

Memory and Historical Trauma in Derek Walcott's "NAMES"

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to look into the historical trauma of the Caribbean through the lens of identity and retrospective analysis. It also emphasizes the importance of names in tracing the lineages of the colonizers and the impact of their actions in shaping the cultural distinctiveness of a region. It also delves into the severance of ties with one's past identity due to colonisation and the resulting alteration which gives birth to the contemporary identities through the amalgamation of colonizer cultural traits and the native cultural traits. We are also going to put a special reference on the poem "Names" by Sir Derek Alton Walcott. **KEYWORDS:** Names, Identity, Colonisation.

INTRODUCTION

Sir Derek Alton Walcott is a Nobel Prize winning poet and playwright from Saint Lucia. His magnum opus is the Homeric poem "Omeros". He also has an Obie award for his play "Dream on Monkey Mountain", a Royal Society of Literature Award, the Queen's Medal for Poetry, the inaugural OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, the 2010 T.S. Eliot Prize for his book of poetry "White Egrets". His contributions to the cultural and literary history of the Caribbean are priceless and hence, his work boasts genuine flair as well as historical accuracy when it comes to slavery and

MOSAIC, VOLUME : I, 2025

anti imperialism.

Given the multitude of facets that surround a region's cultural identity, we cannot ignore the blemished past that is left behind in the wake of colonization. The Caribbean sea was the original identity of the natives, undefined and yet constantly seeking definitive features but yet the hammer of colonization took away the color of their whole being just based on the color of their skin. Walcott's preoccupations with two different kinds of races regarding identity is evident through analysis of the text which is the seeking of the communal or tribal identity marking the distinctiveness of a group and the personal identity that makes one different. Amidst a struggle between French and Caribbean roots, he desperately tries to hold onto the traits of both cultures for the sake of his personal identity as denial of his French roots would mean negating the horrors of the colonization that the natives faced essentially erasing their struggle and trauma.

Particular cities have been mentioned to accentuate the disparities and the displacements in the wake of colonization - the once glorious cities of Benares, Canton, and Benin of the Caribbean as well as the ever mighty Castille, Versailles, and Valencia of France which signifies how the colonizers attempt to recreate their homelands on foreign lands and yet in doing so desecrate the original identity of the land. Even the language is tainted with foreign words. When the natives cry out for help, they do so in a language that belongs not entirely to their own and contain traces of the oppression of their oppressors. Only the "I" which sounds like a painful cry "ai-yee-h" remains, which emphasizes personal identity is still not lost and "I" can also be inferred as "eye" which has seen the lush vegetation turn into cities of sophistication. The identity given to the oppressed has not been claimed so the oppressed now dangle between the original past blemished and altered to cater the needs of the colonizers who are obsessed with the European ideation regarding all that one sees. They teach the oppressed in their manners, attires, tongues, and create their own versions of utopian societies

that thrive on the basis of erasure of past identities.

THE BURDEN OF TRAUMA

Historical trauma has always been associated with the rewriting of past identities and the creation of new ones often with the amalgamation of European powerhouses and the native cultures of the colonized regions. It is referred to a labyrinthine and shared trauma that has persisted over the course of generations and is both individual and communal in nature as it appears on the conscience of a man and also his community. It often passes from generation to generation on the basis of oral history in the form of stories, tales, or written history like journals, letters etc. The colonizers often try to replicate their sophisticated European utopias but instead it often leads to the transformation of the native lands into twisted dystopias.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

“Memory and Identity” have always been linked to each other. If a person remembers a particular time frame where the unblemished past or the roots were ideal and pride was reflected through, they would assimilate with it to give themselves an unique identity which marks their place in the world. In “Names”, Walcott shows the struggle of the natives of the Caribbean from the moment the earliest civilizations began to flourish along the Caribbean shores and how they sought to mark their identity unlike the nature around them, such as the deep and tranquil sea or the vast horizons of the sky. Walcott also affirms the power vested in names. The European fascism that led to the vanishing of Benares, Canton and Benin which once hosted the finest of Caribbean culture and yet prolonged effects of colonization have taken away the magic that used to reside in those cities. The arrival of the colonizers meant the erasure of the unblemished identity and the creation of a new one which threatened to take away the journey and past identity of the natives. The names of the oppressors help trace back the lineages and help to draw the fine line between European ideation and fascism.

CONCLUSION

Walcott himself was a product of European colonization, where he dangled between his French and Caribbean roots often

MOSAIC, VOLUME : I, 2025

wondering about his unblemished identity. Walcott shows us that identities shape the community or tribe's distinctiveness but also the uniqueness of one's self portrait. The language of the native people are often criticized by the colonizers and they taught the natives to speak in European languages essentially taking away the right of expression in one's true thoughts. Only the "I" which refers to oneself sounds like a painful cry "ai-yee-h" which is often uttered in times of distress and often associated with trauma remains which emphasizes that personal identity can never be truly "I" can also be inferred as "eye" which has seen the culmination of the past cultures with present ones and they have also seen the vanishing of uncombed lands and untouched shores becoming a twisted European haven for the oppressors who themselves have been displaced from their homelands. Just like masters, the colonizers' obsession with sophistication and the natives' curiosity or maybe their trauma associated with the crisis period of oppression often led to the erasure of the important pasts and replaced by traditions of foreign lands.

Implications of colonization have always appeared differently throughout the course of history. Somewhere it was a bloody struggle, elsewhere it was a quiet and slow arrival of trade that later on through amalgamation with the native cultures have shaped the modern identities if these regions and "Names" would always appear which showcased peril and persistence among the oppressed. The identity of a place will always be remembrance of a colonized past as the unblemished past often fails to latch on to people and drifts to unknown shores along with the sea.

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