INTRODUCTION

Writing is precisely the possibility of change, the space that can serve as a spring board for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.

- Hélené Cixous.

Walcott was born in the tiny island of St. Lucia where he did not have much of theatrical legacy worth the name. Owing to acute dearth of interest in drama or rich theatrical experience, he had to forge his own way. Against the grain, he considered drama to be a powerful cultural force and an ideal national theatre to be a significant cultural institution. He was convinced that it could offer fresh cultural ideas for both literate and non-literate countrymen alike. Whatever theatre was there in the islands under colonial rule, it had little vision and power to shape opinion or open up scope for collective participation and representation. Notwithstanding this bleak situation at home, Walcott derived artistic inspiration from his father's background in painting and his mother's interest in Shakespeare. In the Catholic dominated society, in 1958 the twin Walcott brothers were banned by the Catholic Church. Here in the background of his family, Walcott did cultivate his anti-authoritarian stance and also reposed faith upon poems and plays among all art products to generate a cultural consciousness that would break free from the clutches of the popular political, religious and cultural discourses of his time. The indigenous and identifiable cultural matrices in his hands became a hybridized cultural artifact; they retrieved the voices of historically 'mute' groups. Since the 30s, West Indian theatre began to recognize actively the local life, history, indigenous culture. Caribbean theatre attained new prominence as local custom and folklore were increasingly foregrounded. In an interview with Anthony Milne in 1982, he emphatically stated, "It is about time the experience of the theatre be expanded, and certainly it should not contract itself racially. That is a danger here as well. You can see that there is almost beginning to be a division in terms of colour in the theatre"(59). Walcott worked toward the creation of a resident professional company, an ensemble that could equal the production standards of non-commercial, regional, state-sponsored and/or subsidized repertory

companies and "art' theatres throughout Europe and the united States. Walcott's zeal to develop a distinctivelý West-Indian theatre led him to multi-tasking- directing, critiquing, production arrangements and of course scripting the plays. In 1951, his own Trinidad Theatre Workshop began as an expansion of the Little Carib Dance Company. Instead of finding metropolitan production, he sought to create a world- class company. Trinidad theatre Workshop, a product of immense faith, dedication and discipline has been compared by Bruce King with "Brecht's Berlin Ensemble"(qtd. in Burnett220). The Trinidad theatre Workshop proved a major breakthrough by making creative use of all the resources- combining West-Indian play with British, American, other European or African plays which corroborates Walcott's astounding range of creative imagination.

Leaving behind derivative and bland imitativeness of the 18th and 19th century, West Indian literature was entering upon a new epoch, generating self-consciousness and cultural pride. West Indian literature has claimed an independent space for itself and as cultural agency it has its own dimension. And its growing stature, no doubt, gained from the unique career of Derek Walcott. The political and cultural upheaval of the middle of the century generated a new phase of poetry, fiction and drama. Kenneth Ramchand has singled out West Indian literature among the three cultural institutions which have kept alive the inchoate idea of the federation. The political federation and the emerging nationhood of various islands were closely tied to a growth of independent literary writings and many such intellectual enterprises. The literary establishment set off a flurry of anthologies as " Federation meant a way out of the parochialism of the individual islands, meant larger audiences, meant larger audiences and better communication among writers" (Breiner 95). Walcott belonged to a generation stirred by West-Indian nationalism, with independence and federation struggling to take shape. It was an era of literary writings which combined anti-colonial perspective with search for new values and beliefs. Notwithstanding all the local differences, a vision of unified West Indianness was taking shape to subsume all experiences and local differences and contraries. Hence, what was indigenous had to be re- invented to promulgate cultural resistance to the Euro-American cultural hegemony. Assertion of Caribbean identities has been a pressing need along with repudiation of colonialist ascription of New World identities in face of strident colonial scepiticism. In the 1950s rich artistic output of diasporic Caribbean writers, like Lamming, Selvon and Naipaul brought to the notice of metropolitan readers the range, depth of creative imagination of the

West-Indian artists. But the literary journals and local theatrical productions proclaimed Caribbean as a new literary terrain. When poetry and novel were striding ahead, drama too did not lag far behind. It was a time when West-Indian literature became conscious of itself and reflected upon its function. And drama had to rid itself of the cultural baggage of the touring companies. Because he felt the drama will be more widely appealing, a truly egalitarian artistic form, capable of overcoming low literacy level and poor educational opportunities. It was no wonder that local and particularistic drama entailed the audience at home as poetry did not. As a flourishing art form, it sustained the popularity of the oral tradition, local myths. Spanning over four decades his dramas exerted wide appeal; even their international productions have enjoyed local favour overwhelmingly as they speak of the communal predicament and address the public life with greater immediacy.

When Walcott made a foray into playwriting at the age of nineteen, the myth of artistic 'ground zero' still inhibited the creative minds in the Caribbean region. Unsurprisingly, there were very few indigenous precursors available to guide him. In fact, few before Walcott were convinced that the Caribbean stage as a cultural, ontological space could revolutionize images and identities and redefine the socio-economic realities of the Caribbean. His plays were to act as that 'springboard' which Cixous believed would be instrumental in transforming 'social' and 'cultural' structures. Rather than remaining chained to past, Walcott appeared as initiator of drama and founder of local theatre company, he stated his objective in very explicit terms: "When one began twenty years ago it was in the faith that one was creating not merely a play, but a theatre, and not merely a theatre, but its environment" (Twilight 6). In the post-independence years, having no stomach for foreign values, the colonized countries sought to define their culture reactively from within. A small minority of educated people stood committed to active drama and introducing the knowledge of world theatre. To the region's emerging cultural habits and experiences, Walcott's syncretic performance was a new thing, a new artistic experience. His unflagging devotion lasted for two decades before he settled in Boston and involved in his twin role as dramatist and director. It is commonly observed that in his hands theatre had become a sort of "contact zone", and a sort of politico- cultural forum in the sense that Brecht wanted theatre to be. Burnett in her brilliant study "The Theatre of our lives: Founding an Epic Drama" invites a comparison of Walcott with Brecht in forging a new language for theater, in drawing upon folk forms and dialects he did not appear to be neither

purely regional nor original. Living in midst of tiny and fragmented community of St. Lucia and with scant experience of serious theatre, Walcott brothers(both Rodnie and Derek) harboured a vision to produce an indigenous, local theater, without the blemish of parochaility. "The dream", as Paula Burnett observes "was to build the society it would serve and which would sustain it" (25). Walcott and his brother identified with relatively small educated theatre-goers, the lives of the majority of St. Lucians – the theatricality and performance-oriented public life, the informal dramas of daily lives that spurred the playwright in him:

"The theatre was all about us, in the streets, at lampfall in the kitchen doorway, but nothing was solemnized into cultural significance" (Twiligt5). Determined to fashion "theatre from theatricality", out of common, quotidian experiences in the streets of St. Lucia, Walcott and his brother Rodney established the St. Lucia Art Guild, performing both canonical and local dramas. It was in their hands that Caribbean drama moved beyond a mere device and technique and began a process of cultural de- coding and re-coding. Shaw had advised the native writers to reclaim their stage in place of English and American plays, shrugging off the modes of Western performance and culture. Because such touring performances were removed in time and space as well as disconnected from its place of origin- in spirit, climate and elements.

In America In the mid60s when Amiri Baraka popularized "Revolutionary Theatre" with hate as its guiding principle, it appeared to be largely a political weapon to overpower the white masters. Described as "theater of victims" it was designed to be an aesthetic revolt. Though Barka's contemporary, Walcott in his dramas resolved to establish "mulatto aesthetics" and it would be rebuttal of cultural separatism, victimology and absolute valorization of the black or denigration of the whites. Unapologetic Afro-centric nationalism was not commensurate with the cultural reality of the archipelago. At a time when indigenous stage productions were rather fledgling, the New World was in J. Thieme phrase "an artistic ground zero", an empty slate. There were little of what could be the model for indigenous theatre. Most of the touring professional performances were European or American plays. Most of theatrical representations of the previous centuries were replete with colonial myths, discourses, legends and stereotypes. Based upon mis-imaginings, the European writings only attested to the imperial visions. So the dramatists felt compelled to initiate the process of cultural re- signification. As Rob Canefield observes, "the theater of the West Indies begins with the masterscripts and with white masque, a

dissemblance of the new world and a disfiguration of Caribbean identities" (289). One of the earliest of such misrepresentations is Caliban, the disfigured image of "natives", inept and incapable of self-representation. At the observance of the centenary year of the British rule, two of L.O.Inniss's works, *Carmelitta, the Belle of San Jose* and *The Violet of Icacos* extolled the British rule and completely denied the presence of the Africans, the group that constituted almost eighty percent of the population. Many other plays are informed with discourses of 'othering', as Gay in *Polly* perpetuates imperialist and mercantilist dependencies upon constructs of the very identities so dispossessed by the Power. Another remarkably successful play *The West-Indian of Cumberland* staged the glorification of the English identity and romanticizaion of the Caribbean life. In the18th century local military groups and travelling companies from England and America found a good market in the islands. There is no denying that since the 19 th century and well into the early decades of 20 th Caribbean theatre was merely a reflection of English and European, British, and occasionally French and American players. And these performances were mostly attended by the upper class society, like the planters, merchants, military and naval officers, govt.officials and civic leaders. The playhouse, established in Jamaica in1682 , catered to the entertainment of the British officers, rather than to the indigenous people or the native slaves. Hence, in the 19th century most of these dramas legitimized and codified the English dominance. Similarly, many travel narratives of this time bastioned the ideologies of colonial othering and discourses of difference. Resistance on the stagespace inspired the performers and playwrights to reaffirm creole syncreticity and thus disrupt "official" narrative and modes of representation staged by the colonial overlords. The use of indigenous folk traditions and mythology, rituals of folk lives and early theatres of resistance produced the mandates for national theatre. Errol Hill's 1960 play *Men Better Men* is epoch-making as it steered away from the mimicry of European styles and deployed oral traditions, street communications and local festivals. Popular cultural events hitherto tabooed by the masters were claiming validity at the hands of the new generation writers. As new cultural contexts began to gain grounds, the notion of culture as irreducible, undifferentiated category became quite vulnerable. By shrugging off the imperial authority, they claimed to be legitimate self-representation. Instead of insular, ghettoized theatrical experience, drama would develop a syncretic model of its own. Thus, it gave voice, as Rob Canefield describes: "not only to the masses of Caribbean peoples

traditionally misrepresented in masterscript but to the very mechanisms that continue to erase and denigrate, enslave and encrypt" (297).

Walcott's immediate predecessors like C.L.R James and Marcus Garvey initiated local dramas which would vent the spirit of anti-colonial movement. But Walcott brothers moved away and made a remarkable departure from the other noted contemporaries. Walcott also moved away from Cesaire's theatre of the 60s as a medium for advancing the political project of Negritude movement. To engender consciousness, drama was to be local, homespun in a more egalitarian sense; it could fuse popular and high art form in a well-crafted plot. It was here that politico-cultural intervention of drama could be instrumental in transforming individual and collective awareness. As Paula Burnett states "the drama was conceived essentially for the Caribbean couched in a verbal, visual and symbolic language directed primarily to the insider"(158). In his *The English in the West- Indies* (1688) traveler- historian Froude had made a demeaning observation: "no people lived in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of his own" (8). For a young artist the rebuttal to such berating was to represent his people locked into negative images and thereby confront discursive construction and ascription of cultural identity. With the coming of independence and the consequent emphasis on promoting indigenous cultural heritage, Walcott strongly felt the need to be original in producing theatre. In the 30s, Caribbean theatre entered a new epoch with more of local history and life made inroads to the stage. Local drama groups and entertainers sought to exhibit more folk entertainment and deployed dialects in a far more dignified way. The focus on indigenous culture brought to the fore native comedians, notably Ernest Cupidon of Jamaica and Sam Chase of Guyana, both of whom wrote and performed comic sketches before admiring popular audiences. In the Hispanic Caribbean too the 50s was the decade of the flowering of drama and the increasing prominence of local aesthetic and artistic parameters.

Produced in London in1936, C.L.R. James's *Touissant L' Ouverture* was regarded as a watershed in Caribbean theatre. In the formative years a very significant part was played by the University of West Indies. The Western-styled education became a determining element of the theatrical form and language in much contemporary drama. Its extra mural tutors helped encourage the writings and publication of local plays through the English-speaking Caribbean and initiated the practice of popular theatre using the vernacular. Like Africa here, too, the

vitality was supplied by a sophisticated use of dance, mime, costuming and music. The political leader like Marcus Garvey colluded with artists like Claude MCkay and Louise Bennet who advocated the resurrection of folk culture in order to confront the misrepresentations. In developing Jamaican sensibility and identity, Bennet prioritized folk songs and stories and patois and some of his dramaturgic devices set precedence for Walcott. More decidedly, crucial roles were played by little Theatre Movement and companies like St. Lucian Theatre guilds or Whiteall players which took big strides "to promote essential Caribbean drama to dethrone the gods of Prosperan masque as they tore away the masks of colonial theatralizations"(Canefield, 297). James was already alert to the misrepresentation of the shanty dwellers, peasants and maroons. Walcott's artistic motif finds a resonance in James's character Moise: "Until you cut yourselves off from all the symbols of colonialism and slavery and be truly independent, you will remain just an old man with a dream of an impossible fraternity" (102). It was James's recommendation that a truly West- Indian theatre must meld the master- script with "the plays about voodoo" (106) - a reconciliation between 'popular' and 'art' form. It was taken up by Walcott as he recommended a stage space which will conjoin Shakespeare with banana play or carnivalized theatre. These early attempts of Caribbeanisation worked in tandem with Garveyism or Africanist movement, espousing fervently African identity as the very core of Caribbean identity. But at Walcott's hand these discourses underwent change because they would advance racialist imaginings and discourses of power- based binarism. The post- independence drama will resist such cultural mooring and distortions of West- Indian reality and experience. Errol Hill's *Man Better Man* used the frame of calypso drama and was peppered with creole songs. Calypsonians, lower classes and folk cultures continued to supply the material for Hill. Hill turned to the folk rituals to mandate a national theatre and identity for the West- Indian drama. With the sweeping decolonialization, plays of Gyanan dramatist Gilkes focused on the struggle for identity in the archipelago and the role of resistance of the artist/ playwright in the re-presentation of West-Indian life. After his resignation from the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, he spent his time and energy from the late 70s to get a foothold in the U.S. theatre scene, staging plays in St. Croix, New York and Los Angeles. On his departure from Trinidad Theatre Workshop, Walcott began his more prolific period with a variety of stage performances and musicals which resulted in more global appreciation. Long before Gilroy's classic The *Black Atlantic:Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), appeared Walcott's creative writings

sounded a clarion call for renouncing all racially inflicted absolutism and cultural purism. He sought to extend the Caribbean frontier beyond geography into culture and underscore the promises of cultural nationalism.

Why 'alter'/ native and What 'alter'/ native?

> the west-indian is not one man, but is a composite, a new mixture of races and creeds.
>
> Derek Walcott.

In the post- independence years, the euphoria over political gerrymandering of republics into federation and emerging 'nationalisms 'had assumed what Anderson has described "a near pathological character"; it spread its roots "in fear and hatred of Other and its affinities with racism" (129). So did happen in the Caribbbean archipelagoes in the early 60s. Like the African countries here could be observed a surge of nationalist and radical movements. As in America, there was notable mobilisation of international black consciousness which inspired cultural products to turn imperial hegemony upside down. Since the 30s, as Black Power movements, Negritude movements and Garveyism were gathering momentum; notion of pure cultural practices took hold of the popular consciousness. There was a proliferation of claims which used race, nation as the categories of identity- analysis. They asserted their being in reclaiming African heritage and passionately exalted African cultural values. Along with Africanist identity formation, they reified racial polarity and monocultural identity with all its unnegotiable insularity. A common agenda that informed such cultural orientations was to resist the politics of assimilation and recognising colour as the source of common cultural heritage and racial origin. Antithetically conceived as rival to the European Great Tradition, it asserted an equally homogeneous cultural condition, grounded itself on the mythically satisfying past known as 'Africa'. As Laurence Breiner says quoting C. L. R James' in *An Introduction to West- Indian poetry*, "The road to West Indian national identity lay through Africa".(142) It underscores idealization of Africa meant to be a counter-sign, the flipside of European cultural hegemony. Passive, subservient relationship to dominant culture could no longer be endorsed by the native artists.

From the beginning, Walcott believed that such cultural monolith will only undermine the hybridized racial identity of the colonized. Ideology of hatred and revenge permeated through the Protest Poetry or Negritude writings, producing a kind of 'reverse acrimony' and Walcott scathingly dismissed as 'repugnant'. If such ideology is transformed into a new aesthetic form, it will result in more propaganda than art-works. Cultural legacies of colonialism and racial mixture and the creolized nature of the population in the West-Indies found race to be inadequate as the sole determinant of unified, stable identity. Naturally, identity could not be pinned down as definitive: "A great deal of modern Negro poetry and prose belligerently asserts its isolation, its difference, and sometimes psychic superiority" (Walcott 64). Hence, Caribbean identity should be conceived as what Said has called "a geography of other identities, peoples, cultures, and then to study how despite their differences they have always overlapped one another through unhierarchial influence, crossing incorpation, recollection, deliberate forgetfulness, and of course, conflict" (330-331). Though eminent poet, like Braithwaite, found in Black Power Movement a scope of forging transnational solidarity.Uncritical acceptance of oppressive raciologies would have locked them as "forever victims, objects rather than subjects". By sloughing off the victim mentality one could get rid of ascribed identities; Walcott knew that the model of Africanism will play into the hands of exclusion and essentialist politics. He inveighs against artificial continuity between distant African homeland and present Caribbean state. Because such aesthetic orientations only helps in the "reproduction of dominant structures in subordinate languages, thereby recreating the hierarchical mechanism" (Chambers73). It was believed that Afrocentrism was cultural remedy for the wounded Black psyche, disoriented by centuries of Eurocentric historical presumption and arrogance. It was natural then only that Caribbeans should re-align themselves with the cultures of pre-colonial Africa. As Brian Crow with Chris Banfield believe such movements were only but "the ideological banner waved by reactionary nationalism, or the tattered cloak that conceals the nakedness of corrupt, incompetent and exploitative politicians" (10). These words express major imperatives for Walcott's strident challenge to ideologically convenient mythology. Instead of harking back to the ancestral memories, Walcott was sensitive to differences of culture and in valourising 'difference', he boldly asserted:

" this earth is one/ island in archipelago of stars" (*Star Apple Kingdom*,20).

To free identity from the boundaries of particularism, from the constitution of it within nativist discourse and Western representational system, Walcott unleashed a polyphonic and syncretic theatre. Much of his work throughout the 1970s excoriates Afrocentric demagoguery in politics and art and redefined Caribbean is to be perceived as a polysemic sign. As celebration for new intellectual horizons began to unfold, the model of static, rigid culture began to wear out; it was found unsuitable for the complexities of Caribbean cultural fabric. It is commonly observed that the Caribbean culture represents a combination of differences that coexist simultaneously and differently To make this re-defining possible the discursive apparatus of eurocentricism must be displaced. Like Cesaire he belived "Theatre should evoke the invention of the future" (184) and in the emerging culture of decolonization drama should play a very constructive cultural challenge and explore space for politico-cultural transformation. The attempts of cultural self- assertion mainly by reclaiming "African" in the West-Indian hybridity oppositional / adversarial nationalism, Walcott knew would be "a transitional and transitory moment in the decolonizing project" (Gandhi122).Beyond binaristic structures of identity, 'authentic 'native' 'genuine' culture and communities was needed to be supplanted by alternative cultural practices. The ethnocentric view of culture and identity provoked strong antipathy in Walcott; he debunked the illusion of 'return home' or 'pure'/authentic state. Idealist return to roots worked in tandem with totalizing ideologies like Nativism and Black consciousness. The heavy presence of black, African population fuelled the strive for cultural recuperation, a communityism which glories in Afro-centred history. In his articles for *Trinidad Guardian*, he vented his growing annoyance with "abuses of nationalism as an excuse for chauvinism in the arts" (Breslin27). In a review of Federal Arts Exhibition Walcott wrote: "I think there are many bad amateurs who are getting a great many fancy notions about national art without getting rapped on the knuckles". They are dangerous and superfluous" (6) because such cultural nationalism got only entrapped in reverse discourse. Constant railing against Western hegemony, the nativists have become its party without knowing it. The cultural nationalism remains in position of counter identification and its huge cry of nation making proves inadequate. Time and time again, cultural nationalism followed the route of alternate genealogizing(170). Hence Walcott felt that new narratives, multiple in time and ensemble of polyphonic voices must be forged to articulate what Bhaba calls "the heterogeneity of its

people". As Shabine, Walcott's famous persona of "*The Schooner Flight"* proclaims that the nation must be re-imagined along the multiple heritage and contradictions at the origin.

"I have English, Dutch and nigger in me, / And either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation".

(*Collected Poems* 1948-1984, 346).

Staging Transformation, Generating Consciousness

To see ourselves, not as others see us, but with all the possibilities of the new country we are making.

-Derek Walcott.

Walcott has consecrated his art to his island community because it has nurtured his prodigious literary ambition. As a communal form, theatre addresses the very practical social and cultural needs and the dramatist appears to be transmitter of collective voice. Walcott was always insistent about the transformative and emancipatory power of performance on stage. Walcott's dramas began to be staged at an important historical juncture- the end and withdrawal of European colonialism and beginning of political independence in some of the islands. In the colonized islands, the burgeoning attention to theatre movements attests to the key role of theatre as powerful political engagement. This was eventful moment of enormous transformation- the claim and promise of sovereignty and the rapid advance of modernity. In the post-independence years with the presence of 'boom writers' there was an upsurge of popularity in West-Indian novels. In dramaturgy, methods and perspective, it would be a complete indigenous practice, a powerful cultural tool which can break down the tyrannical web of representations. It was the time for finding the new form for new age, a style of performance that is global in its ambition and also interrogative of political action at home. It was intended to negotiate with the complex,

overlapping culture and the creole realities of his native land. Popular ethnocentric nationalism which underpinned Black or protest literature drew on forms of identification: *us and them, insider and outsider*. Walcott was quite convinced that protest literature or angry writing would only distort the cultural reality and cultural richness of the Caribbean.

Nation-centered conception of culture, as Gilroy argues, is incompatible with the values of cultural hybridity. His words in the context of British Cultural studies seem apposite with Walcott's strong repudiation of political claims of identity:

"Identiy becomes a means to open up the realms of being and acting in the world which are prior to and somewhere more fundamental than political concerns. Any lingering enthusiasm for the supposedly trivial world politics is misguided, untimely and therefore doomed to be frustrating. It also corrodes identity and can profitably be replaced by the open ended process of self-exploration and reconstruction that take shape where politics give way to more glamorous and avowedly therauptic alternatives"(383).

From the earliest days of his dramatic career, Walcott's preoccupation was to release the cultural practices from ethnically absolutist orientations and narrowly culturalist definition. He had strong antipathy towards Black Nationalism and White supremacy and endeavoured to re-locate aesthetics outside any traditional raciological alignments and the world of political rhetoric and vaunting. As he writes in his seminal essay "What the Twilight Says*:* An Overture*"* "… If one went in the search of the African experience, carrying the luggage of a few phrases and crude map, where it would end? We had no language for the bush and there was a conflicting grammar in the peace of our environment" (37). For Walcott, nation is no mere homogenized artifice which can subsume all ethnic cultural, linguistic, gender differences and dissonances. As he was sceptic of growing popularity of ethnic identity model or socially constructed identity, Walcott knew that identity is a process marked by endless negotiations, convergence and divergences. Unlike determinate identity, hybrid cultural identities disrupt homogeneity and essentialist discourses of ethnicity and nationalism. As Shalini Puri observes in her acclaimed critical study *Caribbean Post-colonial* with this observation: "The philosophical burden of the concept of cultural hybridity in the post-modern academy has been to correct purist, essentialist and organicist conception of culture" (19). Post-colonial identity and nation-

formation are obsessive concerns of Walcott's dramatic narratives. At a time when political decolonization and social transformation were going hand in hand, the locus of national culture was bound to be a contentious issue. Legacies of colonialism and rapid encroachment of global capitalism were regarded by Fanon as redoubtable problems of post-colonial experience. In Walcott's poems and plays, in lieu of nationalist narratives, he foregrounded *petit recit*, issues of local knowledge, marginalized social categories- a site of convergence of African, Asian, Amerindian and African origin. No wonder then that the region's literary products merited a "transcultural ethic" (Hall 7) - one that can tear down the false and superficial barriers of ethnic nationalism, race or class. In the Post-Independenc days, 'valid', 'pure 'culture was defined by politics and power. Walcott inveighs the contemporary cultural representational system, racialization of nation-states in explicit manner: "We have broken up the archipelago into nation, we attempt to assert characteristics of the national identity. Everyone knows that these are the pretexts of power if such power is seen as political"("Twilight"21). The cultural legacy of subjugation and oppression persisted even after emergence of the Federation. The experience of slavery, Middle passage or plantation Economy had impaired the cultural existence of the West Indians. At this stage drama had the potential of defining cultural personality of his people and de- mythify the fixation of colonial discourses. Amidst global capitalism, thriving tourist industry, swelling poverty and degraded social life, Walcott envisioned a theatre production that could register a kind of cultural certitude. A commercially viable and artistic theatre will be resistant to increasing fascination with "American" ways of life which had left "a deep, debilitating effect on West- Indian culture and identity" (Walcott 10). This possibility for art and culture was very emphatically laid down by Walcott in his seminal, prefatory essay *What the Twilight Says:* "West-Indian militancy lies in its art"(7) as poverty and commercialization were twin conditions out of which a rich, native theatre tradition will issue. This vision, no doubt, points towards an optimistic future. As eminent African critic Anthony Apiah believed that in African countries, art and culture will continue to flourish notwithstanding poverty and disease: despite the overwhelming reality of economic decline or despite unimaginable poverty, despite wars, malnutrition, disease and political instability(69) . It was in his dramas that Walcott endeavoured to exhibit the worth and value of the calypso, steel band and creole speech and the rich gifts of cultural experiences that he came to inherit; together, they will weave the rich

texture of 'alter/native' plays. They truly attest to the fact that for the Caribbean people capacity for creativity; it is rooted in ageless appeal of human narratives and ideology.

Walcott's birthplace St. Lucia, the mountainous island changed hands between the British and the French, its cultural condition was far from homogeneous- it was a site of co-habitation of Anglophone and Francophone cultures, Afro-Carib folk forms, subaltern cultures and Europeanised cultures, standard English and Creole. It is natural that Walcott defined himself as '*The Divided child'* and proclaimed it to be a favourable condition for creativity. The creolized plurality became an enabling condition for new cultural formation. In choice and treatment of subject matter, his range was remarkably eclectic- from Shakespearean drama to Trinidadian carnival, from Noh and Kabaki to American musical fertilized his imagination. Thus it collapses the cultural distance between Europe and the Caribbean, between the 20th century and other historical periods. New forms of cultural production became imbued with transcultural energy of the non- European societies; they not only appropriated imperial discourse but also rethought difference through connection. Such cultural engagement and negotiations, by crossing boundaries of time and place could initiate cultural transformation. Wilson Harris, Walcott's famous contemporary also believed that cross-cultural dynamic by bridging the divides in Manichean paradigms of cultural superiority holds the possibility for humanizing sensibilities. With teeming intersection of cultural forces, self- estimation of the indigenous people had to be reasserted. At the nascent stage of nation-building, by throwing off the shackle of foreign rule, literature sought to displace the elite nationalist histories. By translating the various legacies imaginatively, producing remarkable counter-narratives, Walcott exhibited how literature can take over when history fails an emerging nation. Walcott, it may safely be averred, believed, like Fanon, that the birth of national culture will follow the awakening of the consciousness with an international dimension to it. By the 18th century, the historian Kathleen Wilson argues, the Caribbeanness was associated with ineffable otherness. Both Naipaul and Froude voiced deeply pessimistic view about the region's banality and non- achievement, its harsh legacy. The wealthy planters represented forms of vulgarity, backwardness and degeneracy that inverted the standards of English culture and civilization. Faced with such reductive, dismissive stereotypes, Walcott's plays exude fresh confidence in turning to alternative indigenous interests and needs; they articulate "a process by which objectified others may be turned into the subjects of their history and experience" (Bhabha 178).

In attaining decolonization, the Caribbean had to emerge not as a failing outpost of Empire but as self- invented world. Walcott was always insistent that longing for a 'pure' origin and uncontaminated culture would inhibit its growth as literary region. The literature of the 50s and 60s endeavoured rigorous examination of the colonial experience, combining an anti-colonial perspective with a search for new values and definitions. Gyanan poet Martin Carter's *Poems of Resistance* sums up two different and dominant tendencies of the literature of this period- stridently political, anti-colonial spirit of investigation of the colonial society and the colonial psyche. For a writer like Lamming confronting the past also meant envisioning future of the native people in self-knowledge and reintegration of personalities. Some mention may be made that these were pressing concerns of Walcott's art works as well. What already began in fiction and poetry, the search for a native idiom and aesthetics, for cultural experiences was accomplished by Walcott's 1949 play *Henrie Christophe* and1954 play *The Sea at Dauphin*. For Walcott imagination was necessity and invention; in absence of systematic, linear history, imaginative ventures could fill the void and deepen the awareness of meaning and significance of the West-Indian world. Possibilities of re-birth of a new community were spelt out in *The Guiana Quartet* of Harris. In these decades poets and novelists were possessed by 'colonial syndrome'. His was a singular aim to capture the nuances of Caribbeanness- in terms of lives, landscape and language. When Braithwaite found creative artistic possibilities in Creole language and folk language and rituals, closely connected to Africanist cultural practice, Walcott maintained a somewhat skeptical and critical distance from black nationalist, cultural and political projects of national reconstruction. The strong hold of revolutionary and radical ethos of the 70s could not sway his dramatist's vision, necessary to preserve and sustain the unique condition of being a Caribbean "the era of the struggle for independence was marked by a corresponding eagerness to distinguish WestIndian theatre from English literature, to establish the former identity as an on-going concern."(Breiner101). Through the creative agent of literature only, the people would emerge from the history of brutalization and dehumanization. By emptying consciousness from both European and African schemata, old automatized patterns and perception of belief, the dramatic narrative could powerfully critique the subject-constitution of the people.

Identity – A Caribbean Problematic

As David Richards has phrased, identity is "the universal lingua franca of contemporary global post-colonial discourse" (9). The term 'identity' has proved to be highly resonant since the 1960s in the Caribbean cultural context; it has been inflicted through various contesting political and social discourses. The proliferation of claims on identity was facilitated by the Black Power and other ethnic movements. Without challenging its basic presupposition and displacing the structure of colonial hegemony, they only inverted colonial racism. Thus, beyond a shadow of doubt, identity is a matter of political signification. Post- colonial writings seek to deconstruct the old, stable codes of identity founded upon the notions of impermeable entities, such as the nation, culture and selfhood. It reconceptualises autochthonous identity as rather 'fluid' and transformative, fragmentary and multiple. It is constantly produced and exists at the intersection between the individual and other determining structures and institutions. A true post-colonial identity can be forged by cultural performances as they defy all borders and promulgate a new selfhood. In his much-anthologized essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall makes a nuanced analysis of Caribbean identity, by repudiating the search of a singular Caribbean essence. Identity thinking, Hall believes, has two poles to it-one a shared cultural experiences and codes that determine the idea of stable, unchanging idea of identity, a sense of sameness, belongingness or seamlessness. This sense of cultural kinship was the central vision of pan African movement and Negritude aesthetics Identity, evinced by such popular cultural paradigms was only fictive unity. This imaginary unity is resistive to the fragmented and dislocated nature of the cultural life. The other pole/ side of the spectrum of identity sees identity as a process of positioning and re-positioning, "a process never completed- always in process".(2)With characteristic suavity Hall explains that far from being eternally fixed in some timeless essence, they are subjects to play of history and culture". (ibid) Leaving behind the enclosure of particularism, identity opens out to embrace plurality. Imaginary reunification over the experiences of dispersal and fragmentation only reifies the particularistic and monolithic identity. But it is punctuated by extreme cultural differences and racial unlikeness; even within one, single island cultural identity appears ruptured. Extreme belligerent relation between West-Indians of African and Asian descent, people of colour and mulatto and their cultural polarities made impossible notion of one nation, one language and one identity. Though certain identity

matrix is tied to race/ colour, nationality, ethnicity or language, colonialism has rendered the old grammar of identity obsolete.

Given the non-synchronous history and complex ethno cultural setting of the Caribbean region, the political ideology of "one nation" or articulation of 'true' national identity appeared inadequate and deficient. Post-nationalistic skepticism to nation has been critical of totalizing knowledge, totalitarian nationalisms and binaristic notion of 'self' and 'other' as new images of cultural identity emerge through dialogue of cultures. It is not an essence or a normative measure that "totalizes heterogeneous selves and subjectivities"(Radhakrisnan752); it prompts an abandonment of essentialist universialist condition called 'race' or 'ethnicity'. The shared history, ancestry or common cultural belongings could not be the ground upon which Caribbean identity could posit itself. Identity, as it is reimagined, appears to be a polysemic sign and scripted against the projection of nationhood. As culture is always on the move here, rupture, discontinuity and overlapping of histories inform the formation of Caribbean states. As R. Radhakrishnan points out in his essay "Postcoloniality and The Boundaries of Identity, "At the very outset the objection might be made that identities are monolithic and non hyphenated by nature and therefore can have only single boundaries, each identity entrenched within its own single time" (750) With official nationalism very much pronounced and populist national consciousness on the rise, the politics of 'return' sought to redirect the post-colonial subjectivity. Nation-centred articulation of identity or ethnic awareness of 'Africanness' could only retrench reductive versions of identity. With the colonial 'other' now eliminated, the newly independent nations began to undergo the internal dissonance of race, gender and caste. Intertwined historical developments which include a wide array of "discrepant experiences", like colonialism, diaspora, neo-colonialism and globalization- all enmeshed with each other made the 'imagined political community" and a shared national identity look very paltry. Walcott in his career as a theatrical director and playwright struggles against the poisonous contagion of the mythical origin. As a post-colonial hybrid he knew "a myth of shared origins is neither a talisman which can suspend political antagonism nor a deity invoked to cement a pastoral view of black life that can answer the multiple pathologies of contemporary racism' (*Atlantic* Gilroy 99).

After colonialism's distorting mirror was removed, it became more urgent to restore people to their rightful sense of selfhood. For the Caribbean people the priority was to reinvent themselves in their own stories and histories: "because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: in reality who am I" (*Black Skin* 23).

The question that confronted Martinician revolutionary thinker Fanon also confronted his contemporary Walcott- when colonialism has psychologically debilitated the people, can the post-colonial subject achieve any kind of agency? At a time of flourishing literary activities, both Lamming and Walcott felt a distance from colonial violence. In his introduction to the *In* the *Castle of My Skin* Lamming makes it explicit: "The Caribbean endured a different kind of subjugation. It was a terror of the mind; a daily exercise in self-mutilation". – (xxxix,xxxvii) as colonial subjects and mostly diasporic, the Caribbeans rehearse the traumas of arrival, the impossibility of re-connection, the loss of cultural origin. Having undergone cultural dislocation, down the years they discover their identity in a state of motion/transition. Amidst the presence of competing discourses of identification, their cultural being on not have the anchorage of racial essence or the originary commonness. Identity bound by restrictive paradigms of 'politics', ' History', 'Race' will reduce the New world artists to a state of "enslavement to truth, the defenders of the history as time".(Tejumola112). Walcott believed that New world writers are compulsive challengers of the idea of "history as time"(9). History, propped up by linear, sequential time constructs the hero-victim duality, binaries like Prospero- Caliban. As he grudgingly pointed out in his noble acceptance speech, "We make too much of the long groan that underlines the past". But Walcott, a passionate opposer to the idea of unimaginative history propounded the idea of history as myth and time as ever-present. Released from the idea of past, Walcott proposes an alternative approach to nationalism which displaces the hold of imperial historiography. Walcott dismisses the linear, time- bound historiography as he goes on to combine strategic appropriation with creative, individual expression. The cultural past-lessness enabled his artistic vision to expand. Only by exploiting partial loss of memory or 'amnesia' of his race, only by constructing what Harriss calls "theatre of creolioty" can the New World be re-invented. And there lies the exuberance and elation of the alter/ native artistic practices.

Power, State and State of Art in West Indies in the 60s

Walcott has likened the West Indian artists with Adam standing before his unnamed world- one who creates without the baggage of history and tradition. With the slate wiped clean, he/ she is free to assert his 'pastlessness' as a privilege. Art as vocation can only recreate the world and redeem its degraded histories, the blight of poverty. And Walcott never backed out from a proud but affirmative claim about West-Indian art and culture. In the wake of ravages wrought by colonialism, slavery and indentureship, Caribbean man must have recourse to compensatory cultural measures. Having been born into "one of the finest and most beautiful of countries" Walcott was avowed to put his native place in colour and rhyme. Because he knew that without transfiguration of imagination, the island will remain 'beautiful but dumb". The island artists had more than a few odds to overcome- lack of good publisher, lack of public funding, true theater building, collector or patron of plastic arts. Finding himself as an artist trapped in a neglected minoritarian position, he proclaimed/responded to artistic responsibilities, "in these new nations art is a luxury, and then theatre the most superfluous of amenities" (Twilight 23-24).

In his oft-cited Prologue to *Dream on Monkey Mountain* Walcott lambasts the crass, state-sponsored commercialization of folk- tourism, fetishization of local popular performances and other nationally mediated structures of power and oppression. Like Anzaldua's Mexico, Walcott's Caribbean was not a merely a paradise of tourists. In the post –independence years the state was callously indifferent to art and culture until it offered opportunities for bringing foreign dollars. This attitude, he described "stubborn, clog- headed indifference". In the post-independence years, the prevailing philistinism, the strong hold of seasonal carnival on popular minds had disappointed Walcott. Against the background of the rise of Black Power movement and the re-Africanisation of popular consciousness, Walcott in a series of essays interrogated the preference of the racially pure art of the fervent nationalists. Especially, his seminal essay "What the Twilight Says" takes to task the appropriation of folk culture by the government. Appropriated by the state, the folk art appears a sign of 'carefree, accommodating culture" and the figures like steelbandman, calypsonian and limbo dancers became stock popular entertainers.

Before he could organize theatricality into disciplines of theatre and stage-performance, he was alert to commercialization of popular and folk forms and the popular performers. Walcott deeply bemoaned that popular forms were trapped in state version of cultural 'authenticity' and supporting new hegemonies: "in these new nations art is a luxury and the theatre the most superfluous of amenities" (16). The idea of a 'unified', 'authentic' culture, made up most notably by folk arts or performances is a fiction the state constructs in collusion with commercial interests. Walcott laid stress on the fact that the island's cultural authenticity is a consumer item for the neo- imperialist powers that economically dominate the region. Walcott' plays have been fiercely critical of the neo- colonial and tourism industry and bastardisation of folk-culture catered for passive consumption of cultural commodities. Like most post-colonial theatre, they hold up to scrutiny imperial system of governance, social and economic structures of power or local post-independence regimes. The contemporary cultural and political needs, promises of budding nationhood were negotiated by such stage performances. A newly emergent aesthetic and cultural semiotic could decode and problematise the colonial representation. Some of his later plays (discussed in the final chapter) register the tension of the traditional, indigenous life and onslaught of modernity- hype of 'progress' and 'development'. The network of globalization and local government's collaboration became a pressing concern in Walcott's later works.

Mulatto Aesthetics, Black Aesthetics and Syncretic Performativity

> After the white man, the niggers didn't want me
>
> When the power swing to their side.
>
> The first chain my hands and apologize, " History"
>
> the next said I wasn't black enough for their pride.
>
> -Derek Walcott (*Collected* Poems350)

As oppositional aesthetic was completely incompatible with the Caribbean's broken histories, different temporalities and creolized identities, Caribbean artists, were driven to formulate Caribbbean aesthetics- a new aesthetics which could articulate their cultural identity and at the same time pose a vibrant challenge to the poetics of anger and protest. What made their situation so unique was that they had no pre-colonial cultural heritage to fall back upon and the process of canon- formation. Robert. D. Hamner points out, " Throughout the social disturbances of the independence-minded fifties and the Negritude and Black Power sixties and seventies, Walcott kept his fingers on the pulse of the times without relinquishing his own aesthetics principles"(7). The Caribbean is in B. Rojo's famous definition a 'meta-diaspora'(15) and all having arrived from 'elsewhere'- Asians, Europeans and Africans- had serious claim to the cultural make up of the Caribbean region. Especially, the artists of Caribbean extraction, inheriting more than one cultural heritage, were torn between present 'home' and ancestral home. A sense of irreparable dislocation haunted them and suffering deprivation and dehumanization, they yearned for a cultural rehabilitation.

A large section of Caribbean writers and intelligentsia privileged the cultural and linguistic tie with Africa and thus posited a unique black difference. Besides, the glorification of peasant culture and shift towards nation language accompanied the politics of the region. Caribbean aesthetic, as Braithwaite defined it had its principal axis in black, working- class culture. It is the 'authentic' culture as it utilizes Creole language and principles of orality. Black Power Movement and its incipient aesthetic evinced a fixed, stable ideological position. As Belinda Edmondson explains its importance in her essay "Race, Tradition and Caribbean Aesthetic", "… Afrocentric theories, while they have done much in the way of political empowerment, have also functioned to simplify complex political allegiances within Caribbean society and without"(8). The political motif of liberating African-based culture from the stifling confines of European mores and claiming authenticity was the guiding motto of Afrocentric aesthetic. In its earliest manifestation, Afrocentricism sought to operate as a counter hegemonic discourse to Euro-centric epistemologies. While it tended to exclude the East Indian, Chinese and other nationalities. In the mid 60s Amiri Baraka, in his play after play defined the aspects of Black Aesthetics and demonstrated the salient qualities like absolute cultural separatism, a denigration of whiteness and passionate valorization of brotherhood. Besides perceiving black as oppositional category, Braithwaite formulated that a writer should necessarily conform to

Afrocentrism. But merely being oppositional, Black aesthetic will restrict Caribbean stage to the ruling paradigm of 'History', 'Race' or "Politics'. As Olaniyan Tejumola stresses, such artists by such rigid involvement will remain "enslaved to historical truth' and be identified as "defenders of the idea of history as time" (8). The fashionable radicalism and betrayal of the people by the state politicians roused Walcott's deep anger. Veering away from this highly politicized and insular aesthetics and orality movement, Walcott relied on syncretisation which allowed more regular borrowing from European canon andfrom oriental cultural tradition. He sweepingly dismissed the proponents of Black cultural nationalism as fundamentalists who engaged in "ethnic hair splitting" and jeopardized the fragile unity of the newly- built federation:

"These are the dividers,

They encompass our history,

In their hands is the body

Of my friend and the future,

They measure the skull with calipers

And pronounce their measure

Of toms, of traitors, of traditional and the Afro-Saxons."(*Another Life*)

In his 1959 essay "The Artist in the Caribbean", C.L.R James rejects the notion of an indigenous West-Indian aesthetic tradition upon which the West-Indian writers must draw. Instead, he emphasizes the essential individuality in artistic process and argues that it is only through the individual literary work of the 'great artist' that the West-indies can achieve national consciousness. Much of this aesthetic vision of James was identified by Walcott. With a scathing indictment of black/ Afrocentric aesthetics, he espoused a counter-aesthetics and a productive, hybridized performative style that can define hybrid West-Indianness. His West-Indian theatre sought to undo "ideological manoeuvre through which imagined communities are given essentialist identities (Bhabha 294). Only by redeeming from the politics of polarity or frames of representation, new identities emerge in praxis and performance. Ideological and cultural apparatuses of imperialism were to be supplanted with a new cultural bonding of islands together- one that can flesh out its rich mixture of genealogies, linguistic innovations, syncretic religion. From his apprentice years, Walcott was adept at fusing from different cultures and

traditions- the folk traditions of the native Caribbean and the high art of the classical European canon, the theatrical conventions from Europe, Asia and other countries- all intermesh in his works. In multi- racial and polyglotic societies, cultural difference could not be expressed in exclusivist, ontological black-white terms. Having both White and Black ancestors and heir to two conflicting cultures, Walcott identified with both African and European ancestry. This dual allegiance is brilliantly described by Seamus Heaney in his essay "The Sound of the Tide". "Africa and England beat messages along his blood" (305). In Walcott's own descriptions, he was "mulatto of styles" and his distinctly defined aesthetics entailed various cultural strands rather than giving voice to "vengeance, recrimination and despair". The Aesthetics of the Whites or uncritical romanticism of African roots and ideological agenda that underlay it were completely parochial. Torn between aesthetic longings and preferences, a Caribbean artist might have found a better alternative in"mulatto aesthetics" to the aesthetics of the coloniser. It was a realization of aesthetics dissociated from racialised politics. Through his mulatto aesthetics Walcott did not mean outright rejection of blackness but only a repudiation of the essential black self or its strident opposition to Western world. Walcott has often proclaimed his schizoid personality; the conflicting racial, cultural inheritances have proved a strongly enabling condition for Walcott, the artist also. As Caribbean is much more than a system of binary dualism; in Benitez Rojo's famous definition it is "cultural sea without frontiers". Not confined to ethnic particularism, mulatto aesthetics laid stress on selective collaboration of the colonized in order to what Mary Louise Pratt has called" to hybridize the codes and episteme of the colonizer" (11). What Walcott describes as "tough aesthetics of the new world" underscores the syncretism and synthesis of local and literary languages, creole and classical in aesthetic terms. As analyzed by Olaniyan, "The aesthetics proper to this space calls… 'mulatto', neither purely black, nor purely white; a hybrid aesthetics free to speak in creole, English or both, or appropriate forms from the diverse cultural traditions that make up the Caribbean- European, African or Asian". (199)

On the level of praxis, Walcott's championing of "mulatto aesthetics" has been borne out by "creolisation' of the stage space. Walcott was convinced that the charge of empty derivativeness or sterile mimicry can be transcended by exploring syncretic space, in coupling of the melody of Europe, the rhythm of Africa. Laying aside the performance paradigms of Europe, without confining to Western theatre spaces, he forged his alternative performance style,

interweaving a range of ethnic and cultural influences which evinces a practice with transformative possibility About Soyinka's rich dramatic texts, J. P. Clark has observed that they had heart right at home in Nigeria and its head deep in the wings of American and Eurpoean theatre (19). Both Soyinka and Walcott depended on imperializing cultures for their theatrical practice. In his earliest creative practices, Walcott defined his role as natural assimilator: "the writers of my generation were natural assimilators. We knew the literature of the empires Greek, Roman, British through their classics; and both the patois of the street and the language of the classroom hid the elation of discovery"(17). From the earliest text he had been diligently careful to appropriate forms and technique from the source tradition and indigenous practices. His dramatic repertoire demonstrates how the Western forms have been a strong imperative for him in his apprentice years, like the dramatic art of Marlowe, Synge, Lorca and Brecht. Walcott's earliest play, *Flight and Sanctuary*, written at the precocious age of sixteen is a testament to the extension of the great tradition. Written in verse, it eschewed west-Indian setting, characterization, language and story line. As Soyinka describes the process in his famous essay "Aesthetic Illusions: Prescriptions for suicide of poetry", Art, dialogue and outrage: Essays on Literature and culture: "When we borrow an alien language to sculpt or paint in, we must begin by co-opting the entire properties in our matrix of thought and expression. We must stress such a language, stretch it, impact and compact, fragment and reassemble it with no apology as required to bear the burden of experiencing"(18). In his essay *Meanings*, Walcott also claims that a theatrical form a distinctively theatrical style which does seek to initiate post-colonial performance praxis ; this newly performative was a rebuttal of the to the political debate of the 60s and 70s : "Creole or English"? The polyphonic dramaturgy was also an affirmation of vibrant cultural tradition amidst all the populist touristic entertainment, shows dished out before the Western tourists. Walcott was aware from the very beginning that such performance style will foster cultural pluralism and will be instrumental in dismantling the hegemonic cultural codes. It will confront the tyranny of a masterful imperial culture or radical political posture. Like Soyinka, he sought to invent intercultural stage-experience; his aesthetic recognize not only the African-derived cultural forms but also other contributory streams that make up the Caribbean. This traffic enables the audience to experience different constellations of beliefs, manners and languages which will destabilize the received definition of Caribbeanness. In *Drums and Colours*, written on the celebration of the birth of West-Indian federation, political

vision of unity is affirmed by the strong presence/ assortment of cross-racial fighres- Ram, Pompey, Yette, representatives of Europeans, Asians and Africans. It is succinctly expressed by Mano:

"That web Columbus shuttled took its weave,

Skein over skein to knit the various race,

Through warring elements of the past compounded

To coin our brotherhood in that little place". (18-21).

Walcott's syncretic stagecraft ran counter to monocultural practices and eventually manage to initiate what Glissant termed as 'theatre of creolity"(25), one that transcends the centre-periphery, insider-outsider, oral-scribal dichotomy. It embodies truly post-colonial response to the historical violence and ruptures of the past, the states of loss, alienation and fragmentation. Inspired by the values of colonial heritage, they re-evaluate cultural identities in a more egalitarian way.

Reading the Caribbean through Glissant's *Poetics of Relatioin*

In his much acclaimed study *Poetics of Relation*, the Francophone novelist cum critic Edouard Glissant has proffered a theoretical model to define the way of framing and highlighting basic notion of plurality and diversity and mirroring pluralized, inchoate world of migrant subjectivities. To Glissant, it seemed that Caribbean consciousness needed to change direction, ceasing its vain attempt to plunge down towards its African roots. Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* is primarily concerned with the ways in which different cultures clash with one another in contingent historical circumstances and are transformed into new and unforeseeable entities. According to Glissant's description: "Relation is not to be confused with the cultures we are discussing nor with the economy of their internal relationships nor even the intangible results of the intricate involvement of all internal relationships with all possible external relationships. Nor is it to be confused with some marvelous accident that might suddenly occur apart from any

relationship, the known unknown, in which chance would be the magnet. Relation is all these things at once" (170–71). In the Caribbean- a rhizomatic identity model is more relevant since identities are constantly made and re-made through intercultural contact or cultural dialogue, In the mid 60s, Glissant's writings focused upon the idea of a 'relational poetics' which laid the ground for the Creolite movement. Since creolisation undermines 'absolutes of identity'(270) or the static polarity of Same and Other, it espouses identity as a shifting term in a network of relation with other. To exist 'in relation' is to be an element of ever-changing and ever-diversifying process in which identity loses it singularity or essence and the claims of rootedness and monoculture are undermined. As a concept, it presupposes a natural openness to other cultures, a non-hierarchial principle of unity, a relation of equality with and respect for the opacity of Other's difference. Identity is always a state of becoming- created through contact with each other. It welcomes opaqueness and safeguards other's difference which resists attempts at assimilation and homogenization.Employing rhizome as a basis, Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* is concerned with the ways in which complex process of creolization operates. Creolization entails a dynamic process in which difference continues to function and proliferate as a constitutive reality and as a basis for thought and action. Freeing themselves from forced poetics, the conception of teleogical and linear history of European traditions, the West- Indian artists must strive for self-expression. The principal of *la relation* is the non-hierarchial principle of unity, a relation of equality -"In Relation the whole is not the finality of its parts: for multiplicity in totality is totally diversity" (Glissant 10).

Glissant's model poetics repudiates conceptualizing other as mere fodder for its drive to reduce everything to the 'same'. Contrary to the ethos of the liberal humanism, it seeks to create a Relation which sees the Other as equal and a presence that is necessary because it is different. Operating within a totality than unity, it also works against the notion of 'essence'. As it needs the presence of all its diverse and equal elements, it is polar opposite of totalitarianism. For Glissant, differences and their encounter do not work toward homogenizing differences upon the resolution of contradiction. Rather it foregrounds the process of identity formation as ever changing and ever diversifying. *Relation*, it demands to be stressed, not only celebrates the diversity of world's cultures but also places a particular value on the internal diversity of these societies that include a number of ethnic communities, such as the Caribbean. *Relation*, between cultures, between the written and the oral and between each link in the chain that leads the

author's unrealized intention as manifestation of a particular people, positive products of a complex and multiple set of historical circumstances. The syncretic Caribbean culture and their essentially creolized character is the very opposite of the Sameness of European hegemonic tradition. In a lecture from 1993 Glissant stresses even more explicitly creolization's opposition to essence: "Creolization is unpredictable, it cannot solidify, become static, be fixed in essence or absolutes of identity."(pg). The static polarity of Same and Other give away in Relation, to a situation in which identity exists only as a shifting term in network of multiple relations with the others. Hence, Relation welcomes of the opacity or the "irreducible density of the Other". Thus it offers an alternative site of negotiation reveal the irrationality of what in other context Deridda has called "homo hegemony". It is Glissantian break with the logics of universal and universalism and its determinism; because relation is not the universal but the presage of ideas across the individual cultural contexts.Seamless unity in identity thinking proffers the violent exclusion and subordination of the other. Caribbeanness has always been heterogenous, conflictual composite, an imbrication of opposite cultures. Walcott's dramatic texts can be read through Glissantian conceptual lens of *Relation*, a model that is non-hierarchial and a- centred and confronter of cultural hegemony. Walcott's dramatic narratives are energized by his splicing together multiple and overlapping legacies of the colonizer and colonized. The Caribbean *differenc*e is no longer defined in the black-white ontological terms in the complexities of race, gender and classes. In his plays, Walcott explores the infinite creative possibilities engendered by cultural tensions. Exploiting full range of creole practices, each of his play unfolds an aesthetic principle which is neither African nor American or European but a complex, multi-faceted, a rich dramatic experience. As he evinced, cross cultural aesthetics emerges from intersection of diverse and multiple- as an account of the relation of the writer to both his own community and that of the colonizer. In articulating identity, metropolitan concepts of rootedness and monoculture are exploded by contact and mutual engagement of cultures.