

## Motives of Mimicry in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*

### Abstract

*This research work explores the issue of cultural transformation of the people for the reconstruction of identity and live a free, honored and successful life. Nobody is superior or inferior by the racial background he or she has but it is the ability and talent to perform the work. Roth's hero Coleman Silk gets tired of identifying with his group- Negroes who were negatively judged on the basis of their race- discriminated and also deprived from opportunities being a Black person. For the reconstruction of his identity, to get rid of domination in the name of cultural background, to champion freedom with due honor in his life and also due to the effect of cultural hegemony, he abandons his racial/cultural identity and mimics the Whites. Identity for him is not the fixed thing that history and culture decides but it is fluid and flexible which can be constructed by the personal effort. Therefore, he utilizes mimicry as the means to upward social mobility and financial success. In this research, issues of mimicry have been analyzed with the theoretical insights from Homi K Bhabha, the concept of hegemony with Antonio Gramsci's notion, identity related issues have been discussed with Henry Tajfel's concept of identity. Therefore, this paper explores the different factors causing people for changing their identity by mimicry.*

Keywords: Mimicry, Identity, Hegemony, Negro, Discrimination, Culture and Race

This research centers on the motives of mimicry in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000) to explore the desire of people to be identified as an honored citizen at any cost. For most of the people, personal and communal identity has become important aspect in present society for which many movements have been taking place. However, the protagonist in Roth's novel, Coleman Silk, an Afro-American, chooses to aside his socio-cultural identity, history and family for the reconstruction

of his identity with due respect and honor in his life. Here, mimicry for Silk becomes means to be transformed into the White which would avoid prejudices and domination opening up the ways for opportunities and freedom securing his better position in the society. His mimicry to the Whites equally reflects the cultural hegemony in America and the great love for his dream for achieving success, freedom and happiness which he couldn't get in his Negro identity, Black community and family.

The paper scrutinizes why people sometimes change their socio-cultural status or identity and adopt the identity of others. Identity and socio cultural practices have been important aspect for human beings because they make them unique from other. For Anastasia Christou, identity theorist and writer, "identity is a complex and multidimensional construct" (41). Regarding Coleman Silk different aspects like his family, Black culture, Negro community, history of his clan, language and many other intermingled things are contributing factors for the construction of identity. For Coleman Silk identity is not fixed entity but a dynamic aspect which could be constructed by the person. So he, leaving his solid and fixed identity as Negro, mimics White American Jew for the process of reconstruction of identity. By taking account of Coleman's double positioning as an American and a Jew, Roth addresses issues crucial to the understanding of the contemporary psyche, which is probably one of the challenges of the twenty-first century. Zygmunt Bauman, regarding the question of identity in postmodern society opines, "the modern 'problem of identity' is primarily how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the postmodern 'problem of identity' is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open" (36). Similarly, Silk makes his way open to reconstruct new identity without sticking on the history of his clan.

Not only the personal but the cultural and social identity makes deep

connection to the person's success. Henry Tajfel argues, "Social identity is defined as that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional Significance of that membership" (255). Therefore, it is always the collective and personal identity having important role in shaping personality. In this way, *The Human Stain* invites to reflect on identity constructions, on the difficult negotiations between the "given" and the "chosen," and between group identity and the freedom of individuals to define their own identity at the crossroads between fixed patterns and personal choices. By mimicry, Roth also calls for a redefinition of interpretative patterns and theories of identity, in the sense that existing theories based on monolithic categories fail to explain the complexities of contemporary identity.

Coleman Silk's divorce with his culture and family casts important meaning in this novel. Although many social and political changes have taken place in America during 20<sup>th</sup> century, the hero of this novel, Coleman Silk, happens to mimic white identity. He does so in order to avoid discrimination, prejudices, and inequality. Similarly, his mimicry is the means for the persuasion of American dream (freedom, success and happiness) which he had been lacking as a Negro. So, the main concern of this research centers to find out these factors causing him to abandon own identity and mimicking others identity.

By the word 'motive' we mean an incentive to act in a particular way or a desire that makes one want to act. *Oxford English Dictionary* defines motive as "A reason for doing something." So, it is a deep reason or emotion that provokes a person to act something. A person may not give up his race, family and culture for a simple reason. Similarly in this case, there are several motives of Silk's mimicry which would be discussed throughout the work. In the surface level it is seen that he wants to live a

free life and enjoy the equality to Whites in America where Blacks were not thought and behaved equally although declared by the constitution. For theorist Bhabha, "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (122). So, it is Silk's desire to be reformed or best person like the White. But thinking in broad view, this is the compulsion created by White cultural hegemony in America. He has become the puppet of hegemony created by white culture and society. Born in 1926 in a colored family he has faced many changes in the country but still he happens to mimic white's identity. He becomes the puppet in the discourse created by whites. Blacks could not succeed and live freely as Blacks. White people, declaring themselves as superior, enforced Negroes to abandon indigenous black culture and tried to merge them in their own. Moreover, it is the process of reconstruction of identity for Silk. By mimicry he wants to reconstruct his identity and live a respected life in twentieth century America. Thus, in this situation, Silk's mimicry gains freedom, success in professional life and happiness. I have applied the concept of Bhabha regarding mimicry; Henry Tajfel and Stuart Hall's concepts of identity and diaspora; and Antonio Gramsci's notion of Cultural Hegemony in order to justify my points.

Mimicry here is the means to be identified as free, civilized and successful person like Whites. As Roth reveals, "all he'd ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white - just on his own and free" (120). So, passing as Jewish for Silk brings about a freedom and lack of restriction that he was never able to enjoy as an African American man. Coleman realized early on that to acquire the things he wanted in life - the education, the wealth, even the women he was interested in - he would have to mask his real identity. As Coleman's sister, Ernestine, mentions, "today, if you're a middle-class intelligent Negro and you want your kids to

go to the best schools and on full scholarship if you need it, you wouldn't dream of saying that you're not be, now its advantageous not to do it, just as then it was advantageous to do it" (326). Therefore, it is not his desire to be a simply White man but this is his compulsion to live a better life.

Moreover, this is the result of the White's discourse and hegemony over other culture. The root cause of his mimicry is the hegemony of white culture in America. Whites have been successful to establish a discourse declaring their culture as civilized, modern, and a best in the world. Whites can easily get success, and they are free and civilized people in the world. Accepting such discourse, he mimics the identity of White American Jew disowning from his Black community, abandoning his culture, history, family and identity as a whole. Silk transforms his identity into white's one to be civilized and the best in the world. Silk is living as other but not as himself because his original identity has been suppressed. His assumption, Negro identity as a cause of the domination and backwardness to him, often provokes his work of mimicry.

Published in late twentieth century multi cultural America, this novel reflects the changing pattern of the society. Roth's novel unfolds an interest on the idea that subjectivity is central in defining a personal identity. In Roth's narrative, Tim Parrish identifies some degree of superiority:

What makes *The Human Stain* so remarkable and so controversial is that Roth's ostensibly Jewish protagonist, Coleman Silk, is actually born African American. Thus, in the guise of telling a Jewish story, Roth also tells an African American one. As such, *The Human Stain* is the logical outgrowth of Roth's lifelong aesthetic commitment to the fluidity of the American (or ethnic) self. (211)

*The Human Stain* unravels the complexities of human identity in a context of national identity of the late twentieth century multicultural America.

Silk's wish to avoid prejudice and domination leads his action to leave his race and family. He finds his family and Negro society was also the object of mistreatment and oppression. Silk faces prejudices and domination on him in school, college, playground, swimming pool, church and almost everywhere. As a colored boy he was deprived from many opportunities due to which he didn't see any ways to achieve high life standard in life as a Negro. He was the resident of the multicultural society of America, the country of White's supremacy. He thought that Whites, who were in power and ruling post, and their culture is the root of happiness, success and freedom. Rejecting his history, he began to mimic whites, married a white girl and followed the white culture to achieve his dream.

Silk seeks universal renown and esteem on the basis of individual capacity and achievements but not by the racial background. But he is evaluated and behaved on the basis of his race. He concludes that in the times he lives in, he can attain this objective more readily as a "white Jew" than as a "light-skinned black," the latter identity conveying a social stigma that would render it nearly impossible for him to achieve his goal: the greatest possible degree of freedom. Zuckerman justifies why and how Coleman had quit Howard, "how Coleman had enrolled at Howard because that was their father's plan. How their father dropped dead while serving dinner on the train one night, and how Coleman had immediately quit Howard to join the navy, and to join as a white man" (318). He leaves the college searching for respectful life where he could get opportunities for achieving success.

Bhabha argues that mimicry is the desire of a person to be identified as others, who are comparatively civilized, high cultured, colonizer or people in power. He

thinks mimicry becomes the only option of marginalized people to live like mainstream people. In his own words "mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (122). Roth's protagonist Silk as well remains in between; almost like Whites but inwardly Black. His mimicry is the desire for upward social mobility and freedom. He wants to be established as respected person and wants to gain economic and social progress with happiness like Whites. He leaves his birth place, family, culture and society because he thinks that it is his race and Black culture which is hindering his happiness and success. He gets married with a Jew and begets two children who never know about his original culture and identity.

Coleman's process of self transformation is deeply connected with desire- his desire to live an honored and successful life. Coleman Silk is not an ordinary man these days but a hardworking and tireless professor and dean of reputed Athena College having good image and working capacity who was once most dominated and discriminated person. Silk has achieved huge success in his life. He is the first Jew to become the dean of Athena College. Zuckerman narrates, "Coleman was also the first and only Jew ever to serve at Athena as dean of faculty" (5). He is strong and hardworking person who brings many reformations in the college. Zukerman says:

But Coleman had been no ordinary dean, and who he got rid of and how he got rid of them, what he abolished and what he established, and how audaciously he performed his job into the teeth of tremendous resistance succeeded in more than merely slighting or offending a few odd ingrates and malcontents . . . Coleman had overturned everything. (7)

He has justified his post by bringing reformations in the college. He has performed his tasks perfectly like white person. Therefore it can be said that the Blacks are equally

capable and knowledgeable to the Whites. He manages to build seminar room and the faculty-eat in the cafeteria with the students. He organized many faculty meetings and made the place competitive.

Silk wants to live on his own achievement, self identity based on capacities and work and respectful life with high self esteem. So, he regrets his brief attendance, at his father's insistence, at primarily black Howard University, feeling it degraded his uniqueness and self-esteem. Studying at Howard in Washington DC he was repeatedly called and reminded as Negro; a person of another race which is inferior. He didn't want to stay as "a Howard Negro" at this place. He dreams to construct his own identity beyond of this racism and prejudice. So, he explains to Ellie, his girlfriend, after he transfers to New York University that "Howard University looked to me like just too many Negroes in one place" (134). There he must be identified as 'Negro we' group which was not his choice. So he says:

A Howard Negro at that. Overnight the raw I was part of a we with all of the we's overbearing solidity, and he didn't want anything to do with it or with the next oppressive we that came along either. You finally leave home, the Ur of we, and you find another we? Another place that is just like that, the *substitute* for that? (108)

Unlike his brother and sister, he rejects "black pride" as a contrived, conformist concept demeaning to his individuality. He is not satisfied with the method of behaving people with their race or group. However, Tajfel claims that the "group" that a person belong as an important source of pride. He proposed that the groups (e.g. social class, family, football team etc.) which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. According to him groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world. In order to increase our self-image



we enhance the status of the group to which we belong" (215). But Coleman Silk goes against to his family, community and Negro identity. Abandoning his family and race he joins the other group-Whites by the mimicry. Rejecting Black's pride he took his Negro group as burden to his freedom. The desire for reconstruction of identity based on his strength and capacity leads his quit to the Howard University. So he says, "I just did not want to be around them like that. Did not at all see what it had to do with me. Everything there was just so concentrated that any sort of pride I ever had was diminished. Completely diminished by a concentrated, false environment" (134). The zeal inside him provokes him to quit the college that identifies him as a person among Negros.

Silk's identity in the past was fixed in terms of one, collective, shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity that is considered to be fixed or stable. But he didn't accept such kind of group identity and chose to gain individual identity which is fluid that is marked by the acts performed by him. For Stuart Hall, "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (235). He begins his discussion on 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' with a discussion on the emerging new cinema in the Caribbean which is known as Third Cinema. This new form of cinema is considered as the visual representation of the Afro-Caribbean subjects- "blacks" of the diasporas of the west- the new post colonial subjects. Using this discussion as a starting point, Hall addresses the issues of identity, cultural practices, and cultural production. Hall argues that instead of considering cultural identity as a finished product we should think of it a production which is never complete and is always in process. He discusses two ways of reflecting on cultural identity:

There are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'. The

first position defines 'culture identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. ... Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time history and culture. (223, 225)

Firstly, identity is understood as a collective, shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity that is considered to be fixed or stable. According to this understanding one's cultural identity reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide all as "one people." Differently, the second form of cultural identity that exist among the Caribbean, this is an identity understood as unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory which signifies an identity marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences. This cultural identity refers to "what they really are", or rather "what they have become."

By following the White's culture and tradition he wants to be identified as free, civilized and successful person like Whites. In other words, he wants to be reformed and recognizable other or like Whites. In "Shades of Passing: Teaching and Interrogating Identity in Roth's *The Human Stain* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*" Lisa A. Kirby demonstrates that Coleman's passing is the yearning for social prestige. He argues:

Silk's passing in *The Human Stain* only reflects his own need to "silence" his true identity in exchange for achieving his American dream. ... Silk is motivated to pass because of his quests for the American dream and his own yearnings for upward social mobility. ... Passing was something not so much

accepted but at least understood at the time that Coleman was doing it because, for many African Americans, this was one of the few ways to achieve the American dream. (152,156)

Connecting his desire to get social prestige with Whites, Kirby argues that Coleman's passing is the result of this convention. She defines Silk's passing as a desire for greater social and economic success and freedom.

As an American Jewish writer Roth exposes the real condition of cultural transformation as a way to achieve honor and freedom for colored people in twentieth century in America. The boy becomes the central object for domination and prejudice in his school, college, playground and neighborhood. Set in late 1990's in rural America, this novel tells the secret story of Silk who have been living as white in New York. Dealing with the issue of racial prejudice and discrimination, this novel depicts the struggles, failures, prejudice, oppression, mimicry, lies, and achievements in Coleman Silk- a Negro's life. The story mainly revolves around Coleman's life from 1926 (his birth) to 1998 (his death), prejudices on him in school, college and neighbor. It also deals with his decision to pass as white in New York City, his marriage to a white girl-Iris Gittelman, affair with another white woman- Faunia Farley, ex-wife of war victim- reformations he has brought in college as a dean and professor, accusation for him as a racist person, his resignation and his accidental murder at the last. Moreover, it projects the life of traumatized war victim and the unsuccessful family life of Lester Farley, the post war conditions and its effects. Even he is rejected by his loving girlfriend after knowing his Black race. Similarly, he remembers the whorehouse from he was thrown out for being colored man. The undefeated boxing player gets defeated in life due to his Negro community. But fortunately or unfortunately, he was a light-skinned silky man. Grasping this

opportunity he decides to pass as a white man who later achieves success, happiness and honor in his life. Keeping his identity secret he marries a White girl, becomes the professor and dean at Athena college.

Coleman's mimicry is the means to avoid discrimination and achieve progress in life. Mimicry is only the way for African American to achieve opportunities and enjoy successful life. Coleman was a Negro without any proper job and respect in the society. Negroes were always regarded as the second class citizen in the society. Therefore, Silk, a light-skinned Negro, has been passing as a White Jewish person and becomes the professor of classic at Athena College. Critic Lisa A. Kirby demonstrates, "Passing was something not so much accepted but at least understood at the time that Coleman was doing it because, for many African Americans, this was one of the few ways to achieve the American dream" (156). So, in this regard it can be said that mimicry has been used as a means to achieve specified ends i.e. liberty, happiness and successful life.

Mr. Silk wants to determine his life by himself but not by the unintelligent society. He wants a free and happy life without any oppression and prejudice. Regarding his wish, Zuckerman writes, "All he'd ever wanted from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black not even white- just on his own and free. He meant to insult no one by his choice" (120). He wants to keep the key of his life on himself and live a free life without imitating anyone. Discrimination was everywhere like in church, school, college and society:

East Orange's White rich said, "I see we have some colored families here. We will have to do something about that." After consulting with the seminary in New York, he had seen to it that various services and Sunday schools for the colored were conducted, outside basic church law, in the colored families'

houses. Later, the swimming pool at the high school was shut down by the school superintendent so that the white kids wouldn't have to swim with the colored kids. (122)

Avoidance on the swimming pool and church for Negro is also unacceptable for Silk. If he stays there and remains same he should have to be discriminated for whole life. Such kind of treatment clearly shows the prejudice and discrimination to Black community for which Silk decides to abandon his race.

Bonnie Lyons in “Lies, Secrets, Truth-telling and Imagination in *The Human Stain*” illustrates that Coleman’s passing of identity is precious secret that permits to live morally and socially compliant, even exemplary life. She regards his “life-long lie is neither an act of racial shame nor of self-advancement - it is, according to the novel, the truth of his psychological sense of himself as singular” (89). Therefore, this White cultural hegemonic society compelled Silk to mimic Whites. It is also the desire of colonizer to transform indigenous people to their new culture. So, there is some compulsion of cultural hegemony and personal desire to get happiness, freedom and success in his life behind the mimicry. Bhabha also stresses on the compulsion of a person for mimicry. He argues that where there is difference there lies mimicry to be reformed. He further underscores:

Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is thus the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' Other as it visualizes power. ... Mimicry is also the sign of inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledge and disciplinary power. (122)

The above argument hints that mimicry can be an option of the deprived people to achieve the standard of other people. So we can see the abandonment in Silk's life. He could achieve nothing in his Negro life rather discrimination and deprivation. He even abandons his identity; family, culture, place and to adopt other's identity. He even couldn't go to brothel, we can imagine other misbehavior to him. In this way mimicry is the way to come up to life, freedom and success.

Moreover, prejudice is prevailed in the society where Negroes are behaved like a second class citizen. Though Silk was appeared first in the class by the grade, he could not achieve the position due to the quota system. People want to buy even academic position, "there was Dr. Fensterman offering three thousand dollars for Coleman to place second academically so as to enable Bert to come in first" (88). He couldn't attend classes in famous university due to prejudice prevailed in the society. There was no fair treatment to Negroes and even to Jews:

Dr. Fensterman knew that prejudice in academic institutions against colored students was far worse than it was against Jews. He knew the kind of obstacles that the Silks themselves had had to overcome to achieve all that distinguished them as a model Negro family. He knew the tribulations that Mr. Silk had had to endure ever since the optical shop went bankrupt in the depression. (86)

In the above lines Zuckerman describes that Dr. Fensterman also knew the prejudice against colored students. There are more hardships in Negro family compared to Whites. So, it is like a curse to be a Negro for Coleman Silk. The way that he chooses later becomes the point of departure for him to avoid such kind of prejudice in the name of race. His adoption of new identity can be defined as the wish for reformed, free and honored life. Bhabha also claims "Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of double

articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the other as it visualizes power"(122).

Coleman's mimicry is the means to avoid discrimination and achieve progress in life. Mimicry is only the way for African American to achieve opportunities and enjoy successful life. Coleman is a Negro without any proper job and respect in the society. Negroes are always regarded as the second class citizen in the society. Like swimming pool and church, there were different blocks and classrooms for students to study. There was distinct separation of the classes in elementary education. Ernestine says:

Now that was one building, but it was divided into two parts. There was a fence between the two sides of the building, and one side was colored kids and on the other was white kids. Likewise, the teachers on one side were white and the teachers on the other side were colored. (322)

Therefore, the society and its prejudice and oppression compelled him to mimic others who are superior. Moreover, separate classes and blocks for colored and white students is also dominating practice. As a human being or students they should not be treated unequally. Therefore, Silk, a light-skinned Negro, has been passing as a White Jewish person and becomes the professor of classic at Athena College. Critic Lisa A. Kirby demonstrates, "Passing was something not so much accepted but at least understood at the time that Coleman was doing it because, for many African Americans, this was one of the few ways to achieve the American dream" (156). So, it clarifies that mimicry has been used as a means to achieve specified ends i.e. liberty, happiness and successful life.

The Negro people and families as well are socially excluded in East Orange. They were not treated as the part of the society. Situation for Negroes was very

critical, "what his father called the country's "Negrophobia"" (103). They would face insults, prejudicial treatment and discrimination on workplace, society and everywhere. In their view, Negroes were bad at any time and inferior being:

Any time a white deals with you," his father would tell the family, no matter how well intentioned he may be, there is the presumption of intellectual inferiority. Somehow or other, if not directly by his words then by his facial expression, by his tone of voice, by his impatience, even by the opposite-forbearance, by his wonderful display of *humaneness*- he will always talk to you as though you are dumb, and then if you are not, he will be astonished.

(103)

These Coleman's fathers remarks make everyone emotional which meant Negroes are thought to be dumb and inferior in the eyes of Whites. Whatever they work or perform they are thought to be lower class by knowledge and skill. Whites dominate/discriminate Negroes directly by words and indirectly by behaviors like facial expression, tone of voice and impatience. Demarcation line between whites and Negroes is created: superior/inferior, wise/bad, intellectual/dumb and so on.

Frantz Fanon, an Afro-Caribbean revolutionary writer, argues that human beings who are not considered as humans shall not be bound by principles that apply to humanity in their attitude towards the colonizer. Describing the consciousness of "black" subject in a world of "white" power Fanon reveals the prejudices faced by blacks. He argues that "The black man among his own in the twentieth century does not know at what moment his inferiority comes into being through the other" (83). He portrays the real condition of the Blacks with an event, thus:

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad,



the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up. *Black Skins, White Masks*. (86)

By this we come to know the heavy loads of prejudice and mistreatment to the blacks. Such behavior was like inhuman and unbearable to them.

Silk wants to break away from the tradition- acceptance of the White's supremacy and domination. As a son of saloon keeper he had very narrow ways in his life. He says his father pushed him to be a serious student "studying my high school Latin, taking advanced Latin, taking Greek, which was still part of the old fashioned curriculum, the saloon keeper's kid couldn't have tried harder to be any more serious" (22). Coleman Silk is from the lower class background. The East Orange, where his father had saloon, was very poor place. He joined US navy lying his father during World War II hoping to achieve prosperity and honor. But he was deprived from opportunities and he was compelled to left.

Silk's mimicry is the process of reconstruction of identity. This is the place of white's supremacy. In this situation, his life was very pathetic during his child age or the days before mimicking Whites. He was thrown even out of whorehouse being a Negro. He thought that he would not find any opportunities and could not grasp success in such a situation. His life was nearly a 'hell'. So, he abandoned his family and past to live a new life. Silk determines to renounce his race and everything and everyone connected with it after his failed relationship with two white girls.

Connecting his failures with his race Jay L. Halio analyses that Coleman Silk's passing as Jew is the desire for happy life. His father having died, he severs all other family ties, proclaims himself a secular white Jew, and marries Iris Gittelman, a woman born of atheist Russian immigrant Jews. Neither she nor their four children ever learn of his true origins; in fact, no one does until after his death, except perhaps for Faunia Farley, the lover half his age whom he has taken near the end of his life. Halio exemplifies, "The Human Stain, supposedly based upon the life of the *New York Times* literary critic, Anatole Broyard, is about Coleman Silk, a Newark-born African American whose fair complexion allows him in his adult life to pass as a white man" (174). Therefore, his mimicry is the compulsion to live free, happy and honored life.

Similarly, Mr. Silk faces discriminatory behavior in Woolworth while moving to see Washington Monument. He couldn't enjoy hot dog because of his black race. He was with his roommate of Howard University where he was studying medical doctor. They refused to give him hot dog:

And yet his first week in Howard, when he eagerly went off on Saturday with his roommate, a lawyer's son from New Brunswick, to see the Washington Monument, and they stopped in Woolworth's to get a hot dog, he was called a nigger. His first name. And they would not give him the hot dog. Refused a hot dog at Woolworth's in downtown at Washington, on the way out called a nigger, and, as a result, unable to divorce himself from his feelings as easily as he did in the ring. (102)

The above lines reflect the prejudice and discriminations towards Negroes. Silk again gets dissatisfied upon himself and his race. With all these events, his desire to be identified as civilized, developed, high cultured and powerful man (White) gets

deeper. Thinking that he can't get success being a Negro man, he happens to mimic Whites.

Moreover, separation with his girlfriend Steena makes him more frustrated upon his race. She leaves him just knowing about his race and family background. The very good love relationship is also destroyed by his family and background:

"I can't do it!" she cried, and, without another word of explanation, gasping, violently weeping, clutching her bag to her chest- and forgetting her hat, which was in his lap, where he'd been holding it while she slept- she raced alone from the train as though from an attacker and did not phone him or try ever to see him again. (125)

In this way, two year's love relationship was broken when she got to know about his family and racial background while she visited his family. So, he concluded that it is his race and Negro identity which is hindering him to be a happy and successful person.

Silk is motivated to pass because of his quests for the American dream and his own yearnings for upward social mobility. Lisa A. Kirby in "Shades of Passing: Teaching and Interrogating Identity in Roth's 'The Human Stain' and Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby'" demonstrates that Coleman's passing is the yearning for social prestige. She views, "Silks passing in The Human Stain only reflects his own need to "silence" his true identity in exchange for achieving his American dream" (152). Connecting his desire to get social prestige with whites, Kirby argues that "Coleman's passing is the result of this convention. Passing was something not so much accepted but at least understood at the time that Coleman was doing it because, for many African Americans, this was one of the few ways to achieve the American dream" (156). He had very loving family: mother, father, sister and brother. Nathan knows

their family love by meeting Ernestine, Coleman's sister:

Ernestine told me how gracious Coleman's mother had been to the girl, Steena. How thoughtful and kind they'd been to Steena- and Teena to them. How hard working their mother was always, how after their father died, she had risen by virtue of merit alone, to become the first colored head nurse on the surgical floor of Newark Hospital. And how she had adored her Coleman, how there was nothing Coleman could do destroy his mother's love. (318)

Nobody leaves such family in small crisis. The then situation to Silk was more bad than hell due to prejudice and domination on the name of race. So, he chooses to pass as a White and achieve honor.

Iris, a white girl, becomes the medium to Silk for his cultural transformation for the reconstruction of his identity. He becomes most happy with the relationship of Jewish girl- Iris. He identifies himself as a Jew to all the people in new place. "Coleman had been allowing that he was Jewish for several years" (130). He becomes Jewish connected with Iris:

With Iris- the churned-up, untamed, wholly un-Steena-like, non-Jewish Jewish Iris- as the medium through which to make himself anew, he'd finally got it right. He was no longer trying on and casting off, endlessly practicing and preparing to be. This was it, the solution, the secret to his secret. (132)

Everyone of his family is dead for him. He has disowned himself from his family because if he gets connected with them his real identity will be revealed. Visiting his mom he says, he is getting married with a white girl and she thinks that he is also white. He seems happier to marry a white girl because he is now imitating as white.

Moreover, this is the result of the White's discourse and hegemony over other culture. The Whites have established a discourse that the White culture is the best in

the world, the Whites can easily get success, and they are free and civilized people in the world. Silk is living as other but not as himself because his original identity has been suppressed. Although many social and political changes have taken place in America during 20<sup>th</sup> century Silk happens to mimic white identity. So, the main concern of this research is to find out these factors causing him to abandon own identity and mimicking others identity.

Inhuman treatment to the Blacks is unacceptable for Silk so he decides to move away from his race for freedom. He is a good fighter and a basketball player and a navy but could not succeed due to his skin color. He has been identified, in a brothel, as a Nigger trying to pass and been thrown out. When the woman sees his naked body she recognizes him as black and pushes him away from there:

Even on that night in the Norfolk Whorehouse, when the woman who was watching from the bed as he began to peel off his uniform- a big-titted, fleshy, mistrustful whore not entirely ugly but certainly no looker (and maybe herself two thirty-fifths something other than white) smiled sourly and said, you are a black nigger, ain't you, boy?" and the two goons were summoned to throw him out, only then had he been as undone as he was by Steena's poem. (114)

We can imagine the situation for the Blacks, if people are behaved in such a way even in brothel. Such kind of discriminatory situation forced Silk to abandon his race and family and to mimic the white's life.

Though he abandons his family to become anew- white man, he can't stay totally detached. His sister, Ernestine, says to Zuckerman that there is regular contact between them. From Ernestine it is known that he loves to listen their news and he also shares his good news by calling to her. Even he regularly had been asking about his mother with Ernestine on phone calls. She said, "We always had a good talk

together. He always wanted to hear the news, even about Walter and his promotions" (319). It is not true that he does not love his mother but he wants to protect her from being hurt. Ernestine said, "He believed that if the line of communication remained open, Coleman was going to break Mother's heart a thousand times over, exactly the way he did it that day" (319). Therefore, neither he has not been able to forget his family nor he has been able to communicate openly and establish a family relation with them. In this regard, he is in-between, neither a Negro nor a totally White. In Bhabha's words he is now an ambivalent. Bhabha argues:

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence. ... Ambivalence of mimicry does not merely rapture the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence.

(122/123)

In the process of reformation and achieving success in personal life he had left over his family and Negro identity and transformed into White culture and became almost the same to White. For Bhabha the transformation of mimicking subject is a partial but not the total. He/she could not be totally new person to new culture or he/she remains ambivalent. Mr. Silk as well can't forget his past totally neither he can adopt total Jew culture and tradition- he is in-between.

Secrecy is at the very heart of what identity means in this novel. There is meaningful relevance of his secrecy in the novel. He would be again dominated if he would not have hid his real identity. Living in New York he married a white girl, Iris. He has been hiding his original identity and imitating Whites. He has adopted Jewish culture and tradition so as to appear as White Jew. After seeing no way to

come up from discriminated life he chose to abandon his whole identity. His mother bursts in tear after knowing his deed. She says, "There was always something about our family, and I don't mean color- there was something about us that impeded you" (139). He had chosen his life against his family and race. Narrator states:

But only through this test can he be the man he has chosen to be, unalterably separated from what he was handed at birth, free to struggle at being free like any human being wish to be free. To get that from life, the alternate destiny, on one's own term, he must do what must be done. Don't most people want to walk out of the fucking lives they have been handed? (139)

Therefore, he puts himself and his wishes at the center. His bitter experiences as Negro forces him to abandon his family and identity. He is compelled to mimic the Whites. And marriage with a White girl is also his medium to be a white man and finally for the success. His dream for freedom and success pulls him to mimic white's culture which is thought to be superior and the best. Bhabha opines that mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other. In his opinion, "mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategy of colonial power and knowledge" (122). Silk as a Negro didn't get any opportunities and respect in his life. So, his mimicry is the desire to be identified as other (white) in order to get opportunities and honor. Therefore, mimicry means adopting the lifestyle of others leaving own identity. People mimic other in order to be recognized as them but not as own self. Similarly, Silk mimics the Whites in order to be identified as the White and grasp huge achievement. The person bringing all these reformations is a Negro, who is mimicking the Whites. If he was a Negro he would not be able to reach to this post. Nobody would believe him and give opportunity to be a professor and the faculty dean of reputed college. Therefore, his mimicry is to achieve huge success and honor

in his life.

Another important cause of his mimicry is the hegemony of white culture in America. The Whites have been successful to establish a discourse interpreting their culture as civilized, modern, and a best in the world. Accepting such discourse, Silk gets attracted into White culture. There is cultural hegemony in America so that Blacks like Silk can't be respected and get proper opportunities for success. He imitates Whites in order to get success, freedom and happiness in his life which is secured in hegemonic culture (White) but not in Black culture. Antonio Gramsci, a neo-Marxist theorist, argues that in multi-cultural societies marginalized people are compelled to adopt the mainstream culture by using ideology through different institutions which is called cultural hegemony. He asserts that hegemony is the state of ideologically dominated capitalist ruling system where there is not only the use of power but also the use of ideology through different institutions to maintain control over people. He argues:

The entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules. ... civil society (or the hegemony of a social group over the entire nation exercised through so called private organizations such as the church, the unions, the schools, etc. (112,113)

So, cultural hegemony is the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society so that their imposed, ruling class world view becomes the accepted cultural norm. Coleman Silk imitates Whites in order to get success, freedom and happiness in his life which is secured in hegemonic culture (White) but not in Black culture. Whites have created a discourse that their culture is superior to any other culture. So, he falls under the White's cultural



hegemony because he has abandoned his original culture and has been mimicking new culture.

Asok Sen, in his study of Gramsci, argues that in the course of his reflections, Gramsci distinguished between civil and political societies, the sub-spaces of consent and force which interact in the consolidation of bourgeois order. He opines:

The central issues of Gramsci's reflections on state, civil society and hegemony pertain more to the context of advanced capitalism where capitalism responded to its own economic crisis through a self-conscious restructuring of its own apparatuses of reproduction and social control. The class struggle of the proletariat had to face new complexities engendered by the innovative forms of interlocking of the state and the economy. (32)

Therefore, for continuing ruling power and getting legitimacy bourgeois not only use their power but also the ideology to control people.

Silk abandons his identity and mimics the identity of the Whites not because of power but through different ideologies created by them. The Whites have been successful to establish a discourse that the Whites are superior, they are free and happy, their culture is best in the world. So, in the diverse cultural society, Silk is attracted towards the White culture, that attraction is known as cultural hegemony. Antonio Gramsci argues that there lies hegemony in culturally diverse society. According to him it is the ideologically dominated society which controls people not only through power but also through the use of ideology through different institutions. Gramsci argues, "ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (112). Gramsci claims that cultural hegemony is the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society so that their imposed, ruling class

world view becomes the accepted cultural norm. Bourgeoisie propagated hegemonic culture by establishing their own norms and values as "natural" or "normal" values of all.

Andrew Heywood regarding Gramsci's concept of hegemony argues:

Gramsci saw civil society as the public sphere where trade unions and political parties gained concessions from the bourgeois state, and the sphere in which ideas and beliefs were shaped, where bourgeois 'hegemony' was reproduced in cultural life through the media, universities and religious institutions to 'manufacture consent' and legitimacy. (101)

Therefore, hegemony is established not only through power and economy but also through ideology used in different cultural institutions like media, universities, colleges, religious institutions and so on. This is the discourse created in the society by ruling class people especially to have control over people. In the same way, Coleman Silk is compelled to change his culture and adopt White culture- ruling class culture which is hegemonic culture.

It is the result of cultural hegemony in America that he chooses to change his culture. There might be other ways as well to get rid of domination and prejudices but his attraction towards the White culture justifies the cultural hegemony. After experiencing and understanding about the discrimination upon his family due to his color, he has already decided to come out of this situation. Disobeying his father he joins navy and marries a white girl and also develops sex relation with white woman, Faunia Farley. He leads his life on his own wish i.e. rejects his family and Negro community. His love for better future becomes heavier than his love for family and Negro identity. Zuckerman says, "But first he had broken the law by lying to get into the navy, and now, out looking for a white woman to fuck, he had plunged into the

worst possible disaster" (182). The discontinuity to the previous life with family is the result of his credo for the free, happy and successful life. Narrator writes:

If Coleman kept on like this, he'd end up in a ditch with his throat slit. Look at where he was now. Look where he had come to hide. And how? Why?

Because of his credo, because of his insolent, arrogant "I am not one of you, I can't bear you, I am not part of Negro we" credo. The great heroic struggle against their we- and look at what he looked like! (183)

If Coleman had remained inside Negro "we" he would fall in ditch. His credo and struggle had changed his life to better. With the abandonment to the family, mimicry to White, marriage to a white girl and his hard work he earned a new life. Bonnie Lyons in "Lies, Secrets, Truth-telling and Imagination in "The Human Stain"" views that Coleman Silk wanted to come out from Niggerness, so "A light-skinned black man, he rejected the we-ness of his black family and all-black Howard University, refused both the racial pride of his barrier-breaking brother and the racism of those who might label him nigger" (89).

A Negro man living in America faces many difficulties in life, could not get opportunities and could not get success in life. He sees the Whites happy, free, of best standard, and successful. He also thinks that people of the White culture are getting better opportunities and success. Declaring that it is his culture and Negro identity hindering him for his success and happiness, he decides to abandon original identity and adopt or mimic the culture and identity of those whites who are in power and respect. He is there "to seek the deeper meaning of existence? A world of love" (183). So, he is in the process of self development. For Gramsci, this is the result of hegemony which is ideologically developed in the society. He suggests that state and ruling capitalist class- bourgeoisie- don't use coercive power, violence or economic

force to control over ruled but they use institutions like media, religious institutions, universities, culture and so on to manufacture consent and legitimacy. Therefore, there is the use of ideology rather than violence to maintain hegemony in the society. According to him, cultural hegemony is the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society so that their imposed, ruling class world view becomes the accepted cultural norm. Bourgeoisie propagated hegemonic culture by establishing their own norms and values as "natural" or "normal" values of all.

For Ernestine Coleman's decision of mimicry is not uncommon. Before the civil rights movement, she says, it was very difficult for Negroes to live in the society. So, she views "Even what Coleman did, the decision that he made, despite his Negro ancestry, to live as a member of another racial group- that was by no means an uncommon decision" (323). There was a very deep impression on Coleman that he and other Negroes have been dominated and deprived from opportunities because of their Black race. He always thinks that Whites are always happy, satisfied, the best in the world, and superior human being. This is the reason behind his mimicry. This is the white cultural hegemony which undermines other cultures and glorifies own culture making people compelled to accept it.

Critic Arthur Scherr examines *The Human Stain* as the evil of "political correctness" and its threat to individual freedom and achievement in academe and the wider society. He asserts:

In presenting his "politically incorrect" thesis, Roth could just as easily have allowed Silk to be a Jewish professor persecuted for alluding to two students who had never attended his class as "spooks" (an antiquated, derogatory term for African Americans), not knowing they were black. Silk, a surname more

common among Jews than African Americans, even marries Iris Gittelman, the proverbially willful "Yid dish mama." More realistically, Silk never practices the Jewish faith. He and Iris, who grew up in an atheistic, communist Jewish home, are "anticlerical atheists. (61)

He mentions that theme of mistaken identity pervades the novel. No one except the reader is aware that Silk is the Black until the end, when Zuckerman finds out from Silk's long-lost biological sister, Ernestine, at his funeral.

Born in a lower middle-class family with cultural aspirations, Silk's ability of self-invention is catalyzed by the socio-cultural and political ethos of the first-half of 20th century America. His early interest in boxing points out his "shadowy" secrecy and his desire for self-invention that will later define his whole identity. However, his art of playing boxing could do nothing important achievement in front of his race. He was perfect boxing player in his college age. He had good speed and counter punching in boxing. Even though his fast learning capacity could make him successful but his race had blocked for him to access to the opportunities. Rita D. Jacobs views Silk as a person who reinvents himself. In her words Americans have the intrinsic ability to reinvent themselves. She writes:

By making the microcosm of one man's life his focus and following it through a variety of truly surprising events, Roth manages to skewer academia, intellectual pretense, American politics, and the problems of race and class in America. Coleman Silk is a victim of the very same America that gave him his opportunities. (116)

She views that Silk is living the American Dream, but it is a dream with a dark and demonic underside. Silk, a light-skinned black man who has opted to pass as a Jew, struggles with the fear of exposure at every turn. In an ironic twist, he is condemned

by the politically correct fervor at the college for innocently using the term "spooks" to refer to several missing students who just happen, unknown to the professor who has never seen them, to be black. The academic downfall of the seventy year-old Silk is accompanied, through the aid of Viagra and a thirty-four-year old illiterate janitor, Faunia Farley, by a rise in his sexual passion.

Silk wishes to come out from the world of dominance and prejudice. As a Negro he was hugely mistreated by others in the language used to call him. Words used to call him also notify the degree of dominance to him or to Negroes. Therefore, negating his racial history he mimics the Whites by which he would get due respect and freedom. Words/ phrases like "Silky Silk", "Silky", "that's all you are", "that's what you are" etcetera have been repeatedly used representing Coleman Silk. During boxing his companion Mac says, "knock the punch down. Counterpunch. You are a counterpuncher, Silky. That's what you are, that's all you are" (90). These are dominating words used for Negroes where there is no honor and respect. "If nothing comes up," Doc said "you don't bring it up, you are neither one thing or the other, you are Silky Silk." That's enough" (98). Mac and Doc have been using such dominating words to a Negro, though he is a talented person. Mac wanted to push down Silk to the second position in academic field whereas Doc behaves him with poor words in boxing game.

Whites have created negative image of the Black people and whole community. Ideology is the shared ideas by the community or group. According to the linguist Lesley Jeffries ideology is constructed and communicated by language. He argues "The important issue for us is that language can carry ideologies, either explicitly (I hate foreigners) or implicitly (those horrible foreigners are back again)" *Critical Stylistics* (8). Therefore, either implicitly or explicitly language can create

ideology. Similarly in *The Human Stain*, the White community carries the ideology that the whole Negro community is inferior and bad which should be treated dominantly which can be seen in the above paragraph. In this way, language used to call Silk are dominating and exploiting due to which he declares to mimic White. The title of this novel, *The Human Stain*, is also very suggestive. By 'stain' we mean 'a discolored spot' or 'a blemish on one's character'. So, here human stain suggests us the negative mark or blemish on Coleman Silk's human life. The only stain of Silk is his Black race which prohibits him from many opportunities and brings him many oppression, prejudices and domination. He was good boxer, student and hard working person but all these qualities weigh lighter beside his race. Critic Arthur Scherr opines that "Silk's prowess, including utilizing racial stereotypes of the "superior" black athlete, Roth depicts Silk as an award-winning runner and semiprofessional boxer, as well as his high school's most brilliant student and valedictorian. These abilities seem embarrassingly far-fetched" (83). Until and unless he mimics Whites couldn't gain anything. Therefore, his race and Negro identity have become his stain.

In this respect, it is found that there are different motives of Coleman's mimicry to Whites. First of all, it is the domination, prejudice and deprivation from opportunities to the Negro people. There were separate school/colleges, churches, playgrounds, swimming pools for Negroes and Whites in America before 1940's. Negroes had been behaved very negatively, even behaved as non-human. Silk's father was saloon keeper at first and then he worked as a waiter in train. Their family used to get domination from Whites. This made him feel that he should have to be white for freedom. So, one of the motives of his mimicry is prejudice and domination on Negroes by the Whites.

Similarly, another motive of his mimicry is his desire for upward social

mobility. There was no honor and respect as a Negro which was secured in White man. For example he can't get proper job because of his race, he is thrown out of even warehouse for being a Negro, he is placed second in the class because of his color, he is behaved and thought as bad person for being the Black. By mimicking white he gets opportunities and reaches to the honored post- professor and dean of the college.

Moreover, it is the effect of the White cultural hegemony in America which leads Silk to mimicry. His mind is filled with the ideology that only the Whites are happy, successful and best in the world and to achieve such things everyone should follow the White culture. So, he wishes to follow the so called world's best culture which guarantees a happy, successful, prosperous and free life. In this context, Silk's mimicry is a point of departure to pursue the American dream that includes new, happy, free and successful life. Therefore, this act of mimicry is the impact of the White cultural hegemony established in America.

Lastly, his mimicry is the process of reconstruction of his identity. Silk is evaluated and behaved on the basis of his race negating his personal abilities and talents. For this case, he wanted to create his personality on the basis of his talents which is beyond his race. By mimicking Whites, it was possible for him to achieve huge success, happiness and honor. Therefore, domination and prejudice to his race, deprivation from opportunities, white cultural hegemony in America, his dream to get honor and live a free life, his desire to achieve American dream are the motives of Silk's mimicry.



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