

## The Discursive Formation of Ethnic Subjectivities and Identities in Popular Romance

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### Abstract

Within the framework of postcolonial studies, this paper undertakes to examine the politics of ethnic subjectivities and identities in Rebecca Stratton's popular romance *The Silken Cage*. It lays bare how 'blackness', as an identity marker of ethnic difference, carries social and political meanings in British popular romance. This paper challenges the commonly held view of 'skin colour' as a mere biological feature without deeming factors and forces that have informed its conception and hence have constructed it in a number of ways. The suggested romance is worthy of study by virtue of its concern with the notion of 'blackness' in the colonial context. A postcolonial analysis of *The Silken Cage* revealed that 'black' subjectivity and identity are constructs that have been shaped and reshaped by historical, social, linguistic, discursive, ideological, and political dynamics. The paper also showed that Stratton's popular narrative is an order of discourse wherein 'blackness' is more than a matter of pigmentation; it is a mark/mask, a uniform, a signifier, a fetish with a whole range of significance and implications. Colonialism, racial segregation, and captivity are some racist practices exploited by the writer to inscribe ethnic subjectivities and identities in the cross-cultural encounter. 'Blackness', in this sense, is a political, social, and ideological construct.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Any account on the construction of ethnic subjectivities and identities, be it literary or otherwise, should look back in history on the manner it has been conceived through time. This retrospective move is essential to the general argument of this paper in that it leans upon the assumption that since 'black' subjectivity has been characterized in varying ways according to different historical stages and geographical contexts, it follows that it is not an inherent and fixed property, but rather one that is socially, historically, and politically characterized and thus constructed. It is in this respect that this paper tries to investigate the construction and reconstruction of black subjectivities and identities in Rebecca Stratton's popular romance *The Silken Cage*. It seeks to unveil how the notion of blackness, as a racist practice and an identity marker of difference, is utilized by Stratton to celebrate Western domination and subjugation. The chosen corpus is very much motivated by the need to explore the politics of black subjectivity and identity construction in a context conditioned by colonialism.

In broad terms, much research has been conducted on the thematic issue of ‘othering’ in cross-cultural encounters. Edward Said’s seminal book *Orientalism* (1978) is undoubtedly the most foundational study to unravel how the oriental ‘Other’ is conceived of by the Western ‘I’ in colonial discourse. As far as Said is concerned, Western writers’ representational discourse of the Orient, albeit its different styles and approaches, is monolithic. The Orient has been most of the time associated with negative attributes in Western discourse (fiction, mass media, art, history...). Along with Said’s influential work, there is Leina Lewis’ *Gendering Orientalism: Race Femininity, and Representation* (1996). Lewis’ work is as crucial as Said’s in the sense that it problematizes masculinist assumptions connected with the stability and homogeneity of the orientalist ‘gaze’. Lewis has managed to disclose Western female writers’ participation in the (mis) representation of the oriental ‘Other’. The most recent studies on how ‘black’ Morocco is racially represented in imperial works are closely associated with historical discourse (e.g., Bekkaoui, 2023; Cabezón-Fernández, 2023; and Goikolea-Amiano & Simour, 2022), colonial cinema (e.g., Lamghari, 2023), and travel writing (e.g., El Mitry, 2023; Oumoussa, 2021; and Wade-Lang, 2019). Unlike the previous studies (Said and Lewis’ studies in particular) which gave a big deal of attention to the theme of ‘Otherness’ in the so-called “canonical literature”, this paper comes as an attempt to examine how black subjectivities and identities are (re) constructed in imperial romance, as a non-canonical genre of popular fiction.

By adopting the postcolonial theory, this paper argues that black subjectivity and identity are a construct that has been shaped and reshaped by historical, social, linguistic, discursive, ideological, and political dynamics. Stratton’s popular romance *The Silken Cage* provides a space where these forces and factors are played out. This paper is split into two main parts. The first part is quite theoretical; it draws upon a variety of theoretical premises relevant to the construction of ethnic subjectivities and identities in colonial discourse. The second part analyses some mechanisms of blackness and black subjectivity in the selected corpus from a postcolonial perspective.

## **2. IMAGINING ‘STEREOTYPED’ SUBJECTS IN COLONIAL DISCOURSE**

Strictly speaking, Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha are two postcolonial critics closely connected with the notions of ‘blackness’ and ‘black subjectivity’ construction. Colonial discourse has tended to impose on the colonized subjects its cultural value system and moral principles. It has stressed that it is by adhering to this system that the colonized assumes sophistication and refinement. The colonized, Fanon (1967) elucidates, “is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.” (p.18) The inferiority complex of

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the colonized people comes into being with the rejection of their native cultural values and the appropriation of those of the colonizers. In so doing, the colonial discourse positions its subjects as superior to the colonized people, and the black skin acquires a low status *vis-à-vis* the white one. Fanon explains, through elaborating on one of the mechanisms by which colonial discourse gets disseminated, how the colonized people assimilate the colonizer's system of attitudes:

In the magazines the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage are always symbolized by Negroes or Indians; since there is always identification with the victor, the little Negro, quite as easily as the little white boy, becomes an explorer, an adventurer, a missionary 'who faces the danger of being eaten by the wicked Negroes.' (Fanon, 1967, p.148)

Following Fanon's logic, hatred and fear of black people become not only typical of whites but of black people as well. This explains how people who have never been in direct contact with the colonizer can assimilate the subjection embedded in the colonial discourse. It is sufficient for the colonized to be exposed to these colonial magazines and other mass media for him/her to assimilate the colonialist's outlook. The construction of space in the colonized world might also be deemed a key colonial strategy in the process of positioning/formulating the 'Self' as superior and the native 'Other' as inferior. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963) displays how the division and disparity between the settlers and the natives is persisted and epitomized in the spatial representation of the colonized country. Very close to what Michel Foucault theorizes upon in "Space, Power and Knowledge" (1999), Fanon (1963) argues that the colonial construction of space in the native country is carried out in a way very much reflective of the power relations and power stratification of the colonizer and the colonized:

The settler's town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt...The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by evil repute... It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other's. (p.39)

The stark disparity and division that govern the location of the colonizer and that of the colonized is symbolic. With the way, the natives look up to the territory of the colonizers as a location of luxury, nobleness and refinement, a sense of inferiority is certainly to develop among the natives *vis-à-vis* the settlers. Fanon (1963) points out that "there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place." (p.39) Colonial

discourse hinges upon the practice of spatial construction to impart its supremacist ideology and impose it on the colonized people. The blackness of the black person, Fanon adds, is the source of his/her estrangement and denial of humanity: "In the white world the man of colour encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness." (Fanon, p.110) The conscious objectification and concretization, or "the crushing objecthood," as Fanon puts it, of the black person's body is very evident. The skin colour of his/her body assumes a symbolic yet encumbered function and 'responsibility'. The blackness of the black person stands for his/her race and ancestors. It signifies "tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships," "Black Magic, primitive mentality, animism, animal eroticism." (Fanon, 1967, pp.112-126) This 'objective examination' which the black subject undergoes when he/she comes in contact with the colonizer is very instrumental to the construction of the black individual subjectivity. It makes the black subject's body acquire social, historical, and political implications. The colonial discourse 'fixes' the black subject within a well-defined role based on his/her body. It is his/her obligation to act in accordance with this role. The subjects cannot represent themselves outside the colonial discourse. The black subject becomes alienated due to this disjuncture between consciousness and body schema. "White civilization and European culture", Fanon (1967) writes, "have forced an essential deviation on the Negro." (p.16) This phenomenon, very similar to DuBois's notion of double consciousness, generates a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of the others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." (Black, 2007, p.394) The subject is torn between two worlds, two perspectives, the one imposed by the colonizer and the one by his/her native country. Yet, "his customs and the sources on which they are based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him." (Fanon, 1967, p.110) This shows why it is that the colonizer's perspective is of crucial influence on the subject's identity and self-conception and how it is that s/he appropriates the perspective of the colonizer.

While Fanon provides an analysis of colonial discourse based on the concept of the "collective catharsis" to explain the mechanisms whereby the subjection of the colonized people comes to pass, Homi Bhabha chooses to utilize the device of stereotyping to explain the same process. In his characterization of the colonial discourse, Bhabha introduces the controversial notion of "ambivalence" to describe its contradictory feature. Colonial representation is contingent on this form of ambivalent discourse to perpetuate its position of ascendancy over the colonized subjects. Bhabha advances a critique of Edward Said's analysis of the orientalist/colonial discourse which is predicated on Michel Foucault's concepts of

*pouvoir/savoir*. It hinges upon the interplay between power and recognition as an immediate reaction in the process of subjectification. He proposes instead “attention to representation as a concept that articulates the historical and fantasy (as the scene of desire) in the production of the ‘political’ effects of discourse.” (Bhabha, 1994, p.72) Bhabha believes that subjectification in colonial contexts can better be understood with reference to the stereotypical discourse and its dependence on the dialectical interaction between the psychoanalytical notions of desire and disavowal. With regard to the notion of blackness, Bhabha provides a rereading of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). He posits that for the black, the stereotypes of “savagery, lust and anarchy” are “the signal points of identification and alienation.” (Bhabha, 1994, p.72). Bhabha assumes that the colonial stereotypical discourse places the colonized subject in a position of either/or. He can either imprison himself that he starts thinking of himself in terms of his body schema/racial difference or “as a new kind of man, a new genius.” (Bhabha, p.75) The skin, Bhabha explains, stands as the key signifier, in the Lacanian sense of the term, of cultural and racial difference for the reason of its visibility. In such a stereotypical discourse the skin, as a symbolic signifier, determines its owner according to the symbolic significance it carries or assumes within the dominant culture. As cited by Bhabha (1994): “The difference of the object of discrimination is at once visible and natural – colour as the cultural/political *sign* of inferiority or degeneracy, skin as its natural ‘*identity*’.” (p.80) The black subject is primordially fixed and yet triply split between the incongruent knowledge(s) of the body, race, and ancestors. “The visibility of the racial/colonial other,” Bhabha (1994) points out, “is at once a *point* of identity (‘Look, a Negro’) and at the same a *problem* for the attempted closure within discourse.” (p.81) The colonial device of surveillance is a powerful mechanism in the process of the black subjectivity construction because the skin colour, as a racial signifier, is always prepared to be fixated, and the stereotypical image to be engendered. Surveillance implies a gaze which stands for the *grande autre*, power, and force. “For the observer, sight confers power; for the observed, visibility is powerlessness.” (Ashcroft et al., 1999, p.226) “Look, a Negro” represents a moment or event of subjection or, as Fanon suggests, objectification in which the black subject concretizes his or her blackness. Blackness becomes more than just a skin colour. It acquires significance, and social, political and ideological implications at the moment of the interpellation and gazing. The black subject, according to this scopic drive, is fetishized and turned into an object of colonial desire. Stereotyping and gazing are very central mechanisms to the colonial discourse for its process of Othering.

Though Michel Foucault never intended to develop a theory on the subject, a large body of his work addresses the issue in a number of ways which can provide a full vision of his conception of the subject. Foucault believes that no human being is a ‘free’ subject, but rather

determined by an array of networks and forces. It is this belief, together with his conviction that “no utterance [is] undetermined by a predetermined order or code,” and “no single individual is the sole source of any utterance” that has pushed him to declare the death of the author. (Loomba, 1998, p.34) Discourse, as a system of representation of objects or the world around us, seems to shape our conception of this world. Thus, truth stands as contingent on the social discourse that has constituted it. This has stirred Foucault to consider individuals as products of the discursive system that has shaped their conception of the world in the first place. Yet, discourse does not only manipulate the way individuals visualize the world around them but also their positions vis-à-vis their own beings and others. In “The Subject and Power”, Foucault (1982) analyses the different modes of power in the culture, namely the “three modes of objectification” by which “human beings are made subjects.” (p.777) The discursive categorization or “the dividing practices” of people into “the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the “good boys” provides well-defined roles for them to accommodate and integrate within the social milieu. (Foucault, p.778) These categories begin to represent a law of truth which imposes itself on the individual and claims his/her recognition. “It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects.” (Foucault, p.781) Discourse, power, and subjectivity are very basic elements in Foucault’s theoretical analysis. He believes that subjects are products of their social discursive systems and regimes. Power is not an uninvolved construct in this process of subjectification. It is very much associated with discourse such as that it materializes through it as a medium of articulation.

In his latest work, “Technologies of the Self”, Foucault (1988) describes the mechanisms of subordination of individuals as “technologies of power” which, he stresses, “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject.” (pp.16-17) The point becomes more discernible with Foucault’s account on “governmentality”. Governmentality, for him, is a combination between the domination of power of individuals, that is technologies of power, and the individual, or inter-relational interaction, whereby the subject transforms himself/ herself “in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” (Foucault, p.17) It is this interaction between the individual and the social and discursive mechanisms of power that brings about the identity of individuals as ‘speaking subjects’, and hence discursive constructs. Through the practice of Exomologesis in the medieval Christian church, Foucault elucidates how the imposition of a given identity is very much conditioned by rather discursive practices. The sinner, with a whole past of debauchery, for instance, can turn into a state of purity merely by conducting certain religious practices such as penitence in this case. While this instance



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symbolizes an 'identitarian' shift from one state to another, it is also reflective of the power of social discourse. This break with the past record of sin and wretchedness transpires solely when these social discursive practices allow it to happen. The key point here is that since it is society that sets the rules of indiscretion and iniquity, which is for Foucault a state of identity, it is society itself that grants purity and virtue, which is another state of identity. In either case, it is society through discursive mechanisms that imposes a certain model of identity, and when the individual shifts from one model of identity to another, it is still within the boundaries defined and put to use by *that* society. Foucault, herein, argues that discourse produces subjects by placing limits on what one can say, know, understand and most notably think of oneself. It does not only dictate roles for people to adopt, but it also suggests alternatives and gives the impression of spontaneity and 'freedom' to its subjects.

In sum, the conceptualization of subjectivity construction differs from one scholar to another. Homi Bhabha's theory of the subject has given rise to a significant number of theoretical concepts that will furnish the theoretical framework of this paper. The importance Bhabha ascribes to the stereotype technique, in his analysis of the colonial discourse and subjectivity construction, is an unprecedented attempt. Other concepts are deemed in this analysis, including the concepts of "ambivalence" and "representation" to which Bhabha provides a critical reevaluation. It remains true, however, that some of the concepts he has theorized have raised swirling controversy since they challenged some of the basic assumptions in the postcolonial theory. Frantz Fanon's analysis of what he calls "epidermalization" by which the black subject is objectified and his/her blackness acquires a life of its own with social, political and historical significances, finds resonance in Bhabha's consideration of the concepts of "scoptic drive" and "surveillance". The relevance of Fanon and Bhabha to the discussion of subjectivity construction lies in their analytical contribution to the black subjects in connection with colonialism, slavery, and racism. Michel Foucault's conception of subjectivity is also of great cruciality in the sense that it suggests that subjects are discursively constituted through a body of mechanisms of power and social practices. This paper does not intend to authorize one theoretical interpretation to the exclusion of the others. Far from that, it tries to exploit all of them in order to understand factors and forces that influence the construction of subjectivity. By exploring these theoretical positions, this paper hopes to enrich the theoretical framework upon which the analytical part will be based.

### **3. MECHANISMS OF BLACKNESS AND SUBJECTIVITY CONSTRUCTION IN REBECCA STRATTON'S THE SILKEN CAGE**

Rebecca Stratton's romance *The Silken Cage* (1981) is worthy of examination by virtue of its delineation of the dialectics of subjectivity and colonialism. The oriental subject, be it a male or a female, is set in a world that exercises on him/her a multiplicity of forces that shape and reshape his/her subjectivity incessantly. Louis Althusser's analysis of "ideology" can allow insight into a number of practices and powers that are manifested in the novel as mechanisms of constructing the black subject. In *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Althusser (2014) introduces the concept of ideology as a "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." (p.181) Ideology is a system of ideas that represents reality to the individual in a way his/her own existence, as a social being, is meaningful. Althusser suggests that all individuals are necessarily and inescapably subjected to ideology. It is ideology that interpellates individuals into subjects through energizing and imposing on them socially determined roles: "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject." (Althusser, p.190) The importance of Althusser's theorization of the subject is very much articulated in his discussion of two types of apparatuses: Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). RSAs refer to the state institutions and agencies (e.g.: government, administration, prisons, courts, the army, the police, etc.) which function massively and predominantly by 'repression' and 'violence'. (Althusser, 70) The ultimate aim of these apparatuses is, by force or otherwise, to perpetuate the relations of subordination and exploitation so that they keep being 'produced' continuously. The effect of these institutional structures lies in their ability to ensure and enforce *directly* and *physically* the individuals' behaviours and social conduct to the extent that the subject acts in accordance with the law and regulations dictated; otherwise, he/she will be pointed out as a "criminal" or a transgressor. It is largely due to these systems, along with Ideological State Apparatuses, that individuals are forcibly constructed as subjects. Ideological State Apparatuses, however, stand for a body of institutions, not necessarily belong to the state, which function by 'ideology'. (Althusser, p.75) ISAs present themselves to the individual in the form of distinct, specialized, multiple and relatively autonomous institutions. Althusser provides a descriptive list of these ISAs: the Scholastic/Educational Apparatus (the system of different public and private 'Schools'), the Familial Apparatus (the family), the Religious Apparatus (the system of different Churches), the Political Apparatus (the political system, including the different Parties), the Associative Apparatus, the Information and News Apparatus (press, radio and television, etc.), the Publishing and Distribution Apparatus, and



the Cultural Apparatus (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.). (p.75) For Althusser, it is through these systems and apparatuses that ideology is generated and disseminated, and subjectivities are consequently interpellated. ISAs provide the conditions where subjects are constructed.

Drawing on Althusser's theory of ideology, it can be argued that the institutions of colonialism are examples of the repressive apparatuses that transform the black individual into a subject of the colonial powers. Stratton's *The Silken Cage* expounds on forms of colonial 'subjectification' (such as schooling and missionary activities) which operate as an institution of education. Those structures constitute the ideological apparatuses that endorse the colonial presence in Morocco, thereby interpellating and constructing the Moroccan black subject. The writer depicts two completely discrete worlds: the Western 'white' world and the oriental 'black' world. The former is described as a site of possibilities, luxury and prosperity while the latter is a 'doomed' world where only misery and wretchedness reign. Nowhere does this seem more clearly evident than in the following passage:

“Taking the direct way, Troy did not ask if Mr. Peter Darrell had stayed at the hotel, but stated definitely that he had and asked if the clerk remembered him. Heavy-lidded eyes regarded her cautiously as if the very fact of her being there alone was cause for suspicion, and it brought home to her that that factor alone could well be a stumbling block to all her enquiries in this male-dominated country” (Stratton, 1981, p.15)

This spatial characterization of “home” (Britain) and the colonized Morocco, to recall Fanon and Foucault, links directly to the power relations between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’. The interrelation between space and power/ideology is indicative of the social and economic positioning of the blacks and the whites in Morocco. Interestingly, the disparity between the two different worlds generalizes over all aspects of the political, social, and cultural life of both categories. The strength of the Western world is built up at the manipulation and exploitation of the Eastern world. One of the manifestations of Western hegemony over the Orient is a master/slave relationship that develops between the two different subjects, with the whites at the top of the hierarchy and the blacks at the very bottom:

“Ayesha was pretty, but not in the way that Troy would have expected to appeal to Peter. Ever since she could remember Peter had shown a preference for tall and slender blondes, and Ayesha was the complete opposite of everything he claimed he liked best. She was of pure Moroccan blood and her skin was golden as peach, her hair as black as her brother's, and a full

and slightly pouting mouth suggested a reason for her plumpness. For Troy could imagine her constantly nibbling at the sticky sweets and pastries that her aunts were so fond of.” (Stratton, 1981, p.179)

Reflecting on Troy Darrell’s ambiguous impression and attitude towards Ayesha, ‘blackness’ is a construct that comes into being through ideological and discursive practices. It is a construct because it is not ‘naturally’ inferior but rather made inferior. We notice how Ayesha (the Moroccan ‘black’ woman) is constructed as inferior, and Troy’s brother Peter (the British ‘white’ man) is presented as superior. The indicator of difference between the two subjects is hard for Troy to recognize. Stratton enforces the ideology of white supremacy through a number of ideological and oppressive apparatuses. To exemplify, the educational system is used in the novel to reflect and foster racist thought towards the indigenous subjects, Kadir Ben Rachid in particular. Kadir’s ethnic subjectivity and identity are ‘transformed’/reconstructed by his education at a Western institution. Having been educated in such a way, the Moroccan man (Kadir) serves as a subject who is in need of being civilized and enlightened by the West. These configurations demonstrate how the colonized subject is forced ideologically into a ‘spontaneous’ role and show how the colonial power establishes itself through exploiting native subjects to serve its own interests and advocate its social and cultural systems. The discursive practices in relation to the issue of subjectivity construction of the black individual are well epitomized in the exercise of Western domination and subjugation.

In *The Silken Cage*, blackness is also constituted as subordinate through ‘fabricated’ laws and legislations. Colonial discourse tends to give preferentiality to the white race over the black one even if the former is found guilty. Blacks are customarily deprived of necessary rights such as freedom of expression, travelling, and self-making decisions. This is a common practice of Stratton’s imperial romance so as to strengthen the established ideology of patriarchy, which endorses the widespread principle of white supremacy and black inferiority: “...Troy was convinced that women over the world like to gossip, and she could not imagine that even the more restrictive world of the Moroccan woman was so much different in that respect.” (Stratton, 1981, p.50) The Repressive State Apparatuses manifest themselves in the novel through the acts of exhibition of power against the black population. The RSAs are means by which the state ideology or at least the dominant ideology is maintained and imposed through recourse to the use of force and coercion. There are plenty of instances in the novel where these mechanisms come into play. For example:

“Believe me, Troy, she will never be forced to marry a man she does not love, and whatever your brother believes of us we shall not punish her for what she has done. Our ways may seem harsh to Western eyes, but we love our daughters no less deeply, even when they have done wrong.” (Stratton, 1981, p.149)

‘Marriage’ is introduced here as an ideological apparatus featuring Moroccan women’s imprisonment in a male-dominated society. In other words, Ayesha, as a Moroccan subject, is an image of all Arab women who are exposed to much male oppression and subjugation. Along with ideology and the use of power, the practice of interpellation is instrumentally supportive in the production of black subjectivity in the novel. Blacks are being ‘called upon’ by some whites in negative terms, as the following excerpt highlights:

“What do you imagine will \_\_\_ happen? Kadir enquired, and she glanced up at Peter’s angrily defiant face before she answered. ‘I\_\_ I don’t know,’ she confessed, but ‘but you \_\_\_\_’ ‘As you think me a barbarian, I had forgotten that!’ he interrupted her harshly, getting up from his casual pose and standing facing her so that she was once again reminded of a figure of vengeance.” (Stratton, 1981, p.141)

The offensive word ‘barbarian’ is utilized by the Western woman, Troy Darrell, to address and insult blacks. The act of calling a black person a ‘barbarian’ makes his/her skin colour the cause of their misery, subjugation, and inferiority, thereby pushing them to internalize their blackness as being the embodiment of subordination. The concretization of the blackness of the black person, as Fanon shows, pushes him/her to think about themselves in terms of bodily/corporeal schema. Their identity becomes synonymous with their blackness. Lacan’s notion of the signifier, as developed by Bhabha, can also explain this phenomenon. ‘Barbarian’ operates as a symbolic signifier in the unconscious of the black subject. S/he becomes a ‘slave’ to this signifier. Other appellations, which are usually prefixed with the adjective ‘black’, are used by Stratton to refer to the primitiveness of the black subjects. These appellations include the attribute “watchdog”:

“You brought me here for some ransom of your own, shut me up in the women’s quarters and presumably expected me to be content to stay there, and now you’re trying to make me a prisoner! Well, let me tell you something, I refuse to stay cooped up in your wretched harem, and I demand to be allowed out into the village! If you don’t order your—*watchdog* to get

out of my way I shall scream loud enough to be heard in Meduhma.”  
(Emphasis is mine) (Stratton, 1981, pp.58-59)

Troy's mode of representation accounts for the discursive and linguistic subjection of the blacks (Moroccans). Blackness becomes a negative aspect within the dominant discourse of Stratton's imperial romance *The Silken Cage*. A different approach to the issue of black subjectivity construction is that of the mode of appropriation of the ideology of white supremacy and black inferiority that is woven into the patriarchy. According to Fanon's idea of resistance to colonial subjection, black subjects are interpellated as inferior not only because of the dominant ideology and the use of force to impose it but also because of their powerlessness. It is because of this that blacks appropriate and 'recognize' their self-image as subordinate. Fanon's notion of powerlessness explains how resistance since it all the time goes awry due to the ruling power's force, remains incapable of bringing about agency and sovereignty. This makes the assimilation of the native population a matter of time.

To sum up, Stratton's *The Silken Cage* unearths the traumatic effects of the racist discourse. The experience of 'skin colour' is represented as being the very cause for the separation of the population, and the trigger for the tension and the feud between blacks and whites. 'Blackness' in the novel is characterized as a mark/mask of inferiority, misery, and suffering. It is found to be an ideological, social, and discursive oration. Captivity, legislation, and discrimination among others constitute the ideological and repressive apparatuses that the writer exploits to celebrate white supremacy credo and black inferiority. Of equal strength is the discursive and linguistic gamut which superimposes an array of signs and images on the conception of blackness in the novel under discussion.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This paper has emphasised that ethnic subjectivities and identities are constructs very much determined by historical, social, discursive, linguistic, political and ideological factors. A postcolonial reading of Rebecca Stratton's *The Silken Cage* has revealed that blackness is more than a matter of skin colour; it is a structure, a mark/mask, a uniform, a signifier, a fetish with a whole range of significance and implications. Thus, Stratton's imperial romance can be viewed as a space where ethnic subjectivities and identities get constantly formed, deformed and reformed according to the vicissitudes and changing conditions and forces. Colonialism, racial segregation, and enslavement are some racist practices exploited by Stratton to inscribe ethnic subjectivities and identities.

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Blackness is a subject matter that has been challenged within the framework of postcolonial criticism in relation to the colonized subject. In its attempt to lay bare the dynamics of blackness and black subjectivity construction, this paper has sought to explore a common ground where both traditions come together, and also highlight a history of shared oppression and subordination that seems to represent a point of commonalities and substantiates for the argument that blackness is a product of oppressive apparatuses much more than any other forces. This paper hopes then to have contributed to the long-standing debate on the issue of ethnic subjectivity and identity construction in cross-cultural encounters.

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