



CONFLICT RESOLUTION DURING COLONIALISM: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO THE POEM A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA BY DEREK WALCOTT

¹*Y. Atchuthan, ²P. Sarmatha and ³S. Mathivathany

¹Advanced Technological Institute, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka

²Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Business Studies
University of Vavuniya, Sri Lanka

³Department of Project Management, Faculty of Business Studies,
University of Vavuniya, Sri Lanka

**atchuuj2510@gmail.com*

Abstract

Colonialism is considered an era with conflicts between colonists and natives in their respective regions of origin. Though the nature of conflicts varies, the core of conflicts was for power and dominancy. This harmed the peace that existed within and among different ethnic groups. The poem “A Far Cry from Africa” by Derek Walcott portrays conflicts between British colonists and native Kenyans, Kikuyu tribes. The main objective of this study is to find the reasons, nature, and consequences of this conflict among the people involved. Relevant lines from the poem were taken and they were analyzed using descriptive and argumentative research methods. The findings of the study reveal that the conflicts have occurred due to the injustice accompanied by the misleading political agenda of the British and the aggressiveness of the native Kenyans to regain and protect their fundamental rights. This has caused conflicts and disturbed the peace which existed within and among communities. Political ideology and its agenda have played a role in the creation, manifestation, and consequences of conflicts.

Keywords: *conflict, imperialism, peace*

Introduction

Peace refers to freedom from any disturbance. Galtung (1988) says that colonialism is direct, cultural, and structural violence. Studies around the world record numerous violent incidents that occurred in the colonized countries when the dominant power tried to control the weaker and feeble. Through colonialism, powerful countries invaded other countries and kept the new colonies under their direct control by all means.

According to Galtung (1980b), colonizers harassed the indigenous people in the colonized countries through exploration, penetration, fragmentation, and marginalization. Further, according to (Galtung, 1988, p. 298), colonialism created imbalance in the world as many nations and certain sections of people became rich and powerful while some on the other underwent poverty and hardships.



The notion of imperialism which appeared in the second half of the 19th century stands for the greed of the states in expanding their administrative power in other parts of the world. Later, it was defined to be the dominant policy of the empire. When the researchers argue on the motives for imperialism, they highlight how colonizers control and exploit the marginalized communities in the colonized countries through communicative, cultural, political, military, and social means. Further, it is notable that trauma, suicide, mental illness, and lateral violence were the common factors that the natives were compelled to face in the phenomenon of coping with the new challenging situations which were put against the indigenous in the colonized countries.

Some communities still bear scars of prior conflicts as it has affected old and new generations alike. The poem *A Far Cry from Africa* by Derek Walcott reveals the harsh reality the native Kikuyu tribe experienced in the republic of Kenya due to European settlers during their colonization. This poem highlights the painful reality of ethnic conflict. Thus, the primary objective of this study is to analyze how the peace of the inhabitants was disturbed. Also, the secondary objectives include the historical and the sociological factors that motivated the participants to engage in the battlefield.

A section of Kikuyu people formed the Mau Mau, a terrorist organization in 1952 as a response to the cruel treatment of British colonizers and their invasion. This study's findings will further enlighten English literature and other relevant fields on peace and conflict reconciliation.

Literature Review

Brigg and Bleiker (2011), highlight the compelling link between culture, conflict, and the search for peace. Different cultures place different emphases on a variety of aspects of human experience and interaction in certain circumstances. During the postcolonial era, this conflict was tremendously exposed in literary texts. As this study focuses on the poem "A Far Cry from Africa" by Derek Walcott, it further explores similar poems based on the theme of conflict between the indigenous and western cultures and traditions.

Accordingly, the postcolonial poem "Piano and Drums" written by the African poet Gabriel Okara divulges the complexity between the African culture and the culture introduced by the colonizers. In general, the poem discusses the effects of colonialism on the African continent and the experience that Africans had with it through metaphor and symbolism. The poet uses the drums to represent African culture and the "piano" represents Western society. In contrast to western society, which is steeped in sophistication and leaves the black man perplexed, the poet loves the simplicity and lack of complexity of African culture. The confusion began because the poet is torn between two civilizations. During the colonial era, western civilization was so firmly ingrained in African culture that even the Africans themselves were unable to distinguish between the western way of life and their genuine history. The



African man has reached the stage where he cannot distinguish between western life and his own culture because, although he occasionally remembers his own culture and wishes he could return to the past, he is also enmeshed in western culture. This is exposed in the following lines:

"And I lost in the morning mist of an age at a riverside keep,
wandering in the mystic rhythm of jungle drums and concerto"

This poem vividly portrays the cultural clash.

Similarly, the poem "Night of the Scorpion" written by the Indian poet Nissim Ezekiel also expresses the conflict that the speaker feels between social observation and a personal crisis. The speaker of this poem recalls his childhood in which his mother was suffering from the bite of a scorpion. As a little boy, he was confused about praying to God to save his mother's life because of the mixture of Christianity and Hinduism. He prays to God for his mother's well-being simultaneously he prays for her best reincarnation which is a religious concept of Hinduism. In the following lines,

"The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times
to paralyze the Evil One."

The poet refers to the colonizers as swarms of flies who introduced Christianity. The amalgamation of Christianity and Hinduism made the natives perplexed and they could not surpass the boundaries of Hinduism at the same time they could not welcome the new religion wholeheartedly. This poem evidently expresses the religious clash in the post-colonial scenario. In contrast, the poem "This Language, This Woman" written by the Sri Lankan poet Yasmine Gooneratne discloses the conflicts between the native language and English Language. The English Language is referred to as the Colonizers' language. The poet expresses the trauma of this new language acquisition in Sri Lanka as follows:

"So do not call her slut, and alien,
names born of envy and your own misuse
that whisper how desire in secret runs.
She has known greatness, borne illustrious sons,
her mind's well-stored, her lovely nature's rich,
filled with these splendid warm surprises which,
now the distorting old connections done,
fit her to be your mistress, and my Muse."

In Sri Lanka, even after the independence, English seemed to be the official language, and the native Sri Lankan hated that language because they were afraid that this language would replace their native language use. They carried out uprisings and riots against the English Language. Nationalists hated



English because the colonizers introduced it. However, the poet metaphorizes the language as a female lover. Even though everyone in the country shows abhorrence towards the language, the poet vigorously defends the positive attributions of the language. However, this poem points out the country's political crisis of the English Language.

Having considered all these, it is understandable that there was a postcolonial conflict in terms of culture, tradition, religion, and language. These ideas and concepts help to draw that there is a conflict resolution in the postcolonial nations which was expressed in their literary works.

Methodology

Lines from the poem, 'A Far Cry from Africa' by Derek Walcott were taken for this study and they were analyzed using descriptive and argumentative research methods. Secondary data including the author's biography and historical information about the state were used for analytical purposes.

Results and Discussions

Inner conflicts

It is clear that the responses of indigenous people towards the invasion of colonizers created psychological conflicts for the eyewitness. Accordingly, the narrator of the poem "A Far Cry from Africa" undergoes this kind of conflict as he has come from African and English heritage. He is divided within himself as the people in his country. Though he shares a hybrid heritage, he feels lonely as he realizes a split identity in his personality. He hates both roots as they do not attempt to bring any honour to the land. The line "I who am poisoned with the blood of both" highlights how the narrator has been disturbed by the consequences of fights between the white colonizers and the indigenous people in Kenya. This shows how the inner peace of individuals was disturbed and subjected to threats and harm.

Barbaric acts of terrorism

The poem portrays the gruesomeness of the Mau Mau uprising against the British imperialistic attitudes. Mau Mau as a terrorist organization that was formed by a section of native Kenyans, fought against the British colonists ferociously which is against the notion of civilization and humanized behavior. The line "The violence of beast on beast is read as natural law, but upright man seeks his divinity by inflicting pain" emphasizes the animal unkind and uncivilized behaviors of the parties involved in the battlefield. In this way, the narrator is not in favour of his own people due to the fatality of their barbaric acts.

This can be further understood through the line "To savages, expandable as Jews?" The narrator alludes to the incidents of what happened to Jews in World War II.



The above examples indicate how people lost peace and were forced to live with constant fear and anxiety due to the sense of uncertainty created due to colonists' presence in Africa.

Meaningless Colonial Policy

The colonial policy has been criticized due to the irresponsibility of the policymakers, leading to human slaughter on African soil. The line “Statistics justify and scholars seize the salient of colonial policy” indicates the inability and arrogance in realizing the harsh realities of the policy which was set in capturing new lands. In fact, the narrator humiliates the loophole in their policy as it does not accommodate human suffering and cries. This emphasizes how policymakers and their policy in terms of politics disturbed the peace in the ancient world.

Injustice

Further, this poem shows how injustice intrudes on one's freedom and finally leads to the destruction of peace among people. Also, the poem emphasizes two types of peace: peace within oneself and peace that prevails between ethnic groups. The lines “Again brutish necessity wipes its hands upon the napkin of a dirty cause” reveal the injustice of British colonizers to the natives in the African continent. Through this line, the writer emphasizes how the settlements of white colonizers are looked at with a sense of injustice as they captured the farmlands from the indigenous people by force.

Conclusion and contributions

In conclusion, the above poem reveals several factors which are the immediate reasons for the nature of the conflicts in the continent of Africa. Imperialistic attitudes accompanied by injustice, cruelty, and meaningless policy have disturbed the natives and colonists internally as well as externally in the post-colonial scenario in the continent of Africa. The peace which the narrator anticipated in this poem is found within oneself. The poem reveals that it is the greediness of the government and people's aggressive behaviours in protecting their rights have contributed to the conflicts in the poem which harmed peace and freedom. In this case, the findings of this study will give insights into studies related to conflicts and reconciliation in the post-colonial scenario in the world.

References

- Galtung, J. (1980a). Peace and world structure: Essays in peace research, volume IV. Copenhagen, Norway: Christian Ejlertsen.
- Galtung, J. (1980b). Peace problems: Some case studies - essays in peace research, volume V. Copenhagen, Norway: Christian Ejlertsen.
- Galtung, J. (1988). Trans armament and the cold war: Essays in peace research, volume VI. Copenhagen, Norway: Christian Ejlertsen.



Brigg, M & Bleiker, R. (2011). Post-Colonial Conflict Resolution. In *Mediating Across Difference: Oceanic and Asian Approaches to Conflict Resolution* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 19-39.

Okara, G. Piano and Drums. <https://litionaryblog.wordpress.com/2017/12/19/the-piano-and-the-drums/>

Ezekiel, N. Night of the Scorpion. <https://allpoetry.com/Night-of-the-Scorpion>

Gooneratne, Y. This language This woman. <https://e-kalvi.com/this-language-this-woman-summary-and-analysis/>