



## Derek Walcott's A Far Cry From Africa a Paradox of Hybrid Inheritance

Dr. Nandita Mane

Associate Professor

Matru Sewa Sangh Institute of Social Work, Nagpur.

### Abstract

Colonialism has left an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of the people it colonized. The people who have been colonised identify themselves as the victims. They are aware of their identity as being oppressed. But there are people of mixed inheritance who belong to both the oppressor and the oppressed. People of such hybrid inheritance find themselves at a crossroad. They suffer from the dilemma of constructing a coherent identity. This paper deals with this aspect of identity through Derek Walcott's poem *A Far Cry from Africa*.

Key words: identity, colonialism, hybrid, inheritance.

Colonialism has left an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of the people it colonised. The people who have been colonised identify themselves as the victims. They are aware of their identity as being oppressed. But there are people of mixed inheritance who belong to both the oppressor and the oppressed. People of such hybrid inheritance find themselves at a crossroad. They do not know which side they belong to. The pain, the dilemma and the inner emotional conflict arising out of it remains unnoticed. As a result they suffer from the dilemma of constructing a coherent identity. This paper deals with this and traces the misery and emotional anguish suffered by the people with mixed heritage in the context of colonial and postcolonial experiences.

These elements are chronicled in Derek Walcott's 1962 poem *A Far Cry From Africa*. The poem talks about the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya which was fought between the British colonists and the native Kenyans during 1952-1960. The speaker in the poem has mixed heritage – African and British.

Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa," published in 1962, is a painful and jarring depiction of ethnic conflict and divided loyalties..... The ongoings in Kenya magnified an internal strife within the poet concerning his own mixed heritage. Walcott has both African and European roots; his grandmothers were both black, and both grandfathers were white. In addition, at the time the poem was written, the poet's country of birth, the island of St. Lucia, was still a colony of Great Britain. While Walcott opposes colonialism and would therefore seem to be sympathetic to a revolution with an anticolonial cause, he has passionate reservations about Mau Mau: they are, or are reported to be, extremely violent—to animals, whites, and Kikuyu perceived astraitors to the Mau Mau cause.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/far-cry-africa>

The first two stanzas in the poem deal with the Mau Mau Uprising but the last two stanzas depict the inner war going on in the mind of the poet. "I who am poisoned with the blood of both, where shall I turn, divided to the vein?"

Walcott experiences shifting loyalties. He has no problem in accepting the British but at the same time he cannot ignore the brutal treatment of the Africans at their hands. Walcott feels alien in both cultures due to his mixed blood. He feels isolated in both cultures and this feeling grows within the poet. The feeling of ambivalence in the poet prevents him from forming an allegiance with either of the culture.

An individual sense of identity arises from cultural influences, which define one's character according to a particular society's standards; the poet's hybrid heritage prevents him from identifying directly with one culture. Thus creates a feeling of isolation.

<http://deshapran.com/wpcontent/upload/2020/09/A-Far-Cry-From-Africa.pdf>

The dilemma in the poet seems more profound towards the end of the poem. The inner cry of pain comes to the surface. It is as if he wants some external factor to help him resolve this complex situation he finds himself in

I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how  
choose  
Between this Africa and the English tongue I  
love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they  
give?  
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?  
How can I turn from Africa and live? (Lines:  
26-33)

It is complex to ascertain from which vantage point is the poem written since he belongs to both groups. In such a situation how can there be reconciliation within the poet. The poem shows Walcott's feeling of dismay and anxiety due to his inability to resolve the paradox of his mixed inheritance. Walcott, within the poem, is unable to resolve his conflict about whose side to take. He is divided due to his emotional turmoil with no escape. The poem ends with the idea of searching for identity. We find that the concept of *Us* and *Other* loses its meaning in the case of people belonging to both the Oppressor and the Oppressed class. As Homi Bhabha rightly

dismisses the idea of fixed identity which follows the *I vs. them* policy since human circumstances can never be universal to all.

The poet finds it difficult to put an emotional and ideological distance between the issue of the colonizer and the colonized. With the shift in his loyalties we also find the shift in his point of view. An array of heart-wrenching questions pours out from the depths of the poet in the end. But his questions remain unanswered. These questions pertaining to life are artistically woven in the poem.

Fittingly, the poem ends in the word "live." For this speaker, questioning and living are one and the same. Forming questions into art—in perfectly controlled lines, displaying all of poetry's power—is how this poet approaches a crisis of identity. Somehow, a speaker nearly ripped apart by inner conflict produces a poem that races up and down but, in the end, seems overwhelmingly whole. Despite the questions, the mission of self-description within the context of history is accomplished.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/far-cry-africa>

Though the poem does not answer any question but raises many questions which are complex in nature. The act of caught between two cultures and belonging to two opposing ideologies causes a internal rift and division in one's heart mind and soul. This betweenness is like a double-edged sword which will cause agony when fallen on any side.

"His often anthologized early poem 'A Far Cry from Africa' (1962), for example, places the poet 'Between this Africa and the English tongue I love.' Even in this poem, however, betweenness is not a solution, but an arduous problem. Even here, betweenness cannot adequately conceptualize the poet's position, since betweenness doesn't necessarily question the authenticity of the oppositions supposedly surrounding the poet." <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/far-cry-africa>

Like many, these are some of the questions that will always remain unanswered. They are the

---

reminders of the deep scars of misery and irreconcilable issues caused by Colonialism.

**Works Cited**

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/far-cry-africa> <http://deshapran.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/A-Far-Cry-From-Africa.pdf>  
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/far-cry-africa>