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POST-COLONIAL CHAOS OF IDENTITY CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS OF DEREK WALCOTT'S *DREAM ON MONKEY MOUNTAIN*

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Abstract

The contemporary situation of the once colonized people is an amalgamation of cross-cultural influences, mingled, patch-worked, and stratified upon one another. Hence, the postcolonial era has developed into a combat zone where the indigenous and the colonizer fight with each other to retrieve their allocated share in the novel cultural space. The contemporary situation of the once colonized people is an amalgamation of cross-cultural influences, mingled, patch-worked, and stratified upon one another. Hence, the postcolonial era has developed into a combat zone where the indigenous and the colonizer fight with each other to retrieve their allocated share in the novel cultural space. *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, is based on the cultural and racial predicament that the characters encounter.

Keywords: Cross-cultural, contemporary, postcolonial, colonizer

The contemporary situation of the once colonized people is an amalgamation of cross-cultural influences, mingled, patch-worked, and stratified upon one another. Hence, the postcolonial era has developed into a combat zone where the indigenous and the colonizer fight with each other to retrieve their allocated share in the novel cultural space. This dilemma creates ambiguity of identity which, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, is defined as "the state or feeling of being very similar to and able to understand somebody/something." Hence, in the age of this cultural chaos the effects of colonialism result into identity crisis of the indigenous people, which is the issue of central concern in the postcolonial literature.

The poet and playwright Derek Walcott is one of the great literary figures from Trinidad. Walcott's work bestows upon us a glance of the creation of contemporary Caribbean identities;

and investigating his work can facilitate us to recognize the contemporary Caribbean predicaments and efforts in identity-making in the context of the colonial inheritance of global socio-economic and political inequalities. The Caribbean is “a place with no stable cultural origin” (Bongie 23). According to Samad, the West Indian whose self is a “heterogeneous entity” has been playing the character assigned to him/her by “other ‘cultures,” and the West Indian has admitted the character “uncritically” (227).

The Nobel Prize winner, Derek Walcott was born in Saint-Lucia in 1930 and his writing elucidates the course of identity-making in the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean. Walcott's writings represent the complex relationships of the colonized and the colonizer as Saint-Lucia has suffered centuries of colonialism under French and British control. The Homeric epic poem, *Omeros* (1990), is considered as Walcott's finest work by many critics. Apart from the prestigious Nobel Prize, he has won many literary awards during his career including an Obie Award in 1971 for his play *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. Most of his plays address, either directly or indirectly, the subaltern position of the West Indies in the post-colonial period. Walcott's vision of identity is valuable for studies of identity of the Caribbean society and the colonized all over the world.

Dream on Monkey Mountain, is based on the cultural and racial predicament that the characters encounter. The central character, Makak, is embarrassed of his black colour and wants to be like a white man. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, there is a hunt for and recognition of one's identity. When Makak is questioned at the beginning of the play, he cannot tell Corporal Lestrade his real name or much about himself. To the question, “what is your race?” Makak replies, “I am tired” (Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, 48).

Derek Walcott's play, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, is based on the circumstances of his native island, Saint Lucia. The play enacts the essence of Caribbean milieu. The language used by the characters is informal providing an allusion that they are not accustomed to the use of appropriate language. Derek tries his best to depict the Caribbean theme. The play revolves around the infamous phenomenon of slave trade prevalent in the region during the time of author's adulthood. Slave trade is shown to adversely affect the lives of native people who are being forced to be displaced from their land. This is evident from the adversities faced by the central character, Felix Gobain who prefers to call himself Makak, often describes Africa as the region of his roots, dreams and integrity. The whole play is profuse with such thoughts but the distinction finds its way when Makak's soliloquy, filled with the impressions of his black color, is considered.

I was a king among shadows. Either the shadows were real, and I was no king, or it is my own kingliness that created the shadows. Either way, I am lonely, lost, and old man again.... We are wrapped in black air, we are black, ourselves shadows in the firelight of the white man's mind. Soon, soon it will be morning, praise God, and the dream will rise like vapor. (Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, 304)

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, the 'black' colour of a man signifies the lack of his identity, and Makak also greatly suffers from it. Walcott's has effectively portrayed the fragmentation of Makak's integrity as a result of colonial rule. He despises himself due to his black colour. He is so disenchanted from his own image that he hasn't seen himself in a mirror for last 30 years. In addition to this, he also avoids his reflection in water while drinking water from a water source: "Not a pool of cold water, when I must drink, I stir my hands first, to break up my image" (Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, 226). In all these years, Makak has started seeing his image from the mindset of an English colonizer. According to Patrick Colm Hogan: He is, in effect, a metaphor for those legacies of colonized subjects who, in Walcott's words, "looked at life with black skins and blue eyes" (Walcott, *What the Twilight Says*, 9).

In the play, Makak is transfixed in an imagination as if he were in a dream. The play sets a West Indian Island as its background where Makak is jailed because of his rowdy behavior. He requests the judges to let him be alone with his dream. He, himself pleads his case and bears confirmation to the reality of his dream telling the judges- "Sirs, I does catch fits. I fall in a frenzy every full moon light. I does be possessed. And after that, I am not responsible. I responsible only to God who spoke to me in the form of a woman on Monkey Mountain. I am God's warrior" (Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, 226). Makak is actually a victim of his state of mind that causes illusions. He is disappointed because he loathes his identity as a black man and eagerly wishes to find a solution for it. He thinks that if he is successful in finding a witch, she can provide a solution for his predicament. In his desperate attempt, he starts having the illusions of an aesthetically appealing white woman, whom he believes God has sent to him to help him. In reality, his dream is the result of the illusions created by his subconscious mind that forces him to believe that white people are superior to him and his problem can only be solved by them. Colonization has greatly affected these colonies and created a sense of inferiority in the native people. The colonized are made to believe that servitude is part of the nature of the colonized, the domination being part of the colonizer. In Moghimi views, the colonized choose to be identified with the master whom they see as the symbol of "the best" and an ideal to reach. As

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a consequence, the colonized try to forget their own culture, “identity, customs ... traditions, and history” (Moghimi, 21). Hence identity is a continuously changing factor in countries with history of multiculturalism (due to centuries long colonial rule) where identity crisis appears as an inherited legacy.

The era of colonial rule exhibits segregation of society into two culturally different groups: one as the colonizer and the other as colonized. Western colonization was established upon dual oppositions such as “the colonizer and the colonized, the Occidental and the Oriental, the civilized and the primitive, the scientific and the superstitious, the developed and the underdeveloped” (Prakash 3). The demarcation between the colonizer and the colonized was represented clearly with many adjectives and stereotypes by the Western world and the colonized were placed into a subaltern position. The condition of the subaltern is described by Gayatri Spivak as in the context of colonial production, “the subaltern is thought to have no history and no ability of speaking” (82-83).

However, after World War II many colonies became independent. Art, literatures and cultures of the indigenous people prospered and colonial cultures and characteristics mingled with native traditions which fructified as the postcolonial text. Postcolonial cultural critique re-evaluates the colonial history from the point of view of the ones who experienced its impact and its significant role in modern-day social and cultural domains. In the influential work *Orientalism*, Said argues the condition of “the Oriental” confronting the West and explains that the colonized population is still in subaltern condition due to the centuries long colonial discourse. He writes: “Such locales, regions, geographical sectors as ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ are man-made” (132).

The tremendous impact of White-superiority causes people to believe that they can be a socially accepted only if they are white or behave like white people. Walcott symbolizes darkness with the native people’s feeling of being lost. The prison is shown symbolically equal to the colonial rule that denies freedom. This clarifies Makak’s search for his own identity and his hope that by this he can discover acceptance for himself and his country. The play chiefly focuses on Makak’s attitude towards racial, political and psychological conundrums of post-colonial world.

Makak used to be a charcoal burner who has a firm belief that he looks ugly so he avoids social life which includes people of white as well as black race. Makak’s is desperate in his effort to find a place where he can get respect. He has a liking for a white woman and believes that he can be successful in his quest with help from her. There occur some ironic incidents in his search for his identity. His dreams of a white woman who takes care of him and defends him. Makak receives

encouragement and motivation from her: “She says something I will never forget. She says I should not live so any more, here in the forest, frighten of people because I think I ugly. She says that I come from the family of lions and kings” (Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, 228). In his dream, he considers himself as a great leader and holds burning charcoal in his hand to prove his special powers to the people who surround him. In his fantasy, he sees the loathsome complications of his compatriots and observes that they, all, are encompassed in darkness and are unable to find their roots and identities. To help them overcome this condition, he urges them to explore their hidden potential and strength by saying–

Sing as you sing in the belly of the boat

You are trees under pressure

You are brilliant diamonds

In the hand of your God. (Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, 249)

He, usually, remembers his native place – Africa and has an impression that Monkey Mountain characterizes his African roots. He assumes the role of a spiritual healer and seeks God’s help to cure people. He works for the restoration of self-worth of black people. When trying to heal a dying man, he kneels on knees and conjures up Divine Help:

Like the cedars of Lebanon

Like the plantations of Zion,

The hands of God plant me on

Monkey Mountain.

He calleth to the humble.

And from that height

I see you all as trees

Like a twisted forest

Like trees without names a forest with no roots. (Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, 248)

In another trail, Lestrade Corporal deserts his faithfulness towards the Whites and comes back to his black inheritance and swears allegiance to Makak. He makes efforts to persuade him that he shouldn’t rely on the white woman for guidance and tells him to avoid her. Along with that, he cautions him of the dreadful outcome of his approach. He indicates that due to the extreme influence of white culture on his mind, Makak has forgotten his own identity and in order to recall

it again, Makak should efface it from his imagination. About the white woman of Makak's dream, he asserts:-

She is the wife of the devil, the white witch. She is the mirror of the moon that this ape looks into and find himself unbearable. She is all that is pure, all that he cannot touch. You see her status in white stone and you turn your face away, mixed with abhorrence and lust, with destruction and desire. (Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, 319)

In the end, he advises to Makak – “She is the white light that paralyzed your mind that led you into this confusion. It is you who created her, so Kill her! Kill her!”. (Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, 319) Due to this Makak becomes successful in his plan to eradicate the illusion that had been afflicting him. He grasps the sword and decapitates the white woman. This demonstrates that at last, he is able to escapes from his illusion. Killing the white woman symbolizes a great sacrifice of Makak as the killing signifies his affirmation to neglect his fantasy. It is a new dawn for Makak as from now; he will utilize his will power to regain his integrity instead of relying on external motivation of some kind.

The convincing fact of the play is that colonialism has a pivotal role when it comes to degrading the identity of native people. It also demonstrates the deleterious effect of colonization on human psyche. Particularly, it shows that the whites asserted their supremacy in such a manner that caused the black to link the colour of their skin and their native customs to inferiority which consequently resulted in an identity crisis.

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