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Cultural Trauma And Post-Colonial Identity In Walker's Possessing The Secret Of Joy.

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Abstract

This paper explores the interconnections between cultural trauma and post-colonial identity through an analysis of Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The study examines how the novel portrays personal and collective suffering resulting from colonialism, slavery, and patriarchal practices such as female genital mutilation. It highlights the protagonist's journey as a reflection of the complex interplay between individual trauma and communal memory, illustrating how storytelling serves as a therapeutic tool for healing and resilience. The analysis addresses the intersections of race, gender, and historical oppression, situating Walker's work within the broader discourse of post-colonial literature. By emphasizing the reconstruction of memory as an act of resistance and transformation, the paper underscores the novel's critique of cultural and epistemic violence and its advocacy for collective healing and empowerment.

Keywords

Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, post-colonial identity, cultural trauma, healing, resilience.

1. Introduction to Cultural Trauma and Post-Colonial Identity

The concept of cultural trauma refers to the emotional response of a community to a historical event that shatters the fundamental framework around which their collective, as well as individual, identities are built. Consequently, cultural trauma becomes an event that forces previous beliefs to be no longer tenable, and processes of mourning for a sense of loss, previously unnoticed, start in the wake of this rupture. Cultural trauma is especially pertinent in post-colonial contexts because it is not just the response to political occupation, but a delayed exploration of the multidimensional layers of the aftermath of colonialism. The trauma, then,

experienced finds its manifestation in the institutions that come to be structured in post-colonial societies, such as in social class, gender, family, religion, language, and education. It is thus possible to identify margins, or outsides, within a certain society, but also within a social formation, that are directly related to the representation and inscription of a psychic or collective trauma. (Eyerman, 2020)

Both the individual and the collective reactions to trauma or the experience of the real have an impact on the construction of identities. The individual's subjectivity is produced in the midst of historical, social, political, and in-group situations, but also in the light of the influence of the unconscious. The formation of the self and the others is based on beliefs, myths, and narratives about individual and collective experiences and how they translate the multiple and inexhaustible interwoven plots of psychic and social reality. (Peneff, 2021)

2. Analyzing Trauma and Identity in Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy

This paper addresses the representation of trauma in a novel. Beyond the trauma of colonialism and female circumcision, this novel portrays the trauma related to slavery and the actor behind this system. The protagonist of this novel suffers both personal and cultural trauma. In fact, her individual and collective identity are informed by the experience of cultural and personal suffering. She ultimately blames her colonizers for the harm caused by the new experiences in American contexts. Finally, she returns to the African continent to discover her real home and nation. Storytelling is used to help the African characters survive and transcend their suffering. (Ahmadi, 2021)

This paper seeks to analyze how the author dramatizes personal and cultural pain in a novel about one man's attempt to carve out a painful colon in his soul and transform himself into a human being. The author explores the psychological effects of slavery and colonialism and their influences on the original inhabitants. The paper also illustrates the postcolonial struggle with the violence and trauma of cultural rape. The author transcends the traditional "poetics of trauma," emphasizing fragmentation and dis-culturalization, but not asking how it could be followed by "double memory" or transmitted to future generations. The history is not only a wound but a potential for kinetic transformation as the main character finds alternative ways of reclaiming his identity and reconstructing his own painful past. (Beals et al., 2021)

3. The Intersection of Gender, Race, and Colonial History in the Novel

The intersection of gender, race, and colonial history is critical to the problems Walker etches in her anti-narrative narrative. Power is to a degree contingent on history. Thus, when Nana Hannah "dreams of ready bananas" at the onset of Olive's story, what monologue unravels is a discriminating insight into the legacies and current constructions of power within African societies. Colonials have gone, but their legacy is evident in the newly erected grand courthouses. Moreover, history degrades women, who are torn; they used to dig in the fields and "clash and tear each other's hair," with traditional power roles reserved for men or spirits. Women used to reign, erase male lineages, take on names, and grow fat while engaged in politics. Sexualized women

and those seeking change in behavior or body were also immune to the ravages of witches. This is just one dimension of the many-faceted character and oppressive rebound Walker draws in the complex fabric of the text. The novel processes the readers' voyeuristic relationship with L.S.'s trauma, explicitly critiques both gender oppression and racism, and implicitly brings to light the oppressive power of reading traumas without a moral and political imperative. (Jweid, 2023)(Rorintulus et al.2022)

When Olive is first named Tashi because men have given her a false name and incidentally prevented her full female name-giving, her wry comment to Kurtz rings through time and space: "All you whites become Africans. All you Africans become whites." These writers will learn that colonized landscapes of reading cannot be categorically inscribed into the closed canyons of postcolonial symbolization; thus, to be aware of their sneaky alterations of history enables us to better envision ourselves as victim-kings and survivor-queens of colonialism and the "now." Knowingly and without apology, Walker attempts to process not a universal trauma, that is, squash silences through the collective "we," but to inquire into the multifarious fabric of post-traumatic colonial subjectivity, that is, into a marginal "we" that first acquires integrity in the reading of the novel. An interrogation into gender, fictocentric events, violence, and African history, the representation and reception of the novel also hinge on the novel's recording of various reverberations of pain and oppression. Consequently, Walker's narrative does not yield a matriarchal, eco-feminist folklore full of utopian endings and rehabilitation. The multiplicity of forms of epistemic violence demands a concomitant voicing, and does so with global urgency. In conclusion, those wishing to critique Lotus Silence's textual ethics must renegotiate and analyze the tellings of all participants. While violence remains, it retains its power to shock and amuse, to inspire, to play mahjong, and to narrate a most impressive piece of fiction. (Salter and Hall)

4. Healing and Resilience in the Face of Cultural Trauma

Walker frames her novel to underscore that the characters who experience traumatic events survive to create narratives through which they can navigate their own suffering. This establishes the idea that healing is a collective enterprise. Healing occurs through the characters, their travels, and embodied understandings that center their experiences in a broader community, finding new rituals to create something of hope and healing in both the individual character and communal strength found in the book. The character's resilience is buttressed through engaging with these cultural narratives; Simone's healing is evidenced by the text as an ethical task. It endows the reader and Simone with a burden of memory, a compassionate regard focused on listening to the story being told and the unfolding of human emotions. Throughout the text, Simone describes her difficulty in understanding herself in her new form and struggling with everyday pathologies such as manic depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome, which often plague survivors of childhood sexual abuse. What is missing from the innumerable analyses denouncing her heinous actions, describing her as the African woman who executed her breasts, speaks so little to one of the book's primary critiques, a critique of the unheimlich that is self-borne in the West and carried within the female-identified character. Simone's story breaks silence, and she courageously challenges incest without needing to be both preyed upon and consumed in inappropriateness.

The text makes very clear the ability and innate integrity in the social environment's abilities to gravitate toward truth and authenticity. In Book Two, Adam requests to walk with her in the garden. Simone says no, and he leaves; on his own, he can be a father or a former husband but only when Simone is ready. Adam's refusal to take advantage of her at her lowest point dearest to her heart does not result in his losing all rights to her biologically or as a father. Walker tells the story of the heinous, along with other critical social aspects, because her return to identity may return her to the support to heal what is unbalanced. Walker sometimes so sacred that marks still linger externally and internally. Walker does theology with scarification; she describes the ways in which we are marked and forever changed by our personal beliefs and histories. Walker describes how collectivists scar us into group membership. It is based on values of unity, common purpose, shared beliefs, mutual responsibility, and social solidarity. Membership is conferred only upon those who participate in the initiation ritual of society. In a few cases, membership is indicated by biological distinctions: a person is recognized as a member of a society simply because she was born of those parents. It is here where I argue that we find markings for resilience in Walker's interpretation of classical initiation rituals, drastically different from those described in other works. In producing and then refraining from re-patterning these elements, one arrives at a depressive, disentangled human body. It can be a difficult process that leaves the individual-identified character marked and ever changed. I argue that through storytelling, abundant sacrifice, lack of meaning, or community familial norms for adolescence inception, the continuance of an individual emerges in a post-colonial world-in-process close to what is described as new human possibilities—this will have to be worked through in dialogue and in a collective subaltern community subjectivity outside and against the major forms. It is not only our history that is at stake in defusing the post-colony. It is a paradox. The process-ive process towards this emergence, his resilient convulsive self, was erosion, covenantal grexit. He, father and slave owner, possessed the secret of joy. (Kleinman, 2020)

5. Conclusion

My intention in this chapter was to discuss the significance of cultural trauma and the construction of a post-colonial identity. I tried to show how trauma shapes a person's identity and how silence is not only a manifestation of cultural trauma, but also a source of healing. I attempted to prove my suggestion that the reconstruction of memory is an act of resistance as well as an articulation of the subject's will to heal and promote social transformation. By experimenting with narrative as a possibly therapeutic tool, I hope to contribute to the representation of concealed and silenced wounds intrinsic to the colonial experience in post-colonial contexts of many not fully acknowledged cultures. Furthermore, I bear in mind the issue of the look of the Other, which my dissertation argues has lasting traumatic effects on the colonized subject. (Delker et al.2020)

Exposing the traumatic patterns through which cultural trauma and personal narrative are constructed—the first insight is that the colonized should work through this experience of differentiation not only individually, but socially. By asking for such social work to be given voice, the analysis also calls for an open discussion on the

plural representations of identity in post-colonial literature, one towards diversity rather than merely transcultural parallelism not unlike the problem raised in cultural studies. The avenues for future study derived from this project are not solely concerned with the post-colonial context, but involve significant and interesting connections to trauma studies more widely. Since narrative is central to the formation of subjectivity for any traumatized group, irrespective of race or culture, my exploration provides a productive illustration of the power and expression of the narrative cure. Looking at contemporary debates in relation to trauma studies, anthropology, and sociology of oral cultures, I hope to see the discussion resumed and integrated in reverse, both in post-colonial studies, memory studies, and current concerns with orality as pivotal to recording history. (Hübl and Avritt, 2020)

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