

# Cultural Politics in Derek Walcott's Prose and Poetry



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*A Postcolonial Reading  
of Selected Works*

By

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*For my husband Hany  
and my children Aladdin and Yasmina  
with deep love and gratitude*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	viii
Introduction .....	1
Chapter One.....	7
The Theoretical Contours	
Chapter Two .....	49
The Poetics of Walcott's Politics: A Study of Two Selected Essays	
Chapter Three .....	82
The Poetics of Naming and the Politics of Caribbean Subjectivity in Selected Poems of Derek Walcott	
Chapter Four .....	157
The Poetics of Naming and the Politics of Place in Selected Poems of Derek Walcott	
Conclusion.....	203
Notes.....	207
Bibliography .....	219

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## INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the issue of cultural politics in the discourse of Derek Walcott (1930- ), the West Indian poet, dramatist, essayist and Nobel Laureate. Focusing on Walcott's prose and poetry and endorsing postcolonial theoretic tenets, the book undertakes two tasks: first, to introduce Derek Walcott as one of the virtuosic postcolonial critics whose views prefigure, support and correspond in many ways to other canonized theoreticians in the field; second, to show how far Walcott's postcolonial critical views are clear in his poetry.

The germ of this study began with reading *The Empire Writes Back*, this seminal book which not only underlines the importance of studying Derek Walcott's literary work from a postcolonial perspective but also cursorily refers to the significance of his critical views in postcolonial theory. Nourished by reading some of the critical works which primarily deal with Derek Walcott's poetry and drama, such germ soon flourished into the topic at hand. Robert Hamner's *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, Stewart Brown's collection *The Art of Derek Walcott* and Bruce King's most illuminating biography *Derek Walcott: a Caribbean Life* were among the first books that reinforced my interest in Walcott as a poet and sustained the possibility of studying him from a postcolonial perspective. John Thieme's introductory book *Derek Walcott* has also drawn my attention to the importance of cultural issues in Walcott's output and has raised my interest in probing his essays which, according to Thieme, "remain seriously neglected" (Walcott 199).

A subsequent further inquiry into Walcott's scholarship has shown that there has not been any serious critical or scholarly attempt at an in-depth study of Derek Walcott's essays and prose writings. Apart from two articles written by Gordon Collier and Fred d' Augier's, there has not been- to my knowledge- any critical examination of Walcott's essays. Similarly, the investigation has shown that apart from the previously mentioned cursory note in *The Empire Writes Back*, there has been no attempt to establish Walcott as a postcolonial critic. As a corollary, almost all postcolonial readings of Walcott's poetry and drama are flawed by the serious negligence of the author's own theoretical postulations and the resort to other views offered by canonized theoreticians.

From this standpoint, the project of this book came to light. Three objectives were in mind: first, to establish Walcott as a non-acclaimed postcolonial critic; second, to fill a gap in Walcott's scholarship by offering a detailed analysis of some representative essays; third, to establish a link between his theory and practice through the analysis of some representative poems attesting to the viability of his theoretical views.

Reading through Walcott's essays, talks, reviews and interviews, one could single out a set of seminal concepts primarily preoccupied with the problematic of cultural power on the postcolonial and neocolonial Caribbean stage. Walcott has particularly written on the fragmented schizophrenic consciousness of Caribbean subjectivity, the importance of cultural and linguistic hybridization, the legitimacy of textual mimicry, the importance of discursive representation in the quest for cultural power and the threats of the neo-colonialist discourse of tourism on the integrity of both Caribbean landscape and people- the two main assets of cultural power, as far as he is concerned. From my point of view, such multi-layered questions could be grouped under one holistic term, that is "cultural politics", here defined as the struggle over power in the realm of culture.

To achieve the first objective, therefore, an extensive reading of Walcott's essays, talks and interviews was required. In addition to Walcott's book *What the Twilight Says: Essays* and Williams Baer's most helpful edition of Walcott's conversations, there was research into other non-collected essays and reviews scattered in books and periodicals. To achieve the second objective, a careful reading and analysis of two representative essays was deemed necessary. Having collected and classified the most seminal concepts in these prose writings, there remained the need to highlight the stylistic and poetic devices which the writer creatively manipulates in driving forth his critical views.

The third objective which involves the linking of Walcott's theoretical concepts to his poetry called for an eclectic approach towards his prolific poems. During his long career, Walcott has produced seventeen books of poetry beginning with his self-published *25 Poems* (1948) and ending with *The Prodigal* (2004). Walcott's penchant for writing book-length poems which culminated in his masterpiece *Omeros*- the 1990 epic that won him the 1992 Nobel prize- has also entailed narrowing the eclectic approach even further so that pertinent extracts of long poems can be subject to analysis. Having established the idea that cultural politics revolves around the play of power in the realm of culture and having discussed the importance of local place and people in Walcott's perception of the struggle over cultural power, it was then necessary to trace the mechanics by which Walcott translates his all-inclusive concept of "naming" (which widely

refers to the use of discursive representation not only in articulating the specificity of Caribbean subjectivity and the spatial particularity of his region but also in denouncing and attacking the neo-colonialist discourse of tourism ) in his poetry. Two chapters were devoted to this scheme which proved fruitful in shedding light on the way other nuances of Walcott's theoretical concepts are applied in his poems.

This book, therefore, falls into four chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter one, "the Theoretical Contours", sets out to introduce Derek Walcott as a postcolonial critic. After a brief overview of postcolonial theory, there follows a definition of the term "cultural politics" in order to establish a link between the two titular pillars of the book. Having established the idea that the question of cultural power and discursive representation lies at the center of both terms, the study narrows the scope even further linking the previous strands to the Caribbean stage in general and to Derek Walcott in particular. The conclusion of this survey is that cultural politics in Walcott's discourse involves the struggle over power using what Gilles Deleuze calls "war machines", by which is meant any tools that enable one to occupy a "space/time." For Walcott these Deleuzian "war machines" include art, land and people.

In the subsequent sections of this chapter, the study will trace and analyze the different theoretical views through which Walcott attempted to find in-between resolutions to the different dualities that may hinder his aesthetical commitment to use art in general and literature in particular as a Deleuzian war machine in the struggle over cultural power. The three succeeding sections, therefore, discuss how Walcott addresses problems of language, text and the torn consciousness of the Caribbean artist himself. His postulations on linguistic creolization, creative mimicry and productive schizophrenia are elaborately discussed.

In the last section of the chapter, Walcott's concept of the poetics of naming, which is deemed at the center of cultural politics in his theory and practice, is to be discussed in depth. The analysis shows that despite the fact that in its broad sense, "the poetics of naming" involves the use of discursive forms in representing the specific peculiarities of one's region including its spatial specificity and its people, in its deeper sense, the concept also involves voicing out the problems threatening the integrity of his peculiar region particularly the threats of the neo-colonial tourist assaults on Caribbean land and people. The analysis will also show that the poetics of naming, at its technical level, involves the creative use of linguistic tools particularly metaphor, in this act of discursive representation.

Chapter two, "The Poetics of Walcott's Politics: A Study of Two Selected Essays", undertakes a rhetorical analysis of two selected essays in an attempt to fill a serious gap in Walcott's scholarship. As suggested by its title, the chapter's chief argument is that Walcott has manipulated poetic techniques as a strategic means through which he can drive forth his critical views. Of Walcott's numerous prose writings, the study sets out to analyze "What the Twilight Says: an Overture" written in 1970 and his Nobel Prize talk "Fragments of an Epic Memory" given in 1992. The chapter is divided into two sections devoted respectively to the two selected pieces. The chief contention of section one, "Twilight as Conflict and Resolution," is that Walcott has played on the metaphor of twilight as a means of voicing the multiple conflicts tearing Caribbean consciousness. Despite the emphasis given to the role of metaphor, the study is to attend to the other stylistic devices which help reinforce the ideas delivered. Hence, a survey of tonal shifts, structural variations and diction peculiarities is to precede the analysis of the metaphorical manipulation of the image of twilight in the whole article. The same approach is followed in the second section, "Fragmentation as Wholeness: Walcott's Nobel Lecture." The analysis shows how Walcott employs the image of the fragmented mosaic as an underlying metaphorical scheme which not only binds together the different pieces of the lecture but also drives forth his ideological point of view on the richness of the multicultural, albeit fragmented, Caribbean experience.

The succeeding two chapters establish a link between Walcott's theoretical views and his poetry. Taking the concept of the "poetics of naming" as its wide encompassing umbrella, the study shows how Walcott has dedicated most of his poems to the act of "naming" the specificity of Caribbean experience. Therefore, chapter three, "The Poetics of Naming and the Politics of Caribbean Subjectivity in Selected Poems of Derek Walcott," explores and analyzes the manifold representations of Caribbean subjectivity in its individual and communal sense. The chapter is divided into two parts; while the first part attends to the individual representations, the second considers the poems in which he introduces collective images of Caribbean people. In the first part, the study focuses on two avatars of these individual representations: first, the use of Crusoe as metaphor for Caribbean subjectivity; second the representation of the Caribbean artist/everyman as an Odysseus figure. Five main poems are to be subject to meticulous analysis 'Crusoe's Island', "Crusoe's Journals", "A Sea Chantey" "Sea Grapes", and "*The Schooner Flight*"- which all belong to his early and mid life career. The second part is divided into two sections. While the first traces the image of simple islanders portrayed in his autobiographical book-length poem, *Another Life* (1973), the second gives

particular attention to *Omeros* in which Walcott gives a sophisticated image of a mosaic community. In dealing with *Omeros*, the study discusses how the act of representing a mosaic island community is sustained by the creation of a creolized epic, the use of the thematic motifs of affliction and healing, the manipulation of pluralistic linguistic registers not to mention the participation of multiple voices in the act of narration.

Chapter four, "The poetics of Naming and the Politics of Place in Selected Poems of Derek Walcott," shows how Walcott applies his poetics of naming in relation to "place". It discusses the strategies by which Walcott uses his poetry as a discursive machine in naming the spatial specificity of the Caribbean island, in inscribing the little island as an embracing motherland and finally in highlighting the threats of the neo-colonialist discourse of tourism. The chapter is divided into three sections each devoted to one of these respective points. Section one analyzes some representative poems in which the poet inscribes the little Caribbean island as an embracing motherland through the use of two motifs: stasis (that is, the willingness to stay, struggle and work in the little island) and homesickness. Section two explores and analyzes some selected poems in which Walcott deconstructs the Western stereotype of wildness and inferiority associated with Caribbean flora and re-inscribes them as powerful signs and symbols. In addition to the cursory reference to some pertinent poems, and the analysis of some extracts from book length ones (*Omeros*, *Another Life*, and *The Prodigal*) the study will analyze "As John To Patmos", "Names", "Cul de Sac Valley", "The Bounty", "Sainte Lucie." The chief contention of section three is that Walcott's belief in the spatial specificity of the Caribbean island with its land, landscape and topography has propelled his attack on the neo-colonialist discourse of tourism which violates land and re-shapes the place to suit the purposes of the neocolonialist tourist. Accordingly, the section traces and analyzes some extracts from *Another Life* and *Omeros* in which Walcott fights and attacks tourism with its manifold projects and symbols, particularly cameras which, as far as Walcott is concerned, tend to fragmentize the exquisite beautiful aspects of the island and turn them into lifeless icons.

It is worth noting that the choice of poems subject to analysis is not only informed by their support of the thematic perspective but also by the way they offer palpable examples of Walcott's critical views. The selection is also meant to evidence the consistency of Walcott's theory and practice across his long career. Hence, the analysis of poems from his early and midlife career goes hand in hand with the thorough examination of his most recent book *The Prodigal*. In most of the sections, however, the study draws

heavily on *Omeros*, this masterpiece in which Walcott seems to be gathering all the fragments of his critical discourse.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE THEORETICAL CONTOURS

In his prose writings as well as his interviews, Derek Walcott has offered a set of critical views which, though highly significant for postcolonial criticism, has not received the due and proper attention. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to bridge a gap in Walcott's scholarship by underlining the importance of his theoretical and critical views in the field of postcolonial theory. In so doing, the chapter addresses the following questions: What are the chief contours of postcolonial theory? What is meant by cultural politics and how does it relate to postcolonial theory? What is Walcott's position on the idea of cultural politics in the postcolonial stage? What are the seminal concepts in Derek Walcott's postcolonial cultural politics?

Before embarking on a postcolonial reading of Derek Walcott, it is necessary to chart out the basic contours of postcolonial theory: its emergence and significance, the controversial points surrounding it, the chief pillars in the field and the status of postcolonial Caribbean theorists. This brief overview is to be succeeded by a definition of the second titular pillar of the book - "cultural politics"-, which requires the inquiry into its two basic constituent concepts: culture and politics. The inquiry will raise questions of "power" and "representation" and hence an investigation into postcolonial definitions of the terms will be briefly surveyed in an attempt to probe the concept of cultural politics in postcolonial theory. Narrowing the scope even further, the study is to relate the previous views and definitions to the Caribbean region and will then move to the case of Derek Walcott. This discussion leads to the chief contention of the book, which is the unclaimed significance of Derek Walcott's postcolonial theoretical discourse. Having established this fact, the chapter moves to an expository and analytical examination of Walcott's most seminal concepts which can all be grouped under the umbrella of cultural politics.

## 1.1 Postcolonial Theory, An Overview

Before introducing Derek Walcott in the line of postcolonial critics and theorists, it is necessary to trace the basic contours of the field: its emergence, significance and pioneers. Despite the fervent disputes surrounding the field, it has become an established fact that postcolonial criticism and / or theory occupy a central place in the critical and academic arenas, a fact emphasized by its central position in the European and American academe and its predominance in literary and critical scholarship.

In the main, and as per common knowledge, postcolonialism refers to a set of theories and critical approaches that grapple with the legacy of colonialism, taking as its focus the discursive forms produced in countries that were once colonies of other countries, especially the major European colonial powers: Britain, France and Spain. Semantically speaking, the term “postcolonialism” refers to the period which follows colonialism. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first use of the term occurred in 1959 when the British newspaper, *Daily Telegraph*, used it in reference to India which gained its independence in 1947. Ever since, it has been common with reference to the formerly colonized countries as they become self-governing states. From the late 1970s, however, the term has been commonly used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization (Ashcroft et al., *Concepts* 186). As such, it offered a detailed study of numerous issues related to the formerly colonized societies. Post-independence nationalism, cultural identity retrieval, the relationship between discursive practices and colonial enterprises, and the equally strategic role of textuality in resistance are but some of these concerns.

The move from the semantic implication of a historical period to that of a critical approach has raised some controversy over the hyphenated and non-hyphenated term. While the hyphenated term was widely held to refer to the period after colonialism, the non-hyphenated term- which the study at hand endorses- was held to suggest a reactive resistance discourse of the colonized who critically interrogates dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from the Western slander and misinformation of the colonial period and who also continues to interrogate neo-colonizing tendencies after the declaration of independence” (Sugirtharajah 13).

At the center of *postcolonial* discourse, therefore, lie self-definition and the attempt to circumscribe a space- academic, geographical, and political. Recently, it has become a rallying point for a fresh assessment of the interaction of class, race and gender (Moore-Gilbert et al. 1-2).

The question now is: how did the shift from a purely historical marker to an established critical approach come about? In other words, what instigated postcolonialism as a critical and literary approach and who are its principal pioneers? Although it is difficult to determine a definite point at which this radical shift was initiated, it is commonly held that Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak “constitute the Holy Trinity of postcolonial discourse” (Young *Colonial* 154) and that Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978) is the instigator of postcolonial theory. Even though this opinion goes against the grain of this study which sets out to stress the significant role of other earlier and simultaneous theoretical attempts particularly those emanating from the Caribbean region, including the canonical work of Frantz Fanon, the significance of those three intellectuals cannot be underestimated. Said’s *Orientalism* has long had a substantial influence on the fields of literary theory, cultural studies, and human geography. The book’s main argument is that academic knowledge was manipulated in order to serve the political purposes of colonial powers. Acknowledging the Foucauldian view that the key to power is knowledge, Said proposes that Orientalism—which is closely connected to “the enabling socio-economic and political institutions”—was exploited as a “Western way of dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Said, *Orientalism* 3). The book also discloses the persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arab-Islamic peoples and their culture, this line of thought which was elaborated in Said’s later studies.<sup>1</sup>

Homi Bhabha, whose critical essays appeared in the 1980s, continued Said’s line of studying “the controlling power of representation in colonized societies” (Ashcroft et al. *Key* 187). Bhabha started his theoretical enterprise by rejecting Said’s view of the “assumed regularity between representation and object [which] ...posts a binary opposition between power and powerlessness ... [and] leaves no room for negotiation” (Young, *White* 142). Focusing on the idea of stereotyping, fetishism, mimicry, and hybridization, Bhabha has been careful to unravel “the ambivalent nature” of colonialism which induces mimicry as it disavows the other and hence creates an in-between space through which the colonized can resist its mechanisms. Bhabha also widened the scope of postcoloniality to include “the persistent neo-colonial relations within the new world order” (*Location* 4).

Gayatri Spivak, who gained fame by translating and prefacing Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, is known as “the first figure to consistently inflect postcolonial criticism with a feminist agenda” (Moore-Gilbert et al 18). Spivak shares Bhabha’s views that imperialism was not only “a territorial and economic but inevitably also a subject-constituting project”

(Young, *White* 159). Making use of the concept of subalternity<sup>2</sup> developed by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)- the Italian Marxist and political theorist- she gives a detailed description of the double subjection of the Third World colonized woman emphasizing that “there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak” (“Subaltern” 101). She also explores “the ways in which some kinds of Western feminism are in fact complicit in the dominant discourses of the world’s privileged societies” (Moore-Gilbert et al. 20).

What unites the three figures is the intentional and intensive use of Western theories in their attempt to disrupt and unsettle the colonial projects. Whereas Said’s discourse derives much from Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, Bhabha’s discursive enterprise is, as Robert Young convincingly argues, “strategically eclectic,” (*White* 157) drawing heavily from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis while making use of Foucauldian discourse. Similarly, Spivak, who has been labeled a feminist Marxist deconstructivist, has eclectically benefited from feminism, Marxism and deconstruction in her postcolonial critique. This justifies the fact that postcolonialism, which lies somewhere between literary and cultural studies and which stresses the importance of hybridity and inbetweenness as two essential parameters, is itself a hybrid approach that lies at the borderlines between different critical approaches. Notably, the three intellectuals launched their theoretical enterprises with no predetermination to establish what turned out to be postcolonial discourse. In fact, they were labeled postcolonial after the publication of their work.

Recently, however, there emerged a new tendency which rejects the work of the so-called Holy Trinity of postcolonial discourse on the grounds of being flawed by abstraction and inability to offer some solutions for the problems posited. Arguably, Said’s analysis of the exploitation of knowledge as will to power served but to reify and emphasize the East/West dichotomy offering no alternatives to the Manichean binaries decried. Likewise, Spivak’s denunciation of Western silencing of Third World women and her insistence on the absence of any room from which the subaltern can speak suggest that she is herself advocating the same approach of speaking for the subaltern which she vehemently opposes. In addition, the emphasis on discursive practices in the discourse of these three figures has led other postcolonial critics like Ajaz Ahmad to express uneasiness towards this limitation which suggests that their discourse fails “to encompass a dynamic for change” (Greenwood 195).

This rejection is often paralleled by a strong support of Frantz Fanon’s work which is thought to be more linked to political reality than the discursive critique of Said and Bhabha. Frantz Fanon, often held as the

forerunner of the holy trinity of the postcolonial discourse, developed his critical views within the experience of colonialism itself. An experienced psychiatrist, Martinique by birth and French by nationality, Fanon was delegated by the French government to work in Algeria during French colonial rule. Fanon developed sympathy with the Algerian cause and is reported to have had an active role in the people's struggle for independence. The linkage he made between mental disorder and imperialist practices situates his discourse at the interface between colonial critique and radical psychology (Moore-Gilbert et al 12). Fanon theorized on the practices of colonialism, the mechanics of resistance, the idea of colonial culture and its relationship with that of nation.

The emphasis on the critique of Said, Spivak and Bhabha has relatively overshadowed the no less important work of other intellectuals across the Diaspora. In fact, the interdisciplinary and polyphonic nature of postcolonial discourse has allowed for a widely expanding number of contributors who, though may differ in methodology, unite in goal. The Caribbean region, in particular, which had a long and remarkable history of slavery and colonialism, has furnished postcolonial discourse with an assortment of fecund critiques stemming from the complex texture of the region.<sup>3</sup> Predominant among these writers are the Martinique Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant who have written extensively on issues of language, race, and history. While Césaire's work has been given its due attention based on his initiation of the Negritude<sup>4</sup> movement, Édouard Glissant's views have mostly passed unnoticed. The Anglophone islands have also secreted some distinguished critical voices. While Edward Kamau Brathwaite (1930- ), the Barbadian historian and writer, has undertaken a long project through which he evidenced the importance of linguistic and cultural creolization in Caribbean history, Wilson Harris (1921- ) has repeatedly argued for "cross-culturalism" as an essential tenet in postcolonial Caribbean context.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Guyanese painter and novelist Denis Williams (1923-1998) has introduced the concept of postcolonial "catalysis" which stresses the creative meaning of the present " (Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 146) rather than a "filiastic" crippling relationship to the Old World. In addition, C.L.R James ((1901-1989), the Trinidadian political theorist and writer, had written extensive political and social writing. He is particularly known for the stress he laid on the role of sports in the realization of the idea of nation. In his *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), which is widely recognized as one of the best books on sports in general and cricket in particular, James argues that West Indians should resort to sports in order to reformulate a national tradition. In the book, James particularly underlines the role of cricket as a game which helped the Caribbean express themselves in relation

to the British and "fill a huge gap in their consciousness and their needs." (233)

What unites most of these Caribbean theoreticians is that they are creative men of letters<sup>6</sup> whose theories come out in narrative forms. This testifies to the view of Barbara Christian who contends that "people of colour were able to develop their own theorizing .... in narrative forms, in the stories ... [they] create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to ... [their] liking" (457). Notably, apart from the case of C.L.R James whose political and critical writing have received their due recognition, the literary writings of those Caribbean figures have got more critical attention and tended to eclipse their theoretical contribution. Similarly, Walcott's essays and interviews, in which he offers some constructive views on postcolonial issues, have been overshadowed by his prolific writings in poetry and drama.

As early as the fifties and sixties, Derek Walcott published several essays which, to use the words of Sandra Paquet, "articulate an overarching set of philosophical and methodological considerations that are central to any discussion of a modern Caribbean aesthetics" (194). In fact, Walcott's essays and interviews offer a set of theoretical insights that strategically address the postcolonial dilemmas of his region: linguistic creolization, the tactical use of mimicry, the relationship between language and subjectivity, the state of creative schizophrenia characterizing Caribbean people in general and artists in particular, not to mention the problematic of discursive representation. The fact that Walcott started writing on these issues as early as the 1950s long before the emergence of the work of the oft-anthologized postcolonial theorists like Bhabha and Spivak heightens the need for a detailed study of these theoretical postulations to breach this research gap in Walcott's scholarship.

## 1.2 The Realm of Cultural Politics

### 1.2.1 What is Cultural Politics?

The term "cultural politics" has gained much currency in the past two decades. Despite its high incidence in manifold scholarships, the term is seldom subject to meticulous definition and is mostly taken for granted.<sup>7</sup> The only attempt at probing the theoretical realm of cultural politics, to my knowledge, is the one offered by Glenn Jordon and Chris Weedon in their book *Cultural Politics*:

Whose culture shall be the official one and whose shall be subordinated? What cultures shall be the official one and whose shall be hidden? Whose history shall be remembered and whose forgotten? What images of social life shall be projected and which shall be marginalized? What voices shall be heard and which be silenced? Who is representing who and on what basis? This is the realm of cultural politics (4).

Although the above set of questions - which can hardly be considered a definition - illuminates the reader as to the field of cultural politics, the reference to interdisciplinary contours- culture, history, representation, social life, voice- adds up to the complexity of the term. In my view, the attempt to define the term “cultural politics” entails deconstructing it into its two constituent parts: culture and politics.

“Culture” is one of the terms which raise much difficulty<sup>8</sup> by virtue of its challenging a fixed and unitary definition. Given that the term has multiple definitions<sup>9</sup>, it might be useful to look into its lexicographic origin and shed light on the definitions that are particularly relevant to the present study. In his seminal book *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Robert J. C. Young points to the fact that the noun “culture”, in its early uses, was a noun of process- “the tending of something”, hence “agriculture”(31). From the sixteenth century onwards, he continues, this sense of culture as cultivation was developed into the cultivation of human minds. Historically, therefore, the term developed from the tending of natural growth to “a whole way of life,” (to use T.S. Eliot’s definition of the term) material, intellectual, and spiritual. The idea of a “whole way of life” was, I believe, fruitful for anthropological studies which offered a long chain of subsequent definitions for the term “culture,” the listing of which is beyond the scope of this work. The crux of these manifold definitions is that culture involves three basic categories: what people think, what they do, and the material outputs they produce. Thus, mental processes, beliefs, knowledge, and values are parts of culture.

It is important to note, however, and as Young rightly puts it, that the anthropological manipulation of the word “culture” was initiated by Johann Gottfried Von Herder, the German philosopher whose *Outlines of the a Philosophy of the History of Man* traces the cultural origins of man back to the very beginning. Young writes that Herder’s project started with the intention of deconstructing ethnocentrism and enhancing commonalities among different cultures. What is interesting and fruitful about Herder’s work- as far as this study is concerned- is that he adopts what Robert Young calls “diffusionist” and “isolationist” position towards the concept of culture: isolationist in his emphasis on the importance of native land and local people on the formation of a given culture, and diffusionist in the stress

he lays on the importance of cultural mixing to human progress (Young, *Colonial* 41). Young further maintains that although Herder stresses the importance of "the situation of the place" and "the nature or generated character of the people" in the development of human history and culture, he does not disregard the significance of cultural exchange pointing to the fact that Europe has taken much of its culture from the Romans, the Greeks and the Arabs.

In his seminal book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said distinguishes two important definitions for the concept of culture. The first, which he cursorily refers to as "the refining and elevating element" (xiii) depends on Mathew Arnold's concept of "high culture" which is fully elaborated in the latter's book *Culture and Anarchy*. In fact, it was Arnold who introduced culture as "a normative value", "the passion for sweetness and light", "the study of perfection" (Arnold 110) and as "the best which has been thought and said in the world." (Arnold 190) Arnold's concept of culture was particularly fruitful for the political agendas as it initiated the idea of the nation-state. To counteract the threat of anarchy threatening society, Arnold argued, there should be some institutions as literary academics, the universities, schools, the established church and the state, which should have the task of developing and maintaining this refining element.

The second definition offered by Said- and which the book at hand endorses- relates to "all those practices, like the arts of description, communication and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure" (*Culture* xii). This definition, therefore, emphasizes the role of discursive and symbolic forms (including literature) in shaping the peculiar cultural identity of each country.

In its attempt to synthesize a definition for the term "cultural politics", the study endorses the views of both Herder and Said. In fact, and as would be clear later in this book, Walcott's attitude towards the concept of "culture" follows the same anthropological line developed by Herder. While Walcott insists that all cultures originate in nature, that one builds according to his local topography and that the local inhabitants of the place are crucial in the definition of its peculiar cultural identity, he also vehemently emphasizes the fruits of hybridity and cross-culturalization, a fact that would be particularly clear during the discussion of the Nobel talk. In addition, Walcott theoretically and practically- by virtue of his own prolific writings- has underscored the role of Said's cultural and discursive forms in forging a unique cultural identity peculiar to his region.



The attempt to define the word “politics” is less controversial. Dictionaries offer five different meanings <sup>10</sup> two of which are most pertinent to our argument. According to Encarta Dictionary, the word “politics” refers to “power relationships in specific field: the interrelationships between the people, groups, or organizations in a particular area of life especially insofar as they involve power and influence or conflict.” The word also refers to “calculated advancement: the use of tactics and strategy to gain power in a group or organization.” The prominence of the category of “power” in the two lexicographic definitions is highly instrumental in attempting a synthetic definition for the word “cultural politics” – a task which the study at hand proposes to undertake.

Based on the previous discussion, cultural politics can be defined as the struggle over power in the realm of culture. The essence of the term, to my mind, revolves around Frederick Nietzsche's theory of the will to power. For Nietzsche "this world is will to power- and nothing besides" (*Will* 550). The will to and struggle over power in Nietzsche's theory, therefore, is the essence of the whole universe; it is the driving force towards life and survival not only in beings but also in societies and states. If this Nietzschean ontological concept is conjoined with Gilles Deleuze's concept of “war machines” –which, for him, has nothing to do with war “but with a particular way of occupying, taking up, space-time, or inventing new space-times” (“Control” n.p)- and with Foucault's view that the operation of power is through discursive regimes, “cultural politics” can be defined as the will to and struggle over power in the sphere of culture manipulating certain “war machines” primary among which are discursive forms. The study, therefore, is to tighten its grip around the Deleuzian concept of “war machines” in charting cultural politics in the work of Derek Walcott. With the emphasis earlier put on Said's discursive forms and Herder's local land and people in the definition of culture, it appears that these discursive machines are intricately tied to these equally important “machines” of land and people and that they are all entwined and overlapping.

### 1.2.2 Cultural Politics and Postcolonial Theory

The emphasis on the struggle over power in the definition of cultural politics invites a correlation with the realm of postcolonial theory. One of the most important tenets in postcolonial theory is that colonialism operates through forged structures of power - colonizer/colonized, superior/inferior, civilized / uncivilized-- which help justify and nourish its imperial practices. Racial and cultural boundaries are the “machines” that are used to subordinate and essentialize people. To this end, Edward Said argues that

European culture gained its strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of “surrogate and even underground self” (*Orientalism* 3). Using Gramsci’s idea of “hegemony”—which is based on the idea that certain cultural ideas are more predominating and influential than others—Said continues his argument adding that “the relationship between the Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (*Orientalism* 5).

Since the Metropolis has used discursive practices<sup>11</sup> as substantial machines in marginalizing and exercising hegemony over the peripheries, it follows that postcolonial resistance involves the act of deconstructing the Western signifiers of power and superiority using the same discursive machines. In fact, Deleuze’s view that war machines stretch from political revolution to “artistic creation” (“Control” n.p) is particularly significant in the postcolonial context. While revolutions were indispensably necessary in the struggle over independence, “artistic creation” remains an indispensable war-machine in the continuous endeavour to occupy a “new space-time” in the Metropolitan circles and to invent new ones for the oft-marginalized voices and regions. To the same end, Julia Kristeva argues that “the text is a practice that could be compared to political revolution” (16). Accordingly, whether referred to as “artistic creation,” “cultural forms” or “texts,” discursive practices are deemed essential “war machines” in the cultural politics of colonial and postcolonial discourse and that postcolonial writers and theoreticians have been fully aware of the importance of literary texts as “a site of cultural control” (Ashcroft et al., *Reader* 7).

The struggle over power using discursive “war machines” is therefore closely entangled with the problematic of representation by which is meant here the use of discursive forms—literature, art and media—in making reproductive images of what is real. In fact, the problem of representation is one of the crucial issues which lie at the center of postcolonial theory and which has received much attention from different critics. Arguably, the chief problem with colonialism is the way in which it is viewed as an apparatus for constituting subject positions through the field of representation. Accordingly, the main contention of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is that the act of representation is a corollary of colonial domination and that the West has produced a chain of representations in order to emphasize its power and authority over the East and to construct this very East as an inferior Other. “The European representation of the Muslim, Ottoman or Arab”, Said contends, “was always a way of controlling the redoubtable Orient.” (*Orientalism* 60) Said also cites Flaubert who not only dominates Kuchuk Hanem, the Egyptian courtesan, but also speaks for her: “she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions,

presence or history. *He spoke for and represented he*" (*Orientalism* 6).

To the same effect, Stuart Hall, one of the prominent postcolonial theorists, has written that "every regime of representation is a regime of power formed by... the fatal couplet "power / knowledge" (395). Like Said, Hall reads representation in colonialist discourse through the Foucauldian correlation between power and knowledge. He argues that colonialism not only positioned colonial people as "the Other of a dominant discourse" but has also subjected them to its "internal knowledge" through the act of representation by which colonial people go through "subjective conformation to the norm" (395).

Further, in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak", Spivak distinguishes between two senses of representation: representation as "speaking for" which she refers to using the term "*vertreten*", and representation as "re-presentation" to which she refers as "*darstellen*" (70). Although Spivak limits the first type to the field of politics and marks the second as the field of art and philosophy- which, I believe, seems confining given that art can both speak for and re-present-she stresses that the West has shifted the distinctions between the two meanings in order to constitute the western "Subject" in contrast to the colonized subject.

Likewise, Homi Bhabha has often stressed that "there is no knowledge- political or otherwise- outside representation" (*Location* 23). In the introduction to his seminal book *The Location of Culture*, he maintains that

[T]he representation of difference must not be hastily read as reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (2 *emphasis added*).

Bhabha, therefore, implicitly suggests that colonialist representation of the colonial is flawed by its "pre-given" misconceptions. He adds that representation should be linked with the capitalization of the present rather than the past – which is symbolically referred to as "tradition." Bhabha also refers to the colonial's right of representation as the "right to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege" (*Location* 2). For him, this right "does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by tradition to be re-inscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those "who are in the minority" (Bhabha *Location* 2). Representation in Bhabha's discourse, therefore, is a colonial and postcolonial mechanism. While in the colonial

context, it is associated with subversion, in the postcolonial stage, it is a strategic tool of resistance.

The importance of these seminal views traced so far lies in the suggestion that cultural politics in the postcolonial context is bound up with the act of re-presenting and representing not only the subject but also the very time-, which is “present” per se - and space wherein the subject is constituted. These views also point towards the complementarity of the different war machines involved in the struggle over power. The act of representation – which lies at the center of discursive practices- is never complete without its target, the object of representation. In other words, discursive representation – which is one of the primary assets in the definition of culture as argued earlier- entwines with local land and people – two substantial assets in the realm of culture- and work towards one goal: reclaiming cultural power.

### **1.2.3 Cultural Politics in the Caribbean: The Case of Derek Walcott**

In the Caribbean region, the complementary and reciprocal relationship between discursive practices and the local- including the land and its people- is rather more significant. To begin with, the importance of the spatial and topographical contours of the Caribbean islands cannot be underestimated. Primarily, these islands which are mostly referred to as the West Indies and which lie southeast of Northern America are marked by their exquisite beauty which welcomes the eye from the first sight.<sup>12</sup> The peculiar spatial uniqueness along with the existence of some floral elements that yield high economic profit -like sugar cane- were among the substantial reasons of the continuous struggle of the major imperialist forces over the possession and colonization of these islands.

Philip Sherlock rightly contends that "colonialism, however important, was an incident in the history of Nigeria and Ghana ... but it is the whole history of West Indies" (13-14). Accordingly, ever since the arrival of Columbus in the fifteenth century, the Caribbean region has been at the center of European rivalries to the extent that within a short time, almost all the islands had been divided among the major imperial powers: British, French, Spanish and Dutch. This long colonialist history has left its imprint on the racial background of the people living there on the one hand and has influenced the type of bond tying those people to the land on the other. The rapid annihilation of the indigenous populations and the importation of massive numbers of slaves and indentured laborers have radically changed the racial structure of its population. People with different racial backgrounds-

African, Chinese and Indian, etc.- were forced to live together in a new place and to establish a sort of indigenous bond with this land to which they were transplanted. This relationship to the land, however, was particularly sustained by the plantation system which exploited both land and people for the benefit of imperialist capitalism.

The negative historical background in the Caribbean region has also underscored the importance of discursive practices in the struggle over power. In fact, the manifold atrocities of colonialism yielded a fragile political and economic structure. Accordingly, even after the colonial islands had gained independence from the European imperial powers, they remained subject to the continuous neo-colonial- mostly American- mechanisms exercised in the region. It is this lack of political and economic power which heightens the need for the manipulation of discursive practices in order to occupy a new Deleuzian space / time. As Rhonda Cobham puts it, "the act of writing performs the desire of the Caribbean speaking subject to enter into the discourse of power- to name himself and his social context, and to contest the domination of discursive space by 'whiteness'" (116).

Walcott's position follows the same line of thought traced so far. In his seminal essay, "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry", he contends that political power, is "ephemeral, unstable" and that "it is the least important aspect of any culture, who rules" ("Culture" 51). In another essay entitled "The Muse of History," he adds that "power ... [becomes] increasingly divided and tribal when it is based on genetics. It leads to the righteous secondary wars of the Third World, to the self-maiming of civil wars, the frontier divisions of third-rate, third world power, manipulated or encouraged by the first powers" (*Essays* 57). Fully conscious that in the Caribbean, they "cannot pretend to exercise power in the historical sense," Walcott asserts that "their definition of power should go beyond the immediately political" ("Culture" 51) Walcott is also aware of the fact that even after the end of colonialism, the Caribbean regions live "in the shadow of an America that is economically benign yet politically malevolent. That malevolence ... threatens an eclipse of identity, but the shadow is as inescapable as that of any previous empire" ("Culture" 51).

If real power in the Caribbean is neither political nor historical, where can it be located? Walcott's answer to this question highlights the vital role of the war machines stressed so far. While he underscores the importance of discursive practices in this regard, he equally stresses the significance of local land and people. In more than one occasion, he states that "the real power of this time is ... art" (*Essays* 57). "The future of West Indian militancy," he asserts "lies in art" (*Essays* 16). Like Kristeva, therefore, Walcott ascribes to art a revolutionary role: "all revolutions begin

amateurishly, with forged or stolen weapons, but the West Indian artist knew the need for revolt without knowing what weapons to use" (*Essays* 16). The difference between Walcott and other Caribbean writers is that he knew quite well the "weapons" or "war machines" needed for revolt. Essential to Walcott's struggle over cultural power, therefore, is his conviction that art must be thoroughly "grounded" and that it should be devoted to the expression of the specificity of the provincial experience.

Hence, for Walcott, art is not the only "war machine" needed for revolt; it should closely function in combination with the specificity of local land and people. In his interviews, Walcott recurrently asserts: "the real power ... we have is in ... people," (Walcott *Conversations* 65) with their rich interracial mixture. He has also recurrently stated that the cultural identity of those people is inseparable from the land on which they live and that "the earth you come from is your mother" (*Conversations* 115). Art, local land and people are, as far as Walcott is concerned, the three main "war machines" through which a space-time can be invented and / or occupied. The relationship between these three "machines" is inseparably intertwined and overlapping. The unnamed position of the Caribbean space and people demands the use of literature-which hinges on the creative manipulation of language-in re-presenting their specificity. Similarly, the writer is in need of the two nourishing machines in his attempt to gain a poetic voice that will enhance his cultural identity and constitute him as a "Subject", in Spivak's sense of the word.

The overlapping role between discursive practices, local space and people is encapsulated in what Walcott calls the "Adamic naming" which will be elaborately highlighted later in this chapter. In the main, the poetics of Adamic naming in Walcott's theory refers to the creative use of language-oral or written- to articulate the rich Caribbean experience which hinges primarily on its peculiar landscape and hybrid population. In this act, the Caribbean subject - ranging from slaves to current writers - manipulates language to produce discursive forms - oral or written- which are to liberate him from bondage and support him in his quest to occupy a new space-time. In this way, the colonized is performing the role of Adam who has the task of naming or writing down the specificity of his surroundings. Implicit in this concept of naming, therefore, is the importance of discursive representation in the struggle over power previously referred to. Walcott, however, ties this act of representation to the local land and people which he takes as two main assets of power independent and unique in themselves. Like Bhabha's concept of the colonial's "right to signify", the act of naming in Walcott's discourse should also be associated with the resourceful potentialities of the present rather than the limiting atrocities of the past.