as the heart of darkness as Marlow's going up to the river Congo is like "travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (39). The savage who "howled and leaped and spun and made horrid faces" is like 'a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on hind legs'(43). Some white missionaries in *The White Man of God* confirm this view of Conrad's. Fadda shares this imperial

ideological view when he gives a special prayer which he calls "the prayer for the conversion of Africa" and says:

O God who made everything and gave us everything that we have, remember the poor folks of Africa who do not know you; who move about blindly like sheep without a shepherd and are scattered about in the jungles where they will perish forever [...]. Listen to the prayers of the angels and saints and good people who pray for pity on them.
(60)

This marks the height of the Manichean dichotomy and racism in the novel. According to JanMohammed, collapsing the African natives into African animals or by mystifying them as some metaphysical essence of Africa, he does not believe there can be a meeting ground between both camps. The portrayal of native image in the Western mind was developed in colonial discourse. Fadda's prayer supports Fanon's Manichaeism in *The Wretched of the Earth* which 'dehumanized the native' and 'even turns him into an animal' (32). Chinua Achebe in "An Image of Africa" describes Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which projects the image of Africa as the "antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (3). The white man painting the colonised as sheep in the jungles widens the Manichean gap and the black man believes he is primitive, chaotic and barbaric as it was intended by colonialist vision.

The discourse of colonialism which portrayed Western ideology created an exaggerated and distorted picture of Africa. It implied that no matter how much Christianity they pumped into Africa, the place never seized to remain in the heathen hands of Satan which of course was without a soul. Fadda believes that even though he has baptized Christians, they are still so heathen and that Africans will never be able to see God. He says:

The devil has built a home here in Nkar, and you, every one of you, is his

pillar. And you all know this! And yet every one of you looks as innocent as a child. The devil has made you his pillars! He sits down comfortably in your hearts holding a calabash of wine in one hand and a woman in the other. (58-59)

Fadda condemns this black people to hell; he fails to understand the natives. He forgets that in persuading blacks to imitate and obey white culture and religion, it must take a long time because the black man has his own way of life before the appearance of the white man.

In the discourse of *Robinson Crusoe*, the black man is seen as native marked significantly by their cannibalism. This is reflected in *The White Man of God* when black Christians argue among themselves and reign insults on each other. This is what the whites have made them to believe of themselves, ‘you cannibal. You eat human flesh and drink human blood.’ (100) Peter Hulme says bluntly that ‘cannibalism does exist. It exists as a term in colonial discourse to describe the ferocious devouring of human flesh practiced by savages’ (183) and this is what the blacks were made to believe in *The White Man of God*.

Christianity plays a very potent role in *The White Man of God*. This is the major theme Jumbam uses to describe colonialism; most of the white people present in the text are missionaries who serve the coloniser’s goal in the sense that Sunday schools serve the interest of colonial discourse and Christianity attempts to impose colonial ideas in the minds of blacks. The Bible is used as a tool for penetration to the native’s mind. The Bible is interpreted to ridicule the natives and make them feel inferior and savage. Pa Matiu the main catechist understands English tells the story of the Good Samaritan:

A man once left Jerusalem to go to Jericho (as a man would leave here to Bamenda). A rubber tree fell on him and the branches tore his clothes, wounded him and pressed him to the ground. His countryman came and saw him and went his way. A man from the same village as him came and saw him and also passed

by. His brother from the same father even came and saw him crying under the weight of the tree and he too went his way. Then a man came who was not his brother, who was not even from the same village nor from the same country as the man, a total stranger saw this man and was moved to pity for him [...].

The man who came from a strange country and rescued the black man from death was the white man.(43-44)

The white man saving the black man from death is metaphorical because death is not only physical death but the fact that blacks lived in a dark heathen world; it was synonymous to death until the white man brought light. Elleke Boehmer says that Christianity was believed to secure happiness, prosperity and salvation of dark tribes sunk in barbarism.

Pa Matiu’s sermons expose the black man into the peripheries of Shadows, “God sent his son to teach us the way to heaven. But what did we do? We killed him. You see how the black man has been? But in dying, the son of God did not hate us. He sent the white man of God to teach us the way to heaven” (44). Such a sermon coming from Pa Matiu whom the Nso people look up to means that their whole tribe has been brainwashed into believing in their own savagery and crime. They fear to hate the white man because God might condemn them to hell because the white man comes from heaven. (104) This confirms what Ashcroft et al say that in the field of colonial discourse, the colonised also come to see themselves the way the coloniser intended it to be. Christianity is seen as a tool to confirm the Manichean gap of both worlds. The white man is seen as a supernatural being who is nearest to God with the gap between him and the blacks very wide. This is reflected in the text when Jumbam says:

The white man of God is coming here for Easter! The white man of God is coming to spend Easter with us! [...]We had been taught everything about him in advance. When he

comes we should observe his beard and see if it was not forked like that of Christ. There was a large picture of Christ the King in the church. We should note the resemblance and see if they were not in fact related. He could be the cousin of Christ. So we should know what respect was due to him [...]. Therefore, anybody who failed to give him due honour was refusing to honour not just God's messenger but even God himself. (30)

In this case the concept of the shadow refers to the feeling of superiority the whites have over the blacks. Blacks are just told to respect the white man without knowing exactly where he is coming from, however, they think, he comes “either from the white man’s country or from heaven” (104). Elleke Boehmer says that “the racial divide was so essential to sustain notions of white superiority [...] whether within the white community or in dealings with the local population” (68).

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangaremba’s views are very similar to Jumbam’s. She presents mission education which coincided with the basis for a smooth functioning of colonial administration. Mission schools serve the interest of the coloniser. One can regard the missionary work as an exploitation of the mind of people like Nhamo and Chido. We see the extent to which the missionaries can alter Zimbabwean thought processes. Despite their saintly works, the missionaries create a situation that convinces even Tambu of her inferiority. She sees the whites as “more beautiful” which “made them superior”. She even calls them “superior people” (103). In a sense, missionaries spread the colonial mentality. One then begins to wonder the real difference between the coloniser and the missionaries. They both travel to distant places to assert their superiority, knowledge and way of life. Both the missionaries and the coloniser disrupt the African lifestyle and impose Western ideologies on the Africans. Both signify exploitation of a people, be it of the land, mind or body. Albert Meummi shares this view when he postulates that the colonisers claim that they have a special mission of “bringing light to the colonised’s ignominious

darkness” (74). This ‘mission’ legitimises colonisation and enslaves blacks. Edward Said posits that the white man believe that it is their “human prerogative” to “manage” and “own the non-white world” (108).

When Tambu is offered a scholarship at the Sacred Heart mission, she discovers that white people are very strange and says, “white people needed careful study” (195) because they are very different from her. She calls the mission a rich kingdom but is very disappointed to find out that blacks may not have the same opportunity or privilege like the whites because of racial segregation. When Babamukuru transports her to the Sacred Heart mission, she discovers that, it is almost a purely white school. She says:

Disappointment. I looked and looked and searched carefully through the crowd, but I could not find a single black face which did not belong to our party, except of course for the porters. The porters were carrying trunks, but none of them offered to carry mine. (194)

This was a typical practice in colonial discourse. Blacks are not only relegated to menial jobs but they are also seen as less humans even if they belong to Babamukuru’s party. Tambu is more surprised and shocked when she discovers that as an African, they are parked in one dormitory segregated from the whites:

And the Africans live here, she announced triumphantly flinging the door to my new life wide open. The room was empty. I was, it seemed, the first black first – former to have arrived. It was not a small room but neither was it large enough. It certainly was not large enough for the six beds that stood in it, three along one wall and three along the other, all of necessity so closely arranged that there was barely space to walk between them [...].

I have been wondering Sister, began Babamukuru politely, I was under the impression that the girls sleep four to

*a room, but I see there are six beds here
Ah, yes, agreed the Sister, proud of the fact. We have more Africans here than usual this year so we have to put them all in here. (194)*

According to Meummi, the coloniser discovers the existence of the coloniser as he discovers his own privilege. He explains that the coloniser “finds himself on one side of the scale, the other side of which bears the colonised man [...]. The more freely he breathes, the more the colonised is choked” (6). To him the coloniser finds a place to settle into by taking away that of the inhabitant. Similarly, in the texts under study, no matter how many Africans are put in the dormitory, the white man does not care even if they are congested or choked.

In a nutshell colonial discourse in both novels succeed to send across the message of primitive blacks who had no history, no culture to boast of and they were very inferior to the white man and the Manichean dichotomy could never be bridged. This was a firm kind of discourse which seems to plead to be rewritten.

Masks of Postcolonial Identity

The mask is perhaps the most iconic symbol in discussions surrounding postcolonial identity popularized largely by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. It represents the forced adoption of the coloniser’s language, culture, education, religion and behavior. Mimicry is a powerful tool and metaphor in the portrayal of postcolonial identities. Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry which also grounds in Fanonian thinking suggests that the colonised are encouraged to be like the coloniser but are never considered equal. The mask is therefore a blurred copy that can act as both a survival mechanism and a subtle form of mockery. This is very clear in the novels under study, In *Nervous Conditions*, we see actions by whites to create a new black man who mimics the coloniser. The history and culture of African were distorted and the coloniser created a new set of values for the African. which can be likened to Edward Said’s *Orientalism* which portrays the colonised “had become a creation by the West” (36). Babamukuru is initiated into the rites of

Englishness with a view of making him a good African who would impose white ideologies on his fellow blacks.

Keith Booker in *The African Novel in English* reviews Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and posits that all major characters in the novel represent specific, identifiable forms of colonial experience and are shaped by identifiable historical forces associated with colonialism. He goes on to say that Dangarembga likens *Nervous Conditions* to Fanonian critique of colonialism and the radical alienation suffered by colonial subjects as a result of the oppressive and unnatural environment in which they are forced to live. This Fanonian perspective is reflected in her title *Nervous Conditions* which is taken from Fanon’s *The Wretched of The Earth* where Jean Paul Sartre notes that:

The colonized people lead a particularly confusing and contradictory existence because colonial regimes insist that their subjects aspire to European modes of conduct and acculturation: at the same time, the regimes declare that these subjects are fundamentally inferior to Europeans and therefore can never hope to fully attain the status of the European. (Booker, 191)

These imperialists come to Babamukuru as, “charitable missionaries” (14). But if he had refused to go to England to pursue the scholarship, “it would have been a form of suicide. The missionaries would have been annoyed by his ingratitude” (14). However, Babamukuru “didn’t want to leave the mission. He did not want to go far away from home” (14). It is even interesting to note that Babamukuru is not educated for free. “They set him to work in their farm by the day and at night. He was educated [...] during the holidays, he took odd jobs at the mission! (18). This likens him to Defoe’s Friday who is given odd jobs to do which were dirty and difficult. Despite Babamukuru’s dignity in his community, he is still inferior in the eyes of the superior whites who make him toil before educating him. The suffering is not minimised but the message was clear;

“endure and obey, for there is no other way” (19). Babamukuru becomes a surrogate European. This condition is best described by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* who says “the native intellectual comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements, behaves in fact like a foreigner” (223). Babamukuru is what white people preached in colonialism; to make a representation of the white man who will thereby impose Western cultures on his fellow blacks. For instance, when Babamukuru uses his patriarchal powers to impose a wedding on Tambu’s parents. As the patriarch and the “success story,” Babamukuru wears the most rigid mask. He must perform the role of the “Good Native” for the white missionaries while maintaining the role of the “Great Provider” for his clan. The strain of keeping this mask in place makes him explosive and tyrannical.

Babamukuru is a complex character used to counter the discourse of colonialism because sometimes in the novel, he represents the colonial voice. “The mimic man” is a common paradox in postcolonial literature. Jenny Sharpe uses the term mimic man to describe a figure who represents this common paradox. She says he is a contradictory figure who simultaneously reinforces colonial authority and disturbs it. (99) Babamukuru is a clear example of a mimic man. Although he is a traditional Shona man in ethnicity and heritage, he also represents Western means of success. The fact that he disturbs the colonial authority is a form of counter-discourse. When Chido is offered a scholarship at the boarding secondary school, ‘Babamukuru had intended him to stay at the mission to counteract the un-African exposure he had been subjected to in England. Because he (Babamukuru) didn’t approve of European habits’ (106).

Babamukuru does not change his point of view even when Tambu is offered a place at Sacred Heart mission. He says to Tambu:

In all that we are doing for you, we are preparing you for this future life of yours, and I have observed from my own daughter’s behaviour that it is not a good thing for a young girl to associate too much with the white

people, to have too much freedom. I have seen that girls who do that do not develop into descent women. (180)

Later when Babamukuru discusses the matter with Tambu’s father, he is still not convinced about the fact that Tambu should go to Sacred Heart. Dangarembga says:

It was on New Year’s Eve that my uncle and my father discussed my future. The discussion took place in the house. I was obliged to eavesdrop.

It may change her character for the worse... these Whites, you know... you never know, mused Babamukuru.

No, agreed my father. How could you know with these ones? You never know. With Whites! No. You never know [...].

I did not want her to go to that school...said Babamukuru. (182)

It is surprising for the proud and eloquent Babamukuru to speak in a broken style represented by the various suspension marks Dangarembga uses. Babamukuru compares Western habits to whoredom and uses all the energy he can muster to transform Nyasha and decolonise her mind from the British exposure. The Shadow therefore produce metaphorical imagery of the masks as postcolonial identities are negotiated and mimicked.

In *Nervous Conditions*, characters like Nhamo, Chido and Nyasha wear mask of “Englishness” that alienates them from their own families. The mask is never a perfect fit. It creates a state of mimicry—where the colonised person is “almost white, but not quite.” This leads to a fractured sense of self. Mimicry in colonial and postcolonial literature is most commonly seen when members of a colonised society imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonisers. Mimicry is seen as an opportunistic pattern of behaviour: one copies the person in power because one hopes to have access to that same power. Presumably, while copying the master, one has to intentionally suppress one’s own cultural identity, though in some cases

immigrants and colonial subjects are left so confused by their cultural encounter with a dominant foreign culture that there may not be a clear pre-existing identity to suppress.

Mimicry is frequently invoked with reference to the 'been-to', someone who has travelled to the West, and then returned 'home', seemingly completely transformed. Frantz Fanon mocked the affected pretentiousness of Martinican 'been-tos' in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In Nhamo's case, he has not even had the opportunity to travel abroad but goes to the mission which represents whiteness and all the values that go with it. He grows to hate his homestead and his ethnic ties, he debunks his parents and develops a kind of weird identity and says:

Babamukuru says I am so bright I must be taken away to a good school and be given a good chance in life. So I shall go and live with Babamukuru at the mission. I shall no longer be Jeremiah's son, he boasted, speaking my father's name in such derogatory tones that for once I was up in arms on my father's behalf. I shall wear shoes and socks, and shorts with no hole in them, all brand new, bought for me by Babamukuru. He has the money. I will even have underwear - a vest and pants. I shall have a jersey in winter, and probably a blazer too. I shall stop using my hands to eat. I will use a knife and a fork. (48)

It is ironical that he thinks of the mission as having serious climatic changes from that the homestead and he even prepares to face winter at the mission. We see a kind of psychological migration because, in his unconscious mind, he has already migrated to England like Nyasha and Chido that is why he is able to imitate them and stop speaking Shona.

Nyasha wears one of the most potent masks in the novel. She wears the mask of England to mask her identity as an African. She mimics everything that is white and Western even though she fails in her quest for her prostomial identity by failing to ascribe an authentic place for herself in the society. She is estranged from the roots, which

stamps an indelible mark on her identity. Her failure of negotiation affected her views of self, home and eventual destination. Because, she thinks she's white, she renounces her African values. Relinquishing these African values mean relinquishing her identity. This is because the colour of her skin does not identify her as a white so no matter what happens, her loss of identity can never be compensated. Her experience abroad has altered her consciousness that she might never be able to reintegrate herself fully into the African society.

Nyasha has rested her entire identity on the belief that England and the Western world represent the best she must follow or pursue to have real happiness. In this vein, she has become a real acculturated African and what Bjornson calls a, surrogate European. Nyasha has lost sense of herself unlike Tambu, she is in love with a society where she does not belong but can no longer find a comfortable niche in the society. She lets her Europeanised self-take control of her behaviour.

In the process of assimilation to the culture in which Nyasha meets in England, when she comes back to Zimbabwe, she experiences a tension between belonging to it and remaining outside, between being and not being. Unlike her parents, she does not remember many things and wishes to forget. When she begins to disintegrate, she tells Tambu, "I would very much like to belong, but I do not" (196). Even though she tries to deceive herself by belonging to the whites, she fails in the end when she says, "I'm not one of them but I'm not one of you" (201). The possibility of Nyasha achieving a true sense of identity is lost. When she tries to belong even to herself, she only ends up antagonising Babamukuru. She tells Tambu:

I think, though, that your uncle is pleased with the quieter environment and I have discovered that it is restful to have him pleased, and so these days I am doing my best not to antagonise him. You can imagine how difficult that is. Impossible, it seems. I cannot help thinking that what antagonises is the fact that I am me - hardly, I admit, the ideal

*daughter for a hallowed headmaster, a
revered patriarch. (196-197)*

She does not meet up with societal expectations of a headmaster's daughter. She fails in her quest for identity.

Nyasha postulates a more liberal position. She continually struggles for self-determination and assertion against patriarchal normative gender roles. Her most important goal is to recognize, explore and rearticulate her sexual identity. Sexual identity in Zimbabwe is different from the one she experienced in England. She is particularly aware of her culturally uprooted and displaced condition which is why to her desire for an identity means deciding to behave like a white even if she is not in England.

She struggles to defend her own independence and refuses to be codified. As a split character, she tries to inscribe her own place in history. Towards the end of the novel, she does not find a comfortable place for herself in the society and slides into a mental abyss. Her last actions of schizophrenic behaviour show that she has no identity in the rapidly changing society.

When Nyasha realises that she does not belong to any world, she disintegrates. Ania Loomba shares this view, "Psychic trauma results which the colonised subject realises that he can never attain the whiteness he has been taught to desire, or to shed the blackness he has learnt to devalue" (148).

Similarly, Fanon says in *Black Skin White Mask* that colonialism attacks the very essence of identity in its subject peoples by inducing a form of mental illness. He says:

*The Negro's behaviour makes him
akin to an obsessive neurotic type. Or
if one prefers, he puts himself into a
complete situational neurosis. In the
man of colour there is constant effort
to run away from his own
individuality, to annihilate his own
presence. This attitude of black man
towards the white or towards his own
race often duplicates almost
completely a constellation of
delirium, frequently bordering on the*

region of pathology. (60)

By Fanon's description, identity is neither natural nor essential but constructed from discourses of difference and inequality. He says that not only must the black man be black but must be black in relation to a white man. (110)

The ideology of Mask connotes the movement between the Shadows, thus the doubling nature inherent in postcolonial identity. Being able to oscillate between the double brings us beyond the initial image to something more complex - even contradictory - and sometimes paradoxically true. This represents not a tension of the opposites so much as an ability to move between seemingly disparate poles and the more poles you have the richer the metaphoric possibilities. That's why it is important to have cultural artifacts which represent the shadows of the colonised. In the *White Man of God*, Pa Matiu is noted for the wearing not just of metaphoric masks (white mask) but also physical mask which represents the traditional artefacts of the people of Nkar Village.

Pa Matiu who wears both masks simultaneously, is the chief catechist in *The White Man of God* speaks the white man's language. He takes advantage of the language and culture of the whites. He knows therefore the language and culture of the coloniser although he carries that in his black body. He acts as an interpreter between English and Lamnso. He characteristically consciously use masks (both literal and metaphorical) to hide their true intentions or to protect their indigenous culture from erasure.

The metaphoric image of the mask in the quest for postcolonial identities offers the colonised the opportunity for and encouragement of shadowed identity to move beyond the boundaries of binarisms; those structural components which divided the colonial world into a Manichean paradigm, Shape-shifting metaphors reside most comfortably in the imaginative realm because of their "always undecidedly double and contradictory" nature (Young 1999: 896). This is the place where the tension of the opposites resides as well, and is a fluid zone with no fixed meaning. 11

By wearing different masks between both cultures, Pa Matiu plays an important mediatory role in resolving the colonial contact conflict. Pa Matiu understands the white man's language and as the interpreter, he mediates between black and white to cool down tension. When Fadda becomes angry and scorns the people of Nkar, Pa Matiu avoids to interpret the hurting words to his fellow blacks because he does not want to dissuade them from Christianity. Jumbam writes:

Sex, sex, sex and drink, drink, drink and sex: that is what one hears in the confessions. That is all you know; that is all you are capable of.

Sweat ran down his cheeks and he cleaned it off with his handkerchief. He was choking with anger and spoke in broken words like one too violent to speak out his mind coherently. Pa Matiu interpreted it in his usual calm yet effective manner. But people still felt that Pa Matiu was not saying all that the priest was saying. (59)

Pa Matiu as the interpreter and chief juju, carries the people of Nso along with him. He strives to celebrate his in-betweenness of both cultures by avoiding conflict. Accordingly, he avoids saying the priest's colonialist rude words to the people so that they would not flee from Christianity and white ways.

He proves that Christianity is compatible with black cultural heritage. He reaffirms the African identity by preserving the cultures of the juju and borrows from white Christian mythology without losing the authenticity.

Richard Bjornson posits that "churches themselves began to incorporate Africa's forms of cultural expression into their services as a means of revitalising the practice of Christianity" (196) in the African continent. Pa Matiu encourages this kind of worship. He as the senior catechist of the Mission usually plays the drum "Pa Matiu went to the drum and played it" (105). Tansa says "we had been made to understand that drums were instruments meant for diabolical use or at best for dancing, though dances were themselves heathen" (99).

Pa Matiu deconstructs the white mythology of heathen drums and constructs a new identity in the third space as he carries different masks along. By playing the drum himself, he mixes both cultures. This confirms what Bhabha says:

No culture is full unto itself, no culture is plainly plenitudinous, not only because there are other cultures which contradict authority, but also because its own symbol-forming activity always underscores the claim to an originality, holistic, organic identity. (Rutherford, 210)

Pa Matiu's desire to identify with both cultures simultaneously, shares the view of Philip Curtis who writes "one possible reaction to another culture is to adopt it, but once adopted, it is no longer alien" (232). The white culture is no longer alien because Pa Matiu navigates truly between both. Curtis goes further to say "both cultures would like to achieve a balance between modern and traditional but in one case the goal is largely modernisation and in the other hand largely preservation" (237).

By taking an in-between position, Pa Matiu suggests to all villagers whether Christians or not to come and welcome the white man of God. He says to the congregation:

On the Wailun which falls on Tuesday, every Christian, man and woman, boy and girl and every catechumen should come to the motor road near the Tsemkan river. Invite all your relatives who are not Christians. Every man should load his gun and the Samba leaders should bring their dancing instruments. The Chong women should come with all their dancing equipment. The procession will be led by the women's dances. The white man of God will follow them and the men's Samba will follow after him. (45)

Pa Matiu's idea of the venue is very significant because "the meeting point is where the big road crosses the River Tsemkan" (46). The venue itself is an intersection signifying that with

the white man coming, there are at the crossroads of cultures. Two roads at the Tsemkan river represent the black and white cultures. It is more significant that Pa Matiu requests not only Christians to come but heathens or pagans as well. The white man of the God is to be welcome in a traditional African style where dance groups and gunshots blasted is the atmosphere. The Tsemkan river is a fertile environment in which blacks and whites can combine diverse knowledge into new insights and plans for action, to bridge the gap between binarism.

In terms of hybridity, the selection of site can be a deliberate strategy to introduce new experiences and perspectives. It is a decentering move that can bring the colonised and the coloniser into positions of ambiguity and negotiation. Returning to Bhabha's original argument, site selection initially appears to be a matter of moving across the boundary between different cultures, rather than living within the boundary. Pa Matiu breaks down binary structures that characterised different cultures. This idea of a third space as Bhabha defines is where identities are negotiated. The river is located beyond the bipolarity of 'us and them' and thus it becomes a territory where characters can escape the dilemma of dichotomies and hierarchies.

Pa Matiu applies the idea of the third space as a guide to re-mapping and leaving behind the binary division of black and white. The river becomes a venue where black and white relationship is negotiated. Like Edward Soja says, there is the first space which could represent colonial discourse, second space represents counter-discourse and this third space which is an intersection is more a trialectic which is a "space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange" (5). It is a space wherein perspectives previously considered to be incompatible can be encompassed in our understanding of a whole.

Pa Matiu disempowers the dichotomies and makes room for possibilities. He does not negate African culture neither does he castigate the Western one, rather he enables a cultural identity that has a future because colonialism is irreversible. Similarly, in *Orature*, Cyprian Ekwensi says that:

The African writer must first look back to his own heritage. Then he must look around at what is available to him. If he decides to adapt existing forms to suit his needs, he can still bring to those forms trends of identity and distinction, which will give him a place in the forms known and accepted by the world at large. (4)

Pa Matiu is the senior catechist of Nkar village in the church. He does not distance himself from the African heritage. He identifies himself with the people of Africa by accepting their culture. First of all, he is very fluent in Lamnso. The use of Lamnso to communicate with black people shows that he identifies himself with the people.

It is common knowledge that in the Nso community, the Kibarankoh is the most dreaded juju and to assume the position of such a juju, the character must have reached the height of his tradition. It is this position that Pa Matiu assumes during the death celebration of Father Cosmas. When other smaller juju dance and thrill the people, the Kibarankoh takes the scene. Jumbam says:

Reputed to be the most dangerous juju of the land it is always restrained from rampaging by two strong ropes tied to its waist and held at the back by two other jujus. It carries two short clubs in its hands and no man goes near it. Whenever it is going to a place boy, and then men, run far ahead warning everybody of the approaching danger and so everybody runs away and hides himself [...].

Did any of them see Big Father kick the biggest juju of the land? [...] Even those who were in the open field ran into the bush and fell down and closed their eyes. Big Father kicked and kicked the Kibarankoh and when it turned round to him he pushed off its big mask and then got the shock of his life. Face to face with the juju he could not believe his eyes. Mathew!

(142- 143)

Pa Matiu wearing such a mask means that he has reached the zenith of black tradition because “the juju is the land and nothing other than that. Not even the Fon that is the ruler of the land can joke with it or touch it. It is not a human being. It is a juju, a dreadful one for that matter” (143). Pa Matiu transcends even the human state of tradition and goes into the spiritual realm which gives him a position sometimes higher than that of the Fon. Pa Matiu merges the supreme cultural practice with the post of chief catechist in the Roman Catholic Mission who even stands to preach on the pulpit in the absence of white men of God. Jumbam says:

When gospel time came Pa Matiu stood up and, with his Bible clasped in his left hand and held close to his bosom, his eyes cast down, walked quietly and reverently up to the pulpit.

He stood there for a time with his head cast down, then he opened his Bible and said: Today's gospel was written by holy Lukas, Chapter 10. He crossed himself and so did the Christians [...]. In the name of the father, son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.
(43)

Pa Matiu is unmasked to the gaze of the Nkar

public, he does not show any sign of remorse or for his double identity. He is the only character in the novel who faces no conflict because he strongly believes that he can conveniently play the role of the masquerade without fearing significant conflict with his other role as a catechist. The mask enables him to perform the role of ancestral spirit on the one hand and Christianity on the other hand. According to Pa Matiu, Christianity cannot be meaningful if it attempts to meet him outside the tradition and custom of the land.

Conclusion

Shadows, masks and postcolonial identities is a rich thematic combination often used in Postcolonial Studies, literature, film, and cultural theory. In postcolonial literature, shadows and masks are not merely gothic or theatrical tropes; they are profound metaphors for the psychological and social distortions caused by colonial rule. Writers use these symbols to articulate what Frantz Fanon famously described as the "nervous condition" of the colonised.

Just like Dangarembga, Jumbam suggests that the "White Man's God" did not bring a clearer light, but rather created a world of conflicting masks and elongated shadows. The postcolonial identity in both novels is defined by this tension: the impossibility of returning to a pure past and the psychological cost of an assimilated future.

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