

**The Problematics of the Quest for identity in  
Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain***

**By**

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**A Project Paper Presented in Partial Fulfilment of a  
Master of Arts Degree in Literature  
at the University of Nairobi**

**Declaration.**

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

**Kawive, Wambua**



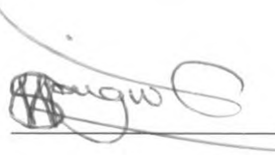
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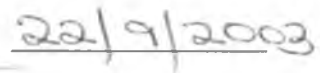
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This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

First Supervisor: **Mr. Waigwa Wachira**



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Second Supervisor: **Dr. Peter Wasamba**



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Date

## Dedication.

This project paper is dedicated to Stella, my daughter, and to Mutinda who does not remember how his mother looked like.

## **Acknowledgement.**

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## Abstract

The study investigates how Derek Walcott treats the theme of the search for identity in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.

The study proceeds from the premise that the search for identity for the Afro-Caribbean is a constant preoccupation. This, the study assumes, is due to multiple factors that mitigate to disorientate the search. And hence the existence of problematics in the search for identity as portrayed in the play.

The conceptualisation of alienation as cultural rootlessness – especially in the Caribbean – is given special attention. A discussion is also carried out of the polyrhythmic cultural base in the milieu of the Caribbean society. The search for identity is thus seen as necessarily taking into consideration this aspect of the Caribbean. Identity is seen as having a multiple and unstable nature. This refers to how the characters, especially the two main ones – Makak and Lestrade – appropriate their alienation and how their assumed identities keep on shifting in reaction to the surrounding realities of the Caribbean cultural heterogeneity. The construction of home (the place of return) as a migrating location and the role of the dream in creating this aura of a shifting “home” is given special emphasis. The dream of return is discussed as being only a vehicle for the characters to realise the truth of their predicament as inheritors of a fragmented culture.

The African-Caribbean is discussed as an individual whose dream of going back to the primeval beginning is disoriented by the present reality – of cultural imprisonment

– in which he lives. The quest for identity is seen as being problematic when one realises that the social and economic circumstances of the people do not constitute their identity, rather, it is the piecing together of the fragments of their history and culture that does.



## Chapter one

### Introduction to the Study

#### BACKGROUND

Derek Alton Walcott was born in Castries, St. Lucia on 23 January 1930, son of Warwick and Alix Walcott, and twin brother of Roderick Aldon Walcott on St. Lucia, an island then belonging to the British Empire, but which became independent in 1979. St. Lucia has a hybrid British/French culture, having alternated as a colony of either England or France across the centuries. Walcott's ancestry is also mixed, with both his maternal and paternal grandfathers being white and the grandmothers being black. It is the complexity of his own situation that has provided one of the most fruitful sources of inspiration. Three loyalties are central for him - the Caribbean where he lives, the English language, and his African origin. Walcott is a man of many cultures, a polyglot of African, colonialist and Caribbean traditions.

When growing up in Castries, the capital of St. Lucia, young Walcott attended St. Mary's College where his most important mentor was a painter, Harold Simmons. He has also devoted much of his grown-up life to painting. After graduating from St. Mary's College, Walcott continued his studies in another part of the Caribbean, on the island of Jamaica, where he attended the University College of the West Indies at Mona. Here he obtained his bachelor's degree in 1953. In 1958, he was awarded a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to study theatre in the United States of America. He is a professor of English and playwriting at Boston University. He has divorced twice and is separated from his third wife: a pointer to a fragmented life.

Walcott published his first poem when he was just fourteen. At sixteen he wrote five plays and had his first collection of poetry published. But he is also a prolific playwright who founded the Little Carib Theatre (later the Trinidad Theatre Workshop) in 1959 and the Boston Playwrights' Theatre at BU in 1981. In the same year, he won the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Award. He later established the Rat Island Foundation, which aims to create an international writers' retreat on an island off St. Lucia, a kind of Breadloaf in paradise. He was the 1992 Nobel Literature prize winner.

The topography of St. Lucia - rugged, mountainous, thickly foliated has contributed much to Walcott's feeling for the place and artistic development. He got to know the countryside early, partly through visits to his grandfather's property near Choiseul, and partly because a close family friend, Grace Augustin used to invite the Walcott boys to spend vacations on her D'Aubaignan and Patience estates on the eastern coast of the island between Micoud and Dennery. His love for the island grew from these visits and the landscape has featured prominently in his writing.

He ransacked the store of world literature, searching for an authentic voice, a sculptured line and a rhythm that would capture his essential style and his celebration of life in the Caribbean. In an interview with Sharon Ciccarelli he says that he has been influenced by Bertolt Brecht, the Japanese Noh theatre, Dylan Thomas, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, Auden and Yeates. He leapt across continents to feed on the sensibility of Robert Lowell, Joseph Brodsky and Seamus Heaney. The ideas of Jean Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon and the Greek mythology – especially the Dionysian ritual – have also influenced his writing. (296-309)

A renowned Caribbean writer, he has more than twenty collections of poetry and plays. *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, the text under study, is one of his major plays and it deals with the theme of the search for identity. His other plays have rich and diverse thematic concerns: *Henri Christophe* (1950) dwells on the Haitian Revolution, *Drum and Colors* (1958) dwells on the history of Jamaica and the Trinidad, *Joker of Servile* (1974), a musical, is a re-working of Tirso de Molina's play *El burlador de Sevilla*, and deals with the Don Juan character and its sexual and moral aspects. *Franklin* (1961) is concerned with the issues of colour and alienation. *O Babylon* (1976) recounts the struggles of Rastafarians in a Babylonian (read oppressive) society and the rejection of the white culture. *The Last Carnival* (1982), *Remembrance* (1977), and *Pantomime* deal with complexities of life in West Indian's society. *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954), *Ti – Jean and his Brothers* (1958), a satire on the planter devil, has a background in Caribbean folklore and especially the mythical Bolom who was denied birth, and *Malcochon or the Six in the Rain* (1959) deals with the theme of the disillusionment of the West Indian.

Derek Walcott is better known for his poetry, which deals with the theme of fragmented identity of the people who inhabit the Caribbean archipelago. But generally, his plays and poems are distinguished by the tensions between the European and African/Caribbean cultures and by the resolutions of those tensions. He explores the burden of cultural pasts and how these pasts contend within its heroic, if all-too-human, characters. As Lloyd Brown has said in his article “The African Heritage and the Harlem Renaissance”,

In the English speaking Caribbean, Derek Walcott obviously obviates charges of sentimental exoticism by virtue of his sustained, no-nonsense emphasis on the very real gulfs between the West Indies and Africa, or between West Indian dreams of an

undiluted African heritage on the one hand, and on the other hand, the hybrid nature of the West Indian's culture. (2)

Brown's supposition of "an undiluted African heritage" in the works of Derek Walcott is wanting for the colonised society cannot claim to have a heritage that is not diluted. The writer in the postcolonial society has to grapple with the heterogeneity of the community and 'logic' of the alienated individual.

Edward Fischer, in *The Necessity of Art: Marxist Approach* notes that, "in the alienated world in which we live, social reality must be presented in an arresting way, in a new light through the alienation of the subject and character" (87). Walcott does this by dramatising the search for an identity and the realisation of the identity in a dream. The word "alienation", according to Richard Schacht, is derived from the verb 'alienare' (to make something another's, to take away, to remove), which is itself derived from 'alius' meaning 'other' (adjective) or 'another' (noun). The implication is that to alienate is to convert into an alien or stranger, to turn away in feelings or affection, to make averse or hostile.

In theatre, Bertolt Brecht came up with the *verfremdungseffekt*, which, as Alfred White argues in *Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays*, is "any technique which allows stage action to be turned into food for thought by being made to seem strange or even forced: 'one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it unfamiliar' " (29). This is translated as 'alienation effect' or 'distancing effect' because, as Margaret Eddershaw argues: "the intention was to 'alienate' or distance the audience emotionally from the characters and their story by breaking with traditional "illusions" of naturalistic theatre and by constantly reminding the audience that they were watching

actors” (136). In this kind of theatre for instance, a character could mount a podium to give a political speech and proceed to do so without knowing that he was naked. The character would be alienated from the audience because they would see his nakedness but he would be immersed in the action.

Theatrical alienation will not be the focus of this paper, rather, the focus will be thematic: alienation as an estrangement of the individual from the society. This is because when characters are defamiliarised in the Brechtian way, it augments their alienation from not only the audience but from the world in which they live. Walcott’s play belongs to the category of plays called epic dramas. This is because it historicizes the characters, and as Brecht argues in an essay “On the Experimental Theatre”, this kind of theatre

uses *verfremdung* to render even every day events remarkable, particular and demanding inquiry: To alienate an event or character is simply to take what to the event or character is obvious, known, evident and produce surprise and curiosity out of it.( qtd Carlson 385).

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain* Walcott takes a simple case of a charcoal burner who is put in jail for being drunk and smashing a café and transforms it into a point of departure in the delineation of the quest for identity in the Caribbean. This he does by “distancing” the character theatrically.

Theatrical alienation in a way enriches thematic alienation and examples of this will be drawn.

Alienation is seen as an experience that dehumanises the individual. It, indeed, is one’s estrangement from humankind and from one’s cultural base. The realisation of alienation triggers in the conscientious individual a process of return to the roots. If these cultural roots have a new constitution, then the return gets a new meaning, a new implication. Derek Walcott’s *Dream on*

*Monkey Mountain* presents this scenario, as he says in his essay “What the Twilight Says: An Overture”; “The west Indian mind, historically hung over, exhausted, prefers to take its revenge on nostalgia, to narrow its eyelids in a schizophrenic daydream off an Eden that existed before its exile”. (19 –20)

Thus the return ‘home’ to ‘Monkey Mountain’ is, as this study will demonstrate, problematic: ‘home’ gets a new construct every time the character appropriates it. Our study thus dwells on the problems that the characters encounter in their quest for identity.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The study investigates how Derek Walcott treats the theme of the search for identity in his dramatic work. It examines the problematics of the search for identity as is portrayed in Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. It also investigates the attempt at a reversal of alienation and whether this attempt is riddled with disappointments with regard to the character’s expectations of the place of their return (home) and its variance with the reality. It seeks to explore the concept of ‘return to Africa’ in the search for identity as it is realized in a dream. As well, it explores the concept of “home” and “home going” as being but a dream of the alienated individual.

## **OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to elucidate the problems that the alienated individual in the Caribbean encounters in his/ her search for identity.

To demonstrate that the 'return' (even though psychological) to the 'expected' primeval 'mountain' is problematic for the place of return is itself invaded by the same problems from which the individual is running.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

The study makes the assumption that the alienated individual who seeks a rebirth by a process of return – psychological and/or physical – encounters obstacles that become setbacks to the quest.

It also assumes that for the reversal of alienation, the basis of cultural roots of the alienated individual should be identified so that they can be appropriated.

## **JUSTIFICATION**

Alienation, the estrangement of the individual from his/her culture and self is rife in literature from cultures that suffered colonialism. As a derivation of domination, alienation has many forms, but, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o says in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, colonialism's "most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world" (16). The individual can also voluntarily alienate the self from the society as a result of being frustrated in a search for identity. Such is the case with the narrator in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

The kind of alienation that Derek Walcott portrays in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is not only mental, but also a remove from the mind: a dream. Makak's alienation – so much a thing of the mind that he obliterates his image and hides away in the mountain – takes a turn for the worse on his

deciding to go on a search. This is because the identity he searches for is two removes from the reality: it is disoriented by whiteness (the fixation with the white man's culture as the ideal) and the dream of its exorcising. His search thus has the potential of becoming a metaphor of the question of identity in the Caribbean.

This is a unique realisation: if based on the fixations of the romantic Africa, the search for identity of the alienated Caribbean individual is challenging. The basis of their cultural roots is itself alienated from the primeval conception: it is "dead" and its "resurrection" can only be a "dream". This implies that African roots in the Caribbean are but remembered relics of an unattainable past.

From my preliminary research, it is in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* that Walcott extensively employs the dream as a demonstration of the "unrealness" of the "ideal" romantic Africa that the alienated Caribbean individual visualizes. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is viewed as Walcott's "dramatic masterpiece" (Mjoberg 1). It bears his defining philosophy in play writing: that the Caribbean person is alienated from both the white and black reality and that a search for identity, and a wish to return to black Africa as his home can only alienate the individual from the multicultural reality of his present home. But most important is the intimation that this return can be actualised in a dream. As Walcott himself says in "What the Twilight Says: An Overture": "Once we have lost our wish to be white, we develop a longing to become black and those two may be different, but are still careers" (*Dream* 20). It is evident that he is mocking the two types of alienating experience, for the two are aspirations towards an identity that of necessity excludes and is antithetical to the other.



The point of departure for this paper is that the return to 'Monkey Mountain', that is, to the primeval beginning is both unrealistic and out of keeping with the Caribbean spirit. This is best demonstrated by what Antonio Benitez-Rojo posits in *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and Post Modern Perspective* that the Caribbean has a 'polyrhythmic' cultural base and not the destructive binary of oppositions imposed by the colonial empire: "that the Caribbean aesthetic factors are not simply the products of root X (say Europe) and root Y (say Africa), but also of its own variable Z." (qtd Lichtension I). The Caribbean is therefore an admixture of the cultures of Europe and those of Africa and that there is a unique culture that is particularly Caribbean. It is Walcott's appropriation of this cultural reality and the resultant negation of the two others that is going to be the mainstay of this paper.

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* is also the only play in which Walcott demonstrates that "the Caribbean is not simply a postcolonial society, not a society forever writing back to the imperial center, but rather appropriating that center within a new, Caribbean world" (Liechtenstein 2). His other plays, though they deal with the theme of alienation, do not capture the essence of the search for identity as it does. As well, although alienation is a great concern of Walcott's works, it is the text identified for this study here that dramatizes the dream of return to Africa as a precept to the search for identity and hence capturing most vividly the challenges that the African Caribbean individual faces.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is going to proceed from the postulates of the postcolonial theory.

As used by Bill Ashcroft *et al* in the book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practise in Post-colonial literatures*, postcolonial theory covers “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2). Colonialism in the Caribbean took the forms of racial, cultural and economic estrangement. Derek Walcott, in his writing responds to these forms.

Again, Terry DeHay posits that the colonial project normalizes the rule of the colonial difference, namely the “alienness” of the ruling group “representing the “Other” as inferior and radically different and hence incorrigibly inferior (1). In Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, the “Other”, the blacks, are portrayed as “monkeys” or as appropriating to being so, hence their dehumanisation and inferiorisation.

The postcolonial theory also interrogates the role and impact of imperialism on the colonised people. Edward Said in *Orientalism* says that the imperialist powers needed to create an “Other” an “Orient” in order to define themselves as the center: “ a collective notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non- Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (134). Our study will examine the colonial question as evident in the text.

The desire to get an identity, to be able to define and have pride in themselves, is a preoccupation with the people whose culture was disoriented by colonial occupation. This is because :

A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. (Ashcroft *et al* 9)

In view of this oppression postcolonial writing becomes an essential part of the process of decolonisation. Peter Barry asserts that, "if the first step towards a post colonial perspective is to reclaim ones own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which the past has been devalued". (192). Thus, in our looking at the quest for identity, the reclaiming of the past (a past that is captured and further devalued in a dream), will be focussed on.

Further, as Edward Said argues, the 'Other' in the colonial construct is seen as homogenous, people are portrayed as anonymous masses rather than individuals: "Theses of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy and inequality with the West most easily associated themselves early in the nineteenth century with ideas about the biological bases of racial inequality." (144). He goes on to say that "the whole question of imperialism, as it was debated in the nineteenth century by pro-imperialists and anti-imperialists alike, carried forward the binary typology of advanced and backward (or subject) races, cultures and societies." (145). Racial considerations and generalizations have been used to disorientate the African-Caribbean's quest for identity but they are essentially a denial of the aspect of polyrhythm.

The postcolonial theory seeks to deconstruct the colonial literatures (the Enlightenment project), which provided the rationale for colonization. A rationale based on binary opposition in the sense of civilized/primitive, rational/irrational, light/dark, good/evil. (De Hay: 4). Walcott as a post-colonial writer responds to this binary opposition and our study will focus on its role in the delineation of identity in the text.

Bill Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back* offer two discursive strategies in the postcolonial postulate: “abrogation” and “appropriation”. The former is a process of denial/rejection and counter identification in which the subject refuses the negative images and turns them back on the offerer, while the latter is a process of reconstitution and disidentification’ on which the subject works ‘on or against’ the images imposed on himself. And this, as Homi Bhabha says in “The Other Question”, is the point of entry of postcolonial theory: “The point of intervention should shift from the identification of images as positive or negative to an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse” (qtd Lee 113). The way in which the characters are presented in the text will be looked at against this backdrop. This will be a guiding principle in our study.

In the postulates of the postcolonial theory, the postcolonial writer exhibits certain tendencies. Writers, firstly evoke a pre-colonial version of his/her own nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted with the colonial status. Secondly there is a tendency towards the use of the language of the oppressed/colonised. Thirdly, in the writing, there is an emphasis on identity as doubled or hybrid or unstable. Fourthly, there is a stress on cross-cultural interaction: the notion

of the double or divided or fluid identity. We are going to explore how Derek Walcott's play, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* exhibits the sensibilities and tenets of this theoretical framework.

The discussion of the problematics of the search for identity will necessarily depend on these postulated tendencies of the postcolonial theory.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Alienation has been a major concern of critical studies of writings from post-colonial regions. The alienated individual in these literatures is, in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's view as he wrote in *Decolonising the mind*, "'disassociated' from the 'sensibility' 'of his' natural and social environment" (17). This means that the individual is removed from the society's activities and is either a recluse or a hermit. The kind of alienation portrayed by Derek Walcott in his numerous writings, is of a 'hybrid' kind; it develops from an initial displacement in slavery, dehistoricization and cultural disorientation. Thus the search for identity, precipitated by this alienation preoccupies Walcott:

From the beginning, he has intensely felt the antagonisms between the cultural heritage of the Old World and the traditions of the new one. In his critical work *Derek Walcott*, published in 1999, John Thieme describes the conflicts Walcott has experienced between the positions of European and African, Anglophone and Francophone, Standard English and Creole, and Methodist and Catholic. In the earlier collections of poetry, Thieme traces "a sense of lost perfection, cracked innocence and psychic fragmentation," which he considers to be a result of the racial divisions of the Caribbean society.... Walcott tries to find expressions for the difficulties inherent in Caribbean identity." (Mjöberg 1)

But there are no difficulties experienced between the polarities. Rather there are difficulties that the characters encounter in trying to integrate the elements of the fragmentation in their singular lives, for the African-Caribbeans are a people whose identity has been fashioned by diversity. The colonial agenda of mental slavery resulted in the black man seeing himself as an apology to humanity, an addendum of the white man who had set himself as the reference point of human existence. It is this that Walcott is negating and at the same time advocating for the harnessing of difference into a unity both of character and cultural perception.

Alienation is a direct result of the black man being uprooted from his culture and hence being forced to adopt a new one. In "Alienation in Caribbean Literature with Special Reference to the Works of George Lamming", Waiyaki Nyoike argues that: "The ex-Asian and ex-African underwent linguistic, religious, cultural loss as a consequence of crossing over into the Caribbean. Up-to-date, there is a strong bias towards European culture in the Caribbean" (vi). Further in his thesis he discusses the theme of estrangement from the self and the search for identity in the Caribbean character. Nyoike focuses on three paradigms of alienation: 'the movement away', 'exile' and 'the return' in which alienation is seen in the culture conflict occasioned by the differences between cultures, the psychological disillusionment consequent upon the immigrant's knowledge of the center of civilization and the failed national identity consecutively. Pertaining to *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Nyoike only mentions the existentialist trait in the act of Makak beheading the white apparition.

Our study will go beyond the three above-mentioned paradigms, beyond just tracing the rise of alienation. Ngugi, in his book *Homecoming*, writes of the peculiar feeling of estrangement Edward

Braithwaite felt on arriving in Africa: "Here I was in Africa; But what was an African? Did the years of slavery and manumission through which my forbearers passed completely separate me from these people? Was there part of me which remained African after all these years?" (qtd. Ngugi 82). Ngugi says that Braithwaite later said: "Perhaps I am lucky", he wrote in *A Kind of Homecoming*, "in that I have no known point of origin; all Africa is therefore my original home, and I am at liberty to make it my home." (qtd. Ngugi 82). In his embracing 'all Africa', Braithwaite seems to forget that Africa had its own slavery in colonialism and its manumission was a smokescreen of neo-colonialism, it could be his 'original home' but not his panacea of vanquishing alienation. And this is a point of departure for this study for it is an identification of home, and therefore, for the Caribbean character, a deconstruction of the idea behind the search for identity.

Discussing the search for identity in Derek Walcott's works, Jöran Mjöberg in his paper, "A Single, Homeless, Circling Satellite: Derek Walcott 1992 Nobel Literature Laureate", argues that "in a sophisticated way, this play expresses components of Walcott's attitude to the political, racial and psychological problems of his post-colonial world." He does not discuss the so-called "sophisticated way" which to me is the dramatization of the search for identity. Again, for the most part, his short paper paraphrases the plot of the play. Nevertheless, he points out that:

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott makes a great effort to interpret the nature of Caribbean identity. Colonialism has been important in damaging the human soul and humiliating the inhabitants of this part of the world. But there is no point trying to build castles in the air, as when Makak dreams of his African roots. At the end, in the epilogue, this simple-hearted visionary proletarian is acquitted, while Western

civilization with its great characters is sentenced to death. Regardless of this, hate and revenge are negligible - in fact, negative - factors to the writer Walcott.

This position is one that I agree with. The possibilities of exploring the ideas that emerge out of his assertion have not been utilized. In this paper, the exploration of the construction of Caribbean identity will be a major premise. The argument he advances, that Makak's beheading the apparition with an African sword is "a sacrifice that expresses a sound reaction against a fantasy life alienated from reality", is empty rhetoric for it is not adequately supported. His discussion of the symbolism of the prison and Makak's character is sketchy. Our study will demonstrate this presence in the consciousness of Makak and the inherent distortion of this Africa; that the Africa of the West Indian's consciousness is only realizable through a dream.

Steven Hartman in "History and Imagination" notes that *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is acclaimed by many to be Walcott's greatest achievement as a dramatist and that in the play Walcott "is very much a West Indian writer who focuses as intently on the complexities of the Caribbean—its "schizophrenic" hybrid of cultures, its tarnished history, and present shortcomings...." Hartman does not demonstrate how Walcott brings out these complexities. This paper will attempt to demonstrate that Walcott has moved Caribbean literature away from the "sterility of an endless exploration of racial identity", away from a monotonous one-dimensional elegy of history and culture, and forged a veritable unity out of the diversity that is, inevitably, Caribbean.

In the article "Exorcising the Planter Devil in the Plays of Derek Walcott", Robert Hamner identifies both Corporal Lestrade and Makak as alienated but whereas Lestrade straddles the fence of dependency, Makak "works out his independent salvation" (96). He explains that Makak does this



by first being inspired to reclaim his African identity by a white goddess, his preaching for the people to believe in themselves, his escape via dream to Africa, his exorcising the temptation by beheading the goddess, his remembering his name and regaining his religion, hence, he seems to say “disalienating himself.” Hamner’s suggestion that Makak regains his African identity is, in my present view, ill informed, for Makak’s ‘messiahship’ is a nightmare, a dream, and his ‘going back to the beginning’ by exorcising the white devil and embracing nakedness is part of the dream; it disorientates Makak. This is going to be the thrust of the present study.

In his essay, “Cultural Imperatives in Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain*”, Daizal Samad focuses on Makak’s search for the self and his being haunted by the ‘white’ ghost (the white goddess) and the ‘black’ ghost (personified in Moustique). He, in the short essay, explicates the sense of “reintegration” of the “monkey” to his ‘home’ the mountain. He restates Walcott’s philosophy: “That nothing should be allowed to go to waste; each relic of the West Indian’s past however apparently insignificant must be patiently gathered, confronted, resisted and creatively assembled and reused” (19). Much as this philosophy is overridingly present in the text, Samad’s article is not exhaustive for he does not discuss the ‘removes’ the dream of ‘integration’ is vis a vis the ‘reality’ of the mountain. The fact that the mountain is symbolic of the “Adamic” beginning of mankind is not explored in his essay.

Robert Willis in his paper “*Dream on Monkey Mountain: Fantasy as Self-Perception*” posits:

Walcott's drama illuminates the tragic struggle of Makak, his hopes, his fears, and his temporary freedom, which is itself a dream. Makak is a microcosm of all poor West Indians who suffer; he is offered a seeming identity only to return to his mountain

hermitlike life, with dreams defeated again. The play, however, leaves the audience with a hopeful vision: Makak must and will descend again from his mountain isolation to face reality, regardless of the cost. (152)

Apart from the fact that Willis fails to see the significance of the dream as an intimation of both hope and permanence, his assertion that Makak is a tragic character is not entirely right. This is because as will be seen from the present study, Makak is only the personification of the tragedy of the African Caribbean.

This paper thus seeks, unlike the previous studies of the text, to trace the interrelationship between the search for identity and the existing reality of polyrhythm in the Caribbean and how this gives rise to the problems that the alienated character experiences.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on reading and analysis of the text and arriving at conclusions based on textual evidence. Library research of related materials will corroborate it. Reference to other works by the author will be made to augment the argument.

## **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study limits itself to the study of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* by Derek Walcott. The study focuses on a text and library and internet based research and may not include any aspects of a field research.

## Chapter 2

### **Alienation and Cultural Rootlessness: The African-Caribbean Experience**

This chapter is a general introduction to the concepts and aspects of the study. It seeks; firstly, to put in perspective the conceptualisation of alienation as is going to be treated in this study. Secondly, it looks at the genesis of cultural rootlessness in the Caribbean especially with reference to the African experience. Lastly it is going to look at the emergence of a new cultural order, a uniquely Caribbean culture.

In this chapter I focus on why the quest for identity is such an important quest for the Africans in the Diaspora, especially the Caribbean. The chapter will explore the social, political and economic effects of the cultural uprooting of the black people who were taken away from their motherland, tortured, killed in the middle passage, separated from their families and loved ones, enslaved, and when slavery was abolished, colonised and latter neo-colonized by the emergent bourgeoisie class of pro-European orientation. And from this cultural disorientation, I will argue that a new culture emerged, a uniquely Caribbean culture that is a celebration of the cultural diversity inherent in the Caribbean. I will thus briefly examine how some writers in the region have appropriated this diversity and how in their writing they have tried to reconstruct the ever-elusive identity of the Caribbean character.

#### **The Conceptualisation of Alienation**

Alienation, as Richard Schacht has defined it above, is a phenomenon of dehumanisation. It indeed is man's loss of independence, his impoverishment, and his estrangement from his fellow men and

from a cultural base. In his MA Thesis, "A Study of Alienation in Selected Songs by Joseph Kamaru", Kariuki Gakuo says that:

Alienation occurs where man is confronted by hostile and oppressive forces that overwhelm him and reduce him to a victim of circumstances rather than as a master of his environment. When dictates of social existence deny rather than affirm man's humanity the social reality confronts man as a strange alien force, which he is pitted against, rather than as a wholesome environment in which he finds meaning and fulfilment. (29)

What Gakuo fails to note is that alienation can be redemptive for the individual. A character so pained by the existence of a foreign force that is overbearing can easily withdraw into the self or to a different environment, mental or otherwise so as to achieve self-actualisation.

Alienation also can precipitate a powerlessness - for the individual is oppressed and dehumanised - as well as a sense of detachment bringing to bear a state of non - belonging, and the individual becomes apathetic. George Victor in his book *Invisible Men: Faces of Alienation*, says that alienated men "care little about life and reject their own identity; they are tormented by unbelief, the uncertainty as to what we ought to do; the distrust of value of what we do" (x). Therefore to him the individual is 'detached' and has hostile 'orientations' towards society. But this hostility may be misplaced in the sense that it could be directed to the thing that the individual wants to harness. In the Caribbean context, this hostility is directed to the hybrid social set up that allows for racial segregation and the disenchantment of the individual thus designated as "Other", and to the historical reality that has planted the idea of a 'home' away from the Caribbean.

George Victor quotes Seaman (1959) as having identified varieties of the experience of the alienated individual ('anomie'). These are: powerlessness (expectation that one's behaviour cannot determine outcome), isolation (not valuing goals or values widely held in society) and self - estrangement (seeing one's acts as of value only in terms of external consequences) (12). The approach here is a sociological one and whereas it may be satisfactorily employed in the field, I feel that it is not clear on the outcomes of the particular experiences, that is, the resultant behaviour is not addressed. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, for example, seeing Makak as exhibiting these characteristics of the anomie may be delimiting to his innovativeness as a character.

Ollman Bertel in *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* sees the alienated man as an 'abstraction' because he has "lost touch with all human specificity". (134). He stipulates the end products of abstraction as religion, the acquisition of property and engagement in industry. In his analysis of Marx's concepts, he outlines four broad areas of alienation. That man is alienated in relation to productive activity (when work is not the satisfaction of a need but merely a means to satisfy needs external to it), his product (the worker puts his life into the object), other men (social alienation) and the species (one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature).

Though these postulates make sense in the Marxist principles of economic materialism and enhance the belief by Marxists that "unalienation is the life man leads in communism" (132), it is noticeable that these may be more applicable in the literature of a people disenfranchised by the processes of slavery, colonialism and neo- colonialism (which were materialistic and capitalistic) and that the

literatures that emerge from these cultures are a response to the estrangement of the peoples. The Caribbean is typical of these.

The alienated individual, in the view of George Victor may see himself as a 'zombie', a 'puppet', a 'performer/gladiator', an 'observer' or as a 'supernumerary' (13). These negative symbols more often than not lead the individuals to react to their situation in diverse ways. One may confront it actively in a bid to change the self or the environment (becoming revolutionaries) or become super-cool, resigned and apathetic. Others may accept the terms of society while trying to win (for example by pursuing wealth in a single minded way --in which case one gives up self and social interests in the process), or disguise their alienation from themselves or others by the appearance of normalcy (adhering to rules in a mechanically conformist sense). Corporal Lestrade in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. as will be discussed later, in his purported adherence to white man's law, and his later role as advisor to Makak in his efforts at a vindication of his enemies, is such a performing gladiator.

Like George Victor argues, "when we think of the alienated, we are apt to have in mind those who are confused, detached, wandering or homeless, and we usually forget those who go through the motions of life as if they know who they are and what they are doing" (1). Thus, in this study, I look at Walcott's appraisal of the alienation in the Caribbean as wretchedness and a cultural disorientation of all its people – only typified in the characters in the drama. Alienation is such a wide ranging subject that it has become, as Walter Kaufmann argues, "inevitable" (Schacht xxviii). Its use has been so indiscriminate and widespread that it is not clear who is supposed to be alienated, for alienation implies making 'indifferent' or 'unfriendly' and this is a commonplace phenomenon.

This study will not dwell on the misty shroud that surrounds the concept, but will proceed from the understanding that there is a normalcy in the dynamism of the social fabric and that the individual becomes 'alien' to that fabric. I will look at alienation as a loss of the sense of community: a fragmentation of society, a disintegration of the social and moral order, a loss of identity, labour power and creative potential; an estrangement of the individual from his history, culture and community. But in the same vein, society, itself composed of individuals, will be viewed not exactly as a static reference for 'norm' but as shifting its own base, as liable to get sick and thus the sickness of the individual seen as a reaction to this pathological social malady.

### **Cultural Rootlessness**

Cultural rootlessness presupposes not a lack of a culture but a dispossession of a people of their culture. The confusion that results from the act of denial is that the people become averse to the arising cultural order and constantly yearn for the past that they saw as their "true" culture. In this section we are going to discuss the cultural dilemma that the Africans in the Caribbean suffered as a result of their enslavement. Daizal R. Samad, in his paper "Caribbean Dish on the Post-Colonial Supper Table" captures the scenario that led to this anomaly:

these people were rooted out from a place where they had a sense of home and self, a sense of their rightful place in a continent rich in history, culture and tradition, where birth, life and death made sense. They were shackled and placed in the bellies of ships, with no more space to breathe in or move in than Europeans gave to their dead. Slave ships were spiritual coffins; human beings were packed spoon fashion, and it was in this tiny space that they ate, defecated, urinated, sweat and bled. And the fear

was so imperative that even the gods fled; or, at best, were driven underground and transformed into other than themselves. After this horror ended, the horror of plantation life began. Each dawn broke like a whip upon the back of the slave; each night threw a pall over everything that was decent and dignified. Freedom was a grave away. (1)

Death became the respite for the suffering people. It translated into the only “cultural” activity that the people yearned for—for culture is liberating and death was the only liberation for the people. But the vigour of the culture of the African people was not utterly distracted by the inhumanity of the whites. Gerald Moore in his book *The Chosen Tongue: English Writing in the Tropical World*, states that the first Africans landed in the Caribbean islands in 1619 and fifteen months later the Dutch slave ship, *Mayflower*, followed. That was the genesis of the disenfranchisement of the black man:

Whereas the uprooted English man was able to retain his name, religion, language and some living contact with his mother culture, the African was all too often robbed of precisely these things. Utterly severed from his old world, the African found himself without rights or status in the new. All the devices which make for continuity in the human family, tribe or race were deliberately stripped from him, so that he might become a chattel devoid of social connections. The emergence of distinctive Afro-American cultural achievements in jazz, folklore, blues, spirituals, calypso, work-song, ballad and many other forms was brought about in the teeth of these obstacles. If the slave was defined by nothing else, he found a measure of collectivity in his very exclusion from the society of the white and the free (x).



Thus the forceful removal from their society and the rather unfortunate relocation to the Caribbean was the actual genesis of the cultural deracination of the black people. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade saw the transportation of over twenty million Africans to the Americas over a period of three and half centuries. It was accompanied as well as followed by conquest and colonization of the Africans. These people experienced untold suffering. Perhaps the greatest suffering was the cultural disorientation that these people went through. The pain of separation made them lose a sense of family. Rape of the black woman by white slavers led to the emergence of a new crop of illegitimate children, an illegitimacy experienced both at the colour as well as at the family levels. The children lacked legitimate fathers and were neither black nor white. Overwork, beating, killing and other forms of persecution were responsible for the loss of a sense of self-worth and the inception of a fatalistic personality. The Afro-Caribbean thus took to yearning to return to African to regain his/her identity.

Kenneth Ramchand, in *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, sees the Caribbean as “an area of deprivation, longing, and rootlessness, where so many people are inarticulate” (6). This inarticulateness that he talks of is to me as a result of the fact that the blacks, having been so oppressed and never having got a chance to express themselves, took refuge in silence and a withdrawal into their musings and their dreams. It also has a bearing on their constant desire to revise their individuality which was perverted by the process of transmutation.

At the abolishment of slavery, the black people were beset by two main dilemmas: poverty and racism. They had been working for the production of wealth that was not their own and the realisation that they owned nothing led them to provide labour to the plantation owners and to a new

caste of absentee landlords. Ramchand argues that “the prolonged absence or non-arrival of those who came into possession of West Indian wealth and property deprived the islands of its best people and gave the material sanction to the idea that Britain was home and the islands a shinning hunting ground” (32). The Creole whites present in the Caribbean did not provide a model culture for the black people and the poverty that they lived in forced the blacks to remember their African heritage, and to sing and dance their disillusionment away, hoping to transport themselves to the ‘riches’ of their motherland. This was the genesis of a mental alienation; the people were forever looking back to what they left behind. The irony is that this culture was seldom remembered in its original form but was fragmented and its harnessing made difficult by the remove the people were at in respect to their African “home”.

Racial differences in the history of slavery were a justification of this crime against humanity. The black people were seen as evil, and as still undergoing evolution. They were seen as akin to apes and thus with deficient mental faculties. Emile Snyder in a paper “Aimé Césaire: The Reclaiming of the Land” advances that racism “attempts to *deterritorialise* its victim who becomes reduced to beg acceptance as an alien or to seek to assimilate in the hope of disappearing from this monstrous illegitimacy fostered upon him” (39). In the Caribbean the Africans were disfranchised from their geographical roots. They were seen as ‘not belonging’ to the existing social milieu, at least not as equals to the whites with whom they shared the cultural space.

The emergence of the mulatto in the post slavery scene complicated matters. The mulatto saw themselves as better than the blacks because of their racial proximity to whites. The mulatto became the new candidate for leadership and the whites exploited the vanity of these people of mixed blood

to further degrade the black people. Ramchand, talking about the race issue in the Caribbean says that, upon seeing the problems of the social adjustment for the man of mixed blood:

The Negro was resentful: 'he thinks that the mulatto was too near akin to himself to be worthy of any respect. In his passion he calls him a nigger—and protests that he is not and never will be like buckra man'. And they irritated their white neighbours by their want of meekness: 'they are always proclaiming by their voice and look also that they are as good as the white man; but they are always showing by their voice and look also that they know that this is a false boast'. It was the Coloureds who first began to tread the weary road to Whiteness. The psychological disturbance of the mulatto was further deterrent to their emergence as a minority group bringing sweetness and light to the society. (40)

Therefore the black man had an enemy next door –a rootless and shiftless character straddled between the races, rejecting one and rejected by the other. The unrelenting situation was that the whites saw themselves as the center of humanity in the Caribbean and the rest were peripheral characters. But the reality of the Caribbean situation goes beyond the apparent dichotomy so presented by the race question. The individual in the region is constantly seeking to discover his/her identity, and this discovery, Moore argues, "in the cultural sense comes with the realization that one is neither a rootless being devoid of identity, nor a lost son of Africa or Asia, but a man made and shaped by this island now" (3). But this is not an easy discovery, for the black people perceive the islands as personifying their suffering and are wont to wish the islands – and thus the symbols of their bondage – away.

In the world of Derek Walcott, the Caribbean man is “a second Adam, infinitely nearer to us than the first, whose world effectively begins with the first stranding upon these shores”(qtd Moore 20). This does not suggest that the Afro-Caribbean was without a culture but that a new culture evolved in this new land which they had to make a place to live in, a land that does not carry the odour of exile but bears the memories of their origin. Certainly the history of the Caribbean’s did not begin in the islands, but a new chemistry of life was concocted here. In response to Walcott’s statement, Moore reiterates: “if the West Indian is a second Adam, cast out of his African paradise by the flaming sword of the slaver, then he is the inheritor and possessor of the new island world into which history has cast him” (20).

But the reality of life in the islands, with the problems brought about by racism and poverty – and hence inferiorization, is one of disillusionment. The emergence of class-consciousness came with the development of a bourgeoisie class of those people who had benefited from colonial education, garnered wealth by exploiting their fellow blacks and embraced the ways of their white masters. This class the world over thrives on social contradictions so as to safeguard their interests. Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, says of this class of leaders:

These men, who have sung the praises of their race, who have taken upon themselves the whole burden of the past, complete with cannibalism and degeneracy, find themselves today, alas, at the head of a team of administrators who turn their back on the jungle and who proclaim that the vocation of their people is to obey, to go on obeying and to be obedient till the end of time (135).

And what was to be obeyed were the colonizer's law, the very same which had been used to disenfranchise the people. Writers in the Caribbean therefore have had a calling: to endow their people with a sense of importance, to encourage them to take control of their lives, to raise them from, as Ramchand calls it, "being peripheral or background figures" (5).

When Ramchand said novelists from the Caribbean were engaged in social and not class-consciousness, he might well have meant all writers. He says: "The preoccupation of West Indian writers with what some see as the chaos, others as the open possibilities of their society goes along with an interest in the previously neglected person" (4). And the way to go about doing this was by appropriating the African idiom, recreating the past, calling to mind the lost years, the lost history and culture, the lost sense of self. Snyder captures this aptly when she writes:

How do you accept, act upon and transform such a past if not by speaking against it, if not by trying to raise 'the good drunken cry of revolt'? How do you validate your existence, record for yourself and for your posterity a plot of land in the world register (*cadastre*), if not by trudging back along the ancestral path to return to the source—Africa, the matrix, the point of embarkation for the black diaspora and the irreversible moment of parturition? You must sail back to the 'homeland', the family names, the genealogies which almost dissolved in the wake of the slaver's ships (32).

But the reconstruction of this past is pasted on a present reality: the Caribbean is a home of a diverse number of pasts, histories, languages, cultures, and remembrances. It is the finding of unity in diversity that is a major challenge to the Caribbean individual.

## **Polyrhythm as a Caribbean Cultural Base**

I take cognisance of the “Polyrhythmic” base of the Caribbean culture. We will look at culture, and thus identity, as the main premise upon which polyrhythm is arched. The West Indian has inherited a multi-faceted life. In the words of Gerald Moore,

His culture and social habits, though heavily permeated with American and British influences, are really an amalgamation of many things.... The black West Indian writer, especially if he comes from the poorer, rural areas of the islands, will probably find many elements from African religions, foods, languages, folklore, music, and cultural values still working in the texture of his society (xviii).

Polyrhythm presupposes that these elements from Africa do not exist in isolation. They are impacted upon and they impact upon the cultural elements of the other ethnic groups that live there. In his book *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Antonio Benítez Rojo argues that:

The main obstacles to any global study of the Caribbean's societies, insular or continental, are exactly those things that scholars usually adduce to define the area: its fragmentation; its instability; its reciprocal isolation; its uprootedness; its cultural heterogeneity; its lack of historiography and historical continuity; its contingency and impermanence; its syncretism, etc. This unexpected mix of obstacles and properties is not, of course, mere happenstance. What happens is that postindustrial society--to use a newfangled term – navigates the Caribbean with judgments and intentions that are like those of Columbus; that is, it lands scientists, investors, and technologists--the new (dis)coverers – who come to apply the dogmas and methods that had served them well where they came from, and who can't see that these refer only to realities

back home. So they get into the habit of defining the Caribbean in terms of its resistance to the different methodologies summoned to investigate it (1).

The call he is making is that in conceiving to study aspects of the Caribbean we should be able to accommodate the multiplicity that is the base of the social cultural set up in the region. Identifying and labelling diversity does not help scholarship on the Caribbean. He suggests that we need to assess the cause of the prevalent impermanence and appreciate the emergent society which is unique but not different in the sense of being averse. Failure to do this will of necessity alienate the study from the real chemistry of the region's body politic.

Interviewed by Sharon Ciccarelli, Derek Walcott said:

The fantastic thing about Trinidad – and it has been ignored to an amazing extent – is the diversity of culture: Chinese, Hindu, African. All these races have their own epics.... If there could be even the most concentrated or minimal means of access to all this racial knowledge, to the collective memory, one could enrich one's writing to a great extent. If I am a West Indian living in Trinidad, and if the Chinese, the Indians and the Africans all live there, and if I share my life with them, then, ideally I should know the origins of all and yet still be *of* my name. That, I think, would be complete fulfilment for a West Indian (306).

It is from this understanding that polyrhythm in the Caribbean will be discussed – that the people can not have one cultural rhythm that is distinctly 'monoracial' that their cultural rhythm has to be an amalgamation of elements from the cultural vestiges of the different peoples.

In his M.A. thesis: "Alienation in Caribbean Literature with Special Reference to the Works of George Lamming", Waiyaki Nyoike says: " the ex-Asian and the ex-African underwent linguistic,

religious, cultural loss as a consequence of crossing over into the Caribbean. Up-to-date, there is a strong bias towards European culture in the Caribbean”(vi). But in Walcott’s work there is an exemplification of a cultural ‘moving the center’ from the dominant Eurocentric or the ‘aggressive’ African to the essential polyrhythmic pulse of the Caribbean. The play unmasks the assertion of Africa and African roots beside European roots in Caribbean by aesthetically distancing Africa as a land accessible only in a dream, and again, eliminating the romantic idealization by creating Africa as a land in which crimes against humanity are perpetrated. Jöran Mjöberg argues that:

The dream visions in this play seem both to belong to Makak and to the collective atmosphere of the plot. Ironic effects appear through out the events. At the same time as Makak’s romantic dream of Africa is presented, he cherishes a fantasy of a white protectress who takes care of him. But, as suggested by Lestrade, he gives up his dream, brutally beheading the woman with an African sword. This is a sacrifice that expresses a sound reaction against a fantasy life alienated from reality.”

Mjöberg says thus that Makak’s reality is in his African roots. I disagree with this for, in my view, Walcott does not idealize or authenticate Africa or African roots. Rather he creates a disillusioned charcoal burner who, in a dream, traverses the land from which he was uprooted, as a great man, a king, an ‘orientator’ an epitome of the culturally ‘planted’ and gets even more disillusioned. When at the end of the play he goes back to Monkey Mountain, he has accepted himself and his present reality.



Inevitably, the cultural clash of the African and the European played a major role in the alienation of the African people. Slavery, colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism are factors that led (and lead) to cultural deracination and a disenfranchisement of the people of African descent.

Paul Gilroy, in his book *The Black Atlantic*, holds the view that “the reflexive cultures and consciousness of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the “Indians” they slaughtered, and the Asians they indentured were not, even in the situations of the most extreme brutality, sealed off hermetically from each other”(2). This, coupled with the indisputable fact of cultural dynamism, precipitated a movement away from the “known” ways. Alienation presupposes a search for identity, but the question is, what identity? Gilroy argues that there is an “instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade.” (xi). This is the point of departure for polyrhythm in the Caribbean and by extension the African diaspora.

Therefore the discussion of alienation and cultural rootlessness will of necessity take cognisance of this fact, for the social norm is much more fluid and the crusade for humane perspectives is dampened by the injustices suffered by the people.

Jean Paul Satre in a prologue to Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that in reading Fanon, we will learn how an oppressed people “in their period of helplessness, their mad impulse to murder is the expression of the natives collective consciousness”:

If this suppressed fury fails to find an outlet, it turns in a vacuum and devastates the oppressed creatures themselves. In order to free themselves they even massacre each

other. The different tribes fight between themselves since they cannot face the real enemy – and you can count on colonial policy to keep up their rivalries: the man who raises his knife against his brother thinks that he has destroyed once and for all the detested image of their common degradation, even though these expiatory victims don't quench their thirst for blood (16).

This is true of the Caribbean, where the mulatto and other blacks have necessarily gone into different camps, the former looking at the latter as being uncivilized, ape-like and therefore inferior. The mulatto, having suffered the tragedy of being unacceptable to the white race that they yearn for, having been rejected by their white fathers who were either having fun or multiplying their slave population, and being persecuted by the white women – for the mulatto was a testimony of the infidelity of the white race and a living proof of betrayal by their husbands – becomes the faithful disciple of the colonial agenda of oppression of the 'blacker' brothers.

It is evident that Fanon has influenced Walcott's writing. On the superficial level, he quotes Satre's essay to introduce the two parts of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. And at the thematic level, Walcott constructs the contradictions that people the Caribbean person's search for his/her place in the world (s)he lives in--in view of their oppression. The characters in the play see the others as hindering their pursuit of fulfilment, their pursuit of self worth. The vain mulatto is pitted against the epitome of Africanness and their quests for belonging are interrogated in a dream. This will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

David Lichtenstein, in his paper “Polyrhythm and the Caribbean: Intersections of Culture, History And Literature”, argues that:

Historically rhythms from around the world have clashed and combined to make up the modern day Caribbean. Digging through the layers of history, one first locates the shadowy presence of American Indians. Tribes such as the Caribs and the Arawaks once flourished on these islands. However, with the arrival of the second major rhythmic group-- the Europeans—the American Indian rhythm largely disappeared, preserved only in a handful of ancestors in places like Guyana. But the arrival of the Europeans only increased the diversity this region possessed, for with them, as slaves and indentures, they brought the world. Black African, Indian, and the Chinese peoples arrived in the Caribbean as servants of a growing empire. Though the Europeans commonly attempted to cut these people off from their roots, nonetheless traditions and cultural practices did in some cases survive (1)

It is therefore evident that as much as the African people were dispossessed, they were not an isolated group, for the other ethnic groups present in the region suffered the same fate of being dispossessed and being culturally uprooted. But for the black in the Caribbean, the urge to go back to Africa, the land that resonates with the identity of blackness, has been great indeed. This has been necessitated by their suffering which was evidently greater than that of the other people due to their racial orientation. The fact that they are racially segregated only fans the pain of their poverty. Colonialism ‘of the flag’ can be said to have come to an end. But its attendant factors have not. They are replete across the racial and poverty divides. Alaka Holla in “Post-Colonial Residue” rightly notes: “to think that colonialism can end abruptly, dictated by independence’s inception, is naïve. Colonialism—which brings new values, new beliefs, foreign languages, alien traditions—cannot be

shed like the skin of a snake and then tossed away and forgotten. It will always leave something behind, some form of residue” (1).

What Holla calls “residue”, in the case of the Caribbean, becomes the core element in the culture. It no longer is “undesirable thus left behind”, but what actually *is* the cultural ingredient. Therefore in Trevor Rhones’s *School’s Out*, the use of Creole by Mr Hendry and Mr Rosco is a sustained argument on the question of language and its relevance. Pat, the expatriate, is portrayed as a key member of the Caribbean society who, in a disinterested way, advances the colonial agenda of inequality by getting more pay than his fellow teachers as well as ‘preying’ on Miss. McAdam. The relationship of the two is momentarily destabilized by the entry of Russ Dacres, a pro- reform teacher who succeeds in streamlining discipline in the school. But the dirt and inefficiency that he is fighting gang up against him and he soon discovers that he is irrelevant:

Chaplain: But I cannot be a party, Mr Dacres, to any situation where members of staff impute my reputation, my reputation by being involved on an illegal act. Illegal in the eyes of God and the State. I have no option. I must resign. I will not, and cannot, be a party to it. You have put me in a most untenable position. I resign.

*[General chorus from the rest, except ROSCO—‘Me too’. They all start packing to leave]*

Russ: That will not be necessary. *[As he collects his things.]* My resignation will be with the Head within the hour.*[the CHAPLAIN immediately starts unpacking.]*

(Act 2 scene 3, 137)

Dacres to me was trying to impose a constant or routine rhythm for the school but the various rhythms –that of the bored intellectual Mr. Josephs, that of the crudely educated Mr Hopal Hendry, that of the pathetic headmaster, that of the disinterested expatriate, that of the socially decadent students, and that of the cynical Reverend (whose hypocrisy is all there is to his rich character)—all these outsmart his resolve. In his resignation we see a restatement of polyrhythm. It is not so much a triumph of evil over good for then, Mr.Dacres, though he is black, is a student of the colonial school who wants to create space for himself by denying other people their humanity and not caring to understand how they came upon that space.

Trevor Rhone's play augments what Gerald Moore says of the region: “ even if the West Indies had created nothing else, they have certainly created a people; a people, moreover, forged from the most diverse of elements in the most tragic of circumstances” (8). It is the recognition and appraisal of the ‘tragedy’ of the cultural confluence that is a prerequisite to an understanding of the Caribbean situation.

David Lichtenstein in his paper “Polyrhythm and the Caribbean: Literature”, captures the devotion of Caribbean writers when he says:

Inevitably, the authors of the West Indies have picked up upon the cross-rhythmic nature of their culture. Indeed, they have amplified it in so many different ways in their writing that one could include this quality as a defining characteristic (if such an essentializing process is possible) of modern West Indian writing. They have used this polyrhythmic writing both consciously and unconsciously, in pursuit of different

political and artistic agendas. Authors have used this structure to play one voice off another, to allow different perspectives to coexist, to juxtapose characters with different status or different history. In short, the notion of polyrythm has allowed Caribbean authors to synthesise any number of conflicting factors or forces in one loose union (1).

If we take the example of George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, we find that he presents many instances of cross-rhythms. Lichtenstein argues that Lamming "does present figures of both colonizer and colonised status, in order to set them at odds with each other and depict the process by which growth in the Caribbean has been retarded. But he also creates a kind of Bakhtinian multivocality by literary representing (through dialogue) the voices of several different characters of different ages. By attuning the reader to the voices of elders such as Pa and Ma, and of the youth G or the boys in the schoolyard, Lamming attempts to recreate the polyrythmic voice of a Caribbean community (1).

This is true of what Lamming does in his novel – especially so by the use of shifting narrative voices. The floods at the onset of the novel symbolize the uncertainty with which these people live – the floods of their suffering: "the consistent lack of an occasion for celebration" (1). We are able therefore to perceive a reconstruction of the lives, experiences and ideas of all the characters, who, in their alienation, create a niche for themselves in the novel, in the light of the perceived cultural bastardisation. The characters are inheritors of a history of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. They suffer cultural disorientation and have a new rhythm: the presence and inevitability of diversity. G's going away at the end of the novel is synchronised with the impending death of Pa, for his being moved to a house of the aged is like being taken away from history. Thus G's denial of

his Barbadian identity is paralleled with the destruction of the repository of history. This is approving of the polyrhythmic view of Caribbean identity and celebrating the presence of diversity, Lamming condemns those who seek to declaim it. As well Lamming suggests that the going away is an invitation of a greater diversity by creating Trumper who goes away and comes back more knowledgeable about the history of the black people and especially the race question.

Walcott's obsession with the quest for identity is even more explicit in his poetry. Unlike in his other plays, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is written in the form of a poem. It is poetic in form considering the versification of many of the words of characters and the poetic diction as well as poetic symbols that fill the pages. It is a poetic appropriation of the myth of identity, a play with a poetic identity. In this play that stands out from his other plays as a dramatic masterpiece, Walcott dramatises the identity crisis that the Caribbean person goes through. The poetry of Derek Walcott exhibits a kind of acceptance of the Caribbean persona's hybrid identity. In the poem "As John to Patmos" for instance, the persona takes a prophetic stance and gives an apocalyptic prophecy that he would speak from the Caribbean: that the beauty of the islands will be his home away from home, and that just like biblical John who wrote the Revelation, it is from the Caribbean that he would prophecy; that the serenity and the enveloping darkness of the island (that surrounds and thus gives identity to the blacks) has constructed a new home for him/her – though like John he was put on that island as apart of persecution.

Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* sees Walcott's poetry as deconstructing the colonisation of the Caribbean as the possession of "a space through the power of naming":

Ordinary language develops an auratic authority, an imperial person; but in a specifically postcolonial performance of reinscription, the focus shifts from the nominalism of imperialism to the emergence of another sign of agency and identity. It signifies the destiny of culture as a site, not simply of subversion and transgression, but one that prefigures a kind of solidarity between ethnicities that meet in the tryst of colonial history (231).

To him, Walcott's conception of history begins with "that moment of undecidability or unconditionality that constitutes the ambivalence of modernity... a historical time envisaged in the discourse of the enslaved or the indentured... the historical present" (233). The concept of the "historical present" evident in Walcott's poetry presupposes a hybridity, a point of cultural confluence which of necessity mediates polyrhythm—for the articulations of difference in terms of race, gender or religion, are "never singular or binary" but "must be understood as they constitute identities—contingently, indeterminately.... Claims to identity are nominative or normative, in a preliminary, passing moment...." (234).

The suggested 'temporal' nature of identity in Walcott's poetry is a testimony to the migrating nature of the perception of identity – that at the time that one is called upon by society to state their identity, the spatial-temporal "location" will be 'home' and 'self'. The implication here is enormous: that the quest for identity outside the Caribbean becomes not only a façade but also a denial of the polyrhythm—hence an exercise in futility.

Walcott, in his search for a unique West Indian aesthetic as well as identity, challenges this polyrhythm by situating his poetic personas in the throes of diversity. He:



situates much of his poetry imaginatively right upon the beach, where land, sea and sky encounter each other. Walcott is the solitary man, the castaway, who must learn to know the island upon which chance and history has stranded him. But his eyes are forever fixed on the sea that vomited him. Thus he is both a spokesman for a generation endeavouring to throw off racial and colonial inhibitions in the search for a distinctly West Indian existence and the great reminder imposed upon them by space and time. It is their very loneliness, their exclusion which forces self-discovery upon them. It gives them also a certain stature. (Moore 20)

This is explicit for example in Walcott's poem "The Schooner *Flight*", a poem that traces the life of the Afro-Caribbean in the islands capturing the 'stranding upon the shores':

I saw History once, but he didn't recognize me;  
an old man with a parchment skin as mottled with warts  
as a barnacled sea-bottle, he crawled crabwise through the shade  
of the Creole Quarter, from Castries to Christiansted  
and, making history, I shouted with affection:  
"Ay, Sir! Is me, Shabine, your unhistorical  
grandson; you remember Grandma, your black cook at all?"  
The deaf bitch spat. It's worthy a thousand words.  
That's all those bastards left us anyway. Words. (Schooner 170)

Here Walcott constructs difference as a defining parameter of identity. By creating a white man and giving him animal characteristics, he denies him the title he gives him at the beginning. The white man is not History, it is Shabine who creates and thus becomes a personification of history: first by acknowledging diversity and secondly recognising the persistent desire for being white and

declaiming it. The underlying rhetoric is that the white man, with his feelings of superiority, only managed to indent history with the imposition of his language. The fact that he fathered Shabine thus becomes an historical accident, and that the history of the Caribbean person is not determined by skin colour. This is the predicament of the African-Caribbean, the realisation that they have nobody else to rely on, that they are the destitute children of Africa spewed on the fated islands and that it is upon them to rethink their lives; to live them to the full. They have to collect the bits and pieces of memory of their past, and with their present experiences, fashion out a cultural garment that befits them.

In looking at another Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite, June Bobb argues that Brathwaite “descends into the darkness of the Caribbean’s fragmented psyche searching always for the nature and complexity. Often complicity of the BROKEN, dispossessed sometimes alienated GROUND on which we at ‘first’ find ourselves” (1). She correctly argues that Brathwaite celebrates “the purgatorial experience of black people” and rants at the world for its refusal to “be properly ashamed of slavery”. The Caribbean experiences a ‘historical marginality’. This is borne out of the fragmented nature of its history. And since the history of any society is captured in its culture, the supposition is aptly captured in Brathwaite’s assertion that the Caribbean people are engaged in “making with their rhythms something torn and new” (qtd Bobb 2)

The cultural dilemma of the Caribbean is best portrayed in the use of language. Ngugi, in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* has argued that language is the embodiment of culture:

Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a peoples experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to another.” (15)

His arguments build on the assertion by Frantz Fanon that “To speak a language is to assume a world, a culture” (1952, 50). But the Caribbean case is different. Here we find a people so deracinated that the languages of their African ancestors were rendered ineffectual by the process of enslavement, separation and colonial subjugation. The collective memory bank of the people is therefore fragmented. The present generation of the Caribbean people inherited this fragmentation and have tried to appropriate their history through it. The emergence of the Creole therefore becomes a primary factor in the discussion of language. June Bobb argues that in Brathwaite’s view of the Caribbean language situation, Creolization is the:

process by which the cultural groups in the Caribbean interact with each other, resulting in the emergence of a language and a culture that is distinctly Caribbean. Creolization becomes a metaphor for Caribbean unity and possibility. Creolization “result(s)” in subtle and multiform orientations from or towards ancestral originals. “Caribbean culture... can be seen in terms of a dialectic of development taking place within a seamless guise or continuum of space and time; a model which allows for blood flow, fluctuations, the half look, the look both/several ways; which allows for and contains the ambiguous. And rounds the sharp edges of the dichotomy” (2).

The choice of language is very important to the Caribbean writer. Writing in English or French or Spanish will of necessity alienate the reader. This is because these languages are not spoken in their

true forms (as in their parent forms), neither are they spoken exclusively. The slavers were diverse; their languages were diverse as well. To make themselves understood by the slaves, they decentred their speak. The slaves inherited this linguistic phenomenon and, largely banned from acquiring literacy, they further multiplied the linguistic propensity by borrowing from their African languages. The writers of the Caribbean, and especially Derek Walcott, therefore engage in an Antillean art that is the restoration of what he calls “our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original unique way” and that “brings to the surface of Caribbean consciousness a history too traumatic to forget” (qtd Bobb 1-2).

The Afro-Caribbean person lives in a world of turmoil and torture. It is from this historical reality that Derek Walcott, in his writing, creates characters that are alienated from the reality of their predicament, who want to run away from the chaos of their lives, to find a panacea, an ideal, a home. At the period that colonialism came to an end, Walcott says in his essay “What the Twilight Says”, the Caribbean people experienced their “twilight”, which is a metaphor of the withdrawal of the Empire and the beginning of their doubt:

Colonials, we began with malarial enervation: that nothing could ever be built among these rotting shacks, barefooted backyards and moulting shingles; that being poor we already had a theatre of our lives. So the self-inflicted role of martyr came naturally, the melodramatic belief that one was message-bearer for the millennium, that the inflamed ego was enacting their will. In that simple schizophrenic boyhood one could lead two lives: the interior life of poetry and the outward life of action and dialect.

(Walcott, *Dream* 4)

The underlying factor here is the parallelism drawn between poverty and creativity. Extreme poverty as was experienced in the Caribbean becomes 'creative' in its own right. It is as if the throes of tragedy that are enforced by poverty are a dramatisation of the cultural dilemma of the people. This to me explains the ever-present desire of the people to go back to Africa, to go back to their Adamic nature, and hence the preponderance of the oral forms in Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. In "A Season of Plays", a Handbook of the Trinidad Theatre workshop production of *Ti-jean and his Brothers* and *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott says that his use of folk culture in his writing is a celebration and a revamping of that culture:

Our culture needs both preservation and resurgence, our cries need an epiphany, a spiritual definition, and an art can emerge from our poverty, creating its own elation. Our resilience is our tragic joy, in the catharsis of folk humour. Our art for the time being, because it emerges from and speaks to the poor, will find its antean renewal in folktale and parable. We present to others a deceptive simplicity that they may dismiss as provincial, primitive, childish, but which is in truth a radical innocence. That is what our fable is about. (qtd Errol Hill 8)

'Our' in this statement is in diametrical opposition to 'they': the former referring to the people of African descent in the Caribbean and the latter referring to the "Other"—not necessarily other Caribbean people, but the colonialists to whose Empire the colonials are supposed to be looking up to. Walcott constructs a new sense of pride and of power in the vestigial poverty of his people. He sees the cultural liberation of his people in accepting the simplicity and impoverishment of their lives.

To Walcott, the Caribbean man is “ a second Adam, infinitely nearer to us than the first, whose world effectively begins with his first stranding upon these shores” (Moore 20). What cast him out his African paradise is “the flaming sword of the slaver” and so he is “the inheritor and possessor of the new island world into which history has cast him”. It is in this sense that the characters in, for example, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* are engaged in trying to make the island a place to live in; “ a land not of exile, but of origin, a New World” (Moore 20).

In an interview with Sharon Ciccarelli, Walcott said that in the Caribbean the society is stratified in terms of the rich and the poor. The artist therefore inherits the social split—seeking riches whereas drawing his material from the ‘roots’ of the poor. But he concedes that:

Much deeper is the historic racial split resulting in two kinds of bloods, almost two kinds of people. Language and the experience of illiteracy among the poor is a profound problem that divides the West Indian writer. The more sophisticated he becomes, the more alienated is his mental state. It is not his business to lower his standards to insult the poor. When one is confronted with this problem of language, two situations occur: wanting to reach one’s people; and realizing the harsh reality of the society, the depression and the economic exploitation. At the same time that one’s intellect becomes refined, and one learns more about the society, there is a movement away from that society. (300-301)

This sets the ground for alienation. The “movement away from society” becomes, to the West Indian writer the antithesis of the quest for identity. The writers’ alienation is reflected in their works in that writing itself contradicts the orality of the community. But in the same breath, the use of oral

forms attests to the affirmation of their identity as African-Caribbeans. The people of these islands are therefore the inheritors of both double consciousness and subverted individuality. The former arises out of the fact of their being forcefully transplanted from Africa and the latter as a result of their efforts at denying the painful history of slavery and colonialism. The poverty of their present only goes increase their bitterness.

In this chapter we have looked at the concept of alienation with respect to cultural rootlessness as expressed by writers from the Caribbean. We have seen that the region has a unique culture and that cultural rootlessness to some extent can be construed as fallacious since there is an existing cultural base. Society is dynamic and this applies to culture as well. The African-Caribbeans therefore have a rich cultural legacy that they have cleaved from the existing diversity that has been their inheritance. Alienation, conceived as being detached from the African roots, gets a revision. It now implies being removed from and not accepting the polyrhythm of the islands.

In the chapters that follow, I will explore how the alienated characters in Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, who find themselves in an essentially polyrhythmic society, relate to one another and how their quest for identity is affected by their perception and appropriation of cultural rootlessness.

## Chapter 3

### The Multiple Nature of Identity

In this chapter, I intend to explore the experiences that Makak, and Corporal Lestrade go through in their individual search for identity. They are representations of the Caribbean dichotomy: for one is black and the other is a mulatto. Identity for the African-Caribbean individual is fluid and determined by the heterogeneous nature of the social setting. Walcott's creation of these characters is guided by the cultural multiplicity of the society. The racial and poverty questions—both of which engender in the individual a desire to search for identity and fulfilment—are constituent elements of the historical experience. Therefore the journey to the self (or to Africa) will of necessity address these two in relation to the cultural hybridity so characteristic of the Caribbean.

The development of characters is premised on authors' appraisal of the society in which they live. An author's creation of characters is a reflection of the cultural situation that the people experience. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in their book *Theory of Literature* state: "Literature occurs only in a social context, as part of a culture, in a milieu" (105). Literature thus (as much as I agree that it cannot be a replacement of sociology or politics), intersperses the socio-political space and recreates it as it develops a life of its own: a life moulded on the existing cultural perceptions. More so, for the postcolonial writer, who is struggling to reverse the negative impact of a foreign culture's domination, the creation of characters that are a statement of the conflicts experienced by the people is a primary preoccupation. The characters that Derek Walcott creates therefore are a reflection of the cultural milieu he experiences. This does not necessarily mean that the characters are stereotypical but that they are mythical, that they are imbued with the metaphor of the island, that



they are a resurrection of the tempo and tone of the island's life, that in their individual nature they are a statement of the life of the African-Caribbean.

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott envisages a situation in which the characters work towards an assertion of their identity against the odds of declamation by other so professed 'established' cultures of Africa and Europe. The African-Caribbean appropriates his African roots as remembered in the vestiges of music, story telling and mythicism to assuage the feeling of inadequacy that emanates from the knowledge of the injustices suffered in the historical moment of their denigration. The perpetrators of this evil are demonised and denied humane qualities – even the ability to be tragic. They suffer a colourlessness (rather whiteness) that is in keeping with their inhumanity. The psychic fragmentation resulting from the racial divisions is manifested in the characters, especially that of Makak and Lestrade, who, in the dramatic moment that they are confined to "normalcy" (this is contrasted to the state of "dream"), are conscious of their psychological disquiet.

The discussion that follows is centred on Makak and Lestrade. I am going to trace the expressions that the two characters voice in view of their search for identity and the 'melting pot' that is the confluence of their, inevitably, common identity. The presence of Souris and Tigre as the two characters struggle to interrogate their identities has a great dramatic function. They form a kind of sounding board for the characters' assertions as well as enhancing the dramatic conflict by providing an alternative voice. They are aesthetically marginalized (felons) and thus the credibility of their role is dramatically enhanced by role-play in a multiple scenario. They are the welcome chorus for Makak's entry to jail, the judges in his mock trial, and basically the prime movers of the dramatic plot. They act as the 'conscience' of identity and ignite the processes of search for identity for both

Makak and Lestrade. With their interjections that are either judgemental or contrastive to the assertions of two principal characters, they bring to the fore the multiplicity of, and contradictions inherent in, the claim to identity.

### **(i) Makak and the Myth of African Inferiority**

Makak (whose name is the French patois for “ape”) is cast as a diminution of the humanity of the African. He is a stereotype of the African ex-slave who has been so dehumanised that he seeks to voluntarily alienate himself. He is a representation of the woodcutters, the fishermen, the charcoal burners, and the footmen of lorries who are a confluence of “all fragments of Africa originally but shaped and hardened and rooted now in the island's life, illiterate in the way leaves are illiterate; they do not read, they are there to be read, and if they are properly read, they create their own literature” (Walcott, Nobel Lecture).

He is therefore an encapsulation of the ‘inferior’ African caught in the web of slavery and colonialism, an image of the African as the child of the Empire. But he is also a representative of the conscientious man aware of this label of inferiority and seeking to assert himself. The play principally addresses the theme of Makak’s search for cultural identity in the face of colonialism. Just before his entry on stage, the conteur and chorus, setting the pace and the dramatic conflict in the scene, lament:

CONTEUR

Mooma, mooma,

Your son in de jail a'ready,

Your son in de jail a'ready'

Take a towel and

band your belly. (212)

We are thus introduced to two ideas at the same time: that of the imprisonment of a son, and that of a mother preparing herself to give birth to another or to smother the pangs of childbirth as she remembers her son. The repetition that there is nobody to sign the bail bond implies that the son can be bailed out of that imprisonment but there is no one to do it. The funereal nature of the lament and the fact that they say: "Forty days before the Carnival, Lord / I dream I see me funeral" (213) enhances the claustrophobic air of the setting: that Makak is in jail and there is no respite for him. He is introduced to us as the "King of Africa" (214) and as we see him sitting in a cell with an old clothe around his shoulders we realise that Walcott is making a statement about the imprisonment of the African person in the Caribbean as well as pointing to the impoverishment that they suffer. He is charged with being drunk and disorderly. The Corporal says: "He was drunk and he smash up Alcindor café" (215). Alcindor's café is to me a symbol of wealth and, being drunk, Makak sees in it the representation of what he has not been able to get. He turns his violence against life's metaphor in a rebellious move.

The crisis of Makak's life is the assertion of his personality. But where do his muscular demonstrations take him? To a new captivity, a physical incarceration that is a remembrance of being captured and manacled in the ship on the way to slavery. This does not dampen him and reduce him to a defeatist, but enables him to transport himself in a dream to the land in which his

identity can be reasserted. He is, in his new captivity, equated to a “mange-ridden habitual felon” as the Corporal describes Souris (214). Thus his character gets a multiple bearing: black, poor, and saviour.

Jöran Mjöberg argues that “Makak's character also bears symbolic similarities with Christ: in prison, he is followed by two robbers, and from Good Friday he is able to look forward to the moment of resurrection on Easter Sunday. The prison can be understood as a symbol both of life itself and of colonial rule” (1). I agree with him, for severally in the text Makakis compared to Christ and the Corporal actually refers to Souris and Tigre as the two thieves (20). But by giving him this proportion, Walcott creates in him a possibility for the resurrection of the faith of the black people from the death (symbolised by their yearning for a return to Africa) to a life of self-acceptance (as participants of a unique ethos) and hence cultural revival.

Walcott gives Souris and Tigre to howl like animals so that he can introduce the racial theme in the play:

*[Inchoate, animal howling, leaping and prancing]*

#### CORPORAL

Animals, beasts, savages, cannibals, niggers, stop turning this place into a zoo! (216)

This sets the stage for the exposition of the pseudo Christian myth and—in the racial agenda—it is intertwined with the Darwinian Evolution theory that has been perpetrated by the white man to segregate the black man:

## CORPORAL

In the beginning was the ape, and the ape had no name, so god called him man. Now there were various tribes of ape, it had gorilla, baboon, orang-outan, chimpanzee, the blue arsed monkey and the marmoset, and God looked at his handiwork, and saw that it was good. For some of the apes had straighten their backbone, and start walking upright, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind, and that was the nigger. (216—7)

It is not that there is confusion on the two Eurocentric myths but that their infusion in the drama creates in those words spoken by the Corporal a confluence of both; it is as if they are one and the same thing and that they work together towards the vilification of the black man. From the onset of the play, the two myths get a unity of purpose: the inferiorization of the individual of colour. That they are uttered by a mulatto highlights the depth of their incursion in the social fabric as well as the irony that permeates the character of light skinned: that they do not realise that they are in league with their darker brothers in the eyes of the colonialists. This diatribe of the Corporal is levelled at Makak whom he derisively calls “the Lion of Judah” – a title that is reminiscent of Christ – a symbol used by the black people in the diaspora who saw that a saviour would come to redeem them from the ‘Babylon’ of slavery and gloom.

Makak has been defamiliarised: his humanity has been transposed and he has got a new identity; he is now an ape, a construct of the colonial agenda. His theatrical alienation is based on three things: that he has so far been denied speech, that he is in an unfamiliar setting (a cell), dressed in an odd

way (an old cloth wrapped on his shoulders), and the appearance of the full moon, sets him on a trial against the background of racism. The moon as Edward Baugh in *Derek Walcott: Memory as Vision—Another Life* says, is, to Walcott a “ ‘yearn[ing] for whiteness’, a ‘yearning shared by his generation’ ”(21). Thus with the appearance of the full moon, Makak becomes the personification of the African-Caribbean (and indeed the whole African diaspora) dilemma—whether he is human or whether he only serves to enhance the humanity of the “Other” by craving for things that are white.

The first words that Makak speaks are a manifestation of his longing for an identity, a home, and the taking away of the devastating conditions that have denied him of his individuality. “Let me go home, my Corporal” (218), therefore establishes Makak as a character actively reclaiming his lost honour, and acknowledging the presence and role of others in his devastation. When asked whether his home is Africa he replies in French Patois and even later he does not respond to a question on religious affiliation until it is whispered to him by Souris in Patois. The theatrical technique used by Walcott here is the Brechtian distancing effect in which one identity is played against another and hence achieving a tableau of diversity in the individual; an acknowledgement of a multiple identity.

Asked what his name is, he says: “I forget.” (219). This is a reality, for Makak – in the expansive sense of Africanity – has had so many names that his real name could have been forgotten. Getting a name, a label, is getting an identity and thus in these two words, Makak effectively deconstructs the space in which alienation is to be viewed; he gets characteristically marginalized. He is tired of the whole inhuman doctrine of racism. What he says of his race is even more significant: “I am tired” is what Robert J. Willis in his essay “*Dream on Monkey Mountain: Fantasy as Self-Perception*” rightly calls a “declaration of long-standing prejudice” (152). This prejudice is a racial

one; that since he is black, he is inferior, and by accepting to be reminded of his inferiority, he plays into the white man's myth. Makak is "tired" of being discriminated. But why does Lestrade ask that question when it is obvious that Makak is black? It is on one hand a pointer to the redundancy of the whole phenomenon of racism, and on the other, it is a fork-tongued dramatic irony levelled at Lestrade himself. The biblical allusions to the suffering of Christ at the cross draw a satirical parallel between Him and Makak as well as a dichotomy of cultural domination.

The dramatisation of his quest for identity is captured in the mock trial in which Souris and Tigre are given the roles of judges. This is another case in which the Brechtian model of the *Vrefumsdungeffekt* is employed in the text to interrogate thematic alienation. In it, Lestrade is a counsel of the court and the two thieves are made judges. Their identities are revised in this dramatic moment: they are unfamiliar to us as the audience and their actions and words in the mock trial are removed from the reality of their "normal" lives.

In the mock trial staged in the cell, the identity of Makak is declared non-existent. The 'counsel' argues: "My lords as you can see, this is a being without a mind, a will, a tribe of its own"(222). To me, this is the process of dehumanisation: that the African man did not exist before the coming of the white man, or else did not know that he existed. Reference to his voice coming "from a cave of darkness, dripping with horror" (222) configures an inhuman character; it dehumanises Makak.

When the Corporal says: "These hands are the hands of Essau, the fingers are like roots, the arteries as hard as twine, and the palms are seamed with coal. But the animal, you observe, is tamed and obedient" (222), he is alluding to the unblessed son of Isaac. In this biblical story, the rightful

blessings were for Esau, but the younger son, Jacob whose name sounds like the Hebrew name for a “cheat” took his birth right. When the cheated Esau asked his father whether there were no blessings for him, he answered: “I have already made him master over you, and I have made all his relatives his slaves.” (Genesis 27: 37). This myth of the Israelites was used by the whites to justify their enslavement of the black people, adding that Esau was hairy (therefore ‘monkeyish’) and black. Slavery is used in this context as a ‘taming’ instrument, for the black “evil” man is violent, perhaps a notion derived from a perversion of the words of Isaac to Esau: “You will live by your sword, but be your brothers slave. Yet when you rebel, you will break away from his control” (Genesis 27: 40). Violence for the discriminated man becomes a tool of emancipation, but in their imperial treachery, the white men break the will of the Africans and tame their desire to rebel in to a desire to be white and therefore acceptable.

A dramatisation of the ignominy to which the black man has been reduced by a process of cultural deracination is presented to us. It is akin to the Pavlovian “classical conditioning” whose ultimate was an elimination of the sense of self-worth, and the creation of an “automation”. Makak responds to commands from the Corporal and his responses are punctuated by:

#### CHORUS

I don't know what to say this monkey won't do,

I don't know what to say this monkey wont do. (222)

In this seemingly simple chant is endowed the whole concept of colonialism: that the white man is the one who has mental prowess and that the black man listens and does – a process of the creation of unequals and hence entrenching the master-servant relationship. The master has a linguistic



ability whereas the latter is mute: an ape responding to the commands of a human being. In the charges that the corporal as counsel levels against him, we see the deliberate creation of the typical colonialistic dichotomy. Where Makak had accused Felicen Alcindor as being “an agent of the devil” the counsel says he is a “God-fearing, honest Catholic” (224). Makak’s dream is described as “vile, ambitious and obscene”. His noble call for a return to African is seen as a defiance of Her Majesty’s Government, a call to the villagers to join him in “sedition and the defilement of the flag” (225).

He has therefore been labelled a rebel, rebelling against colonialism – an act paralleled to the rebellion against God – justice and humanity. But his dream is one of emancipation, of freedom and of the perpetuation of the brotherhood of all men. He even dismantles the image of God as white. He sees this as a continuation of the colonial myth that creates God as white and thus black becomes devilish. For the black men to be children of God, they had to be “washed as white as snow” in a culmination of their yearning for whiteness. His “taking” a photograph of God and seeing “blackness” is a recreation of that myth, indeed, a removal of the conceptualisation of God from being a premise of the whites. Lestrade’s claim that Makak “had lost his faith” is a hangover from the colonial confusion.

I hold the view that Makak was being “arraigned in court” for affirming his identity, for his call to a rejection of the colonial instruments of cultural humiliation, for calling against the leprous habits of the whites and maintaining that he can heal these by asserting blackness. He is to me a fulfilment of what Walcott says in his 1965 article “Leaving School” that a figure that obsessed him is that of “a charcoal burner/woodcutter/human embodiment and distillation of the landscape”. Makak is such a

figure, one that represented “the most isolated, most reduced race-containing symbol” (qtd Baugh 6). But, on the reverse, his reduction is a dramatic technique that, instead of marginalizing him, makes him prominent in an admirable rather than pitiable way.

Upon being accused of crimes against the Empire, Makak pleads madness. But his claim to madness is, to me, a further distancing affair, he distances himself from the conception of what normalcy is and therefore when he explicates his dream, we look at it sceptically. Here, unlike in dramatic instances in which it is the audience that judges and distances itself from the marginalized character (who claims to be normal), it is the character who distances himself and the audience has to grapple with this new reality: a man accepting his madness and hence discrediting himself.

Makak sees the white God as female. This is an inversion of the hitherto propagated image of God as a man—an old, white, long-bearded man—and thus reversing the images that have been used to entrench the white empire. The image of this white woman is superimposed on the “full-moon”. The full moon therefore becomes a construct of his endearment to the whites. In making his disposition, Makak paints a picture of a social recluse; an individual who has wilfully and deliberately obliterated his identity, and who for thirty years has never seen his image:

#### MAKAK

.....

Is thirty years now I have look in no mirror  
Not a pool of cold water, when I must drink,  
I stir my hands first, to break up my image (226).

By this he insinuates that he is not even aware of his own physical identity. His identity and its appropriation becomes to us something peculiarly absent for he seems to have lost faith in himself, drawn, as we learn at the unfolding of his dream, by his desire for whiteness as the social ideal. His dream constitutes “a white mist in the mind” hanging “like cloth from the dress of a woman”(226). This implies that it is the doings of the white man that have led to his purported madness. When this mist rises for the earth “like the breath of the dead on resurrection morning” he finds himself walking to burn charcoal. He thus is not dead nor is he resurrected but he is engaged in the mundane activities of life. He cuts the figure of a being left out by the movement of time—a fixture on the landscape of time. He then is a cast of the eternal man, comparable to the Greek myth of Sisyphus who was eternally pushing a rock up a hill only for it to slip off and roll down to the bottom. But again there is a sense of double-speak; that the ideas of the whites, decadent as they are, imbue him with a new vigour, a new energy, a new urge to search for and assert his identity.

This identity at one level is created as his recognition of and closeness to nature. In his dream, his hearing and/or remembrance of nature: “drum of the bull frog, the blackbird flute” (227), makes him rethink his essence in the world. His ugliness becomes not an impediment but an enhancement of his assertion of identity:

### MAKAK

.....

And this old man walking, ugly as sin,  
In a confusion of vapour,  
Till I feel *I was God self*, walking through cloud (227).

[Italics mine]

At this point he has almost actualised his desire for an identity, for in his earlier on despised ugliness, he has realised the ultimate: Godliness. But this becomes elusive for he immediately encounters a contradiction to his search:

### MAKAK

I see this woman singing  
And my feet grow roots. I could move no more.  
A million silver needles prickle my blood,  
Like a rain of small fishes.  
The snakes in my hair talk to one another,  
The smoke mouth open, and I behold this woman,  
The loveliest thing I see on this earth,  
Like the moon walking along her own road (227).

His near achievement of an identity by a closeness to nature is swept aside by the realisation and adoration of the beauty of whites—he is a deception of his real self; he no longer has control over his life. As he remembers the dream the apparition appears on stage but is dramatically seen by Makak and the audience. The “judges” and the “counsel”, in their righteousness, do not see it. Souris mocks this reality of a white control on the lives of the people by calling the apparition “darling” and rolling on the floor in jest. When the Corporal, remarking ambiguously on either Souris’s mockery, or Makak’s genuine bewilderment, says: “My lords, is this rage for whiteness that does drive niggers mad.” (228), he is condemning the whole racial question that has been made the talking point of cultural enervation.

Makak's search for identity gets a new fatalistic twist. His face is now seen as "old and cracked" graced by the kisses in sleep by the "lady in heaven". The apparition becomes a heavenly being from which he asks for assistance to fight his enemies:

"Appear to my enemies, tell me what to do?

.....

Help poor crazy Makak, help Makak

To scatter his enemies.... (228--229)

His conception of his enemies seems to have changed as well, for he is in league with the goddess and those who are against his attachment to her are now his enemies. He cuts the figure of the African abandoned by their white mentors now crying for their coming back to help them further entrench their power among their people. The sweet song of the goddess erases his monkey (ape) characteristics: "I feel my back straighten" (229). He becomes a man only by association to the white. His identity therefore is appropriated in reference to that of whites. This is a false identity for the strength, the tempo, and the energy that he gets is momentary and is exhausted by a dance:

.....

I began to dance with the splendour of a lion,

Faster and faster,

Faster and faster,

Then, my body sink,

My bones betray me

And I fall on the forest floor,

..... (299).

Thus his redemption is not to be found in the craze for what is white. Relying on white peoples' power and definition to cleave ones identity is pointless for it only comes to a façade, a smokescreen of reality. The two 'woodmen' who collect him from the forest floor are symbolic of closeness to nature (read as embracing African values) that is going to be his only redemption. The real world of the cell dissolves into the dream world. The removing of the cells transforms the space of the stage to a primeval forest in which he plunges and explores the return to the African ways as the only salvation for the Afro-Caribbean – and again a damnation to those that fake or use this sense of 'African' for their own convoluted ends. Africanity is thus given a spiritual conceptual basis.

Moustique, on being told the dream later by Makak, does not understand but sees it as a confirmation of Makak's feverish madness. In this explication, the white apparition knows Makak by his real name – a name he does not use. This is a show of the colonial presumption of knowing, and naming. That he does not use the name is reminiscent of the inability to articulate his identity, that he has submerged his personality in an action akin to voluntary alienation. Her sitting him down and *talking to* him presupposes a one way communication, a silencing of the black man, a transposing of a wordless unease to the black man who must do what he is bid. It is not surprising that she knows every thing about Makak yet asks him to tell her about his life so that she can accept to stay with him; by doing this she confirms the role she adopts as an interrogator of Makak's self actualisation.

She ignites Makak's reorientation into society: "She say I should not live so any more, here in the forest, frighten of people because I think I is ugly. She say that I come from the family of lions and kings" (236). Makak believes her yet she is a contradiction of his quest for identity. His retreat to the

mountain was a running away from the ideal that the whites had created of themselves and to which he could not measure up to due to his “ugliness”. Makak insists that this lady’s talking to him—and thus the call for a return to Africa—is not a dream; that it is reality whereas Moustique, his alter ego, sees it as a fixation with whiteness, a tragedy as well as an untenable situation for Makak: “Which white lady? You is nothing. You black, ugly, poor, so you worse than nothing. You like me. Small, ugly, with a foot like an “S”. Man, together two of us is minus one” (237). This is a negation of the individual’s identity, a negation of the self, based on racial and material factors. But Makak’s search is the antithesis of this predicament – he wants to recapture the dignity of the black man. And my argument is that much as this dignity is premised on the black man overcoming the racial as well as the economic infirmity, it can be realised in a dream in the realm of the theatrical. Daizal Samad, in a paper “Caribbean Dish on the Post-Colonial Supper Table”, argues:

Makak is tempted by the vision of a White woman to seize upon his kingly African heritage. His reward would be to taste of her white flesh. But Makak is an old West Indian wood-cutter, and he may don princely African robes and live out his dreams of revenge, but his power is both illusion and delusion. He is, after all, still being manipulated by the White woman, the symbol of European cultural tradition. It is not simply a case of becoming white, of bleaching the mind and the skin; rather, it was to become more African than the African while contorting the mind ignominiously to European rhythms. On the other hand, Makak is tempted by Moustique, his friend on Monkey Mountain, who offers yet another absolute model by which to live and kill: capitalism. But Moustique is Black. These are the kinds of demons, in the end, which the West Indian must wrestle and vanquish. (1)

The problem that Samad does not realise is that the wrestling of these “demons” is complicated by their incompatibility to the search for identity and that the two are so close to Makak that they are distortions of his alienation. Both of them have “invaded” his “home” in Monkey Mountain and they are a personification of the colonial aphorism that Makak has sought to alienate himself from by retreating to the mountain.

Moustique sees this craze for white women as the bleak predicament of the black man: “The misery black people have to see in this life.... A man not only suppose to catch his arse in the daytime but he have to ride nightmares too” (238). This disparagement, this articulation of the reality of cultural disorientation, as if mocked by whites, is dramatically cast away by the yells of pain when he is immediately bitten by a spider: “A big white one with eggs. A mother with white eggs. I hate those things” (238). It is as if the spider, a symbol of the white empire, is bent on destroying any rebuff to the schemes of its high priest (the white goddess) on Makak.

Makak sees the spider bite as a bad sign, a signal of defeat and death but Moustique interrogates the superstition and questions the rationale behind such religious beliefs. He sees them as being an acceptance of the white dictum of savagery for the African. By taking out the mask, Moustique intends to flaunt the objectification of Makak’s dream before him, to shake him to reality. But it is this that catapults him into his dream of return. He wants to “walk like he used to in Africa, when his name was lion” (240). Moustique satirises this, and reiterates the factors that dehumanise the blacks: “Which woman ever look at you, once, much less a white one? .... Where two black not-a-red-cent niggers going?” (241). The defeatism that hangs around these two questions is a restatement of the whitewashing of the pride of the Africans and the apparent negation of their own



worth as a people. Yet they are juxtaposed with the rendition of the dream and therefore structurally place Moustique as the black antithesis of the dream of disalienation. The dream has its enemies from within the racial divide and this makes it not African *per se* but pro Caribbean.

Makak's words as he soothes Moustique, inscribe a reality that the conscientious man has to live with: "Come, don't mind the spider. If we dead, little one, is not better to die, fighting like men, than to hide in the forest?" (242). The apparent call to a violent assertion of their identity is a reflection of the alternative to subjugation that many oppressed people around the world have had to take. Their march, much as Moustique does not understand or appreciate it, is easily rationalised as an occupation in the Walcottian appropriation of the desire to negate what is white by embracing what is black: acceptance of suffering and misery as being important to the definition of the black self: "A man not a man without misery" (242). This is misplaced because the pursuit of identity is a negation of the misery that Moustique talks of. This rationalisation is not in concurrence with history, it is not a pointer to identity being a collection of the shards of memory.

Moustique distorts and commercialises dream of embracing Africanity. He is, by doing this, the shadow of the death of the dream of identity. That is why he is confronted by Basil at the market, unmasked and beaten. Makak finds him at the threshold of death. Moustique implores him to forget the dream and go back to Monkey Mountain, for out there, in the market, is the spider. At his death, Makak sees a "black wind blowing" – a signal of both the coming death as well as of the rising of black consciousness. Makak is frightened by the vision he sees in his eyes, the vision of the disorientation of the dream of return. The demons and spirits that bear him away upon his death keep the company of "the figure of a woman with a white face and long black hair" – the figure of

the goddess who is directing Makak in his dream. At his death, Moustique has found unity with the perversion of the Eurocentric agenda of disorientating the African. Makak sees in the eyes of his friend the futility of his dream. This is because he fails to accept the multiple nature of his identity: that he is an African disoriented by white men's inhumanity and thus a subject of both cultures – one filled with nostalgia and the other seducing him.

Makak is out of his dream in a significant dramatic interval in which the use of violence as a redeeming engagement is foregrounded. This dramatic interval (Part II Scene I) builds up the desperation of his search for identity as well as drawing more thickly the line of the racial and socio-political dichotomy. The delirious state of his dream has reduced him to a pitiful state:

### SOURIS

He's been there moaning, muttering to himself, since he come in. Sometimes he sing, some times he letting out a cry, some time even a little dance, and half the time in gibberish. (278)

This delirium is cast against a background of oppression and defeat by a set of white unfeeling laws that deny the black man his rights which in the words of the Corporal have been reduced to: "the inalienable right to life, liberty, and three green figs. No more, maybe less" (279). There is no freedom for the imprisoned felons, yet the Corporal talks of 'liberty'. This is the irony of the life of the Caribbean people who have freedom only in the theoretical sense, a freedom that cannot be actualised for they arte perpetually in a cultural prison. Makak's offering to pay the Corporal money so that he can release him is a show of the despair that they face. It is also a last step, a step of compromise, which is one step away from violence.

It is Tigre, in a deceptively money motivated scheme, who puts in Makak's mind the idea of violence as a tool of liberation. Makak's desperation is worked on by this scheme. Tigre uses the symbols of the lion and of the moon and plays the two against each other. He asserts that it is the violence of the lion that determines the fate it is going to have: "The jaw of the lion is the opening and closing of the book of judgement" (283). Violence thus becomes an instrument for the harnessing of identity and thus a liberator. Tigre argues that when the moon is in quarter, the Africans say: " That the jaw of the sun, that is the lion, has eaten the moon. The moon, that is nothing, but... a skull...a bone..."(283). Thus, the African identity is more attractive than the white's identity for the white totem is devoured by the black man's violence. Makak is so excited by this that he gets into a trance and unsheathes a knife, which is a bold fighting move:

#### TIGRE

No. No... friend... as the moon unsheathe its blade, I swear by the crucifix of the handle, the old black gentleman has unclouded.... (284)

The guilty so painted by Lestrade in his submission as counsel in the mock trial is erased by the possibility of violence as a means to liberation. Makak, in Fanon's words, exchanges "the role of the quarry for that of the hunter"(*Wretched* 41). He wants to get even with Lestrade. Since his pleading madness was not heeded, he now feels that he can claim superior status by the use of violence. Tigre has realised this potential in Makak and preys on it. In his scheme, further, Tigre advises Makak to pretend madness at the time the moon is coming out again. The juxtaposition of the two is a call for us to weigh the strength of each in defining the self: the call to violence *vis a vis* the sublimation to

whiteness. Walcott seems to be condemning the two though for they are not instrumental in the delineation of identity. They are but parts of the whole that is Caribbean identity.

Tigre's statement: "And the old man over there, groaning and coughing like a sick lion all night ... between him and the moon they keep me up" (285), is a further illustration of this misnomer. It panders to the slavery-old myth of the African being marooned between the two peaks of cultural dilemma – that of the Europeans and that of the African's. His lack of sleep is a lack of rest, indeed a lack of identity. He does not know what to do and it is clear that both of these things share his attention and his identity is divided. He does not identify with either and he sees both as being a distraction for his search of comfort.

On stabbing Lestrade – and thus satisfying his thirst for blood – Makak momentarily celebrates his new lion-identity: a confused and confusing identity for then it has erased from him the sense of humanity:

#### MAKAK

*[Holding Tigre and Souris and near-weeping with rage]*

Drink it! Drink it! Is not that they say we are? Animals! Apes without law? O God, O gods! What am I, I who thought was a man? What have I done? Which God? God dead, and his law there bleeding. Christian, cannibal, I will drink blood.... (286).

He is at this moment a heretic whose sacrilege is the result of a lack of something to believe. His central belief in the sanctity of life has been shaken by the violence. But much as there is a vague feeling of a denial of humanity, it is clear that the conception of humaneness is neither of the

Christian God nor of the white man's law. His shedding of the Corporals blood is to him not retrogressive but an affirmation of myth: a process of the negation of negation—using the white men's myth to vilify them.

Their violence has liberated the black people, for they, in Makak's words, "...have come out of their cages to breathe the air, the air heavy with forest, and if that moon go out...I will still find my way; blackness will shallow me...."(286). This is an assertion of their African identity, an acceptance of the animal imagery as a satirical way of rejecting it. The freedom that violence affords them is not transient, but real and tangible: it is symbolic of the negating of the "moon" – which goes out – and an affirmation of "blackness" is in the offing. His saying that he will wear blackness "like a fish wears water" is testimony of the centrality of the black aesthetic in his life, his determination to proudly embrace the ways of his people.

The question that plagues them at this point of the shedding off of their animal (and thus degenerate) identity is where to go. But since they "have tasted blood" their primeval essence has been activated and they trudge on to Monkey Mountain to continue with the dream.

## (ii) Lestrade as a personification of the Caribbean cultural dilemma

In the creation of Corporal Lestrade as a mulatto, Walcott preoccupies himself with the question of the cultural dilemma experienced by the people of a mixed parentage. Much as Lestrade is developed in the stereotype of the tragic mulatto (a miscegenation of white and black parentage,

who, in the cultural context of the diaspora, rejects the black race and is rejected by the white race), he is a symbolic confluence of cultures; the meeting point of the racial hegemony.

There is a great element of superficiality in his claim to the white man's culture of imperial tyranny. Though he refers to the black characters as "animals" and laments their turning the prison into a zoo, he nonetheless shares a bottle of rum with them. This is negating the racial dictum of segregation. He is a caricature of the mulatto, for he does not believe what he says. He is always quick to point at the fact that he is only an agent of the white man's law:

#### CORPORAL

I am an instrument of the law, Souris. I got the white man work to do.... (279)

This seems to deny him the ability to think and to act as an individual. In his taking the role of "counsel" in the mock trial, he represents a myth in whose making he has had no role. He in fact is a consequence rather than a participant of the mythic intimation—that of white superiority rendered in binary opposition to the base sensuousness of the African. He is painfully aware of his predicament: his being straddled between the racial (and hence cultural) divide. The initial illusion he had, because of the lightness of his skin, was wiped off by the reality of white injustice:

#### CORPORAL

Don't tell me about the law. Once I loved the law. I thought the law was just, universal, a substitute for God, but the law is a whore, she can adjust her price. In some places the law does not allow you to be black, not even black, but tinged with black (279-280)

He is tinged with black and therefore has been a victim of the “prostituting” law. The law is a preserve of the whites—they make it and it is supposed to protect them. He is therefore an outsider. His having this knowledge is redemptive to the crisis of his identity yet he keeps on mouthing the doctrine that denies him his humanity. This is a show of the irony that caches his character. He uses the white man’s law as a means of silencing the blacker brothers as well as creating a niche for himself. But since the law is a negation of humanity, then he embodies a falsification of identity. His labelling Africa as a bush, a land of sordidness and darkness, coupled with his reference to “niggers” as corruptible and unprincipled, he is unsuccessfully creating distance.

The assertion: “The law is your salvation and mine” (280), is a confirmation of his subject status and an unwitting acceptance of the white man’s infallibility. This confirms his being a personification of the African-Caribbean individual who is straddled between the two cultural milieus. He is not a “child of two worlds” but the confluence of the Manichean allegory: a sublimation of one culture and a ridicule of the other. This is the genesis of his tragic nature. He is culturally subjugated and his physical reality is a manifestation of his inner turmoil.

He creates distance between himself and other characters in a manner that is characteristic of the petty bourgeoisie. And to live through the turmoil that his life is, he takes the form of an automation, a socially perverted being “without a mind, a will, a name, a tribe of his own”—a ‘typical’ of the invectives he used to discredit Makak’s claim to humanity and hence identity. The use of these words to demean the black people is in stark irony to his own predicament, for he is an

amalgamation of cultures and races and does not comprehend it. When he asks God to remind him “to ask for a transfer to civilisation” (281), he is saying that he needs to go to the white section of the jail ‘where people do not get hungry’ (for he is reacting to the prisoners’ cry for food). But the truth is that he cannot reconcile himself to the reality of the hunger that the black people live with. He is running away from anything that reminds him of this part of his identity.

When Makak stabs him, he acknowledges the change that has come over the black people—a change that has precipitated rebellion. This is realistic of him. But again, he wants to cut down the revolution before the people believe in it: “and before things grow clearer, nearer to their dream of revenge, I must play another part.”(286). This part he wants to play is one of imperial betrayal of the crusade for equal opportunity in life. He wants to go hunt the “lion” that to him is just a “native” who has refused to listen to reason and adhere to the law of incarceration into a cultural prison.

In an allusion to the Sharpeville massacre in which sixty-nine peaceful anti-apartheid demonstrators in a South African industrial slum were shot dead by a panicky police force (most of them in the back as they fled), he joins ranks with the perpetrators of crimes against humanity. He sums up the use of violence as a means of rebellion an unacceptable attempt to escape fate: “Attempting to escape from the prison of their lives. That’s the most dangerous crime” (287). He is at this point the vanguard of the imperial agenda of pacifying the black man and emasculating him so that he becomes accommodative to the scheme of colonisation. He sees the search for freedom as criminal, simply because for him there is no place or rather no cultural location to escape to—except to his own multiple self which he has not accepted. From this point, he becomes a participant in the dream of return to Africa, for the contradictions that characterise his life can only be sorted out in a dream.



But his participation, unlike that of Makak which is a search for the real African-Caribbean identity, or that of Tigre and Souris who follow Makak because they heard him say that he has some money hidden somewhere, is dictated by the colonial agenda of disorientating the dreams of the African. He goes to the forest to hunt for and kill these “animals” who have asserted their identity.

Following them into the forest, Lestrade’s multiple identity is interrogated in a monologue. He is delirious due to the wound that was inflicted on him by Makak’s stab. He is near mad but his madness and realism merge at the moment of truth of his identity. His peculiar mulatto inferiority complex is seen in his referring to his eyes as being a “tawny yellow” as compared to “a calm blue eye” of the white men who acquired and built the empire. Yet ironically he sees his impending death as the fall of the Empire: “the light of civilisation’s finished” (296) and in the same breath sees the moon as “pock-marked” and alone; “a siphylitic crone” (296). This double speak is a characteristic mockery to the idea of the empire that has, in its sickness robbed the world the beauty of being sane.

Basil, the shadow of death, haunts him with his subversion of existence. Like the food that the corporal refused to give to the prisoners, Basil does not exist. He is a “figment of the imagination, a banana of the mind” (297). Basil presents another face to the multiplicity of identity. He overshadows and upstages Lestrade. As the audience we see Lestrade on stage and know that he is more or less dead. His identity is superimposed on death.

Lestrade is declared never to have had a mind of his own and that this is part of the sins that he has committed to his skin (referring to the black race). He is in trial here, imprisoned by the “grave”. His

death is a metaphor of the fact that by his desire and consequent assumption of the white status, he has died in terms of identity. His quest is thus greater than that of Makak who, at the beginning, is in jail. At this nearness to death, he sees the earth as enveloped in innocence and blackness—and mourns that this home was severed away. The acceptance of his mulatto self is paralleled to his accepting the inevitable multiplicity of identity that the African-Caribbean has inherited. He embraces “Africa” as the locale of his new identity and adopts a closeness to nature and to the primeval nature of man: he undresses.

### CORPORAL

*[Flatly, like an accustomed prayer]* All right. Too late to have loved thee, Africa of my mind, *sero te amavi*, to cite Saint Augustine who they say was black. I jeered thee because I hated half of myself, my eclipse. But now in the heart of the forest of Monkey Mountain *[The creatures withdraw]* I kiss thy foot, O Monkey Mountain *[He removes his clothes]* I return to this earth, my mother. Naked, trying very hard not to weep in the dust. I was what I am, but now I am myself. (299)

He is performing the ritual of the return to the Africa of “his mind”. This ritual is symbolic of his new unity with the primeval nature of Adam in paradise, naked, sinless, and innocent. The white man’s culture is hence effectively decried as the devil’s own culture, the culture that takes man away from the beauty of nature. In the paradox of “I was what I am, but now I am myself”, he traverses the racial dichotomy and accepts the racial polyrhythm; he accepts his tragedy of rootlessness and embraces it as his roots, his identity. In thus accepting himself, he is welcomed into the “African”, rather primeval setting, where the moon is hidden.

In this way he earns the identity of the prodigal son; his repentance and “return to the forest” is seen as an acceptance of his African roots. Wally Hastings argues: “Lestrade has become alienated from his black self by his service to the whites but is cured of that alienation when the others make him strip naked; as Makak tells him, “They reject half of you. We accept all.” But is he cured?” (1). This is an important question for then what constitutes being “cured” is a presence of constancy; the total and unambivalent acceptance of “Africanity” and a rejection of “whiteness”—which in turn will imply a rejection of the hybridity of the Caribbean culture. In this respect then he is not cured, for he has not found himself yet. Like the dream adherents, he is playing a role, he has a personal agenda: to disorientate the dream originally envisaged as a dream of the love for humanity as the mainstay of identity. The multiplicity of his identity is retained, for he does not renounce the role of propagating the white man’s law that he took upon himself.

In the play, Walcott has used the character of Makak as the entry point in the discussion of the multiple nature of the Caribbean individual. In “Citation on Receipt of the Saint Lucia Cross” it is said that in his writing Walcott “has focused on the elemental dignity and pride of Afa the fisherman and Makak the charcoal-burner whose persona is fused into his physical environment achieving a peculiar unity of time, place and person” (1). These characters infuse the elements of the African culture in their Caribbean lives, negating the images apportioned to them by the white man by constantly challenging their own black identity. Thus, to some extent, one can say that Walcott has used the existing metaphor of polyrhythm to fashion out an identity for the characters.

In this chapter I have discussed the literary conceptualisation of the Caribbean identity as multiple, that is, multiculturalism as a single Caribbean cultural paradigm. The argument that has been

developed is that the African-Caribbean's acceptance of one, rather imagined, cultural leaning is a social misnomer and hence their quest for identity is not satisfied but is momentarily disoriented. Makak imbibes the myth of African inferiority and seeks violence as a way to assert himself, to escape the prison that he is in and go to Monkey Mountain. Lestrade on the other hand harps on his skin colour and assumed proximity to the whites (read as ideal), and consequently embraces the doctrine of white 'civilisation.' Both of them are disillusioned by their physical and verbal claims to an identity and thus the writer is clearly condemning their pursuits to identity. By thus doing, he authenticates the multiplicity of identity for the African-Caribbean.

This sets the ground for our discussion in the next chapter where the conception of "home" and hence identity will be interrogated in the background of the dream as a metaphor of the location of identity.

## Chapter 4

### Home as an Imaginary Construct: The Dream of Return

In this chapter I am going to focus on the construction of home as a premise for the reversal of alienation. Home will be discussed in the symbolic sense that it has been portrayed in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. We will trace the various “locations” where the characters seek to find home: the symbolic return to monkey mountain, the rejection of whiteness, the embracing of violence and the reality of imprisonment. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that the search for an African identity can only lead one to the realisation that the fragmentation of the Caribbean archipelago is the only home.

It is the location of home (in this case read as the cultural centre, the imperative of identity and self definition) that configures alienation; alienation is based on the magnitude of “remove” from this centre. Home presupposes a place of return, a panacea to which the alienated individual seeks to find fulfilment and thus the construction of identity is based on the individual’s appropriation of this space—seen in terms of either a physical sense or a mental one. To the African Caribbean, home is seen both in the Aimé Césairean sense of “a native land” to which one returns and as a migrating space to which one tries to appropriate mentally.

Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is a complex play whose major strength is the erasing of the “boundaries” between the physical and the mental location of home. The use of the dream as a way of going home serves the dramatic purpose of uniting the physical home with the imagined space. Makak’s words point out this aspect: “What power can crawl on the bottom of the sea, or swim in the ocean air above us? The mind, the mind. Now, come with me, the mind can bring the

dead to life, it can go back, back, back, deep in time” (291). This breaks the location of one into one continuum of time.

Rosemary George in her book *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction* argues: “the word “home” immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection” (1). In my discussion I will look at “home” as the movement away from what George calls “patriarchal hierarchy” for this aspect creates a sense of domination whereas in the Caribbean the quest for identity is of necessity a negation of domination, a rejection of the “father figure” that has been created by the colonial paradigm of the colonialists seeing the colonised as “children” or as subhuman. But home will also mean a search for comfort, for fulfilment. Her argument is that “... the basic organising principle around which the notion of the “home” is built is a pattern of selected inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing the difference. Homes and home countries are exclusive” (2). This implies that by creating home, the character excludes another with whom they do not share a home and includes another with whom the character shares a home space. It is pertinent for this discussion that we see home as what she calls “a “private” space from which the individual travels into the larger arenas of life and to which he returns at the end of the day”(11), as well as an imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography. Home therefore is a place where “one is in because an Other(s) is kept out”(George 27).

The use of the dream as a restitution of home makes the plot of the play to be complex. The dream and the reality are so mixed up that the real and the imagined lack distinction. Commenting on this aspect of the play, Wally Hastings says:

The play has a rather complex structure, beginning in the police station as Makak begs to be released, then moving in Scene One into an apparent flashback to the events that brought Makak there; or is this his recounting of the dream? Then Part Two begins back in the jail, with the murder [sic] of Cpl. Lestrade and the flight - this seems to be a return to the present, with the re-establishment of the initial situation, but may not be; the epilogue again returns to the site of imprisonment, with Tigre and Moustique both restored to life, and Moustique's more prosaic interpretation of Makak's situation. This complexity may lead us to wonder, what is real? What is fantasy? (1)

Hastings wonders because he is most probably basing his comments on the logocentric form of playwrighting. But to me, Walcott's play decenters logic and appropriates the reality of fragmentation by translating the quest for identity in the West Indies into a metaphor of riveting reality and dream. In the discussion that follows, the two aspects will be treated as flip sides of the same predicament: that in either reality or dream, there is a realization of a "home" – for what can not be realized physically can be realized in the dramatization of a dream.

Makak's "going home" is thus a negation of the West Indies as a home. He sees Africa as his home and includes the jungle and primeval nature of Monkey Mountain as a construct of what he sees as his African heritage. This could not be realised in argumentation and thus the use of the dream is to defamiliarise the construction. But as I am going to argue, this space keeps on migrating: the dream and the reality interact in such a way that home becomes identified in a multiple number of ways.

### **(i) Monkey Mountain as a Symbol of Home**

The perception that Makak gets of home as Africa is merged, in the dream, with Monkey Mountain. At the genesis of his dream he has a white mask beside him. In the theatrical space this is important in that he does not see it but the audience perceives the central role of the idea of the white myth invading the space of his consciousness. He seems to have lost his memory. He does not remember what the day is neither does he remember the donkey Berthlitha. From the onset, we are thus faced with an anomaly, a near amnesic who, by this marginalization, becomes an “unreliable” source of the African-Caribbean search for identity.

Again, we see a character whose identity can only be constructed in the sense of rememory, in the sense of dreaming only about the things that he wants to achieve. This does not mean that he is impractical, but that the selective memory is forced by the long-standing myth of black inferiority, and of white domination in the colonial stage. By using the metaphor of “Monkey Mountain” Walcott is interrogating the myth as opposed to fighting it. This interrogation is presumptive of creating not a counter racial hegemony, but a mockery of the mythic debasement of the white man from the way of love for the humane.

His excuse for not going to the market is that he is mad. We immediately become aware that normalcy does not constitute going on with the mundane activities of life like going to the market to sell charcoal. For the alienated man, normalcy connotes a coming to terms with this alienation, affirming the self in a social milieu that denies the black man his humanity. Yet Moustique, the twisted foot “devil” affirms Makak’s saviour status—that he inspires confidence in the black people: “You was the only one to make me believe that a breakfoot nigger could go somewhere in this



world" (234). Then his madness is almost immediately equated to a sense of pride in the self and an orientation of the distorted personality of the Afro-Caribbean. And in this way the 'logic' of Makak's madness is erased.

Going to Monkey Mountain, the two hermits take a short cut avoiding the winding road in which the reality of being an African in the Caribbean is enacted in a different scene. A bridge to the mountain takes the proportions of a symbol of their alienation from the hybridity of the society that they live in. The bridge is wooden and it crosses over white falling water. The connotation of bypassing the white cultural hegemony is evidenced by this seemingly innocuous reference to a bridge. It is so narrow that "two men cannot pass" (234). This is a show of the inadmissibility of white and black in the dream of return. That going to the mountain can only be realised by a dire acceptance of what is essentially African.

Harnessing what is African is paralleled with the rejection of what is Eurocentric. One of the major cultural elements that need to be rejected is religion. Christianity is portrayed as a negation of African religious concept, a burden to the African-Caribbean, a thing throttling the dream of return. The religiosity of the black man is ridiculed at three levels. One, it is clouded by the imminence of death both as a physical reality (Josephus is dying) and by the dramatic presence of Basil, the figure of death. Secondly, Moustique and the peasants bastardise the arch prayer of Christians—the Lords prayer. He intermixes its wording with a quest for satisfaction in this world. The light that the peasants have lit so as to rest and pray in order to exorcise the sickness become to Moustique a symbol of the devil: "...when we see you all coming, with all those lights, I thought it was the devil" (244). Christianity thus is portrayed as an impediment to the search for identity.

Thirdly, prayer and religion is shown as a grandiloquent plan of impoverishing the people; it is used to beg. Moustique begs for food using this “bastard” prayer so that he can go to fetch Makak. Josephus had been bitten by a snake and he could not be treated by a white doctor nor healed by the prayers of a priest. This is a sign of the despair, the hopelessness that has stricken the black people. It is a pointer that when the black man is at the cross roads, the elements of white civilisation cannot help him. Makak, whose work is selling cold charcoal to make a living, now uses hot charcoal to heal the man. The alienating and unsatisfactory work has been revised and it becomes of use – it heals the sick.

The African-Caribbean has been caught in a circle of poverty arising out of the alienation from the production process and it is only by a revision of this that he can find identity and sustenance in life. The incantation he does at the coming out of the moon is one that elevates him to the level of a saviour of oppressed people. In an allusion to how Moses was called by God, he prays that he be transformed into a burning bush. The distorted allusion elevates him to God and the Africans in the diaspora thus become Moseses—called to liberate themselves from slavery. He sees the people as trees:

.....  
like a twisted forest,  
like trees without names,  
a forest without roots!  
.....(248)

is a confirmation of the rootlessness of the people, their homelessness. The location of home becomes a traversing of history—from darkness of the present, across the seas in the belly of a boat [slavery], across the living fire in their lives “as trees under pressure”, to their “worth” as wounds in the hand of their God (the burning coal in his palm), whose fire will heal their wounds being bitten by “the serpent”. In this incantation, Makak effectively locates the home of the people in their constant quest for identity. He calls for the people to believe in him, which is equated to believing in themselves. The belief in the self is thus presented as the redeemer of the individual from cultural enslavement.

Despite his call, the people cannot keep on singing and their faithlessness becomes a hindrance to their redemption. Like Makak earlier on they suffer from unbelief: “These niggers too tired to give anything again. Remember, is you all self that is your own enemy” (250). Josephus’ wife is a demonstration of the ever-grateful “nigger”. Even though her husband is not healed, she brings food and other gifts to Makak and pronounces her resignation to a religious façade: “...what God will, nobody can change” (250). It is this kind of resignation to fate manned by a “foreign God” that Makak is against and he proposes that they rely on themselves and in the religion of self-love if they are bent on disalienating themselves.

Josephus soon sweats and Moustique grabs the opportunity to declare Makak the chosen of God, the saviour who will take the people home from slavery. But he soon distorts this when he embraces the Christian materialism and declares himself Secretary-Treasurer—“like Saint Peter” (251). The dream transmutes and it is the material gain that becomes important. He even goes so far as the excess of removing Basil’s hat, which is tantamount to unmasking “death”. Basil remains to

confront Moustique at the “crossroads in the moonlight”. These crossroads are also symbolic of a spider: “A white road. With four legs. A spider. With eggs. Eggs. White eggs.” (253). This is reminiscent of the danger that the unbelief in the dream, or a distortion of it, portends. As well it is a show that the healing becomes a celebration of cultural hybridity, located as it is at the crossroads—a confluence of a white man’s infliction of pain on the black man who seeks to be white. “Death” promises to visit, and this time to the man who takes over the colonial agenda of amassing wealth at the crossroads of the black man’s faithlessness.

Makak’s dream of redemption for the black man is distorted by its disassociation from the twin evils of racism and poverty. This is Moustique’s realistic intimation to Makak’s idealism: “Pray for the world to change....when faith alone will move mountains. Pray for the day when poverty done, and for when niggers everywhere could walk upright like men” (254). This is a condemnation of detaching the quest for identity from the issues that the white man used to dispossess the black man. The elimination of poverty and the negation of the racial ignominy are central to the attainment of a meaningful sense of self. At the point and time of healing, the moon looks “like a plate that a dog lick clean” (255), and hence Makak’s believe in the white goddess is seen as a belief in emptiness, a vile, obscene nothingness—for that belief does not interrogate the reality. Going back to Africa, where Africa is constructed as “home”, needs to be based on changing the socio-economic and political predicament of the blacks.

The people take to excesses when they see Makak’s healing power as a panacea for their suffering. They see that by accepting Makak’s dream, they will be saved from the dread of death that hangs around their lives. Makak’s healing power becomes mythic, and as a result principally of the fluidity

of the oral text, he gets currency among the people as a saviour. But the extend of the dehumanisation of the people is still a reality, even against the promise of liberation. The entry of Lestrade and Pamphilion, two agents of neo-colonial oppression, decentres the logic of the people's life. The pistol and the law, weapons of repression, make the people incongruent to the quest for humanity. The corporal, like the white goddess, knows more about the people than the blacks themselves: "... they paralyse with faith. They cannot do nothing, because they born slaves and they born tired" (261). The impotency of the people is a dislocation of home. They become a pale resemblance of what they would have been were they human enough to have dignity and creativity. But Makak's call for the people to believe in themselves has awakened them and they agitate for their humanity, an agitation that turns into a bloodbath.

Lestrade captures the ambivalent truth of the black people: that they are cripples and thus believe in miracles, they are slaves and so they believe in freedom. It is clear that he does not consider himself as part of the Africans. This is ironical since he is unaccommodated by the white culture,; it only exploits his vanity—and worse still he knows of this aspect of the cultural homelessness that he suffers. Despite Lestrade's sentiments, the people enact Makak's dream like a celebration of their new religion of healing. Their enactment is a rejection of the elements of exploitation and enslavement through the process of production—for the production they are engaged in is alienating in that it does not benefit them.

The entry of Moustique is the heralding of tragedy. He is an impersonation of the dream, an impersonation of Makak, and a concoction of the myths of whiteness and Africanity. Greed spoils his appropriation of Makak's dream. But we see in his protracted ridicule of Lestrade a reversal of

roles—and this is the location of cultural identity, the location of home. Finding the self can only be in endeavouring to be the victors, to be the movers of motions, to be in charge: to sing “monkey” to the whites and their underlings. In expounding the dream of Makak he reconfigures the natural beauty and economic endowment of Africa and juxtaposes it with the colonial dictum of meaningless titles that the betrayers of the dream are given by their masters: “...listen, listen, Inspector of milk and corporals of the law. One billion, trillion years of pressure bringing light, and is for that I say, Africa shall make light” (268). He is affirming the spirituality of the African as being better than that of the whites and hence able to liberate the people.

But the sight of a spider shakes his belief, and Basil, the agent of death, the carrion fly of the decadence of the colonised, unmasks his assumed identity. In response, Moustique points to the ambivalence of the “niggers” identity, the pregnant obsession with identity: “god after god you change, promise after promise you believe, and you still covered in dirt; so why not believe in me. All I have is this [*shows them the mask*], black faces, white masks!” (271). It is the instability of their believe, their lack of faith even in the things that can liberate them, that is their undoing. His reference to “black faces, white masks” is a close allusion to Frantz Fanon’s book *Black Skin, White Masks* whose thrust is the alienation of the black man from his own race to the decadence of desiring to be white and by thus doing, unmaking his own humanity:

The black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level...  
There is a fact: white men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (9).

It is for bringing out this truth that he is killed. But the chorus that escorts him out of stage suggests a new location of home – the grave:

### CHORUS

Death, O death, O me Lord,  
When my body lie down in the grave,  
Then me soul going shout for joy.

Makak is confused for then the dream – or rather the misrepresentation of the dream – has cost him a friend and it portends a fatalistic stance: that it is only in death that the quest for identity can be realised. But Monkey Mountain holds the promise of rebirth and death does not distract him.

Makak discovers the “abscess” that eats into the psyche of his people. He decides to go to Monkey Mountain, which is a harnessing of the primeval nature of the African. Walcott makes this movement possible by breaking the dream and in an outstanding superimposition of fantasy and reality, staging violence against the Corporal—the personification of the tragedy of the black man in the diaspora. The corporal is fatally wounded and the three gaolers escape to the mountain. Makak is at home in the forest. It “speaks to his blood” and he can read every leaf. When Souris is hungry, he proposes that they smoke ganga. He has a symptomatic primeval nature, he plays animal. He is, in the words of Tigre, “Half-man, half-forest, a shadow moving through the leaves” (289). He is at one with nature. Souris, the rat, is a typical alienated man, a man without a sense of belief, a heretic who sees Africa as a place of darkness—ala his childhood:

### SOURIS

How you will take us to Africa? What we will do there? In the darkness, now that I can see nothing, maybe, it is there I am. When I was a little boy, living in darkness, I was so afraid, it was as if I was sinking, drowning in a grave, and me and the darkness was the same, and God was like a big white man, a big white man I was afraid of. (290)

He parallels Africa's darkness with the darkness of childhood. His insinuations pander to the three myths of the superiority of the white man: that of equating African's to children, that of seeing the white man as a God-like figure, and that of Africa being a place of darkness and death. He is propagating the colonial view of Africa as the antithesis of civilisation. But he is satirical, poking fun at this edifice of "civilisation" that thrives on misinformation and the dehumanisation of the "other" capitalising on a warped religious inclination and a system of education that teaches self-hate: "...that is what they teach me since I small. To be black like coal, and to dream of milk. To love God, and to obey the white man" (290). The culturalisation of the black man is such that he learns to despise himself and to strive towards being white.

Against the background of this disorientation, Makak envisages a going home that is a premise of the mind. Home is thus located in the imagination. It can be made real by being mentally appropriated. This is the central idea of the drama – going home without relocating from the Caribbean. It is contrasted with Tigre's expectation that he gets money or a tangible thing from the dream of going home. When Makak says that they would find "peace" in their return, Tigre asks: "Peace? Piece of what?" (292). The pun dramatises the rift between the perceptions of the two with regards to home: for Makak, it is the psychological satisfaction, whereas for Tigre, it is the material gain.



Makak's Christ-like character is enhanced by several things: his having two thieves by his side, being crowned with a twisted vine, making Tigre a general and assuming the poise of a king and calling for allegiance and directing his "armies". In this way, he has dramatically distanced himself and thus got a new identity as an African king. He anticipates to decimate his enemies and to emerge the victor, repossessing the pride of his people, and hence "taking them home".

With his assuming of this new role, the peace and closeness to nature that had existed in Monkey Mountain is replaced by wanton violence. Lestrade, who had been welcomed into the company of those who had "arrived home" is soon victimised. Souris sees an opportunity for revenge and attacks him. Stopping them, Makak speaks in a double-edged way—decrying as well as embracing violence: " I came unto my own and they turned me away.... Now they must be taught, even tortured, killed" (301). This is a statement of Makak's own debasement of the dream. He, like a vengeful god, judges and violates the people who worship him, and thus becomes a disappointment to the quest for identity.

Tigre who is following Makak (like Moustique did at the onset of the dream), for the money that he thinks Makak has buried somewhere, is a second source of disappointment for the dream. His belief is ephemeral and unfocussed. He demands at gunpoint that he be shown where the money is hidden. This angers Makak and he says that he has forgotten the way:

MAKAK

*[Holding out he mask]* I was a king among shadows. Either the shadows were real, and I was no king, or it is my own kingliness that created the shadows. Either way, I am lonely, lost, an old man again.... We are wrapped in black air, we are black, ourselves shadows in the firelight of the white man's mind. (304)

This serves a double purpose: one, to show that the illusion of the dream is thrown off by the reality of inconsistency and betrayal, two, that the dream is its own reward, that there is nothing beyond the dream—that it is believing it that is the acme of the acquisition of identity. The messianic fervour of Makak is now lost and for a moment he bends to accepting the inevitability of alienation, the mythical position of the white man as superior to the blacks. Makak says that he has left “death, failure, disappointment, despair” (305) in the awake of his dreams. This immortalises him in the eyes of the audience, he is a free spirit, a winner even at the advent of adversity.

### **(ii) Home as the Exclusion of an(Other)**

Violence is the common way in which the adherents to the dream seek to exclude the other from their construct of the space of home. Noting that Tigre wants to exclude him from his “home” Makak dares Tigre to shoot him. But Makak is saved from participating in this rather banal violence by Lestrade. In a dance of war and death, a dance of the resuscitation of violence as a redemption to the dream, a dance adjudicated by Basil, the Corporal kills Tigre. When the two are circling each other, one defending Makak and the other savagely in pursuit of a need to plunder, Makak says: “locked in a dream, and treading their own darkness. Snarling at their shadows, snapping at their own tails, devouring their entrails like the hyena, eaten with self-hatred. O God, O gods, why did you give me this burden” (305). The darkness is the disorientation that the black people are living in and Makak feels sad that he is burdened with a dream for his people.

And “like the gold and the silver scales of the sun and the moon” the tribes disintegrate. This is seen in the killing of Tigre by the Corporal who now becomes a mentor of the way, a propagator of the dream. But he is indeed playing “another role”—that of the bourgeoisie exploiters—for in his sentiments, we find that he is prescribing to the moon and he is a slave of history and the law. He has become the “good man” doing the work of cleansing Africa for the Africans: “Bastard, hatchet-man, opportunist, executioner. I have the black man work to do, you know,” he says. He is playing the disinterested foreigner: “I have no ambition of my own. I have no animal name” (307). He is the representative of the white bourgeoisie laws, the epitome of neo-colonial ambivalence, and the leader behind the scenes. The dream of return has been disoriented by his insincerity.

The unbelief, the embracing of Christianity, the commercialisation of the dream, the usurping of the dream by selfish characters, and the violence serve to make the return to Monkey Mountain an untenable return home. Home then becomes the exclusion of (an)other. The characters seek to outsmart each other so as to be the sole custodians of the dream. As well, one’s “commitment” to the exclusion of those who have previously maligned Africa governs the definition of who is “truly” African. Makak thus is enthroned as a “true” African king. But his enthronement is a prototypical scene of the black kings’ ostentation. He has inherited the colonial structure in which Basil (the dark ambassador), and Pamphilion (the tax collector)—enemies of the dream—still play a pivotal role. Makak’s disillusionment is subtle; he is realistic. He sees himself as “a shadow”, a “hollow God. A phantom” (311). The corporal is in charge: he is the real God. But in his sophistication, he hides behind the “confusion” that is the law (tribal or Roman) that does not take into mind the concerns of the people, an unjust law feeding the stream of colonial impunity.

In the mock trial, important people in Western history are condemned for their role in marginalizing the black people. Those who are dead need to be “removed” from their historical significance, for their doctrines were of consequence in the dehumanisation of the black people. The tribes recommend that they be hanged. At present, the living who are part of the wrongs done to Africa await their fate, fearing revenge. The architects of oppression and cultural debasement of the black man have send deputations, invitations and indulgences. The Pope, the President of the USA, the Ku Klux Klan, the Republic of South Africa, the UN and the Nobel Committee give offers of recompense. But these offers are rejected. The argument is that Africa is not to be taken for granted, not to be glossed over like an ignorant child. The irony that abounds in this scene is that the rejection of these offers of recompense is a negation of the dictum of love for all humanity, which is a primary aspect of the dream. On the other hand, it is a cleansing by humanity of the evil that persists in its midst.

One important factor to the analysis of the mock trial is that it is the two “devils”, the apparition and Moustique, who are physically present to be tried. Moustique gets a chance to castigate Makak. As a prisoner, he faces a second death. Makak cannot face him for in Makak is the betrayal of the dream of love for humanity and an acceptance of the self. Now that he has power, he has a new set of friends—opportunists who drive him to excesses of bloodshed and killing: he is now, in the words of Moustique, “really mad. Mad, old and blind” (315). This is due to the hate of whites. It is at this point that he has become “a real ape”, “a puppet”—taking white men at their word and practising the same racial impropriety that they have used to distort the search for a humane paradigm of relations in the world.

The white goddess who was first to impart in the Makak the need to have pride in himself is now condemned by the Corporal as “the wife of the devil, the white witch. She is the mirror of the moon that this ape look into and find himself unbearable”, “ the mother of civilisation and the confounder of blackness” (319). He implores Makak to kill her since she is the white light that paralysed his mind and brought him to the present state of confusion. The dream now has been distorted, its noble ideals have been decried as a “confusion” and its significance fades in the light of the “present god” declaring it a disorientation. He tells Makak that if he does not kill her, he will be “ infected with humility”. He therefore needs to kill her so as “to discover the beautiful depth” of his “blackness” (319). The implication that black identity can only be got by killing off the enemies of the race is objectionable. In condemning her, the Corporal speaks as the “law” and yet concedes that she is the colour of the law, of religion, paper and art. His logic is therefore convoluted and is in keeping with the role that he is playing—that of an instigator of confusion: he is “singing monkey” to the search for identity.

When Makak beheads her, he is naked, assuming his Adamic nature. He celebrates freedom in that he is now free to live, free to go home, free to remember his name with pride, free to integrate in the hybridity that is presupposed by the Caribbean cultural milieu. He has gone back to paradise and to the primeval beginning where a unity with nature is symbolic of being humane.

### **(iii) Home as the Reality of Imprisonment**

When the dream comes to an end, the location of home has not been settled on. It is still in Monkey Mountain but the character has to struggle with the reality of the imprisonment of both of the spirit as well as of the body. Robert Willis argues that in the creation of a Makak who remembers his name after the dream, in his making him become “a new man”,

Walcott dismisses revenge as uncreative. Makak, after experiencing his dream, realizes he is a man, a man living off his own land and its native resources. He has found his own roots, which are just as sacred to him as the white man's roots are to the white man. It is his self-imposed image that Makak has learned to dismiss, not by seeking revenge on the oppressors such as Lestrade but by seeking in himself a positive image. His racial identity has been made up of a complex historical legacy, but this should not deter him from creating a new vision of renewal with dignity and purpose. (154)

But what he fails to see is that the complex historical legacy has situated Makak's home in a prison. It is the cell that is the real home of Makak – metaphoric of the black predicament as is carved out by racism and poverty in which they live. Makak remembers his name but still confuses the realm of dream and reality. He asks for General Tigre and General Rat (Souris) and still believes that Moustique is dead. Like every one else he still has the mask of the white woman, but he does not want it any more.

It is the sentiments of the Corporal that unearth the real dilemma of the coloured people in the Caribbean. He thinks of blacks as savages and animals and says: “it have no salvation for them, and

no hope for us” (324). The situation of the blacks is desperate and unredeemable since every time there is pressure being exerted on them; even when they dream, their dreams are overtaken and distorted by the white men or their agents who perpetuate inequality and dependence for economic and political reasons. But there is a new revelation:

What Makak recognizes after he awakes from his nightmare-dream is the lesson he learned from the horror of the blacks' actions in Africa--tribes slaughtering each other--that human cruelty is raceless. Makak has come to realize that the first step in getting rid of his fear of everything white is his need for freedom and identity. The world can and must dispossess prejudice at all levels. Makak has given us a new meaning of life. (Willis 154)

Walcott shows that the entrenchment of prejudice is the negation of the self and the embracing of different cultural precepts such as the desire for whiteness or the inordinate immersion in a religious belief. When he juxtaposes Makak's dream with the singing of the Christian sisters, the significance of the dream and its saving grace is made as impotent as the religiosity of the alienated man.

Alienation thus is an overbearing situation that creates disillusionment and the people turn either into alcohol or religion. Moustique summarises the fate of the black man: “Sometimes, in life, Corporal, a man can take no more...he don't know why he born, why he suffer” (325). For the black man it is not “sometimes” but all the time. The alienated man always struggles to find a foothold in life, to dream of getting an identity, to get it in the dream and to go on living. When Moustique, upon finding Makak in jail, asks the Corporal to let him take Makak away, the location of home for the Afro-Caribbean is most explicitly promulgated:

MOUSTIQUE

He is a good man, Corporal. Let me take him where he belong. He belong right here”

### CORPORAL

Here is prison. Our life is a prison. Look, is the sun.

The black man ~~life~~ is a perpetual prisoner since he is a victim of cultural hegemony. He can only dream about his identity and wake up to the bleak reality of his rootlessness. The rising of the sun is a symbolic redemption of the black man. The paleness of the moon at night portends only dreams. The sun heralds freedom. As Edward Baugh argues, “the sun and its fire, the ‘simple flame’, have come to dispel the miasma and acedia and enervation... to replace the moon, symbol of hallucination, whiteness, the fascination of European traditions” (76). Thus the rising of the sun brings in its wake freedom for the Afro- Caribbean.

Makak is let to go home as the two thieves, who provided a mythic aura in his dream, are demanding for food. He sees himself as a prophet betrayed and mocked but is alive, living in “the dream of his people”—the dream of harnessing identity. Home then becomes a place to go back to: “this old hermit is going back home, back to the beginning, to the green beginning of the world.” (326). It is thus a constructed as a return to the origin of humanity, to a primeval ease; it is a negation of suffering and an embracing of love for human kind, and Monkey Mountain provides a dramatic space for both exploring the dream of return as well as the metaphor of the closeness to nature that mediates peace and love. Slavery, colonial imperialism and neo colonial impunity are all contrasted with the purity and unadulterated innocence of the mountain.



In this chapter I have explored the construction of home as the point of departure in the quest for identity. The characters are looking for a place to call home; a point to return to, a space that embodies their dream of identity. Makak is sure that this place is Monkey Mountain, but this location's symbolic premise keeps on shifting with the characters embracing an aspect of their quest for fulfilment: money, religion, revenge, violence and racial pride.

The quest for identity therefore is in constant mutation; it is shifting its focus with reference to the characters' perceptions of what and where home is. The constant disorientation of the dream is a reminder of the transient identity of the black man in the diaspora who has got a new identity; a new configuration of his colour – that even though he be black, his racial and cultural identity is a celebration of a new cultural reality of hybridity. It is the celebration of the polyrhythm of the Caribbean that is the real harnessing of African-Caribbean identity. The suffering that the African-Caribbeans go through as a result of their quest for identity is only a mental thing for they already have a home in the Caribbean and their yearning is based on an imaginary location.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

We set out to find out whether the alienated African in the Caribbean encounters problems in the search for identity. The study was focussed on how Derek Walcott treats the theme of the search for identity in his dramatic work *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. The assumptions that we made at the beginning were that the alienated character suffers inhibitions in the search for identity and that the basis of a character's cultural roots is important for the reversal of alienation.

In the first chapter of the study we found out that the Caribbean is culturally a polyrhythmic society. It is shaped from the fragments of the cultures of the diverse people who people the islands. Thus, any search for identity must take cognisance of this diversity. The African Caribbean has a different configuration of identity that is neither African nor European but which is a patchwork of the diversity that exists. Notably, we discovered that the writers in the Caribbean look at the identity of the African in the Caribbean archipelago as having been shaped by the experiences that they went through: capture from their original homelands, the torturous journey in the middle passage, enslavement, and colonialism. Attendant to this are the factors of poverty and racial discrimination. These issues have made the individual feel a longing to go back home to Africa so as to reverse the situation.

But the persistent question has been, what is the location of Africa? Is it a mental space or is it a physical space? In our study, we found out that Derek Walcott provides solutions to this question in two ways. Firstly, he looks at identity as multiple. This means that he does not portray the African-Caribbean as being aesthetically shaped by an exclusively African culture, but by being a sort of a

bastardisation of the cultures of the people with whom they live and by the experiences that they have gone through. Makak and Lestrade provide the economic and racial paradigms upon which alienation is arches and provide case studies in the search for an identity. Both of them are social recluses; Makak alienated from the people by his feelings of inadequacy and Lestrade alienated from the people by feelings of superiority. They are then demonstrations of the predicament of the African in the diaspora whose identity is multiple.

Secondly, Walcott portrays a situation in which the negation of alienation by going back to the primeval beginning, going back to nature and to the “innocence” of the romantic conception of Africa (symbolised by Monkey Mountain) is riddled with problems. The dream of return, which is premised on the recapturing of the lost sense of humane self-actualisation for all peoples, is disoriented by the movement away from humanity. There is violence and a preponderance of killings, revenge and manipulations of the dream by the partakers of the journey. Makak’s beheading of the white goddess who inspires the dream and who makes him start having pride in himself as a human being coupled with the removing of the African robe is a negation of the polarities of European and African influences in his life.

Walcott therefore presents a situation in which the characters accept the fragmented inheritance that they have and the reality of their lives as are imprisoned by their being in the Caribbean. The African-Caribbean therefore cannot go back to Africa in pursuit of their roots but needs to appropriate those roots by reconstructing them as elements of the new Caribbean home.

Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is a play that relies on the Brechtian concept of "distancing effect" to dramatise alienation for the Caribbean character. The characters not only live in the fringes of society in their marginalization but also are made unfamiliar by their being participants in the dream of return to their roots. In the theatrical space, these characters are transformed to being restatements of the cultural dilemma and diversity that the African people in the diaspora experience. Makak is portrayed in the text as the personification of the myth as well as the reality of the African-Caribbean. He is the representative of the racist stereotype of the black man as ugly and sinful. It is this that makes him run away from the society's mainstream and to live a hermit-like life in the mountain. He is running away from his ugliness, which he translates as worthlessness and inhumanity. But he soon gets redeemed and turns into a redeemer of the people with his preaching of the belief in the self.

The quest for identity therefore, although elusive and problematic, is actualised in the characters' acceptance of their reality of imprisonment in a polyrhythmic cultural scenario where the elements of the multiple cultural inheritance are integrated into one. That is why Makak remembers his name and instead of being affiliated to one denomination he simply believes in God. This is an illustration of the generic sense of the African-Caribbean identity. In the end, the individual can only *dream* of the "home" they would want to have and *live* with the present reality.

Other aspects of Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* that this study has not dealt with and which are viable as study areas include: theatrical alienation, and symbol and metaphor as aspects of dramatic style.

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