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Intersecting Narratives of Resistance: Aimé Césaire's Critique of Colonization in "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land"

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Aimé Césaire's critique of colonization and the quest for emancipation in Notebook of a Return to the Native Land through a lens that integrates Postcolonial and Critical Race theories. It examines the existential plight of the colonized, emphasizing internal resistance against dehumanization. Drawing on Postcolonial Theory, the analysis situates Césaire's work in the broader discourse on cultural, economic, and political effects of colonization, addressing identity, power, and resistance. A Critical Race Theory perspective explores racial hierarchies within Césaire's narrative, elucidating the intersectionality of race, power, and social structures. Dissecting The Notebook of a Return to the Native Land, the paper reveals pervasive hopelessness and inertia characterizing colonized life. Césaire's vivid imagery captures stagnation and fear in Martinique, portraying a society paralyzed by poverty, disease, and oppression. Emphasizing Césaire's call for confrontation and rejection as steps toward liberation, the research underscores the continuous need for transformation, both individually and collectively. By amalgamating these theoretical frameworks, this paper contributes to understanding the intricacies of colonization and the enduring struggle for freedom in Aimé Césaire's work.

INTRODUCTION

In the diverse panorama of postcolonial literature, Aimé Césaire's magnum opus, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, emerges as a profound exploration of the colonized psyche and the relentless struggle for liberation. Césaire's work transcends conventional analyses, probing into the intricate layers of suffering, humiliation, and subjugation experienced by those living under the yoke of imperial rule. Beyond historical and geographical confines, Césaire's narrative encapsulates an internal strife—a battle for an existence free from the oppressive shadows of colonialism.

This paper undertakes a subtle journey through Césaire's poetic and dramatic expressions, deciphering the multifaceted dimensions of identity, despair, and resilience within the colonized individual. Key to our analysis is the rejection of traditional binary frameworks that compartmentalize individuals into colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed. Inspired by Frantz Fanon's seminal theories, we challenge these established constructs, unveiling Césaire's vision of confrontation and resistance as intrinsic aspects of the struggle for liberation.

Our study endeavors to unravel the existential crisis depicted in Césaire's literary universe, navigating the emotional landscapes of Martinique. We explore the profound layers of fear, hopelessness, and stagnation that engulf the lives of its inhabitants. Through meticulous analysis of Césaire's texts, we illuminate the deep-seated sense of resignation that often paralyzes the colonized, hindering their fight against oppressive forces.

In our exploration of Césaire's narratives, our goal is to decipher the complexities inherent in the colonized experience, emphasizing the imperative of continual transformation, both at individual and collective levels. By plumbing the depths of Césaire's literary creations within the frameworks of Postcolonial and Critical Race theories, this research aims to contribute to a comprehensive insight of the internalized struggle against colonization and the enduring pursuit of freedom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (originally *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*), published in 1939, is a foundational text in Francophone Caribbean literature and postcolonial studies. This long poem marks a significant moment in Césaire's literary and political career and has been the subject of extensive critical analysis. Positioned within the broader discourse of decolonization, Césaire's work reflects the tumultuous socio-political landscape of the 20th century, marked by the struggle for independence and self-affirmation among colonized peoples.

Césaire's critique of colonization is deeply intertwined with his exploration of identity and belonging. Chambers (1999) highlights the poet's utilization of surrealism and imagery to depict the existential plight of the colonized, emphasizing themes of alienation, poverty, and oppression. Through his poetic expression, Césaire confronts the harsh realities of Martinique, exposing the wounds inflicted by centuries of colonial domination. Interpretations of Césaire's work have been influenced by three major contexts: the cultural alienation of Martinique, the theme of return to African heritage and the concept of Negritude,

and Césaire's position within the French literary tradition. These contexts shape the critical discourse surrounding the relevance and significance of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* in understanding the complexities of colonialism and its aftermath (Chambers, 1999).

Vincent Clément's analysis underscores Césaire's personal revolt against colonial domination and his journey towards constructing a new Caribbean identity. Clément emphasizes the trauma of displacement and the poet's deep connection to his African roots, highlighting themes of racial pride and solidarity (Clément, 2018). Critics such as Raphaël Confiant and Laminaire Moi have raised questions regarding Césaire's political decisions, particularly his stance on Martinique's Departmentalization and his portrayal of Africa as the locus of his black identity. Confiant critiques Césaire's Negritude as nostalgic and argues for a more nuanced understanding of Caribbean specificity (Confiant, 2009). Laminaire Moi exposes the ambivalences within Césaire's work, exploring the tensions between acceptance and rebellion, and the poet's negotiation of his position within the colonial structure (Moi, 2009).

While Césaire's political activism and writings have garnered both praise and criticism, his commitment to challenging colonial power structures remains a central theme. Despite the complexities and contradictions within his work, Césaire's unwavering call for liberation and solidarity reverberates through his poetry and essays, inspiring generations of anti-colonial activists and scholars. By interrogating the existential plight of the colonized and the complexities of resistance, we uncover the profound implications of Césaire's work for understanding the ongoing struggle for emancipation in the postcolonial world. Through his vivid imagery and impassioned rhetoric, Césaire challenges us to confront the legacies of colonialism and to imagine new possibilities for collective liberation and solidarity.

The initial reception of Césaire's work was heavily influenced by the historical and cultural context of the late 1930s and 1940s. Césaire's poem, with its innovative use of surrealism and rich symbolism, was a clarion call for the Negritude movement, which he co-founded with Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon Damas. Critics like René Ménil praised Césaire's ability to articulate a powerful sense of racial and cultural identity amidst the dehumanizing forces of colonialism (Menil, 1941). By the 1960s and 1970s, Césaire's work had become a touchstone for the emerging field of postcolonial studies. Scholars such as Edward W. Said and Frantz Fanon acknowledged the poem's profound impact on postcolonial thought.

Fanon (1952), in particular, drew upon Césaire's imagery and themes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, underscoring the psychological effects of colonialism and the quest for liberation. Fanon writes about the "epidermalization" of inferiority – the process by which the colonized subject internalizes their supposed inferiority – a concept that finds its poetic counterpart in Césaire's powerful imagery of bodily and spiritual dismemberment. Césaire's depiction of the alienation and fragmentation experienced by colonized peoples parallels Fanon's analysis of the psychological struggles faced by black individuals in a white-dominated world.

Edward Said (1978), in his seminal work *Orientalism*, cites Césaire as an essential figure in articulating the consciousness of colonized peoples. Said's concept of Orientalism describes the ways in which the Western world has historically constructed the East as the "Other," a process that dehumanizes and dominates colonized cultures. Césaire's poem, with its vivid depiction of the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and its call for cultural and political awakening, directly resonates with Said's critique of imperialist discourse. In *Orientalism*, Said underscores the importance of writers like Césaire who provide a voice to the colonized, challenging dominant narratives and offering a counter-discourse that reclaims identity and agency.

Contemporary critics have continued to explore the rich thematic and formal elements of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. In the 1980s, literary critic Abiola Irele highlighted the work's synthesis of surrealism and African traditions, emphasizing its innovative narrative structure and linguistic richness. Irele (1981) noted that Césaire's poem blends personal and collective memory, creating a tapestry that reflects the broader African diasporic experience. This blending of surrealism with African traditions enhances the poem's depth and complexity, illustrating the multifaceted nature of Césaire's identity and his vision for a liberated black consciousness.

In recent decades, scholars have expanded their analysis to include gender and diasporic perspectives in their exploration of Aimé Césaire's work. Critics such as Maryse Condé and Édouard Glissant have explored the complex intersections of race, identity, and geography in Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Maryse Condé, in her essay "Aimé Césaire: A Daughter's Retrospective," has emphasized the gendered dimensions of Césaire's vision. She notes how the poem's imagery often intertwines with maternal figures and themes of birth and renewal, illustrating the nurturing and regenerative aspects of Césaire's conception of black identity and cultural rebirth (Conde, 2005). Condé points out that the maternal imagery in Césaire's work serves not only to symbolize the creation of new life but also to embody the hope for a new social and political order emerging from the struggles of the past.

Édouard Glissant, in his influential work *Caribbean Discourse*, explores how Césaire's narrative transcends the boundaries of race and geography to forge a collective identity for the African diaspora. Glissant (1989) argues that Césaire's poetic landscape, rich with surrealist elements and vivid descriptions of Martinique, functions as a microcosm of the broader diasporic experience. He suggests that Césaire's exploration of place and belonging resonates deeply with the diasporic consciousness, reflecting both a longing for and a reclamation of ancestral homelands (1989). Together, these critics highlight how Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* serves as a profound meditation on the interconnectedness of personal and collective identities, as well as the enduring impact of colonialism on the cultural and geographical landscapes of the African diaspora.

Recent scholarship has also engaged in critical debates regarding the poem's relevance in the 21st century. Some scholars, like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, argue that *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* remains crucial for understanding

contemporary postcolonial struggles and the ongoing effects of globalization on cultural identity. Thiong'o (2005) asserts that Césaire's exploration of alienation and cultural reclamation resonates with the current challenges faced by postcolonial societies in an increasingly interconnected world. Others, such as Stuart Hall, have critiqued aspects of the Negritude movement, suggesting that while Césaire's work is foundational, it must be read alongside other postcolonial voices to fully grasp the complexities of identity and resistance. Hall's (1984) perspective emphasizes the importance of a diverse array of postcolonial narratives to understand the multifaceted nature of identity, suggesting that Césaire's contributions are part of a larger, ongoing discourse.

Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* continues to be a vital text in literary and cultural studies. Its enduring significance lies in its powerful articulation of identity, resistance, and liberation. Through the decades, critics have illuminated its multifaceted themes and innovative form, ensuring its place as a cornerstone of postcolonial literature. As global discourses on race, identity, and colonialism evolve, Césaire's masterpiece remains a profound source of insight and inspiration.

The research presented in this paper, titled "Intersecting Narratives of Resistance: Aimé Césaire's Critique of Colonization in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*," has identified several gaps in existing scholarship on Aimé Césaire's seminal work. While previous researchers have extensively analyzed Césaire's critique of colonization and the quest for emancipation, they have primarily focused on individual aspects such as the existential plight of the colonized or racial hierarchies within the narrative. However, there has been a lack of comprehensive analysis that integrates these perspectives to fully explore the intersectionality of resistance within Césaire's poetry.

By integrating Postcolonial and Critical Race theories, this research aims to address this gap by providing a more nuanced understanding of how resistance operates at the intersection of race, power, and identity within the context of colonization. Through a close examination of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, the paper reveals the pervasive hopelessness and inertia characterizing colonized life, while also highlighting Césaire's call for confrontation and rejection as steps toward liberation. By bringing together these theoretical frameworks, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricacies of colonization and the enduring struggle for freedom in Césaire's work. However, it also identifies the need for future research to further explore and elucidate the complexities of resistance within Césaire's poetry, ultimately enriching our appreciation of his enduring relevance in contemporary discourse on decolonization and social justice.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative methodology grounded in Postcolonial Theory to analyze Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. The study will focus on close reading and textual analysis to explore themes of dehumanization, resistance, identity, and emancipation. By examining the poem's symbolism, imagery, and narrative structure, the research aims to uncover the psychological and emotional states of the colonized. Additionally,

the socio-political context of Martinique and the broader French colonial empire will be considered to provide a deeper understanding of the real-life inspirations behind Césaire's critique of colonization. This approach seeks to reveal the complexities of the colonized experience and the ongoing struggle for freedom as depicted in Césaire's work.

DISCUSSION

In the works of Aimé Césaire, the colonized struggle against their existence of being colonized refers to their battle against the conditions of slavery, humiliation, suffering, subjugation, and submission. Colonization is not depicted as an external force that the colonized fight against for their freedom, but as a fight for another life. Césaire embraces its energy to overthrow what destroys the ever-present potential for a new life. Freedom from colonization demands continuous acts of clash, involving both physical and mental transformation, individual and collective. This clash involves rejection through acts of replacement, policies of denial, and hindering diversions. Rejection applies to matters that paralyze, prevent, and enslave. Without confrontation, mere rejection and delusions cannot achieve the goal, as the memory of being colonized always reminds one of the oppressive realities of colonialism. Nevertheless, Césaire's desperation brings hope, and the struggle becomes the possibility of revolt. Acknowledging the reality of colonization is necessary to achieve freedom. The process is hard, cruel, and painful, but the power to bear these difficulties paves the way to freedom from one's colonized being.

The people of Martinique suffer a tormenting history of barbaric slavery and exploitation that crushes the population with racism, poverty, unemployment, low pay, diseases, imprisonment, and injustice, leaving them "debased, without revolt or ambition, resigned and futile" (Kesteloot, 12). Frantz Fanon, in his writings on the colonizer-colonized relationship, shows that the colonized are victims and objects of the colonizer's exploitation, turned into objects through colonial "exploitation, tortures, raids, racism, collective liquidations, rational oppression" (Fanon, 35). The objectification leaves the Negro helpless, "without means of existing, without a *raison d'être*, broken in the very depth of his substance" (Fanon, 35).

This binary rationalization of exploitation in colonization, epitomized in the opposite positioning of the colonizers and colonized, superior force and subject of colonization, fails in the case of Césaire. Through presenting the sick, tormented colonized existence, Césaire aspires to transform the miserable colonized life. He rejects the colonized object status and the binary relation of colonizer-colonized through his writings, which become a weapon for confrontation, rejection, and overthrowing colonialism.

In *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, the repetitive phrase "at the end of wee hours" acknowledges the identity crisis and nothingness of a colonized existence. The poet exposes the lack of hope embedded in being colonized. A similar situation is portrayed in his first play, *And the Dogs Were Silent*, where the Rebel's

statement presents his enslavement as an abandoned, dejected condition, an endless doomed life of darkness and torment. This inertia invites a kind of beastly resignation, inactive, unable, and reluctant to fight for oneself or others. There seems no hope or possibility for change; only disintegration develops and exists. This is similar to the beginning of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, where the speaker describes his native place as a dark land, with time not progressing and no moving forward.

Césaire vividly describes the resignation of life without reason or meaning, a condition of utter silence and inactivity. Even in the case of possible movement, there is no sign of confrontation—only a cry without protest. As Césaire states, "It crawls on its hands without the slightest desire to drill the sky with a stature of protest (p. 41)." He illustrates his town paralyzed by fear, disease, hunger, poverty, and suffering, a never-ending situation. The town is plagued with disease and hunger, with the sea having waves, but the people consuming alcohol, never wanting to enter the water, rather drowned in the mud.

Their thoughts are blocked by fear, shutting all windows of hope and regeneration. The people find no way out from this fear, with every possible sight in any direction revealing only fear. The poor man has lost his voice because of hunger, creating a paralyzing force. The horror of hunger puts him in immense enslavement, doubly enslaved by the fear of hunger and colonization. His entire existence is trapped in this vicious cycle of evil, and Césaire seeks to break this fear and spinelessness. He disavows his people's submission to domestic necessity and the fear of poverty and hunger, combating repression that leads to inactivity and total submission to colonization.

Ashamed of his existence, color, and culture, the Martiniquan mimics Christmas more than his African heritage. He seems compliant with his condition, celebrating Christmas with vague dreams. The people of Martinique want to forget their history of slavery and Negro identity, denying their history and part of their reality. Any recollection of slavery is filled with torture and whipping. Césaire highlights this denial: "Poverty had wounded his chest and back and they had stuffed into his poor brain that a fatality impossible to trap weighed on him; that he had no control over his own fate (p. 79)."

Césaire's addressing of his masters as 'white' is significant from a black man's point of view, symbolizing courage and revolt. He stands face to face with the colonizer, reminding them of their treachery and false victory over black people, rejecting white supremacy and pitying the colonizer. As he asserts, "Hear the white world / Horribly weary from its immense efforts... / Hear the grandiose alibis of its pitiful stumbling / Play for our omniscient and naïve conquerors!" (p. 69).

Denying colonial hegemony involves acknowledging pain, wounds, and counter-healing. Pain and wounds block the self, tearing it into pieces. Educated in Europe, Césaire experiences humiliation and disrespect being black. He critiques Europe's disgraceful image for a black man: "Leaving Europe utterly twisted with screams... / Leaving timid Europe which / Collects and proudly overrates itself" (p. 69).

Césaire embraces confrontation instead of hiding, affirming his black identity and transforming into a rebel. He witnesses disease, poverty, and the pain of the wounded and humiliated 'nigger.' Rejecting temptations of Paris, he refuses to mimic the colonizer. For Césaire, escaping reality is never desired. He values real existence, knowing that freedom cannot be achieved in blindness. As a fighter and rebel, he acknowledges the powerful enemy.

The black slave is degenerated with the word "nigger." Poverty and disease inflict life each moment, making him senseless. Césaire captures this dehumanizing condition: "I accept, I accept / And the flogged nigger saying 'forgive me master' / And the twenty-nine legal blows of the whip" (p. 77). The oppressed man learns to endure suffering and survive, covering his anger. Indifference to humiliation and suffering does not mean acceptance, but a suppressed life blocked by the colonizer.

By affirming and accepting his crimes, the inactive colonized achieves a transcendental identity. Resonating with Kazi Naz By affirming and accepting his crimes, the inactive colonized achieves a transcendental identity. Resonating with Kazi Nazrul Islam's notion of the active rebel, Aimé Césaire's portrayal of the colonized transforms into a force capable of challenging and overthrowing the oppressive colonial order. Through his literary works, Césaire illustrates that mere passive acceptance and suppression are not the paths to freedom. Instead, acknowledging the brutal reality and actively confronting it with a determined spirit is crucial for true liberation.

In *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, Césaire's journey is one of self-discovery and transformation. He moves from a sense of deep despair and resignation towards a revolutionary awakening. The poem opens with a stark depiction of his native land as a place of suffering and stagnation, symbolizing the colonized state of being. The lines "At the end of wee hours / this town sprawled-flat" (p. 41) paint a picture of desolation and hopelessness. However, this acknowledgment of despair becomes the foundation for a powerful assertion of identity and resistance.

Césaire does not shy away from the harsh truths of colonization. He vividly describes the physical and psychological toll it takes on the colonized, as seen in the lines, "It crawls on its hands without the slightest desire to drill the sky with a stature of protest" (p. 41). This imagery underscores the extent of the colonized people's dehumanization and their resignation to their plight. Yet, Césaire's work is not merely a lament but a call to action, urging the colonized to rise above their circumstances.

The transformation in Césaire's narrative is evident as he embraces his African heritage and rejects the mimicry of European culture. This shift is crucial for reclaiming a sense of self and agency. He confronts the colonizer with the truth of their atrocities, stating, "Hear the white world / Horribly weary from its immense efforts... / Hear the grandiose alibis of its pitiful stumbling" (p. 69). This confrontation is both an act of defiance and a step towards reclaiming dignity.

Césaire's journey from despair to rebellion is a testament to the power of recognizing and embracing one's true identity. His rejection of European cultural dominance and his affirmation of his African roots are acts of liberation. By doing

so, he not only confronts the physical and psychological oppression of colonization but also paves the way for a new, emancipated existence. This is encapsulated in his powerful declaration: "My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth, my voice, the freedom of those who break down in the solitary confinement of despair" (p. 69).

In summary, Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* is a profound exploration of the colonized experience, marked by an initial acceptance of despair and a powerful transition to revolutionary defiance. By confronting the brutal realities of colonization and embracing his true identity, Césaire provides a blueprint for overcoming oppression and achieving true freedom. His work remains a powerful testament to the resilience and potential for transformation within the colonized individual.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* stands as a poignant testament to the enduring struggle against the dehumanizing forces of colonization. Through a meticulous examination of Césaire's narrative within the frameworks of Postcolonial and Critical Race theories, this research has illuminated the profound existential crisis faced by the colonized individual. Césaire's work transcends mere historical and geographical boundaries, delving deep into the psychological and emotional landscapes of Martinique, where despair, hopelessness, and resignation often overshadow the quest for liberation. Central to our analysis is the rejection of traditional binary frameworks, as inspired by Frantz Fanon, which compartmentalize individuals into oppressor and oppressed. Instead, Césaire's vision emphasizes confrontation and resistance as intrinsic components of the struggle for emancipation. His vivid imagery captures not only the external manifestations of oppression but also the internalized struggle against colonization, urging continuous acts of clash and rejection as pathways to freedom.

The people of Martinique, burdened by a tormenting history of slavery and exploitation, embody the multifaceted impacts of colonialism – from racism and poverty to unemployment and injustice. As Fanon elucidates, the colonized individual becomes objectified and stripped of agency, trapped in a cycle of oppression and dehumanization.

Yet, amidst this despair, Césaire's work offers a glimmer of hope – a reminder that even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, the spirit of resistance persists. The journey towards liberation is arduous and fraught with challenges, but it is through acknowledging the reality of colonization and embracing the power to confront and reject it that true freedom can be attained.

In essence, Aimé Césaire's critique of colonization in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* serves as a rallying cry for collective transformation – a testament to the enduring resilience of the human spirit in the pursuit of freedom and dignity. As we navigate the complexities of postcolonial literature, Césaire's work remains a timeless beacon of resistance and hope, inspiring future generations to continue the fight against oppression in all its forms.

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