

# HOMI BHABHA'S MIMICRY AS REFLECTED IN TANIZAKI'S *NAOMI*

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## Abstract

This research focuses on mimicry based on the theory of Homi Bhabha in Tanizaki's *Naomi*. The research is a qualitative research. The findings of the research shows that Naomi indeed imitate, copy, and adapt the western culture. Naomi in imitating, copying and adapting western norm through their physical appearance uses western products such as cosmetics, magazine, fabric, food and seeing movie and enjoying western music. Meanwhile, Naomi's manners and behaviors confirm the applying of the notion of mimicry which is said as an imitating, copying and adapting the western culture. Naomi is described as good imitator of western culture not only in her physical appearance but also she performs some actions which mimic of western culture. Those actions are being punctual if she has an appointment, and having a lot of male westerner friends.

Keywords : mimicry, postcolonialism

## INTRODUCTION

*Naomi* or *Chijin no ai* (literally A Fool's love ) tells the heroine Naomi who looks like the Western actress Mary Pickford and is trained to behave like a Westerner, become the object of the hero's worship. The novel encompasses the fears of modern men and the rise of modern woman. Joji the main male character in the novel struggles to understand Naomi the main female character who represents a means of transcending the rapidly changing modern times.

*Naomi* or *Chijin No Ai* was first serialized in the *Osaka Asahi* Newspaper from March to June 1924 and then continued in *Josei* Magazine after a five-month interruption. The interruption was

done by the government censors and the readers. At that time they considered that Naomi was immoral and too vulgar. In a fact, the work drives a certain group of readers who enjoys reading *Naomi* create the term "Naomism". The term conveys the image of a modern girl who wants to be free from Japanese convention.

Tanizaki presents in the novel not only the form (the name) but also the description of the girl indeed reconstructs the charm and inadequacies of the "West". Naomi is described as "western-looking" and has west" ideology. In a way, the name, Naomi itself, sum up the great theme of the novel that is modernization.

Modernization which occurred in Japan creates a new paradigm way of life

among Japanese. The paradigm involves a complex and varied cultural contact, interaction and counter-globalization movements. Thus it leads to the civilization of a “new modern culture”. In line with this “new modern culture”, Homi Bhabha, a leading voice in postcolonial studies remarks those circumstances as “mimicry” and “hybridity”

Mimicry refers to adopting and adapting or even copying. It is exaggeration copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas (Bhabha, 1994: 86). Bhabha’s analysis of mimicry in his essay ‘Of Mimicry and Man’ is largely based on the Lacanian vision of mimicry as camouflage resulting in colonial ambivalence. He sees the colonizer as a snake in the grass who, speaks in “a tongue that is forked,” and produces a mimetic representation that “... emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge”(Bhabha 1994: 122).

In postcolonial studies ‘mimicry’ is considered as unsettling imitations that are characteristic of postcolonial cultures. For Homi K. Bhabha, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable ‘Other’, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994: 122). He is the foremost contemporary critic who

has tried to unveil the contradictions inherent in colonial discourse in order to highlight the colonizer's ambivalence with respect to his attitude towards the colonized Other and vice versa. He continues: The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. (Bhabha1994: 126)

### **Theoretical Background**

Since this research employs postcolonial approach, postcolonial criticism are used in the study. Postcolonial theory proposed by Bertens (2007) and combines with the one proposed by Robert Young (2001) are main concepts to be employed in this study. Bertens and Young claims that Postcolonial studies examines how two different cultures meet at the beginning, and one of them dominates another with their superiority and finally become new culture and civilization (2007: 174 & 2001: 69). In this case, this study intends to focus on analyzing the cultural clash between Japanese culture and Western which become hybrid. This is because of the Meiji Restoration in Japan at that time.

Dealing with the achievement of an intended goal in answering the research problems on chapter one, this research

entitled Homi Bhabha's 'mimicry' in Tanizaki's *Naomi*. The ground theory which is applied is the Bhabha's concept of mimicry taken from Bhabha's books called *The Location of Culture* (1994) and *Nation and Narration* (1994). By these theories, the writer tries to find out Bhabha's notion of mimicry in *Naomi*. The data for this research are gathered by reading books, taking notes, and getting online to e-books, journals and articles related to the object of the study. The term mimicry refers to an exaggeration of copying of ideas, language, manners, and culture of the dominant culture that differentiates it from mere imitation.

### **Research Method**

This research applies a qualitative research as stated by Bodgan and Taylor (in Supratna, 1996:110). They say that a qualitative research is a research procedure that results descriptive data in the form of written data or oral from person or behavior observed. The source of data is the novel which is entitled *Naomi* written by Junichiro Tanizaki. The novel was published in 1985. The data analysis uses inductive and deductive methods.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Bhabha's mimicry is a part of a larger concept of visualizing the postcolonial situation. It is a such kind of a binary opposition between authority and oppression. Bhabha states that 'all modes of imposition in including the demand on the colonized to be like the colonizer results in mimicry. Bhabha believes that the mode of asserting authority over the colonized gave rise to mimicry.

It can be seen that there is an anxiety of colonizer which is expected to open a space for the colonized to resist colonial discourse. This anxiety deals with mimicry, Mimicry relates to the colonized adopting and adapting the colonizer's culture. But mimicry is not totally imitation and the colonized is not being assimilated into dominant or even superior culture. As Bhabha explains that mimicry is an exaggeration copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas, thus mimicry is repetition with difference. Mimicry is also one response to the circulation of stereotypes (1994: 122).

Moreover, Bhabha gives further definition on mimicry as the following quotation:

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite which is to say,

that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference. (1994:86) From that quotation, it reveals that the idea of ambivalence is constructed along with mimicry itself. It undermines colonialism's grand discourses of humanism, enlightenment. So he states that there is an obvious disjunction between the material effects of colonialism and its discourses of moral and intellectual *superiority*. He argues further that mimicry does not merely rupture 'the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a partial' presence. According to him, the play between equivalence and excess makes the colonized both reassuringly similar and also terrifying; so mimicry is at once resemblance and menace. (1994:86)

Homi Bhabha suggests that the partiality of presence in colonial discourse leads to a kind of drive to become authentic. He adds that the desire to emerge as authentic through mimicry- through a process of writing and repetition- is the final irony of partial representation (1994:88). The colonial discourse at once demands both similarity and difference in the figures of the colonized. The mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask. In mimicry, identity is never identical with itself. It is pointed out that identity normally operates in terms of metaphor, but that in mimicry it explicitly operates through metonymy. (ibid)

Mimicry being a strategy is characteristically visual. Bhabha insists on the visual as the key element in mimicry, making the connections with stereotype absolutely clear.

He states that the visibility of the mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction. Mimicry is itself a markedly ambivalent phenomenon. Bhabha's idea of mimicry needs to be, thought of as a process that mimics no fixed, final, foundational identity. The colonizer does not have absolute pre-existence identity which can be mimicked, and the colonized likewise has no real identity which he or she is betraying through mimicry. Bhabha suggests that the structure of mimicry derives from a fundamental but unstable urge on the part of colonial authority. There must be intermediaries or collaborators with whom the colonial power can work in the exercise of its authority and these intermediaries are come to seem a little too similar to the colonizer, undermining ideologies of superiority. A further consequence of mimicry is the undermining of the colonizer's apparently stable original identity. The identity of the colonizer is constantly slipping away, being undermined by effects of writing, joking, sly civility and repetition. In conclusion, Mimicry is when someone tries to copy someone else in some way and mimicry implicitly offers an opening for agency, and even a model for agency.

As Bhabha explains that mimicry is an exaggeration copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas, thus mimicry is repetition with difference. In this case, the two novels depict the female main character does mimicry the Westerner's manner,

language or ideology. Moreover, they also conduct the notion of cultural hybridity in which the action of mixing or blending two different cultures into one action or performance. In this case, the female main character, Naomi in *Naomi* and Misako in *Some Prefer Nettles* are chosen to be the central character that being analyzed and indeed they do the notion of key term of HomiBhabha's concept in post-colonial study that is the notion of mimicry and cultural hybridity.

As it is stated that mimicry discusses the copying of language, culture, manners or ideas, Naomi the main female character that is discussed in this research does mimicry. Her deeds of doing mimicry cannot be separated from her intimacy with her spouse, Joji. Joji asks her to be "a fine woman". "A fine woman" in this context refers to the ideal lady of Western. According to Joji an ideal Western woman should be physically interesting and have a good intellectual. She must also speak English very well. Furthermore Joji requires,

"...A woman who wanted to be "the equal of Westerners" and a "fine woman" wasn't very promising if she had no aptitude for systematic thinking and analysis (Tanizaki, 1985, 44).

From that quotation, it is learned that Joji's figure of 'a fine woman' should have a good intellectual and she should be able to think systematically and analytically. Then, Naomi learns the western value that conducts her manner based on the systematic thought, therefore she appreciates the manner of coming on time like the western people do. Naomi also has western people manner when she appreciates the idea of time efficiency. The following quotation shows the statement:

She was always on time and never broke an appointment. Sometimes I was late for one reason or another, and would worry that she might have gone home; but she was always right there waiting for me (ibid, p. 11).

The quotation above shows that Naomi thinks like a western people because she does not want to break a promise to meet someone else and comes on time. While many easterners behave that coming on time is not really important. Joji himself is the man who wants to make Naomi live as a western people cannot keep his promise to come on time. This event indicates that Naomi is really influenced to live as western people with the manner that appreciates the coming on time and keeping promise. Because she appreciates the manner of

coming on time the western people do, it can be said that Naomi does mimicry. She learns the value from the western people by imitating being punctual and never breaking the appointment that she has made.

To make his dream of figuring Naomi as ‘a fine woman’, Joji demands Naomi to quit working as hostess at the Café Diamond. Naomi must resign the job since she must learn and study finally she should turn to be ‘a fine woman’ as Joji asks. The following quotation shows how Joji’s ambition to make Naomi to be “a fine woman”

“...If you’re willing to quit this job, I wouldn’t mind looking after you. I’ll take full responsibility and bring you up as ‘a fine and splendid woman’ (ibid, 13).

The quotation above shows that Joji has a strong will to make Naomi to “a fine woman” which refers to western woman as he dreams. Joji is really convinced that he wants to make Naomi to a perfect Western lady. Later on, in the next phase in novel, Joji finds out that Naomi is not as intellectual that Joji expects. To be ‘a fine woman’, Naomi must be able to speak English perfectly. After taking a private English lesson for quite a long time, Joji tests her English and Joji notices that Naomi’s

English is not good at all in grammar. Knowing Naomi’s unintellectual weakness, Joji doubts whether Naomi could become ‘fine woman’ as he dreams. As it is proved,

...But more than that, I doubted now whether Naomi could become the ‘fine woman’ we’d talked about (ibid, 43).

The lines above present that Joji is asking to himself on Naomi’s intellect. By judging Naomi’s English Grammar, he begins to think that Naomi would not be able to be a fine woman’ as Joji requires. Naomi’s effort to fulfill Joji’s desire is imitating like the western girl figure that dreams of Joji. The following quotation describes the statements as follows:

“What would you like to study?”  
“I want to study English.”  
English and .....anything else?”  
(ibid, p: 12)

The above quotation describes Joji’s will that Naomi has to be like a western girl. This will is in line with Naomi’s own will. By understanding her own will to study English, it can be analyzed that she is pleased to learn western culture and does the way of like of western people. By mastering the English language, she wants to understand the way of life of western people.

The eagerness of studying English is part of her will to learn English literary works, especially prose. The following quotation shows her eagerness of learning English deals with her will to enjoy English prose, “Lying the sofa, she’d put aside the novel (ibid, 57).

The above quotation shows that Naomi wants to learn English so she looks like a western people who understand English. She does mimicry because she thinks that by understanding English she can develop herself with the manner and ideas of the western people that can be gained from the activities of reading English novels. Reading novel is not only the way to look like a western people so that she just imitates the culture, but is a way to understand the manner and ideas of western people, and English becomes the means.

However it is not easy for Naomi to have good manner as a fine woman by the western standard that is held by Joji. The following quotation describes the statement:

A woman who wanted to be “the equal of Westerners” and a “fine woman” wasn’t very promising if she had no aptitude for systematic thinking and analysis (ibid, p:44).

The quotation above describes Joji’s thought on a westernized Naomi. For Joji, Naomi is not western enough if she does not the capacity of thinking systematically and analytically. It means that to be a westerner must have a western manner that is intellegency in which for Joji, Naomi does not have the capability as it is seen from this quotation, “ Naomi was not as intelligent as I’d hoped” (ibid, p: 48).

The quotation above shows the disappointment of Joji that Naomi cannot do mimicry well because she is not smart. The disappointment happens after Joji knows that Naomi cannot understand English well showing that she does not have the manner quality of western people like they want. The disappointment makes Joji think that Naomi can do mimicry only on the surface but not the deep inside of manner as it is stated in this quotation below, “I had failed with the spiritual side but succeeded splendidly on the physical (ibid, p:49).

Joji’s statement describes the conclusion that Joji has after knowing the westernization that Naomi does can be attained only on the surface which means her physical appearance, such as her beautiful face and the fond of eating western food, but she cannot be a western people

from deep inside her brain because she does not understand English as it is expected her to do.

Naomi's mimicry cannot be separated from her intimacy with Joji, someone who adores western civilization. He wants to see Naomi become like his idol, A Canadian actress Mary Pickford, and even Naomi's own name sounding like a western name interests Joji. The following quotation describes Naomi's mimicry that is started from her own name:

Everyone called her "Nao-chan"  
When I asked about it one day, I learned that her real name was Naomi, written with three Chinese characters. The name excited my curiosity. A splendid name, I thought; written in Roman letters, it could be a western name, she began to take on an intelligent, Western look. (ibid, p:4)

The above quotation explains that Naomi's own name sounds like a western name, so she does mimicry in order to be like a western people. There is no certain proof that her name is genuine that she gets since her birth, because the narrator, Joji does not know about her family background. It can be analyzed that Naomi does not mind to have a western name and does mimicry to due to the fact that she does not protest to

have the name while the majority of Japanese have the Japanese names.

Naomi enjoys western culture so that she visits movies and enjoys watching movies. The following statement shows the depiction, "Naomi was fond of the movies" (ibid, p:8). The quotation clearly shows that Naomi does an activity that the western people do in their countries that is watching films in movies. When somebody watches films in movies that means the person watches western films because the eastern people usually enjoy their own performances in the form of traditional theatre that is not seen through cinema. It can be concluded that Naomi does mimicry because watching films in movies is the activity that is done by the western people at the time when many eastern people enjoy amusement at the traditional theatre.

Naomi herself shows her eagerness that she wants to study something west out of her own Japanese background without the instruction of Joji. The following quotation supports the statement, " I want to study English." (ibid, p:12). The quotation depicts the idea that Naomi is a Japanese girl that wants to do mimicry. Because she wants to understand English like the western people communicate and enjoy western culture in



English., it can be said that Naomi does mimicry. Not only does English, but Naomi also wants to understand music as it is seen in the following quotation:

“English and ...anything else?”  
“music” (ibid, p:13).

The quotation above shows Naomi is not a traditional eastern woman. She wants to develop herself by understanding music. Music means the western one because Naomi is eager to learn something that she thinks more beautiful and better and she finds it in the new culture, the progress that is possessed by the western people. It can be said that she does mimicry because she wants to behave like the western people who know the music of the western people after she knows also English, the language of the western people. The music that she thinks to make her look like a western and therefore she becomes a civilized person is to be able to play a western music instrument, piano. The following quotation shows the statement:

Oh, yes, yes. I'm going to buy a piano soon. You'll be such a lady, you won't even be ashamed to mix with Westerners.” (ibid, p:36).

The above quotation shows that Naomi does mimicry because she prefers the western music instrument, piano to the

traditional ones to play. Her reason to do the action is that Naomi thinks by mastering in playing piano, she can be accepted as a part of people that behave like the civilized persons, the westerners.

Naomi's imitation on the western culture is found when she does not mind to behave like a western movie star, Annette Kellerman. The quotation below supports the statement:

“Naomi,” I said, “let me see you imitate Kellerman.” She stood up with her arms straight over her head and showed me her “diving” pose (ibid, p:19).

The above quotation shows the cultural imitation that is done by Naomi. Naomi is fond of western culture. She prefers the western films to the traditional Japanese theatre, therefore she does not mind to imitate a western movie star because she knows well the actress' habit and she loves doing it.

After becoming someone that looks like Annette Kellerman, Naomi is photographed as Mary Pickford. The following quotation shows the statement:

I bought a camera and photographed her face, which was looking more and more like Mary Pickford's, in different lighting

and from various angles (ibid, p:34).

The quotation above shows the way Naomi imitates the western style in which can be described through the effort to make Naomi look like a western actress, Mary Pickford. It can be learnt that Naomi does mimicry by copying a western culture thing.

The pride of becoming a western people is described when Naomi performs her life so that she looks like a western girl. The following quotation supports the statement:

“Very good- better than any actor. Your face looks so Western”  
“Does it? Where does it look Western?”  
“Your nose and your teeth.” (ibid, p:36).

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion that can be drawn is the female main character of Naomi indeed imitate, copy, and adapt the western culture. Naomi in imitating, copying and adapting western norm through their physical appearance uses western products such as cosmetics, magazine, fabric, food and seeing

movie and enjoying western music. Meanwhile, Naomi’s manners and behaviors confirm the applying of the notion of mimicry which is said as an imitating, copying and adapting the western culture. Naomi is described as good imitator of western culture not only in her physical appearance but also she performs some actions which mimic of western culture. Those actions are being punctual if she has an appointment, and having a lot of male westerner friends.

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