

Identity and character: beyond the limbo silence



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Beyond the Limbo Silence is a novel written by renowned novelist Prof. Elizabeth Nunez a few years launching her first book “ When Rocks Dance”. In this book, she explores the ways in which different cultures would mix and shape the life of an individual. She seeks to know how cultures may synthesis or change the characters, beliefs and identity of a person. Prof. Elizabeth revolves around this theme by writing about the life of Sarah Edgehill, a young woman from Trinidad, who receives a scholarship award to study in a college in Wisconsin in the United States of America. When she gets the scholarship from a Catholic priest, she becomes thrilled since she has been viewing America as a land of fortunes, a green-field of success and prosperity and a land where there is social equality, unlike her home town of Trinidad. She describes the priest as a blue-eyed person and suggests that he was looking for primitive people to civilize. Her family members, however receives the scholarship opportunity with less enthusiasm. Her grandmother, for instance, was afraid that the trip to Wisconsin might lead to a tragedy similar to the lynching of her brother-in-law in Georgia. In her view, she describes America as a sea where one could find plenty of fish and food, but at the same time might get drown. She argued that Sarah’s scholarship was a form of payment due to her silence and friendship to the church leaders. Her stay in Trinidad was equally unfulfilling due to the fact that her parents were disappointed by her light colored skin. Manheimer suggest that through Sarah’s story, Nunez was able to tackle various socio-cultural issues that are important to both the immigrants and the Native Americans. Despite the scolding and rebukes from family and friends, she accepted the scholarship

and went to Wisconsin. This clearly indicates that her decisions were solely made and were not influenced by other people.

However, when she leaves for Wisconsin, she is held back by her ties to the family. She is left with tough decisions to make about her character and identity that she gained back home and the challenges that the new environment poses. She really struggles very hard to fit in the new western cultures, and begins to understand that in America the skin color difference is a bigger issue and runs deeper between the racial, social and cultural lines than in her home town, Trinidad. In the course of her studies, she gets deeply involved with a third friend, who is also a black. The trio forms a strong friendship since they were the only blacks in the whole town of Oshkosh. According to Saunders, the writer uses these three women to illustrate a wide range of responses portrayed by different people due to pressures and opportunities brought about by migration.

When she met Sam, her consciousness on racial difference continued to deepen. Maxwell, a former African American military man, insisted that Sarah should be in a position to understand the civil rights movement and the struggles and fights for equal rights amongst the native and non-native Americans. Later on, Sarah discovered that their college had registered more students from West India and much fewer students who are African Americans. In doing so, the college was trying not to offend the alumnae. This indicates that the issue of racism was affecting every organization and institution in the country. It was a very sensitive factor that many people avoided to face directly and solve. Sarah thus would try to conform to the environment by adopting the traditional practices of the people. She was

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however reluctant to do so. Through the love affair between Sam and Sarah, the writer examines another important aspect of intercultural interaction amongst blacks born in the US and those who were born outside. Closely working together, the two were able to give a clear vision to the Civil Rights Movement that potentially bridged interracial cleaves and clefts.

Interestingly, Nunez scrutinizes a critical divide between Sam and Sarah due to their different nationalities, although the two were from the same race.

This similarly suggests that Sarah was an intrusive person who believed strongly on her own principles and values. She was determined to retain her Trinidadian heritage and beliefs.

While Sarah was in love with Sam, she became pregnant and was helped by Courtney to carry out a secret abortion with the aid of some Indian medicine. This, however, contrast her earlier strong belief in Trinidadian cultural practices. Her own mental balance was thus threatened in one way or the other. She finally succumbed in the vast sea of emotions, both at individual level and at societal level. Furthermore, Sarah gets advised by her closest friend, Courtney, on the best ways to approach her womanhood. She counsels Sarah to love herself, open up and listen to her inner spirit and be able to fully understand being. Courtney, who secretly practices Yoruba culture, saves Sarah's life during the secret abortion event, and Sarah admits to her advice of practicing and following the Obeah cult. By heeding to Courtney's advice, it is evident that at one point in her life, Sarah made certain decisions based on influence from other, unlike before when she could do the same. Moreover, the writer tells us about the slow-changing Sarah. She finally learns and agrees to the practices of the Obeah cult, which

entailed the art of traditional healing. In my view, Prof. Nunez had a clear theme of demonstrating how racism and imperialism played a big role in the daily lives of people. She was blessed with the power to demonstrate how cultural mix and synthesis would influence a person's character, and to some, define his/her identity, either wholly or partly.

In the case of Martin Luther King III, his fights for social injustice were greatly influenced by his father, Martin Luther King Jr., who was also a renowned civil rights activist. According to a description given on the King by President Tommie Miller, Martin Luther King III had done nothing by himself. He was unable to live to the high standards that his father left behind. Politicians, historians and renowned scholars have strongly criticized Martin Luther King III for basing his success on the legacy of his father. They claimed that the King had commercialized his father's legacy in order to benefit him and the family. A good example is the sale of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech of "I Have a dream" to media houses and advertising companies. In my view, Martin Luther King III based almost all his success strategies on the footsteps of his father. It may be concluded that without his father previous power and success, he would not where he is now. Even if he may have had the ability to build his own empire, he based too much of his efforts on his father, and thus his success in the advocacy for human rights is deeply rooted to his father's victory in the fight against social injustices.

However, some people also argued that Martin Luther King III blazed through his road to success and power on his own. According to his close supporters and friends, the father was assassinated when he was still very young, hardly ten years, and thus he had to strive and sail all through the hardships

on his own without the father's support. From my point of view, can argue that even though the father died while he was still a young teenager, he could still easily succeed due to political image and supremacy created by the father. It was easy for the success culture and spirit to stream down to following generations of the King's family.