

white
supremacy is
present even
when white
people aren't.

mimicry

Occurs when members of a colonized society copy the language, politics, and other cultural markers of their colonizers.

By imitating those in power, one hopes to gain the same power.

An examination of mimicry in a neocolonial context allows us to see how the legacy of colonialism continues to oppress and exploit Black and Brown communities, even when white people aren't around.

In **Theorizing Native Studies**, Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith observe that “the logics of settler colonialism and genocide are not disconnected from the logics of imperialism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy.”

Basically, long after formerly colonized people “gain independence,” the violence of colonialism continues through neocolonial vehicles such as:

- policing and state-sanctioned violence
- the prison industrial complex
- exploitation of workers and the environment
- privatization of land to benefit only the rich
- marginalization of those who are not heterosexual, cisgender, or monogamous
- general acceptance of white culture as the norm

Through mimicry, the oppressed—intentionally or otherwise—maintain the same structures of domination as their oppressors. Even if one seeks to overthrow those in power, the structures themselves remain, reproducing the power of the oppressors in covert and insidious ways.

Mimicry creates agents of this power with a non-white face, making white supremacy harder to recognize, much less dismantle.

As Audre Lorde notes in *Sister Outsider*, “The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion.”

Likewise, Frantz Fanon points out that even when the colonizer has physically left, white supremacist frameworks of power remain internalized by the colonized. In this way, mimicry allows the white oppressor to “colonize” the minds of those they have oppressed.

Fanon writes in **The Wretched of the Earth**, “Imperialism, which today is waging war against a genuine struggle for human liberation, sows seeds of decay here and there that must be mercilessly rooted out from our land and from our minds.”

a path forward

Mimicry ultimately fails as a transformative tool because it continues to center white supremacy at its core. The pathway to power using mimicry is dependent upon one's proximity to whiteness, and thus it is unable to dismantle it completely.

To fully undo the harms of white supremacy, we must seek out pathways that do not repeat its oppressive hierarchical structures. We can't keep inserting Black and Brown faces into white supremacist frameworks and expect different results.

We need to literally abolish white supremacy in all parts of society—in public realms and in our private lives—for true transformation to occur.

Says Lorde, “For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

resources

adrienne maree brown, “What is/isn’t transformative justice?”

Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing”

Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, Theorizing Native Studies

Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider

Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth

Mariame Kaba, “Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish Police”

Mikaela Loach and Jo Becker, The YIKES Podcast

Monica A. Coleman and Tananarive Due, Octavia Tried to Tell Us: Parable for Today’s Pandemic webinar series

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “In the Shadow of the Shadow State”

Sherwood Forest Zine Library