
A Historic view of the Caribbean islands and the theme of Hybridity in its literature

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Abstract:

The present paper discusses, in brief, the historical developments in the Caribbean islands and the emotional and mental problems ensuing from the long subjugation of islands by the white colonizers. The discovery of islands by Christopher Columbus and rivalries over the domination of the lands started the beginning of imperialists' interests in these lands bringing changes in every direction of life. The paper attempts to show the depiction of racial and cultural hybridity and the consequent dilemma of being black in skin and obsession with white superiority in Walcott's *Monkey on the Mountain* and McKay's *Outcast*.

Keywords: Uprooted, Imperialist, Slavery, Exile

1. The history of the Caribbean is connected with the sudden discovery of the Bahamas in 1492 by Christopher Columbus. The Bahamas, geographically

situated on the eastern edge of America has many small islands. Expressing his great admiration for the beauty of the islands and the great potential of opening up a lucrative trade route for Spain he recommended the king of Spain fortification of the Bahamas. He also assumed falsely an abundance of gold there but soon the attention was diverted to large-scale sugar cultivation there. Columbus' voyage and discovery in fact was the beginning of colonization and globalization and it brought about large changes in the economic, political, religious, social, and natural environment of the world. The inhabitants were named Indians and the lands became West Indies. The new land was fulfilling different needs of different sectors: power and control to the kings, riches to merchants, missionary zeal to the religious leaders and new kinds of governments to colonized people. In the initial phases, many natives were deported from their lands later on many slaves were brought there to work. Modern Caribbean islands are comprised of descendants of those old descendants, slaves, exiled lawbreakers from Bermuda, pirates, and settlers from different parts

of Europe and the world. The majority, however, is of West African slaves and liberated Africans.

Hence the populace of the Caribbean was uprooted from different parts of the world and transplanted there, with colonized minds due to the long hold of different countries on them, even after getting independence from their erstwhile rulers lacked common culture, language, and religion suffer from a crisis of identity and has a confused sense of belonging.

This brutal and indifferent way of slavery coupled with cultural diversity, uprooting, and dispossession robbed the people of a sense of historic continuity and identity, the sense of alienation, and uprootedness brought psychological traumas and had a great impact on the Caribbean mentality and not easy to eradicate even in 21st century, long after this dehumanizing practice was abolished by mid 19th century.

The history of looting of ships by pirates that occurred due to long neglect of the islands even after the discovery and the subsequent settlement of imperialists to protect the inhabitants and merchants also brought extreme feelings of gratitude and reverence for them which also led to the complexity of feelings when later on slavery was established and needed to be rejected.

In spite of the fact that Christianity through conversions had proved a boon to recover their sense of respectability as human beings and at many places in the west indies served as a

catalyst to resist and rebel against an unjust system after having been subjugated for long times, the inhabitants still were ill-equipped to know to use the freedom as to bring upliftment in society. "This deep-seated sense of inferiority and lack of confidence became intensified by the focus of colonial education which encouraged further amnesia and shame about the African past and pushed the blacks towards accepting Europe as good."

The post-emancipation period created a vacuum of the labour force in these islands due to the unwillingness and preferences of many to work in the fields rather than for the meager amount in the plantations work. So indentured labour force started flowing to the place from India and Africa between 1838 to 1924.

Hence Caribbeans are part of society joined basically on the basis of economic reasons without any other kind of common bonds. Thus we see the history of the Caribbean is very peculiar, crossing varying stages from freedom and indiscipline life to piracy, slavery, an Indentured labour force to seeking refuge in far-off lands as well as becoming the workplace to many more economically deprived people from India, Africa, and other parts of the world.

2. Naipaul, along with many other Caribbean writers, believes the West Indies is sterile, static, and without any history. Contrary to his assertions Walcott has quite different views and he points out that history is not only that which is created by ruins but by the deeds

of common men and women. "You who feel the pain of historylessness, look at the work of patterns, the dances, the dreams, the songs and the memories of your forefathers, analyze these and you will be writing your history " Brodber, 1983 p3 Believing that west Indian must move forward conquering the sense of inferiority and forgetting past humiliations that can result in self-pity and feelings of revenge.

Hybridity originates from the Latin hybrida, a term used to classify the offspring of a tame so and a wild boar. A hybrid is something that is mixed, and hybridity means mixture. In this essay, it will be discussed in now that how hybridity in post colonial world leads to schizophrenic identity which, in turn, results in extreme pain, agonizing dislocations, madness, and search for self and identity, in context to Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and Claude McKay's 'Outcast'.

Walcott and McKay, both belong to the Caribbean Islands. As we have seen the Caribbean people are a mixed and mingled lot. The native culture is supplanted by European culture. The colonizers gave them knowledge of the language, geography, and science, "the white man's burden" and the dumb Africans repeated and learned everything in the native accent. Amidst this racial and cultural hybridity, that is, the dilemma of mixed ancestry and the dilemma of being black in skin and white in mind, the natives began their search for self and a legitimate identity which is the

theme of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and 'Outcast'.

Dream on Monkey Mountain has been conceptualized as a collective dream which suggests that the play inhabits the space of mind, the psychological drama played on stage. The play is about conflicting variables which are, the White world and an African heritage which exists in West Indies and the West Indians. Makak, the name of the protagonist who is a product of cultural hybridity, becomes Macaque, a monkey of genus macacas, in the French language. This interpretation of his name is a dehumanizing process. The tragedy is that although Makak has been changed by European culture, he has not been admitted into it. In the European context, Makak is simply an African monkey. But the important thing over here is that Makak seeks to repudiate his blackness by calling himself Macaque. He does so because being educated by White, his understanding of the world, and evaluation of himself and others have been determined by white perception and ideas, according to which Black is ugly; and in doing so he, in turn, alienates himself from his own African world. White education makes the Blacks detest their own colour, culture, and self, so that, as Campbell says "Blacks can idealize the colour, history, and culture of Europeans". Thus, Walcott shows how colonialism or colonial history leads to one's estrangement from both cultures. Makak belongs neither to Europe nor to Africa and this is called an "alienating

Hybridity” which, in turn, results in the loss of his identity and drives him mad.

In the beginning of the play, Makak dreams of a white woman who is beautiful and unattainable like the moon. The moon, a traditional feminine symbol also suggests whiteness and therefore Europe in the play and thus Makak's longing for the white woman reveals West Indian's obsession with whiteness and Europe. But the tragedy is that later in the play, the same white woman consolidates Makak's vision of himself as an African king and inspires him to search for his African roots. This indicates that Makak's desire to trace his African heritage is not so much prompted by the need for change in the colonial situation as by his understanding of racial inferiority which comes from white western colonialism. His search for an African identity is not to discover his essential self but to prove his place and validate his existence to the white world. This fact is also revealed by the way his dream of inner strength and helping his fellow beings by preventing them from further decay to whiteness, degenerates into the dream of power, destruction, and racial revenge against the entire white world. He insists on death for all the whites guilty of shaping colonial history, he forms an imaginary army and intends to kill his own people for rejecting his dream. Thus by beheading the white woman in the end, Makak on one hand gets rid of the white perception and on the other, is freed from proving his existence by reference to ancestral

greatness. In fact, there is a sense of self-acceptance- acceptance of both his non-African name and his West Indian home. Hence, Walcott shows that hybridity is the reality of the Caribbean people, they should celebrate it. It is the time for a new beginning where the Caribbean people should write their own history.

McKay's 'Outcast' is also a poem about alienating hybridity which results in a confused identity. The speaker is a representative of a "New Negro" who takes pride in the black race and African heritage and has a desire to return back to the romanticized and pre-colonial, primitive Africa. His spirit wants to return to the "dim regions" where his ancestors were born, he wants to go back to his native land but his body is held in bondage to the Western world and colonial history. He owes to the Western world and therefore he must bend his knees to the values and traditions of white masters and in doing has lost part of an essential blackness that is rooted in Africa. In succumbing to the "Alien gods", he somewhere has become alien to his own culture. This conflict between spirit and body, the Black and the White world is the reality of Black colonial identity, living in two worlds simultaneously without actually belonging to any. The speaker has internalized the Western culture either after education or by living there and therefore, on one hand, his ethnic origin prevents true acceptance of the alien culture and on the other hand, the

internalization of the alien culture estranger him from his own culture.

The black speaker's identity is given birth not in his native country, Africa but within the inescapability of Western colonialism and history. It is the history of Western colonialism that makes the Blacks, understand their racial inferiority and as we have seen in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, it is this understanding that prompts them to search for their African culture and desire to return to Africa. The irony is that the same colonial education transforms this desire into a lack. Therefore the Black colonial subject belongs neither to the Western world nor to Africa. He has no ties to hold him to any one place and therefore he will always roam the world in search of a home.

Thus like almost all the West Indian writers of the post-colonial world, Walcott and McKay express the dilemma of being a Schizophrenic identity, a white mind in a black body that results from hybridity.

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