

## Colonialism in Derek Walcott's Select Poems

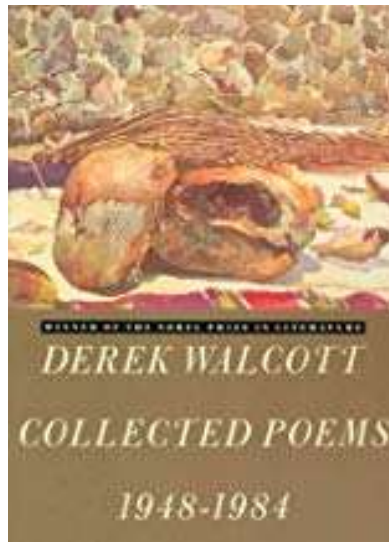
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### Abstract

Derek Walcott, the Noble Laureate of the year 1992, is a Caribbean poet. He explores in his writing the processes of identity making in the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean. The intricate relationships between the colonized and the colonizer and the ways in which the Caribbean self embraces, and is split between different places and loyalties are central themes of Walcott's writing. Colonialism has made a total or partial erosion of the colonized culture, meditation of the identity and subjectivity of the colonized rejection by some elements among the colonized of everything western as a form of reaction and protest against the colonizer. Colonialism has changed everything. The paper is to analyze the plight of the colonialism in Derek Walcott's poem "Names" and "Return to D'Ennery; Rain".

**Keywords:** Derek Walcott, colonialism, identity, colonizer, postcolonial

Colonialism is the dominance of a strong nation over another weaker one. Colonialism is the acquisition of the colonialist, extra resources of a raw material and manpower from the colonies. The colonialist, while committing atrocities against the natives and territories of the colonies, convinces himself that he stands on high moral grounds.

In defense of their actions the colonizers are of the opinion that the colonized are savages in need of education and rehabilitation. The culture of the colonized is not up to the standard of the colonizer and it's the ethical duty of the colonizer to do something about polishing it. The colonized nation is unable to manage and run itself properly and thus it needs the wisdom and expertise of the colonizer.

Colonialism has made a total or partial erosion of the colonized culture, meditation of the identity and subjectivity of the colonized rejection by some elements among the colonized of everything western as a form of reaction and protest against the colonizer. Colonialism has changed everything. In almost all cases of colonialism, the norms, beliefs and cultural values of the larger power are forced upon all the natives by the colonizers. This is because the colonizer believes that natives are "savages" and they need to be civilized. The natives have no choice but to accept these new ways of life.

The colonizers have dominated the colonized. The colonizer claims privilege at the expense of the suppressed or colonized and feels the need to justify this privilege by creating their views towards the colonized. The colonizer becomes a virtuous, civilized man, whose higher capabilities and industriousness make him worthy of his easily achieved position. The relation between the colonizer and colonized was inherently exploitative, hierarchical and conflictual. Fanon says "White men consider themselves superior to the black men and black men internalize this inferiority and don white mask: My blackness was these, dark and unarguable and it tormented me, pursued me, disturbed me, angered me" (177).



Derek Walcott (1930-2017)

Courtesy: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derek\\_Walcott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derek_Walcott)

The purpose of the paper is to analyze plight of colonialism in Derek Walcott's poems. "Names" and "Return to D'Ennery; Rain". Nobel Prize Laureate Derek Walcott, one of the famous Caribbean writers, is noted for his works that explore the Caribbean cultural experience. He is a poet who has been able to map the fractures within the postcolonial West Indian psyche owing to a history ravaged by colonialism and slavery.

Derek Walcott has represented a victim of colonial legacy and he has represented the conflicts in reference to Caribbean region with depth and self-evaluation through his writings in his writings, explores the dilemmas of identity making in the colonial and post-colonial Caribbean. Saint-Lucia, a Caribbean island has faced several centuries of colonialism under French and British control. The intricate relationships between the colonized and the colonized and the ways in which the Caribbean is gashed between different places and loyalties are the themes focused in his writings.

In the poem "Names" Walcott traces the origin of the black races. Walcott's poem begins as:

My race began as the sea began,  
With no nouns, and with no horizon,  
With pebbles under my tongue,  
With a different fix on the stars,  
But now my race is her,

In the said oil of Levantine eyes,  
In the flags of the Indian fields. (1-7)

Walcott tells his race began as the sea began with no languages but now, he is thinking of his race because he can see the colonizer's flag in the Indian fields. His memory turned like acid because the names are held in Valencia glows. Due to the colonization "The African acquiesced /repeated and changed them" (61, 62). Walcott tells he has been proud of his race until the European came there. But now he is not proud because everywhere they are suppressed by the colonizer. Albert Memmi a critic aptly points out, "Colonialism denies human rights to human beings whom it has subdued by violence and keeps them they force in a state of misery and ignorance" (121). Later in the poem, the poet says:

A sea-eagle screams from the rock,  
And my race began like the osprey  
With that cry,  
That terrible vowel,  
That I! (23-27)

The Caribbean people have begun to cry like the osprey. They have begun to adopt the English language and here started forgetting their own history and their names are just written on the sand, which will be erased soon by the sea.

Behind us all the sky folded,  
As history folds over a fish line.  
And the foam foreclosed  
With nothing in our hands  
But this stick  
To trace our names on the sand  
Which the sea erased again, to our indifference. (28-34)

Thus, the history of the colonized is erased and buried. They do not care so much as the colonizer in recording things and keeping them in the archives. In the European culture naming is an important ceremony. The colonizer forces the Caribbean to follow their system.

In the poem "Return to D'Ennery; Rain" Walcott laments on the post-colonial identity of the Caribbean as;

Imprisoned in these wires of rain,  
This village stricken with a single street,

Each weathered shack leans on a wooden crutch  
Contended as a cripple with defeat. (1-4)

Colonialism has not only imprisoned the Caribbean but also crippled them. The poet recalls their life before five years. The phrase “five years ago” (5) reminds one of the beginning lines of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” as “Five years have past, Five summer, with the length of five long winter” (1, 2). Here in the case of Walcott, he recalls the poverty undergone by the people five years ago that “seemed sweet” (8). On the contrary, colonization has changed the situation as “indifferent was this all” (61) with vain human actions. To Walcott that any human action seemed a waste. The place seemed born for being buried there (8, 9). Colonization doesn’t erase the old sorrows of the colonized. Walcott laments:

The rain sweeps slowly to the core of grief.  
It couldn’t change its sorrows and be home.  
It cannot change, through you become a man.  
Who would exchange compassion for a drink?  
Now you are brought to where manhood began  
It’s separation from “the wounds that make you think”.  
And as this rain puddles the sand it sinks.  
Old sorrow in the gutter of the mind (21-28).

The rain is a metaphor used to compare colonization as it keeps into the lives of the colonized, but it fails to change the sorrow but buries them deep in the “gutters of the mind” The colonized are treated as secondary: “You are less than they are for you, truth” (31).

The unpalatable native’s memories of the past have revealed the overwhelming and lasting violence of colonization. The colonizers have plundered the lands of the treated them as animals and brought irreparable loss. Colonialism has created an everlasting wound in their psyche, culture and identity. Walcott has attempted to wrap the memories of the Caribbean past with the napkin of poetic imagination.

The poem chosen for the study clearly show how the colonizers have suppressed the natives. As Walcott has understood best about his people and their personal experience, he is able to portray them lively.

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