

Cultural Erasure in Dionne Irving's *The Island* and Cleyvis Natera's *Neruda on the Park*

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Abstract

The examination of culture, erasure, personality assessment as regards characterization and language goes a long way in the assessment of identity. In the course of this research, a cross examination of cultural erasure in the works of Dionne Irving and Cleyvis Natera: *The Island* and *Neruda on the Park* respectively highlights the struggle of race in the attainment of an American dream. This study investigates Freud's view on psychoanalytical theory, an assessment in the capturing of both the psychological and cultural adaptation, and changes experienced by characters in the collection of stories of *The Island* and also the *Neruda on the Park*. These assessments on the erasure of culture analyzes its rekindling of collective memory to form some sort of remembrance which grounds the identity-formation of characters leading to an adaptation of lifestyle in a foreign land. However, the migrant experiences and influence of a traumatic past or history are key elements that outlines evidences of cultural erasure and form the indices that animate existential crisis and psychological development in both novels.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, identity, erasure, culture and subordination

Introduction

Cultural erasure refers to the systematic suppression, marginalization, or elimination of a particular culture, often by dominant or oppressive forces. It involves the erasure of cultural practices, traditions, languages, histories, and identities, thereby undermining the rich diversity and heritage of a specific group or community. Erasure essentially works to render an “other” invisible. According to *Identity and Erasure*:

Finding the Elusive Caribbean, erasure is defined as the act of "neglecting, looking past, minimizing, ignoring, or rendering an invisible other" (Allahar, 2005, p.125)." Cultural erasure, sometimes called cultural invisibility, occurs when one culture subsumes another over a period of time. Allahar (2005) defines it as "the act of neglecting, looking past, minimizing, ignoring, or rendering invisible an "other". The "other" mentioned by Allahar refers to anyone defined as an outsider to a dominant racial, ethnic, or cultural group. Neglect, whether consciously or unconsciously perpetrated, is a central component of erasure.

In the context of African-Americans, cultural erasure is evident through various historical and contemporary factors. Slavery, for instance, resulted in the forced separation of African-Americans from their ancestral cultures, languages, and traditions. The cultural practices and knowledge that were passed down through generations were disrupted, leading to a loss of cultural continuity. During the era of Jim Crow segregation, African-American culture was systematically devalued and suppressed. Segregated institutions, such as schools and public spaces, limited access to resources and opportunities for African-Americans. This not only hindered the development and expression of their cultural identities but also perpetuated stereotypes and negative narratives about African-American culture. Also, the erasure of African-American culture can be seen in media representation, where historical underrepresentation, misrepresentation, and stereotypes have perpetuated biased narratives. Mainstream education often neglects or minimizes African-American history, literature, and contributions, which further marginalizes their cultural heritage. However, despite these challenges, African-American culture has continually demonstrated resilience, creativity, and resistance. Cultural

preservation efforts, such as the African-American oral tradition, music, art, literature, and community organizations, have played vital roles in reclaiming and celebrating African-American identity and heritage.

This research therefore aims to study, extensively examine, and explore cultural erasure through the framework of psychoanalysis in *The Island* by Dionne Irving and *Neruda on the Park* by Cleyvis Natera. Psychoanalysis allows the study of this research on cultural erasure in both novels to outline characters diasporic experiences which can be divided into two broad categories. First, the discuss of the patterns of dispersal of characters around the Caribbean and the kinds of acquired identities these characters developed in their new locations. Distinctions are increasingly drawn between the "historic" and "contemporary" or "new" character diasporic struggles, referring respectively to characters formed through collective formation resulting to acceptance of the present or recurring happenings. Second, is concerned with analyzing the various linkages that the characters have maintained with their culture. Here emphasis is on the demographic, cultural, economic, political, ideological, and iconographic flow.

The texts: *The Island* and *Neruda on the Park* are recently published works. Hence, little or no critical essays have been carried out. Through the conceptual framework of psychoanalysis comes the grappling effect that alienation and displacement leaves on the African American. Numerous works has been done on the psychoanalytic theory, but few contributions have been made in the analysis of the texts and none has really delved into the cultural erasure aspect of both texts. This is the gap this study seeks to fill. It is our intent to illustrate representations and viability of culture in both novels, while highlighting major character assessments; seek to reclaim and highlight the richness, diversity, and contributions

of the cultures that have been overlooked or erased; document and share cultural practices, language, folklore, and events that helps maintain cultural continuity and pride or what may be termed 'cultural preservation'; analyze the empowerment and identity formation of characters of both novels; and explore the themes of self-discovery, self-acceptance, and self-empowerment. By doing these, we intend to address issues of racial inequality, discrimination, and social injustice, shedding light on the struggles, resilience, and aspirations of characters. By raising awareness and provoking thought, this research aims to inspire social change, counter cultural erasure, challenge oppressive systems, foster a more equitable and just society, and contribute to a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of African-American culture, history, and experiences.

The Island

The Island contains powerful stories that explore the legacy of colonialism, and issues of race, immigration, sexual discrimination, and class in the lives of Jamaican women across London, Panama, France, Jamaica, Florida and more. *The Islands* follows the lives of Jamaican women immigrants or the descendants of immigrants who have relocated all over the world to escape the ghosts of colonialism on what they call the Island. Set in the United States, Jamaica, and Europe, these international stories examine the lives of an uncertain and unsettled cast of characters. Set in locations and times ranging from 1950s London and 1960s Panama to modern day New Jersey, Dionne Irving reveals the intricacies of immigration and assimilation in this debut, establishing a new and unforgettable voice in Caribbean-American literature. Restless, displaced, and disconnected, these characters try to ground themselves to grow where they find themselves planted in a

world in which the tension between what is said and unsaid can bend the soul.

The collection of stories in study also seeks to investigate the alienations that come with displacement, tracing the movements of Jamaican immigrants and their descendants across the United States, Panama and Europe. These stories linger in the malaise of foreignness as the characters try to form bonds across the boundaries of race, class and culture, only to conclude, in several cases, that such relationships are impossible.

Synopsis of the book *Neruda on the Park*

Neruda on the Park is so much more than the story of a mother and daughter. It touches on race, bringing black Dominicans into the spotlight. It focuses on a black Dominican family, that they speak Spanish, that others are surprised that they are black and Spanish-speaking. The neighborhood was vibrant and willing to come together to do whatever necessary to protect themselves. They relied on each other and helped each other. Luz was the one who really came in contact with those outside of her community. There was the surprise and easy dismissal of her race by various characters. And, through Luz, the reader also gets a taste of class differences. Surrounded by wealthy, high powered people with the world at their fingertips, her reality is that she is an immigrant. Yet she buys into what those outside her culture offer, buying the clothes, the jewelry, the shoes, and wanting to live in a specific area. The man she dates, Hudson, met Luz's family, saw where she was from, and still loved her. But Luz and Hudson really did not explore their differences. What initially was a sweet romance eventually turned into something that uncomfortably sexist, but ended up helping to be the kick Luz needed to really figure out her place.

Cultural Erasure as a Structural Device in the Collection of Stories of Dionne Irving's *The Island*.

Cultural Adaptation and Possible Erasure in *Florida Lives*

In *Florida Lives*, there is a reflection of a sense of regret and reflection on the decision to leave San Francisco. This story offers a detailed glimpse into the narrator's experiences and emotions in their new life in Florida. It touches upon themes of identity, race, relationships, cultural clashes and the complexities of adjusting to a different environment. The story initially discusses the narrator's role as the light-skinned daughter-in-law and the expectations placed on her by her husband's family to bring attributes like "good hair" into the gene pool and embody the American Dream that their hard work and education couldn't achieve. Although, it then shifts to highlight the aspirations of the narrator's husband's family, their move from the American South during the Great Migration, and their desire for upward mobility and acceptance, sometimes manifesting in emulation of white cultural norms. This stands in contrast with the narrator's Jamaican background and her own complex relationship with notions of race and identity. It also continues to explore the couple's life in Florida, detailing their new home and lifestyle changes, including culinary experimentation and domestic joys. It also brings out the tension between the narrator and their husband's colleagues, where the narrator grapples with being perceived as "exotic" due to her lighter skin tone.

The story concludes with the couple sitting outside, watching the bats leave their house. This symbolic moment represents the couple's *Florida Lives* coming to an end. The bats' departure also signifies a release from the past and the burden of their difficulties. Throughout the story, themes of identity, relationships, adaptation, and second chances are woven together as the characters navigate the challenges of

their Florida lives and come to terms with their own paths forward. The story portrays a complex array of emotions, expectations, and challenges faced by the narrator as regards cultural adaptation as they navigate their identity, relationships, and surroundings in a new place. It paints a vivid picture of their experiences, providing insights into the intricacies of cultural dynamics and personal growth. It also highlights the sense of freedom and anonymity they find in their new surroundings, allowing them to indulge in secret pleasures without judgment. *Florida Lives* paints a vivid picture of the narrator's journey to Florida, capturing the mixture of emotions, aspirations, and personal growth that come with such a major life change and also it explores themes of regret, change, and the complexity of personal and cultural identities.

Cultural erasure and the complexities of labour in *The Shopgirl*

In the story of *The Shopgirl*, we seem to reflect on the experiences and emotions tied to working in a small shop, run by a person of Caribbean descent. The work is physically demanding, involving tasks such as butchery, customer service, and maintaining the shop. The story accounts for the complexity of this experience, capturing the sense of identity, culture, and heritage associated with the work. The protagonist is immersed in a world of different foods, languages, and cultures, while also grappling with the feeling of being defined by this work. The passage explores the protagonist's connection to their heritage, the tensions between their work and the aspirations of their peers, and the intricate relationships formed with customers. The story further highlights the contrasts between the protagonist's reality and the aspirations of other young people, such as ballet classes and leisurely Saturdays. The shop is portrayed as both a symbol of

inheritance and a source of internal conflict, embodying both pride and a desire for more. The passage touches on the protagonist's identity, their growth within the work environment, and the sense of isolation that comes with knowing their story differs from those of their peers. The writing also alludes to a future where cultural dynamics might change, as well as the protagonist's potential desire to express resentment toward those who romanticize their work. The passage concludes by emphasizing the lasting memory of the work itself, which becomes a defining aspect of the protagonist's life.

Finally, *The Shopgirl* provides a rich and textured portrayal of the protagonist's experiences, emotions, and reflections, while also touching on themes of identity, heritage, and the complexities of labor and cultural erasure.

The character assessment of Delroy, struggle and adaptation in Weaving

The story explores the life of Delroy, a fighter preparing for a match while reflecting on his relationships and experiences. The story delves into his thoughts and emotions, revealing a complex mix of pride, regret, anger, and vulnerability. Delroy is a fighter who finds a sense of power and excitement in strategizing and facing opponents in the ring. His internal monologue reveals his anticipation for the fight, contrasting the exhilaration of combat against people with the emptiness he feels in his personal life. He struggles with self-doubt and a sense of failure, both in his career and personal relationships. The narrative touches on his desire to prove himself, his frustration at his perceived inadequacies, and his longing for a connection that he has struggled to maintain. The story also sheds light on his past relationship with his ex-wife and their daughter. Delroy grapples with

feelings of abandonment, inadequacy, and the longing to connect with his child. His interactions with his ex-wife and her new husband highlight his struggles for respect and recognition, revealing his desperation to be present in his daughter's life despite the obstacles. This story portrays a series of events and emotions in the life of Delroy, a boxer, as he navigates complex relationships and his own struggles.

Cultural Erasure in *Some People*, *The Gifts* and *Walking Life*

In *Some People*, Kerry, a mother living in Upper Montclair, reflects on her experiences and observations at a planning meeting for International Day at the Goldenrod Academy. The meeting is filled with parents who appear to be from diverse backgrounds, which surprises Kerry. She reflects on her upbringing in Queens Village, her Jamaican heritage, and how she and her husband, Nathan, chose Goldenrod Academy for their daughter. Nathan's income supports their lifestyle, and Kerry, a writer, hasn't worked much since becoming a mother. She contemplates her identity, the differences between her and other parents, and her interactions with Lydia, the PTA president, who is enthusiastic about diversity and wants Kerry to participate in International Day. Kerry reluctantly agrees to host a dinner for Lydia's family, but she's unsure about the cultural gap between them. When discussing the dinner with her husband, Nathan, they reflect on their friends' backgrounds and whether Lydia and her husband would fit in.

The story also explores themes of race, identity, and relationships through the characters' experiences and interactions. In this excerpt, the protagonist, Kerry, is reflecting on her life, her husband Nathan, and their move to a new neighborhood. She considers the differences between their

upbringings, their desires for their child's future, and their interactions with friends. Throughout the passage, there's an underlying tension and complexity in how race, social status, and personal aspirations intersect. This story revolves around a dinner party hosted by Kerry and Nathan. The narrative studies the dynamics between the characters, revealing tensions and complexities beneath the surface. Greta's insensitive comments about "taking back" a neighborhood and Lady's refusal to eat dinner highlight cultural differences and parenting struggles. Kerry reflects on her identity and the sacrifices she's made, while also reimagining her screenplay with a more realistic and less idealized protagonist.

The Gifts is a narrative that follows the life and experiences of a woman named Peaches as she leaves her home in Jamaica to live in England. The story tells of Peaches' aspirations, cultural adjustments, relationships, and personal growth over the years. At the beginning, the author establishes Peaches' perception of England as a foreign land, a place where she envisions a better life for herself. The passage explores her anticipation of escaping her current circumstances and the cultural differences she expects to encounter. As Peaches arrives in England, the writing portrays her sensory experiences and observations of the unfamiliar environment. The text describes her encounters with Miss Jennie, a friend of her aunt's, who introduces her to life in England and provides practical advice. Through Miss Jennie's character, the contrast between the cultures of Jamaica and England is highlighted, including aspects like appearance and behavior. Peaches' journey continues as she settles into her new life in England, taking on a job and adapting to her surroundings. The story also introduces Alistair, a man who enters her life and initiates a complex relationship marked by gift-giving and secrecy. As time passes, Peaches' life evolves, marked by changing fashion

choices, her interactions with other women like her, and the dynamics of her connection with Alistair.

The Gifts explores her growing acceptance of her circumstances and her willingness to receive gifts, symbolizing her transformation and empowerment. The narrative further tells of Peaches' increasing isolation and separation from her past, including her Jamaican roots and her connection with Miss Jennie. The story culminates with Peaches receiving a television on her twenty-fifth birthday, which marks a significant shift in her lifestyle and solitude; and marks the erasure of her culture. Throughout the story, the author uses sensory details, dialogues, and introspection to immerse the reader in Peaches' emotional journey of cultural adaptation, self-discovery, and the complexities of her relationships. The writing captures the nuances of identity, cultural disconnection, cultural erasure, and the pursuit of happiness in a foreign land.

In the story of *Walking Life*, which is the last story in the collection of *The Island* by Dionne Irving, there is a glimpse into cultural elements, emotions, and relationships within the narrative. Here are a few points that touch on cultural erasure: Language and Identity: The protagonist's observations about Andreas muttering in his native tongue (German) during sleep reveal the subtleties of language and cultural identity. The contrast between his waking life language (French and English) and the "fits and bursts" of German while asleep highlights the tension between personal and cultural identities. Personal History and Culture: The protagonist's struggle with her mother's absence and her connection to her grandmother portrays a complex interplay between personal history, cultural heritage, and familial relationships. Her desire to protect herself emotionally could be seen as a form of cultural erasure if she's suppressing or ignoring aspects of her identity tied to her family history.

Cultural Difference in Reactions: Andreas' response to the protagonist's behavior can also be seen as a cultural difference. He wants to be there to support her, which could be informed by his own cultural values of closeness and protection. The protagonist, on the other hand, resists this kind of emotional support, perhaps due to her own cultural upbringing or personal experiences. Cultural Influences on Relationships: The dynamics between the protagonist and Andreas might be influenced by their cultural backgrounds. His directness and protective gestures contrast with her internal struggles and hesitation to fully embrace the relationship. Meeting the mother: The anticipation of the meeting with her mother and the protagonist's past attempts to hide from her suggest unresolved cultural and emotional issues. The protagonist's feelings of being detached from her mother might be connected to a sense of cultural disconnection. Emotional Journey: The protagonist's emotional journey is at the forefront, showcasing her attempts to find belonging, love, and closure. Her decision to eat the sweets from her grandmother's tin can be seen as a symbolic act of connection and remembrance rather than erasure. Self-Reflection: The passage delves into the protagonist's introspective thoughts, including her realization of the complexity of family relationships and her own feelings of rejection and vulnerability. Desire to Understand: By visiting Brixton and experiencing her mother's neighborhood, the protagonist is embracing her roots and attempting to understand her mother's choices. This shows a willingness to confront her cultural history rather than erase it.

Finally, it is interesting to note that though some of the collection of stories studied in *The Island* by Dionne Irving doesn't contain explicit instances of cultural erasure. However, it does explore themes related to identity, belonging, and reconnection, race, class, cultural identity, and personal

fulfillment. The protagonist's reflections on their cultural heritage, feelings of being left behind, and their struggle towards adaptation can be seen as attempts to reclaim and understand cultural background, rather than erasing it. The tension between personal history, cultural identity, and emotional struggles creates a rich narrative, adaptation and erasure of cultural values.

Cultural Erasure as a Structural Device in Cleyvis Natera's *Neruda On The Park*

Neruda on the Park reveals from the beginning that the dynamics of culture are subtly presented through various elements:

Cultural Identity and Skin Tone: The description of the brick's color being close to Luz's skin tone indicates an awareness of racial identity. The term *casi puro cafecito* used by Luz's mother, Eusebia, reflects cultural associations with skin color.

Language and Cultural Sensitivity: Eusebia's hesitation to use the word "Black" suggests a certain sensitivity around racial labels. This could reflect a broader cultural tendency to navigate conversations about race with care.

Gentrification and Cultural Change: The mention of gentrification in neighborhoods like Nothar Park highlights the impact of external forces on local communities. This process often brings about cultural changes, with newcomers altering the character of the neighborhood.

Cultural Aspirations and Sacrifice: Luz's and Vladimir's efforts to contribute toward Mami's dream home in the Dominican Republic demonstrate cultural ties to their homeland and the sacrifices they're willing to make to honor those ties.

Community and Tradition: Eusebia's desire to purchase the old tenement building for a garden reflects a connection to

community and tradition. It contrasts with the gentrification process and the accompanying shift in the neighborhood's cultural landscape.

Friendship and Cultural Familiarity: Angélica's familiarity with Luz's appearance and her use of colloquial phrases like *Diablo* and *casi puro cafecito* suggest a shared cultural background between the two friends.

Cultural Conflict and Assimilation: Luz's feelings of being "out of place" at the restaurant highlight the theme of cultural conflict. The experience of being served unfamiliar foods (like eel) and feeling uncomfortable resonates with the challenges of assimilation into new cultural contexts.

Cultural Intersection and Friendship: The interaction between Luz and Angélica brings out their shared cultural background, even as they have taken different paths in life. Their familiarity and teasing interactions underline the lasting impact of cultural ties on their relationship.

However, the novel uses subtle details and interactions to convey the complex ways in which culture influences characters' identities, interactions, aspirations, and challenges within a changing environment. We break down some key aspects of this textual analysis:

Setting and Observation, Cultural References, Mother-Daughter Relationship, Character Goals and Emotions, Neighborhood Transformation, Interior Emotions, Friendship, Elation and Ambiguity, Cultural Allusions, Symbolism, Duality and Conflict

Critically, the author explores themes of identity, ambition, transformation, cultural conflict, and personal relationships. He provides a rich tapestry of emotions and settings that contribute to the character development and progression of the narrative.

Cultural Erasure in Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalytic theory has been criticized for its cultural erasure, or the tendency to view all people through the lens of Western culture. This is evident in the theory's focus on individual development, its use of case studies from Western cultures, and its neglect of the role of culture in shaping personality. For example, Sigmund Freud's theory of psychosexual development is based on the assumption that all children go through the same stages of development, regardless of their culture. However, this assumption has been challenged by research that shows that children from different cultures may experience these stages differently. Another example of cultural erasure in psychoanalytic theory is the use of case studies from Western cultures, as can be found in these two novels. These case studies are often used to illustrate the theory's concepts, but they may not be relevant to people from other cultures. For example, a case study of an American patient may not be applicable to a patient from Nigeria. Psychoanalytic theory has also been criticized for neglecting the role of culture in shaping personality. This is because the theory focuses on the individual's internal world, and it does not take into account the influence of external factors such as culture.

There are a number of ways to address the issue of cultural erasure in psychoanalytic theory. One way is to develop theories that are more culturally sensitive. This could involve incorporating concepts from other cultures into the theory, or developing theories that are specifically designed for people from non-Western cultures. Another way to address cultural erasure is to use case studies from a variety of cultures. This would help to ensure that the theory is relevant to people from all cultures.

It is important to consider the role of culture in shaping personality when using psychoanalytic theory. This could involve taking into account the patient's cultural background when making diagnoses or providing therapy. It is important to note that there are a number of psychoanalysts who are aware of the issue of cultural erasure and who are working to address it. However, there is still a long way to go before psychoanalytic theory is truly culturally sensitive. As a mirror of life and a reflection of the human society and experiences, literature through the concept or framework of psychoanalysis captures or portrays the alienations that come with displacement, tracing the movements of African immigrants and their descendants in America and the Caribbean. What does it mean to be a part of the Americans? Born of a shared history of colonialism, racism and slavery while also feeling dislocated from the culture you still carry with you? These analyses linger in the malaise of foreignness as the characters try to form bonds across the boundaries of race, class and culture, only to conclude, in several cases, that such relationships are impossible and bend to adaptation.

Conclusion

Cultural erasure as a concept is a complex and important study to this research and it is one that is often explored but for the purpose of this work. By understanding how cultural erasure is used as a structural device in the work, one can gain a better understanding of the world around the literary text and the challenges that different cultures face.

In both novels, Dionne Irving and Cleyvis Natera use this device indirectly and directly to put forth the revolutionary politics, sociocultural settings, the white capitalist system of the society towards the Caribbean and African American literature. The work also evaluates the text as having the

devastating effects of intolerance and control. The hegemony of white capitalism established in the society, institutions, and also the dynamics presented in the family system in the texts had impacts on the characters, hence, their ultimate despair.

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