

‘A Far Cry from Africa’ By Derek Walcott: An Overview on the Cultural and Identity Conflict

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Abstract – The "A Far Cry from Africa" by Derek Walcott not only reveals in clever words the imbalances between the colonizer and the colonized, but also the agony of a guy standing between two societies. The poem reveals the conflict of identity which he encounters because of his intercourse. Throughout the poem he begins his quest to obtain his own identity, but in the end his attempt remains vain, as he eventually confesses his love for both the English and his heritage. In other terms, it is the clash between culture and identity that pervades the whole poet, through which the poet sees no way out.

Keywords: Cultural, Identity, Hybrid Conflict, Colonialism, Walcott;

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INTRODUCTION

A Far Cry from Africa reflects on the ethnic and cultural tensions resulting from the imperialist conquest of the continent and the problem for the author, Walcott himself, a black poet who has written in English. Derek Walcott, teacher, playwright, poet and artist and Nobel Prize recipient, was born in British West Indian St Lucia Island. When he grew up, he became conscious of his mixed-race heritage — both white and black — and this idea of broken origins was a fertile source of inspiration for some of his poems. A Far Cry from Africa, written in 1962, examines the past of the British rebellion in Kenya in the 1950s. Some of the Kikuyu local tribe, recognized as Mau Mau's warriors, waged a brutal eight-year war against settlers who they deemed unlawful intrusions on their territory.

Derek Walcott's poetry represent the negotiation of the Caribbean literature with a mixed lineage and colonial experience. Walcott's literary career began as an agony emanating from the loss of nationality, but his later poems praise the composite essence of the Caribbean's ethnic, linguistic and racial identities. As Walcott is trapped between his European and African lines, it's a personal question and the contradiction in his subjective identification. His sympathies, though, are still with the marginalized colonized races and he criticizes his European ancestors' brutality. However, Walcott's postcolonial critique is not entirely one-sided, and his nuanced dual critique is the product of his literal conviction that he does not entirely belong to the African or European race. Analyzing the contradictions in Walcott's poetry requires drawing the poet's meeting with and overcoming the crisis into a postcolonial celebration of hybridity.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Derek Walcott was born on 23 January 1930 on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Lucia, the largest city in the capital of Castries, and was then dominated by Britain. Walcott grew up in the official language of St. Lucia and spoke a French-English patois. His grandfathers were both white, and his grandmothers were both black. From the outset Walcott was a bit of an unknown in terms of St. Lucia. His parents were middle-class and Protestant in the rural, Catholic country; his mother was a teacher in a Methodist grammar school and his father was a public servant by vocation, a beautiful artist, a poet by lawyer. The father of Walcott died soon after the birth of Derek and his twin brother. The home of Walcott was full of books, paintings and music registered. Derek studied drawing and wrote his first poem at the age of 14. At 18, Walcott borrowed from his mother for his first novel, 25 Poetry, two hundred bucks. To repay his mother, he sold his friends copies of the book.

Walcott was trained at St. Lucia in his early years, but he graduated at University of the West Indies in Jamaica in 1950, graduating in 1953 but remaining one year in school. From 1954 to 1957, Walcott, along with his brother Roderick, taught at Grenada, St. Lucia and Jamaica, and published and produced play. Walcott married in 1954. He has been married three times since then and had three children. In 1958, Drums and Colors gained him a Rockefeller grant in New York City to research theatre. Walcott returned alienated in the United States

In 1959 Trinidad formed the Trinidad Theater Workshop with its brother, a project which lasted until 1976. Walcott also published the Trinidad

Guardian for the local newspaper from 1960 to 1968.

In both America and Western Indies, Walcott has taught and won several awards. He has lectured at the University of New York, Yale, Columbia, Harvard and Boston University since 1981. He won several prizes from the Royal Society of Literature: The Castaway Prizes and Other Poetry in 1965; the 1971 Obie's Play Dream on Monkey Mountain for the most distinguished off-Broadway play; the 1977 Guggenheim Awards and the 1981 MacArthur Foundation Prize. In 1992, however, Walcott won the Nobel Award for Fiction. Walcott, the author of over 20 novels, continues to publish, paint and guide.

CULTURAL TENSIONS AND HYBRID IDENTITIES WALCOTT'S POETRY

In his Nobel Lecture, Derek Walcott portrayed the experience of viewing a Ramlila execution in a town in Trinidad, commenting: "... Two distinct religions, two unique mainland's, both filling the heart with the agony that is euphoria." The torment that fills Walcott's heart is the torment of a divided personality. This torment is likewise satisfaction, the delight of a mixture presence. Derek Walcott (b. 1930), a Caribbean writer and dramatist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992, distributed his first assortment of verse at fourteen years old, where he depicted the excellent and rich scenes of the Caribbean Islands. As Walcott comprehended his environmental factors, he understood that his character was full of racial and provincial strains. In his initial sonnets, Walcott faces the contentions of his European and African family.

The paradoxes of his identity remain, however, largely unresolved in these poems. One finds a heightened historical and political consciousness in Walcott's later poetry. This study explores an early poem, "A Far Cry of Africa" (In a Green Nigh: Poetry, 1948-60, 1962), and two later poetry, "Names" (Water Grapes, 1976) and "The Water is Past" (The Star-Apple Empire, 1979), to illustrate the forms in which the poems portray a quest for the past of the Caribbean while addressing the racial, colonial and cultural contradictions implicit in the identity of the Caribbean. In comparison, this research shows the celebration of the hybridity and cosmopolitanism of Caribbean society by Walcott.

The historical and political context in which Walcott wrote these poems is first of all important to understand. The Caribbean Insoles, which served as the focus and motivation of Walcott, are a community of dispersed islands between North and South America populated by the Caribbean or by the Indian-American community prior to Columbus' arrival in 1492.

The British, French and Dutch colonized the various islands. The colonizers introduced slaves to serve in the country from areas of Africa. When the 1863

Emancipation Act ended slavery, the colonizers "imported" labor from India and China.

A variety of Caribbean authors and poets seek an ambitious recreation of the condition of the first group of people who were taken to the Islands. When Columbus "discovered" the Islands, he believed that there were no local people. While the indigenous people were deprived their lives, the position of the slaves and the employees was scarcely better.

They have been driven from their homeland and compelled to live in a largely foreign climate. They couldn't interact with each other. Over the years, the various Diasporas have formed contact languages (Pidgin and Creole), while cultural fusion (American, African, Indian, French, British and Holland) has contributed to hybrid culture.

This mixed community was inherited by later generations. While no migration or invasion happened in the later decades, the inheritance of an identity informed by these nuances contributed to cultural schizophrenia. This psychological state is discussed in Walcott's poem, "A Far Cry from Africa." The key question posed in the poem is, "Who shall I transform, divided into the vein, who is toxic to both?" Walcott evokes the Mau Mau rebellion from Kenya and takes responsibility for the bloodshed by both Europeans and Kenyans. He criticizes the imperial speeches on the grounds of facts and legislation defending the massacre of the Kenyan people.

But he cannot switch aside either from his English roots or from his heritage in Africa. This psychological conflict is theorized by Frantz Fanon as Black Eyes, White Masks Negrophobia. According to Fanon, the black man "lives an exceptionally neurotic ambiguity". In the "collective unconsciousness" of the dark man, being black implies "being cumbersome, spineless, cruel, and instinctual," as opposed to white. Walcott then confronts this interpersonal conflict in 'A Long Cry from Africa' but the identification paradoxes remain unanswered as the key issue is never addressed.

In his later poems, such as "Names" and "The sea is history" the racial, imperialist, and cultural contradictions in the collective Caribbean culture provide a more mature and historical interpretation. The beginnings of the Caribe "race" (referring to the social concept, but also meaning journey) are traces of both "Names" and "The Sea is History." Walcott explains in the first section of "Names," how his species started without nouns, without a horizon, without recollection and without a potential. The change from "my race" to "our souls" and "our names" marks the rise from entity to collective sensitivity. Walcott writes that his race started when the sea arose. The argument is how African slaves were shipped through the Sea to the Caribbean Islands. They had to leave behind and their

ancestral identity was buried in memory. To explain the state of those citizens Walcott uses a picture of an Osprey's Cry—"and my race started like the Osprey / with that cry / that horrible vowel, /that. This scream is the agonizing cries of the displaced to establish an identification.

Walcott searches for a certain time in history while tracing the beginnings of the Caribbean race, when "the mind was halved by a horizon". Walcott means to introduce and internalize the binary opposition between black and white in this sentence. Walcott was unable to figure out why this resistance was introduced into the minds of the European colonizers since the past of the Caribbean Islands remains largely documented. The discourse of orientalism rules this history. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said explores the different institutional instruments that supported such claims on the "orient": their homogeneity, mystical appeal and barbarism. These claims confirmed the "real" regarding the "orient" and shaped the oriental discourse. The 'Western' had the department to 'look at' the 'East.' The 'West' claimed information and control over the 'East.' This speech has created a binary opposition between the 'Western' and the 'Orient,' where the former was empowered and the former increasingly disempowered and primitive. Walcott's effort to hunt down the historic moment that the globe was halved fails because such European discourses tell the past of the Caribbean citizens.

Walcott's challenge is to rewrite this history from a subordinate perspective. Here is an essential question: in which language is this past to be written? The language debate was significant in many postcolonial countries. Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes in *Decolonizing the Mind*: "Language in all languages has a dual character; it is both a medium in correspondence and a messenger of history" (13). For Ngugi, language holds the ideals of a culture that are transferred from one generation to another (the significance of memory, therefore). With the passage of time, these values build up the culture of the community, and culture forms the basis of the identities of people. But for the Caribbean citizens, the issue of language is again a complicated one.

The African slaves and Indigenous workers brought to the Caribbean Isles spoke various languages and dialects. They had to study the language of the colonizers (what could be called the adoption phase). When they tried to learn the language, they modified it (the adaptation phase) with pronunciations and mispronunciations. Over time, they mastered the language of the colonizer and they began to use it to write back to the empire (the adept stage).

The second section of the poem explains how the citizens of the Caribbean Islands called it after locations and buildings of Europe. For the colonizers, this process of naming was important both for

nomination and domination. This poem explains how the Africans first approved the names (adopted), repeated (adapted) and modified them (adapted). The repetition of names often implies imitating the colonizer's vocabulary or acts in a comedic way in order to subvert them. As Walcott writes in the article: "What the Twilight is Saying: An Overture," "What would bring [New World Negro] from bondage is the forging of a language that goes beyond imitation ... a creative use of his schizophrenia, an electric fusion between the old and the new".

In the "names," therefore, the mimicry of the teacher's French terms is not enough, the terms must be pronounced in "new green tones" in order to create a new vocabulary. The development of a new lexicon is reflected by the definition of stars in the final line of the poem, where the student considers stars to be "fires trapped in molasses" in comparison to Orion or Betelgeuse constellations. The symbol is the plight of African captives, who are like light fireflies, trapped in the physical and ideological traps of the colonizer.

As an author, Walcott's job is to help forge this modern vocabulary. Historically, Pidgin and Creole were formed in the Caribbean Islands through merger of different languages. However, Walcott primarily writes in French and in English. The relative importance of Creole and English to encapsulate the diversity of Caribbean culture remains under discussion. In that respect, it is important to remember that Walcott appropriates the vocabulary of the colonizer to question the rhetoric of the colonizer and rewrite the past of the Caribbean people. "The sea is past" is an apt definition. "The sea is past." The poem traces events in the history of African slaves in odyssey-like manner, and compares them to mythical events in the Bible.

The long and blatant war between European colonialists and the Kikuyu tribe in what is now the Republic of Kenya, written in the background of the Mau Mau Rebellion in the 1950s, is not only a brilliant show of the imbalance between the colonizer and colonized individual, but also the agony of a man between two cubits. Though the poet's primary aim is to uphold the Kenyan tribe's rebellion against the civilized white settlers, he confronts a paradox that tears him between "Africa," his heritage and the English language and culture he wants. In other terms, owing to his favorable hybrid condition, Walcott is openly willing to communicate about his homelessness.

When it comes to Walcott's own identity, he writes, "I'm a sort of split writer, one tradition I have is one way and another one. On the one hand, the imitation, the narration and the dancing aspect are strong and, on the other, the literary tradition is quite powerful ". Narendra Ranjan Malas writes in the

essay "Bridging the Breakthroughs: Learning Derek Walcott's Far Cry from Africa and the Ruins of the Grand House." Likened as most English-speaking Caribbean writers, his poetry shows this socio-cultural diversity, ambivalence and searching for a true identity. In *A Long Cry from Africa*, he adds that Walcott "explores his intention to harmonize the difference between his African and European cultural heritage and his attempts to create a bridge between the two cultural traditions."

According to Heather M. Bradley, the *A far cry from Africa* title is of great significance, since the title shows the cultural uncertainty and isolation from Africa of Walcott amid his focus on African topics. His pessimistic opinion of his hybridism: "I, who am tainted by the two's blood, / Where do I transform, split into the vein?" relates to the result of displacement — isolation. Walcott seems to be alien in both societies because of his lack of "pure" blood. As he writes: "The sense of identity of a person derives from cultural forces that determine its character according to the norms of a specific society." The hybrid heritage of the poet prevents him from directly identifying with one culture and creates a sense of isolation. The poem provides a textual version of the poet's thesis on the vices and virtues that distinguish each culture.

Walcott portrays his battle in Western India with ethnic and ancestral divisions. Walcott continues the poem with pictures of the Mau Mau Rebellion and Moveson discusses his internal problem and, due to his mixed race, tears Walcott. This is why the poet uses conflicting arguments frequently to assess his situation between two societies. He describes the Kikuyu natives first as "flying, battering on the bloodstream of the veldt", not only to uphold the British's perspective of the native Kikuyus, but to justify the beneficial nature of the British rule in Africa. But in the very next move he contradicts the picture of the British who are the leading source of the indigenous misery in similarly nasty terms: "Just the worm, colonel of the Carion, shouts: 'Don't waste mercy on these different dead!'. The poem continues until the end of Walcott's poem, where he eventually compares Africans with an early beast and British with a fiscal, but strong, superhero-

"A waste of our compassion, as with Spain,

The gorilla wrestles with the superman"

CONFLICTING LOYALTIES IN "A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA"

In the title of "*A long cry from Africa*," Walcott addresses the tension between his loyalties to Africa and Britain. The title highlights the cultural instability of Walcott as a form of isolation from Africa despite his emphasis on African topics. Walcott juxtaposes the Africans and the British and concentrates on the transgressions of each race. The poet retains his

pessimistic opinion of his hybridism: "Where do I transform, split into the vein?". This severe pessimistic picture illustrates a displacement-isolation consequence. Walcott seems to be alien in both societies because of his lack of "pure" blood. The sense of identity of an individual comes from cultural influences, which define its nature in accordance with the standards of a particular society. The composite ethnicity of the poet prohibits him from explicitly connecting with one society and induces a sense of alienation. The poem offers a literary edition of the poet's mental study on the vices and virtues that characterize each society.

Walcott depicts Africa and Great Britain in the standard roles of the conquered and the conqueror in "*A Far Cry from Africa*," even though he portrays the cruelty of the British imperialism without sympathizing with African tribes people. This objectivity enables Walcott to contemplate the flaws of any society without going back to the partiality produced by moral concerns. In a pessimistic way he characterizes the African Kikuyu: "flies and bats on the stream of the veldt". The Kikuyu resemble primitive savages who abuse their native plains' fertile resources. In this way, the entry of the British is not only advantageous to the inhabitants, but also to the suffering nations. However, by an unfavorable description in the lines below, Walcott contradicts this savior image of the British: The worm, a carrion colonial, shouts: /'Do not bestow mercy upon these individual dead!'. The poet casts the authoritative British figure as a worm, a creature that lives on the evolutionary ladder underneath the fly. The cruelty of the invaders towards their prisoners is linked to the Africans' agricultural and technological ignorance. Walcott's thoughts towards his ethnicity stay vague while dwelling on every culture's weaknesses. It depicts the inefficiency of an objective contrast between the two cultures: "The ape wrestles with the superman". In a fight for dominance of Africa and its inhabitants, the Africans, who are identified with the ancient, natural force and the British, represented as artificially improved force, remain the same.

In the final stanza, Walcott further complicated his quest for a legitimate identity. He wonders, "Why can you pick between Africa and the English language I love?" (1246.29-30). These lines describe the elements of any society valued by the poet. He remains part of the African terrain and way of life, preferring English and the literary tradition. The poet grapples with his affinity for change and technology in British society and his desire for Africa's abundant ethnic patrimony. Each culture's magnetism creates a friction that grows as the poem progresses. The final lines of a poet's poem reject the resolution of his difficulty: "How can I meet such slaying and be cool?" (1246.32-3). Walcott's divided loyalties create a feeling of guilt, since he wants to adopt the British's "civilized" culture, but not excuse the Africans' immorality. "*A Far Cry from Africa*"

shows Walcott's dismay because he was unable to resolve the paradox of his hybrid legacy.

Heather M. Bradley Walcott in his article *Conflicting Loyalty in A Far Cry from Africa*, depicts the standard roles of Africa and Britain, the conquerors of the victorious, even though he portrays the cruel imperialistic exploits of the British, with no sympathy for the people of Africa. This objectivity enables Walcott to look at the flaws of any society without reverting to the discrimination generated by moral considerations.

"A Long Cry from Africa" utilizes phrases such as "Colonel Carion," and sarcastic comments such as "Corpses littered around heaven" to condemn both culture's inhumane and harmful existence. Being an interwoven individual, Walcott uses his own hybridity to dissect Africa and Europe's underlying purpose. He tried to convey the concept that Fanon wrote in his "Wretched of the Earth" that any colonized individual would like to be in his colonizer's place. Walcott uses its genetic hybridity and cultural hybridity to express the extreme of its homelessness.

A Far Cry from Africa, various critics argue, is actually Walcott's journey to establish his own identity. However, as the poem continues, the quest gets more difficult as it sinks into an uncertain state, from which there is no way out. That is why the author himself complicates his quest for a legitimate identification with too many lines in the last stanza of the poem. While he has made several conflicting claims, he cannot turn his head away from the issue "Why do I chose this Africa and my love of the English language?", which he himself does not know about. In addition, the lines quoted clearly show the poet 's admiration for the aspect of both cultures. As Heather M. Bradley writes: "If he likes the English language and literary heritage, he stays partial to the African landscape and the way of life. The poet grapples with his affinity for change and technology in British society and his desire for Africa's abundant ethnic patrimony. The magnetism that any community retains for Walcott induces suspense as the poem begins to develop.

The split loyalties of Walcott establish in him a feeling that he cannot adopt the society of his heritage. While he recognizes the "civilized" facets of British society, in the name of civilization he cannot understand the rationale of British immorality against Africans. In other words, "A Far Cry from Africa" does not give the poet the solution to the paradox of his hybrid legacy-

"How can I face such slaughter and be cool?

How can I turn from Africa and live?"

Walcott begins his search to know his real identity in the poem. He has used words like "poison" to

confirm that he is haunted by the dual identity, which makes him feel guilty that he cannot trace his origin. It makes him feel displaced and lonely. In spite of his passion for English, he cannot accept the colonizer 's community and, at the same time, cannot blend into the "darkness" community and therefore seeks to infer the tussle between himself in guilt for his timelessness-

**"I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
where shall I turn, divided to the vein?"**

The unfortunate ending reveals the Walcott views himself as an outsider because of his mixed blood.

Cultural factors play a crucial role in formulating an individual's personality by establishing his character in compliance with the norms of a given culture. Because of his blood sharing, Walcott cannot identify his own culture. The consequence is the poet's indecisive approach to his own personality. In other words, the hybrid heritage of the poet does not enable him to recognize and isolate his own culture. Walcott's skeptical approach towards both cultures gives him the opportunity to recognize Africa and Great Britain in the standard roles of the conquered and the conqueror. He criticizes the British for the cruel imperialist exploits, although he is still not trying to sympathies with the African people. This shows that Walcott tries to maintain the fault of both cultures without showing any kind of partiality to either Africa or the British. In the following lines, for example, he blames the British for their imperialist design that understands the culture of the Indian, but without sympathizing with the colonized-

**"Only the worm, colonel of carrion cries „Waste
no compassion on their separated dead'."**

In nature, the title of the poem is very ambiguous. The title includes a "far cry" language containing two meanings. In the one side the expression "A Far Cry" indicates that the author himself feels the challenge of writing for a society from which he, physically and metaphorically, is far removed from. "A far cry," on the other side, "might have another sense, that the true nature of the African" paradise "is quite far from Africa, as we have read in accounts of the wondrous fauna, flora and village traditions." The third level of the title is that, despite the gap, the poet can hear the cries of African indigenous people because of their lack of cultural identity. He sees the scream coming in the breeze and he feels happy about his heritage. Briefly, utilizing the term "Far Cree" in the title, the poet not only shows his anti-colonial beliefs, but seeks to explain the reality that while sharing the civilized 's ethos, he cannot set aside his history and his origin.

The poet used ample animal imagery in the poem "A Far Cry from Africa" to criticize the wild aspects of the culture. His hybrid existence gives him the

opportunity to dismantle both the colonizer and the colonized. Bharatender Sheoran suggests in an essay "A question of the Caribbean Populace: post-colonial contradictions and identity struggle of Derek Walcott's Plays" that postcolonialism explores "doubles" in relation to identity and history, as a troublesome legacy of colonialism concerning postcolonial communities. The colonized have lost their original selves in this diversity and hybridity. The current status of the once colonized is nothing more than a divided state, implying that the indigenous populations are without a single self. They don't know just who they are and where they belong, since they display off their own cultures and their western society. It can therefore be claimed that they are in "the third space," in Bhabha 's language, "the intermediate space." When colonized they are multicultural individuals and colonized societies cannot be called "clean." They are heterogeneous societies rather than clean ones. While it is believed to have stopped, colonialism has left signs during the postcolonial period rendering of the colonized societies a mixture of western and indigenous qualities. "Walcott, as a mixed-blood poet, shares heterogenous culture and it is this heterogeneity, as the poet felt as the principal cause, that prevents him from defining his own roots.

Another difficulty confronting Walcott in the poem is the "difficulty of describing this traumatic feeling since the suffering of Blackman in the language of Whiteman is still hard to portray." The poet himself wonders, because of his long distinctions from his heritage, whether he would preserve the suffering of his native Africans in the colonizer 's tongue. As Ramazani remarks in this respect: "The name is drawn from the slave and colonizer tradition, yet the injured black body allegorizes their violence, Philoctetes remembers "the broken" speaker of A Far Cry from the African tongue," cursing colonizers' aggression, but swearing them in their own language."

In conclusion, Walcott 's poetry shows the conflict of personality he faces owing to his interdependence. He proceeds in the poem his search to achieve his own name, but in the end his passion for the English language as well as for its roots remains vain. The concept which pervades the whole poem is the dispute of culture and identity, through which the poet finds no way but to weep at the legacy of, in Bhabha 's term, hybridity—"I who am emptied with the blood of both, where shall I transform, broken up into the vein?"

CONCLUSION

The work of Derek Walcott represents the wanderings of a man who created rich poems focused on the literary practices of several nations, ranging from modern England, Russia, Spain, to ancient Greece. Walcott's life-long conflict between his small home island and the wider world, between

his love of English and his knowledge that it is the colonizer 's language, and the language of the oppressor-and therefore, in a significant measure, his powerful and divided attitude.

The poems A Far Cry from Africa, The Sea, and Names are thus a knowledge of the complexities of the history and identity of culture. The poetry of Walcott is an example of how a master craftsman might turn his ambivalence into an artistic art. His dilemma was not reconciled until the end of his life. He was divided throughout his life by the inner turmoil and the sorrow of a broken personality. While he embraces hybridity and intellectual cosmopolitanism, he never loses sight of his imperialist history and remains critical of the influences that form his future.

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