

***Race Defamation: A Postcolonial Reading of Derek Walcott's
Dream on Monkey Mountain***

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ABSTRACT:

As a postcolonial text, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* depicts the colonial discourses regarding the black. Derek Walcott has vividly presented the sufferings of the black in his play. The inferiority of the black is explicitly reflected in which the white is superior and the black is less than human beings. The best method to approach this text is from a postcolonial viewpoint. Major postcolonial concepts such as othering, mimicry and hybridity. The importance of this study is that major postcolonial legacies are mirrored in this play. The portrayal of racism and the weakness of the blacks are openly presented.

Keywords: Post colonialism, race, black, Derek Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.

Introduction

The formerly colonized countries have produced a great body of postcolonial literature. In their texts, the writers have presented colonial and anti-colonial discourses to reflect the impact of colonization on them. Colonization is not one country's problem; it is a global issue because numerable nations have been colonized for different racial and ethnic excuses. The undeveloped countries and nations are the targets of the colonizers such as African continents and the Caribbean islands.

To understand post colonialism better, two terms should be explained: Colonial and anti-colonial discourses. The former, sometimes called colonialist ideology, includes the narratives, statements, and opinions that deal with colonized people while it is told from the perspective of European colonizers. Besides, the colonizers believe in the superiority of the Anglo-European cultures compared to that of the indigenous people (the colonized). The postcolonial critics sometimes refer to this as metropolitan (Tyson, 2006). The colonizers consider themselves to be the center of the world and the margin is the place of the colonized. Another term of this concept is (self) and (other). The native people are considered (other) who are different and they are believed not to be full human beings. This process is described as "othering." To understand this

term, Eurocentrism should be explained which simply refers to the universality and superiority of European culture as the standard of the world compared to all other culture. In other words, European cultures are the standards for the universe. Edward Said, a postcolonial critic, refers to “othering” as orientalism (Tyson, 2006, p.420).

As for anti-colonial discourse, it is the colonized people’s opposition to the colonial hegemony. They react to what has been culturally imposed on them by the colonizers. The indigenous people, especially through their writings, present a different portrayal of the colonized people from that of the colonizers. The native people celebrate their heritage and are proud of their being black. Besides, they embrace their culture and want to preserve their true identities.

Kelly Baker Josephs has approached *Dream on Monkey Mountain* to illustrate the dreams and the hallucinations of the black (2010). One of the main subjects that researchers have tackled is the quest for identity in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (Abd-Aun, 2015). Alienation is another major concern of the scholars that the main character of the play, Makak, is an estranged other (Mjoberg, 2021). My focus, however, is on the portrayal of the black as inferior and subjugated beings. The significance of this study is in its diversity of the colonial ideologies embodied in the text.

One of the most commonly practiced methods that scholars have used to approach this play is the postcolonial approach as the text is a true representation of the postcolonial theories. The paper begins with an overview of postcolonial concepts and Derek Walcott’s style. Then, postcolonial ideologies in the play are explained and analyzed. The last part of the study is the conclusion that sums up the main findings of the study followed by the works cited.

Postcolonial Concepts

The term postcolonialism is interchangeably used with postcolonial studies. It is broad and it includes several other aspects of life. Postcolonialism is concerned with the impacts of colonialism on the colonized and the various ways they have been exploited by the colonizers. Hence, the clash of colonizers and the colonized is the core of postcolonialism (Galens, 2002). Bill Ashcroft, in his *Post-Colonial Studies*, has defined postcolonial theory as an interdisciplinary study that covers “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2007, p.116). The aim of postcolonial studies is to comprehend the colonization better and to truly depict the experiences of the colonized that have been concealed to the world.

There are many concepts in postcolonial theory, but the main ideas are discussed here, which are relevant to the study including hybridity, otherness, mimicry, loss and search for identity and racism.

To begin with, hybridity refers to any mixing or mingling of two different cultures, particularly East and West. It refers to colonial subjects from Asia and Africa who find a balance between the old and the new culture, how the culture of these migrants and exiled people has been influenced by the new culture and how the host culture, in turn, has been affected by the culture of the newcomers.

Hybridity has four main types, racial hybridity, where two different races are mixed, linguistic hybridity, which refers to the elements of foreign languages entering a given language, for instance, English words that enter the language of Asian nations or vice versa. Literary hybridity, which is an example of postcolonial literature and refers to the genres that essentially emerged in the West, but right after their emergence adopted and used by the East writers as well as novel writing. Cultural hybridity encompasses music, food, fashion, and other aspects of life, which previously belonged to only one nation but now is shared universally (Hutnyk, 2005).

A term that is directly connected to hybridity is “mulatto”. It essentially means a young mule. In postcolonial theory, it refers to the progeny of a European and a Negro. In postcolonial theory, a mulatto refers to the children of different races, especially when one parent is white and the other is black. This action or process is common in those areas where different races live together. In the countries previously colonized, miscegenation was common as a result of interracial relationships or marriage. Those countries that are destinations of emigrants from different countries of having different races are also places where miscegenated children are raised. Its usage is typically restrained to the classifications of miscegenation employed in racist slave discourse, specifically referring to a slave who is one-half white (Tyson, 2006).

Miscegenation has caused a great deal of threat of ideological destabilization of the imperial power. Some critics have argued that the fear of miscegenation thus comes “from a desire to maintain the separation between civilized and savage, yet that binary masks a profound longing, occluding the idea of the inevitable dependence of one on the existence of the other” (Ashcroft, 2007, p. 117).

Otherness or othering is another significant concept in postcolonial theory. The term “othering,” was coined by Gayatri Spivak “for the process by which imperial discourse creates its ‘others’” (Ashcroft, 2007, p.156). The postcolonial theory also questions the role and influence of imperialism on the colonized people. In his *Orientalism*, Edward Said states that the colonizers desired to create an “Other” an “Orient” to describe themselves as the center:

a collective notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non- Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures (1978, p.15).

In the colonial discourses, through “othering” colonized people are labeled as anonymous masses rather than individuals. The process through which otherness or other works comprises of the classification of people into two hierarchal groups. The first group is “us” and the second group is “other” or “them.” The first group is superior and the second group, nonetheless, refers to the colonized people who are inferior, uneducated and sub-humans. The mentioned stereotypical attributes are given to the two groups by the colonizers.

One of the crucial concepts in postcolonial theory is mimicry. The idea simply means that the colonized imitate the culture, habits and lifestyle of the colonizers. The problem is when the colonized people mimic the colonizers, they do not completely become like them, and they rather become people who are torn in between. They are neither purely indigenous nor have they embraced the culture of the colonizers.

Homi K Bhabha, a significant postcolonial critic, has described mimicry the best in his essay “Of Mimicry and Man,” which was published in 1984. Mimicry is the skill of imitation of someone or something. Bhabha believes when something is imitative, there is a fact or truth behind it so it is insincere. According to Bhabha, “Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (1994, p.86). The colonizers want the colonized or indigenous people to mimic their masters (colonizers), but not to become thinking subjects, only mimicking.

The colonizers have systematically worked on the project to convince the colonized that they are inferior to their colonizers. For this purpose, the advancement of technology, education and skin color are used in favor of the colonized. As a result, most of the indigenous people are persuaded that they are the undeveloped and savage race. To overcome this shame, they appreciate the dominance of colonization and imitate their behavior, style and language. This “mimicry” is the attempt to be desired and accepted by the colonizers. Consequently, the aborigines find themselves between two cultures, this “in-betweenness” confuses them and leads them to have “double consciousness.” The colonized people perceive the world as the culture of the colonized and that of their own. This situation shapes

insecure individuals who are psychologically unstable and do not know which culture they belong to (Tyson, 2006, p.421).

Primitiveness defines the early stages of life. The colonizers describe the colonized as undeveloped, uneducated and primitive compared to the binary opposition of developed, educated and civilized. The blacks are mainly linked with primitiveness for not knowing how to live or control their lives. As a result, the colonizers find it their moral duty to educate and help the savages who are non-whites.

William Dunbar is credited to be the first one who used the word “race” in 1508 for the first time in one of his poems. It was a literary work related to the class of people and things. The meaning was still the same throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the term “race” denoted a new meaning of different classes of human beings with physical features diffused by descent. The category of the black or Negro (Ashcroft, 2007, p.181).

The Negro or black African category was frequently referred to as the bottom, in part because of black Africans’ color and evidently ‘primitive’ culture, but chiefly because they were best known to Europeans as slaves. Racism, therefore, means the connection between a group’s physical qualities to their cultural, intellectual and psychological attributes to be savages and inferior. With powerful countries’ colonization and imperialism, racism became a major concept and practice among the masters and the slaves, it characteristically provoked the ideas of superiority and inferiority (Ashcroft, 2007, p.181).

The Playwright, Derek Walcott and *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.

Derek Walcott was born in 1930 in St. Lucia, a British colony of the Windward Islands in the Lesser Antilles. He experienced a conventional and colonial education of a British school system. He lived in a poverty-stricken colonized area. His parents were from different races and cultural backgrounds, his father was an American and his mother an African. This multiculturalism provided him with a clear understanding of postcolonial culture. In his writings, Walcott emphasizes on the issues of injustice, racism, colonial oppression, and search for identity. Colonialism in the Caribbean took the forms of racial, cultural and economic estrangement. Derek Walcott, in his writings, responds to these forms. Exploring the Caribbean’s European colonial history, Walcott seeks to locate expressions of the problems implicit in the identity of the Caribbean, a central thread that runs throughout his books. Walcott’s works are usually postcolonial in that they consider the mixture of European and African heritage that has shaped the development of Caribbean culture (Milne, 2009).

He wrote *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in 1970 and published it in a book titled *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*. The play is divided into two parts. The first part contains a prologue and three scenes. The second part includes three scenes and an epilogue. The language of the text is melodious. The play is described by most of the critics as a poem in dramatic form or a drama in poetry. Poetic and dramatic techniques are merged (Thieme, 1999).

The play is set on a Caribbean Island and deals with the issues prevalent in postcolonial literature. The plot centers around a black man called Makak who hates being black. In the play, Makak is accused of destroying things in the local market and he is imprisoned. While imprisoned, he and his fellow prisoners Tigre and Souris, are condemned by a mouth speak of the white, a mulatto called Corporal Lestrade. In jail, he has a vision of a white woman who encourages him to return to Africa. He imagines himself as a great warrior in Africa and urges others to join him in his quest. At the end of the play, Makak wakes up from his vision and slays the white goddess, and he abandons his obsession with whiteness. He finally calls himself by his real name (Felix Hobain) and reconciles with his actual life. He decides to return to his home, Monkey Mountain (Hamner, 1997).

Patrick Colm Hogan suggests that the delirium that Makak suffers from is clearly due to his failure to communicate with family or society. In reality, he was created by a philosophy that strips him of the individual and human identity inherent in the name and tries to arrange his identity “around a racial typology according to which black is to white as monkey is to human” (1994, p.107). Hogan concludes that the play by Walcott provides us with a strong literary study of the constitution, variety, and production of colonial identity, reacting to the real world's much more important social and personal identity problems.

Postcolonial Representations in the Play

Dream on Monkey Mountain is a true depiction of the degraded condition of the black by the colonizers. Throughout the play, different forms of underestimations are noticed. At the very beginning of the play, the readers encounter the first racist statement by Lestrade. The main character of the play, Makak, along with Tigre and Souris are imprisoned and Lestrade behaves like a white master, though he is a mere mulatto who has forgotten his own identity. Lestrade considers the black as inferior to him and he orders them, “Animals, beasts, savages, cannibals, niggers, stop turning this place to a stinking zoo” (Walcott, 1970, p.216).

The above sentence is full of racist denotations that the blacks are compared to “animals.” They are dehumanized to an extent that they are “beasts” and “cannibals.” They are detached from human

qualities and they are described as evil beings. The word “nigger” is offensively used to describe the black. As a typical colonial discourse, the blacks are savages and primitive beings who simply do not know how to live as they are equated to animals. The mentioned racist statement is one of the most dreadful sarcasms throughout the entire play.

In another scene, Corporal Lestrade continues his racist descriptions of the black:

In the beginning was the ape, and the ape had no name, so God call him man. Now there were various tribes of the ape, it had gorilla, baboon, orang-outan, chimpanzee, the blue-arsed monkey and the marmoset, and God looked at his handiwork, and saw that it was good. For some of the apes had straighten their backbone, and start walking upright, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind, and that was the nigger. (Walcott, 1970, pp.216-17).

The story of creation is explained in the above quotation; however, it is only done in a manner to belittle the black. Charles Darwin’s *Theory of Evolution* is misused to serve the colonial discourse of the primitiveness of the black. The *Theory of Evolution* by natural selection was first expressed in Darwin’s book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. The theory explains the process by which organisms change with time due to fluctuations in heritable physical or behavioral traits (Darwin, 1997).

Lestrade admits that the origin of mankind is the apes, but he believes that other types of apes such as “gorilla, baboon, orang-outan, chimpanzee, the blue-arsed monkey and the marmoset,” received God’s blessing and their hunchbacks were straightened. The black people who are referred to as the “niggers” were not part of these sanctifications, thus they stayed as niggers and they are despised by both, God and mankind. Although Lestrade is of an African descendant, yet he thinks he no longer belongs to his people as he is not as black as them, he is a mulatto. Thus, he describes the blacks as people different from his race.

Though on a rare occasion Lestrade admits his race as that of the colonized and as black, he does it in a way that he is better than them and he is there to aid them. Cultural hybridity is evident in his behavior (Haney, 2005). He reveals this when he is conversing with an inspector:

And if you know how much I would like to do for these people, my people, you will understand even better. I would like to see them challenge the law, to show me they alive. But they paralyse with darkness. They paralyse with faith. They cannot do nothing, because they born slaves and they born tired. I could spit. (Walcott, 1970, p.261).

There is not any sense of being pride in counting himself as black as he calls the “they.” He detaches himself from them of a different ethnic group. Although he calls them “my people” for once, he refers to them as “they” and “them” seven times in a mere statement. This double consciousness or in-betweenness is the result of brainwashing Lestrade by the colonizers. He is a mulatto who has forgotten his identity and blindly mimics the colonizers to be accepted by them.

Colonization has led to segregation between the cultures of the society or the colonizer and colonized. The western nations have always regarded themselves as progressive and/or civilized and the colonized as primitive, they perceived themselves as scientific and the colonized as superstitious and themselves as developed and the colonized as underdeveloped. This otherness or inferiority that was imposed upon the colonized people is also clearly presented in the play and seems to be the cause for most of Makak’s uneasiness and disappointment in life .

Moreover, the language of the black is offended and it is considered to be incomprehensible. This happens when in jail Lestrade asks Makak about his country and Makak responds he is from, “Sur Morne Macaque,” (Walcott, 1970, p.218) Lestrade answers him angrily stating: “English, English! For we are observing the principles and precepts of Roman law, and Roman law is English law. Let me repeat the query: Where is your home?” (Walcott, 1970, pp.218-19).

This process of disgracing the language of the black, which is a part of their culture, is another racist and colonized ideology of the white man’s mentality. This discourse is emphasized on by the colonizers while colonizing a nation. The colonizers intend to remove the culture of the colonized and replace it with the colonizer’s culture. It is a distinctive form of brainwashing. The blacks are obliged to talk in the language of the colonizer. In the play, the colonizers are English, as admitted by Lestrade, Makak has no choice but to follow the orders of the colonizer and talk in their language. Unsurprisingly, Makak then responds in English, “I live on Monkey Mountain Corporal” (Walcott, 1970, p.219).

A name is an identity, something that people are recognized with. When individuals do not possess a name, they no longer have their distinguished identities. At the beginning of the play, when Corporal Lestrade asks Makak about his name, Makak is hesitant, embarrassed and cannot remember his identity, he answers, “I am tired” (Walcott, 1970, p.219).

The issue of having no identity is due to being black and the playwright brilliantly represents this in the embodiment of his central

character Makak. He suffers a great deal of pain as a result of colonial rule. He hates himself for being black and for the last thirty years he has not looked at his image in the mirror. Not only is the mirror he tries to avoid, but even when he drinks water, he tries his best not to see his reflection in the water. For all his life, Makak has looked at himself through the eyes and perspectives of his English colonizers. Makak is thus one of those colonized people who is ashamed of his race. While standing in front of the judges trying to convince them of his innocence, this is how he describes himself:

Sirs, I am sixty years old. I have live[d] all my life
 Like a wild beast in hiding. Without [a] child, without [a] wife.
 People forget me like the mist on Monkey Mountain.
 Is thirty years now I have look[d] in no mirror ‘
 Not a pool of cold water, when I must drink ‘

I stir my hands first, to break up my image (Walcott, 1970, p.226).

Although, after World War Two, many colonies regained their independence and a new era of literature, art and culture emerged that attempted to reflect upon the colonization from the perspective of the colonized and worked on decolonizing the colonized nations, yet the huge impact of white supremacy still haunts the psyche of the colonized people. The reason is that they believe that they would only be accepted in the society if they were white or behaved and acted as white. Walcott skillfully depicts these long-term consequences of colonization in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. The prison where Makak is jailed, stands for the larger prison that the colonized are locked in due to the colonization, where they are not accepted in society and do not have any identities.

Makak’s dream is the trigger that leads them to their search for identity and to go back to their roots and home, Monkey Mountain. In his dream, Makak sees a white goddess, which is symbolic of the white superiority of that time. The woman tells Makak to go back to his home and be the king of his folk. In his subconscious, Makak has so deeply engraved hatred towards the black and respect or fear of the white, that even his savior has to be from the white. Colonization has so greatly affected these colonized people in a way that they absorb what they are told and take themselves to be other or inferior to the colonizers. Makak here takes the white lady to be his savior, which indicates that he admires and willingly accepts white supremacy. The colonized nations are convinced that they are naturally inferior to the colonizers and they look up to their white colonizers as their ideals and thus forget all about their culture, identity, tradition and history. Hence, the identity of the colonized people is constructed and

governed by the social and political factors in the country due to the colonization.

It is only after this dream, which symbolically means being validated by the white, as the goddess is a white woman, that Makak is reconciled with his black color and identity. Not only this, but in his dream Makak is also a leader and healer that enlightens the path for so many followers who have not still found their true identities and potential. He tells them “you are trees under pressure and brilliant diamonds” (Walcott, 1970, p.249). He urges them to reconnect to their past and no longer be ashamed of their dark colors. This freedom and confidence that Makak owns are due to the white woman’s speech in the dream. This is a message of the author that the colonized have not yet attained their identity as they are awaiting the approval of the colonizers, or the ideas and principles of imperialism still exist in the pre-colonized nations in different forms.

As the play continues, Lestrade the corporal also gives up his loyalty to the white and joins Makak to rejoin their black identity and inheritance:

Too late have I loved thee, Africa of my mind, sera te amavi, to cite Saint Augustine who they say was black. I jeered thee because I hated half of myself, my eclipse. But now in the heart of the forest at the foot of Monkey Mountain [The creatures with draw] I kiss your foot, O Monkey Mountain. [He removes his clothes] I return to this earth, my mother. Naked, trying very hard not to weep in the dust. I was what I am, but now I am myself. [Rises] Now I feel better. Now I see a new light. I sing the glories of Makak! The glories of my race. (Walcott, 1970, p.299).

Lestrade, who himself has been for so long assimilated to the white culture now advises Makak not to consider the white woman’s speech so seriously. He tells Makak to stop following the guidance of the white apparition as she is the wife of the devil. Nevertheless, Lestrade abandons the idea of imitating the white and quits being their mouth speak. He eventually understands that no one would accept and embrace him but his own people.

According to the mentality of the white, the colonized people do not have basic rights. Derek Walcott has painfully illustrated this in his play through a dialogue between Tigre, another black prisoner, and Corporal Lestrade:

Tigre: Bring me damn supper, Lestrade! I have me rights, you know!

Corporal Your rights? Listen, nigger! according to this world you have the inalienable right to life, liberty, and three green figs. No more, maybe less. You can do what you want with your life, you can hardly call this liberty, and as for the pursuit of happiness, you never

hear the expression, give a nigger an inch and he'll take a mile? Don't harass me further. I didn't make the rules. (1970, p.279).

All Tigre asks for is a simple meal “supper.” Lestrade, however, finds it more than what Tigre deserves and mocks him for the fact Tigre said “I have me right.” Lestrade denies Tigre's rights and he also admits that he only follows what he has been ordered to, “I didn't make the rules.” Lestrade is another prisoner without handcuffs. He is mentally invaded (Uhrbach, 1986).

Otherness is a major concept in postcolonialism. The colonized are represented as inferior and outsiders. There is a huge gap between “them” and “us.” The former represents other and outside the box of a privileged life. This is best represented by Makak's friend, Moustique when he is talking to Makak: “You is nothing. You black, ugly, poor, so you worse than nothing. You like me. Small, ugly, with a foot like a “S.” Man together two of us is minus one” (Walcott, 1970, p.237).

The colonizers program the colonized in a way they believe that the colonized are uncivilized people. This negative thinking and the idea of considering a race as “nothing” is the target of the colonizers. As previously mentioned, the black are compared to animals and this impression is accepted by the colonized people and in the play is portrayed through Moustique's statement when he prays for a day: “when niggers everywhere could walk upright like men” (Walcott, 1970, p.254). It becomes clear that the colonized accept the colonizer's claim that the black are not of the same type of mankind.

Mimicry as a main concept in postcolonialism, throughout this paper, many examples are given which illustrates Lestrade's imitation of the white. By the end of the play, he reconciles with other black characters and realizes his wrongdoings: “O God, I have become what I mocked. I always was, I always was. Makak! Makak forgive me, old father” (Walcott, 1970, p.300).

Homi. K. Bhabha's idea of mimicry is completely represented through Lestrade. No matter how hard colonized individuals endeavor to be like the white, they are never fully accepted by the colonizer. The reason is simple, the black is primitive and savage while the white is born civilized and privileged. This idea of approving is represented through Makak's response to Lestrade's repentance to be once more accepted as a black person by his people: “They reject half of you. We accept all” (Walcott, 1970, p.300).

Conclusion

Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is a play written in a form of a dream. The playwright has depicted the undermining condition of the black while being colonized by the white. The white has presented their policies and legacies through a mulatto, Lestrade, who has served the white's ideology of belittling the black. One of the

legacies of the colonizers is to implant the theory that the white is superior and they are the saviors of the black. The mentality of the white is clearly portrayed in the play in which they attempt to underestimate the peculiarity of the black. It can be concluded that the black race is defamed by the colonizers for merely being black and true to their heritage. In the colonial discourses, the colonized people fall under the category of marginalized and otherness, thus they are undervalued.

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