



## MULTICULTURALISM: "CO-EXISTENCE OF DIVERSE CULTURE IN CARIBBEAN ISLANDS"

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### ABSTRACT



This Research paper is about multiculturalism which in ordinary parlance refers to the state of co-existence of diverse culture, where culture includes racial, religious or cultural groups. It manifested in customary behaviors, cultural assumptions, and values, patterns of thinking and commitment of revaluing disrespecting identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups (Young 1990, Taylor: 1992, Gutman: 2003). So its consequence was that the Caribbean culture has become an integrated cultural region. Caribbean people themselves often speak as though the region was a seamless expression of common customs, beliefs, and values. The historical facts, native traditions, and socio-economic structures were constantly altered with the arrival of European colonizing nations and made the Caribbean life a complex phenomenon. In fact, the Caribbean as a unified region that confers a sense of common citizenship and community is nonexistence.

It was Walter Rodney (1969:25) who appealed to 'black power' "to throw off white dominance and resume the handling of their own destinies". A place that is deeply divided culturally, racially, ethnically has been emphasized that "it is crucial to note that regionality, as expressed by regional characteristic in the Caribbean, is an abstraction and perhaps more so than in other broadly delineated world regions.

**Keywords:** *Colonial Subjugation, Ethnicity, Multiculturalism, Polyglot of Cultures, Slavery*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Multiculturalism takes for granted recognition and accommodation of "culture" and "cultural groups". It includes a wide range of claims involving religion, language, ethnicity, nationality and rare Caribbean culture which underwent different phases of colonial subjugation by different European colonizing powers and made it a melting pot of different cultures. The economic pursuits adopted by these colonizing powers and introduction of labor-intensive plantation industry necessitated bringing in the indentured labor force from different Asian, African and Latin American countries which led to the formation of a multicultural matrix in St. Lucia prior to the birth of future Nobel laureate Derek Walcott.

The race has a more limited role in multiculturalism discourse. Antiracism and multiculturalism are distinct but related ideas: the former highlights "victimization and resistance" whereas the latter highlights "cultural life, cultural expression, achievements. Modern liberal theorist on multiculturalism throws light on the functioning of the multicultural scenario of the colonized nation produces the clash between the colonizers and the colonized and generates the values of autonomy and equality (Kymlicka: 1989, 1995, 2001). Culture is said to be instrumentally valuable of individuals for two reasons. First, it enables individual autonomy. One important condition of autonomy is having an adequate range of options from which to choose. Culture provides the context of choice and makes meaningful the social scripts. The second culture is instrumentally valuable for individual self-respect. Drawing on theorists of communication and nationalism, Kymlicka argues that there is a deep and general connection between a person's self-respect and the respect accorded to the cultural group of which he/she is a part. Kymlicka moves from the premises about the instrumental value of cultural membership to the egalitarian claim that because members of minority groups are disadvantaged in terms of access to their own cultures. It is worth noting that Kymlicka's liberal egalitarian argument for cultural accommodations reflects a central idea of a broader body of what critics of view have identified as "luck egalitarian".

Like Kymlicka, there is Derek Walcott who has defined lots more about multiculturalism in his poems which appears in several ways: as multiple voices within a single poem, as variations in linguistic registers either within a single poem or among a group poems and a dialogue between cultures for example, African and European. These various kinds of multivocality sometimes exist within the post-colonial paradigm and sometimes challenge it. His many voices reveal tension within the poet and within his culture pulling him this way or that. As Heaney explains, Walcott does not allow those forces to derail his poetry, on the contrary, he makes "a theme of choice and impossibility of choosing". Walcott's multivocality and its relation to his cosmopolitan can be traced from his earliest poem "Omeros" (1990) and Walcott's recent book "The Prodigal" (2004). In one of his earliest verses "As John to Patmos" on which John the Divine, himself living in exile, authored the book of revelation. The poem, which initially appeared in Walcott's first collection - 25 poems (1948) and has received little attention by critics, is crucial in that it allows the reader an early glimpse of the way in which Walcott perceives his placement culturally and geographically within the wider world:

As John to Patmos,

Among the rocks and the blue, live air,  
hounded

His heart to peace.....(1&2line)

So am I welcomed richer by these blue scapes,  
Greek there,

So I shall voyage no more from home; may I  
speak here. (6&7line)

The analogy that Walcott's draws in these opening stanzas is between John on Patmos and himself in St. Lucia.

**DISCUSSION**

St. Lucian island faces Caribbean ocean at one side and also known as the birthplace of Derek Walcott one of the famous Canadian writer who breathes between two cultures African and European, illustrates how gradually with the passage of time it became a multicultural society where



customs, traditions, races, and religion underwent transformations and adaptations. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, it was settled by Arawaks. The Caribs overcame the Arawaks in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Native American people called the island "Iouanalao" and "Hewanorra" which meant "island of Iguanas". Columbus is believed to have first sighted the island in 1502. Some historians believe the first European to sight the island was Juan de la Cosa although the date of discovery is disputed (1499). He once served under Columbus as a navigator. The discovery is uncertain in part because no European settled the island at the time. The first Europeans to arrive on the island were pirates in 1550s. The Dutch were the first Europeans to attempt to hold St. Lucia. They build a fortified base at Vieux Fort about 1600.

The first colonization project was an accident. A group of English colonists on the Olive Branch headed for Guyana was blown off course and landed on St. Lucia in 1605. The 67 settlers purchased land from the Caribs. A second English group also failed (1639). The French arrived soon after and the French West Indian company "purchased" the island. This began a long-term struggle for control of St. Lucia, part of a worldwide struggle between Britain and France that was not ended until Waterloo (1815). The first successful settlements were French and it grew as a number of sugar plantations were established. As elsewhere in the Caribbean, captive Africans were enslaved to work the sugar plantations. As a result, the population of the island became largely black. The first British invasion occurred during the American Revolution which France also joined (1778). The British launched the several additional attacks during the conflicts associated with French Revolution and Napoleonic war. Nelson's victory at Trafalgar (1805) ensuring the British command of the sea meant that the French could not effectively defend St. Lucia leading to the British finally seizing control (1814). The local Creole dialect is a testimony to the French colonial foundation. St. Lucia as an independent country has proven to be a stable, multicultural democracy.

St. Lucia bears the cultural traces, found throughout the Caribbean, of indigenous Amerindians, colonizing Europeans, African brought as slaves, and the neighboring United States and

Latin America. A British colony at the time of Walcott's birth, St. Lucia, like others was frequently colonized by European Colonial powers. Walcott's English-speaking, Methodist family differed from predominantly French-Creole-speaking, Catholic population of St. Lucia. Walcott's grandparents were Afro-Caribbean and white West Indian. His white paternal Grandfather arrived in St. Lucia from Barbados, an island with strong English sensibilities. So in Caribbean society and in Walcott's work, race and color continue to be important. His art forges a regional consciousness that profits from the influence in the Caribbean of the Americas, Africa, and Europe. In the poem "Latin Primer" for the narrator's pupils, finding a firm Caribbean identity divided the world between the North and South sociopolitical blocs to which the Caribbean does not really belong proves difficult:

I spun the globe's meridian  
 Showed its sealed hemispheres,  
 But where were those brows headed  
 When neither world was theirs. (57-60)

This poem alludes to the literary void of the Caribbean region, where the British curriculum focused on the literature of classical traditions, rather than on Caribbean culture.

Despite the troubling history connected with this island in particular and with the entire Caribbean in general- the genocide of the native peoples, the fact that those of African descent owe their very presence here to the slave trade – St Lucia can find solace and even a sense of home, in the natural beauty of the island. In the poem which was written on the eve of St. Lucia's independence, Walcott seems to imply that something new culture has arisen, one distinct from those of Africa or even Europe. A people who had once felt themselves "homeless" have begun to feel at home. Yet he remains unclear at this early moment in Walcott's career precisely what such a culture looks like from the poet's point of view- how St. Lucia relates to Africa and to Europe, to other West Indian islands, and to what extent those relationships are relevant. The notion of "multiculturalism" casting just doesn't figure in the Caribbean, which has been a polyglot of



cultures for centuries. "we don't think that way in the Caribbean", he says. "An actor could be Indian, Chinese, anything and we don't say, 'oh we're having a big undertaking.'" The Swedish Academy noted Walcott's cultural background in its citation.

"Three loyalties are central for him- the Caribbean where he lives, the English language and his African origin".

For Walcott, the process of poetry is one of the excavation and self-discovery (from the Nobel lecture, 1992) and in *Latin Primer*, he examines the ways in which a colonial education affects a young boy (probably Walcott himself) his relation to literature and the process through which he eventually becomes a teacher and a poet. Walcott has had at least two lives. One of them acknowledging his white English grandfather has kept in touch with the empire, the classics, English literature, but also the insignia of Greece and Rome. The other has stayed in the streets of Port of Spain, speaking the patois, Creole. The poem "Latin Primer" stresses the narrator's frustration with a British educational system which does not encapsulate, but in fact is antithetical to the local Caribbean sensitivity and landscapes. The narrator / emerging poet struggles to make sense of the- sea of 4 texts. But literary text remains aloof and dully technical under such algebraic colonial methods of analysis:

Raging, I'd skip a pebble

Across the sea's page; it still

Scanned its own syllable:

Trochee, anapest dactyl (33-36)

"Omeros" (1990) Walcott's longest poem is his most acclaimed and critically studied work. Its expansive narratives address the way all people of the Caribbean uprooted and transplanted, must make themselves at home in a region marked by the coexistence of cultural differences and unities. The *Bounty* (1997), which begins with an elegy for Walcott's mother and contains a brilliant elegy for Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, finds Walcott in France, Italy, Spain, and St. Lucia preoccupied with morality. He returns to his artistic development and his relationship to the Caribbean in his third long poem, "Tiepolo Hound" (2000), as he reflects on the

circumstances under which the painter Camille Pissarro a Jew of Portuguese descent born in St. Thomas, pursued his artistic vocation in France. Three of Walcott's essays, collected in 'What the Twilight Says (1998)', stands for his penetrating comments about Caribbean culture, the artist in Caribbean society, and his position as a leading artist in the region. In the title essay, which originally prefaced "Dream on Monkey Mountains" and other plays Walcott proclaims himself a "mongrel" (9) and states that "the forging of a language" (15) has delivered the west writer from servitude; "The Muse of History" (1974) contains Walcott's pronouncement that "maturity is the assimilation of the features of every ancestor"(36); and "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory" (1992) is his memorably eloquent Noble lecture, in which he remarks that "Antillean art is the restoration of our shattered histories...our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.(69)

#### CONCLUSION

So Derek Walcott writes from the perspective of a mixed-race ancestry-African and European –in the postcolonial Caribbean, a region whose complex political and cultural history finds expression in his multivocal verse. Walcott presents postcolonial and multicultural ambivalence in his poetry; that is his poetry demonstrates the Caribbean people's love and hate of the colonizer's culture. He also shows how Caribbean people make mimicry of European Language, as Homi Bhabha's postcolonial discourse. Besides Walcott also explores Americans' cultural colonization in the West Indies, which is as threatening as the colonization of the British Empire. In a word, Walcott's poetry is the epitome of the postcolonial and Multicultural ambivalence of the colonized. His virtue as a poet is amazing. For him, Caribbean culture constitutes a powerful source of inspiration for the literary production of the emerging poet/ narrator, in a context where Caribbean identity is in the process of defining and establishing itself. Caribbean nature constitutes also a fundamental element of liberation and self-definition. The notion of "multicultural" casting just doesn't figure in the Caribbean, which has been a polyglot for centuries. "We don't think that way in the Caribbean", he says. "An actor could be Indian,



Chinese, anything and we don't say, 'oh, we're having a big undertaking." The Swedish Academy noted Walcott's cultural background in its citation. "Three loyalties are central for him—the Caribbean where he lives, the English language and his African origin". The citation also quoted the poem A Far Cry from Africa: "How to Choose / Between this Arica and the English tongue I love?" Derek Walcott's poems are characterized by references to traditional English poetic tradition and a symbolic imagination that is simultaneously personal and Caribbean. He received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1992 "for a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment".

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