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Towards “that republic in which complexions do not matter”: Derek Walcott’s *Drums and Colours* Fifty Years On

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Derek Walcott's three hour pageant, *Drums and Colours* was first performed between April 25 and May 1, 1958 at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Port of Spain, as part of the West Indian Festival of the Arts, to inaugurate the West Indian Federation. It was a celebration in which all federated territories were supposed to participate. Although for various ideological and logistical reasons every territory did not enter a play, the desire for this to happen was inspired by the idea that in a regional political federation "no element is of greater potential importance than a West Indian theatre, for the theatre is the meeting place and the nursery of the arts" (qtd in King, 1995, 13). As a dramatic work commissioned by the University College of the West Indies, *Drums and Colours* was more than simply a celebration of nationalistic pride and achievement of federal nationhood. In retrospect, the socio-political events that formed the backstory to its creation and Walcott's own orchestration of key thematic occupations such as the quarrel with history, racial and cultural syncretism, and the evolution of a distinctive West Indian theatre style position this play as a foundation on which Walcott's conceptual evolution may be mapped since he, in later works, will clarify, contest, and even contradict key tenets of his aesthetic philosophy.

There is no doubt that the drama to inaugurate the Federation was intended to interrogate the impact of imperial history on the formation of Caribbean civilization and nationalism. As Noel Vaz opined, the drama was expected to depict the "four hundred years of West Indian history" (1). In an ideological stance that anticipates his later essay "Muse of History" (1976), the Chorus signals Walcott's evolving contention that historical figures and history are not evoked for recrimination or revenge - "I raise them up again, / Not for your judgment, but remembrance" (*Drums* 4-5). The character Ram clinches this evolving thesis towards the end of the play by asserting, "Pompey, history not a judge, not a prophet, not a priest and not an executioner" (*Drums* 89). In 1957, when Derek Walcott was commissioned to write the pageant, he was given the freedom to highlight characters and episodes which he felt were fundamental to the whole area of the West Indies. He elected to focus on what he calls "four litigious men" namely, Christopher Columbus, Walter Raleigh, Toussaint L'Ouverture and George William Gordon.

Walcott's choice of a balance between Old and New world characters and the interconnectivity of their lives and aspirations foreground ethnocultural syncretism as the bedrock of Caribbean nationalism. Even in the era of imperial conquest and subjugation, the seeds of a nascent regional nationalism were being planted, as evident in the pronouncements of characters like the Spaniard, Quadrado and Pompey, a character existing in contemporary time within the narrative frame of the play. Quadrado's notion of a common experience and destiny for the region, despite the excesses of cruelty and injustice, is based on an essential humanism. He suggests a reformulation of race which Walcott had

earlier articulated in *Epitaph for the Young* (1948) – “Grometto, do not judge any country by some persons, / Or what its members have done thee, there is only / One race, grometto. Man” (19). Race here assumes more than simply a biological referent of continuity through lineage and acquires a sociological dimension that issues from regional creolization, that is, a group of people sharing similar language, history or customs based on shared experience.

Governor de Berrío is another in a line of characters in the play who articulates a syncretic vision of this nascent West Indian nationalism when he declares himself “the proconsul of a new Empire” (*Drums* 46). In a caution to Walter Raleigh’s materialistic obsession in finding El Dorado, Berrío’s vision privileges equity and sustainability over exploitation. He argues “[t]hat what men take away out of a country / They must restore by something else. Our mines are finishing and the more profitable pursuit / Of growing cities, establishing Christian culture, / Is now the general concern, not avarice” (*Drums* 46). Through the figure of Pompey, Walcott posits ethnocultural syncretism as a *fait accompli* in the modern Caribbean experience. As early as the Prologue, carnival is posited as a site of cross-cultural interweaving and convergences as Pompey sings, “Now you men of every creed and class / We know you is brother when you playing mass, / White dance with black, black with Indian, / But long time, it was Rebellion / No matter what you colour now is steel and drums” (*Drums* 3).

Syncretism, however, was not simply a sociological fact within Caribbean civilization; it was a formal necessity in the creation of a pageant, the conception of which, according to Noel Vaz, had as its “main problem” the issue of “what form this chronicle should take” (1). The University College had previously considered scripts from one Trinidadian and two Jamaican authors but had rejected them because they were hardly more than “little disconnected scenarios” (Vaz 1). Walcott explains that in addressing the problem of form he “re-arranged dates and incidents, but the general pattern of discovery, conquest, exploitation, rebellion and constitutional advancement [had] been followed” (“Author’s Note” 2). The general pattern of racial and cultural interweaving, peculiar to the Caribbean region, had both influenced the form and was reinforced in the play’s message. Both the thematic treatment and dramatic technique reveal Walcott’s synthesizing sensibility in which times, geography and the transformed visions of some who may otherwise be termed villains of history are made to serve the larger overarching vision of ethnocultural fusion.

To this end, dramatic and thematic continuity are effected through the coin motif, characters like Paco and Walter Raleigh who act as bridges between Old and New World episodes, and the playwright’s unremitting humanist message of love, forgiveness and fellowship variously deployed throughout the pageant. The action takes place on an epic scale melding trans-Atlantic physical settings and temporal epochs via songs, dramatic spectacle and speeches in which characters

confess their historical culpability. Columbus, for example, reasons that talking is perhaps better, “than to remember sins” (*Drums* 15). Quadrado confesses, “I still pay for it now. I was called the butcher, but I resign that office” (*Drums* 19). Further, these work with other features of epic drama through which Walcott’s primary goal was to stimulate critical engagement with the idea of West Indian nationalism rather than passive diversion and entertainment. The calypso frame achieves an alienation effect by which the working of the stage machinery is fully exposed to the audience and characters like Mano, Yette, Ram, Yu and Pompey move with some fluidity from the frame narration into the mainstream of the plot towards the end of the play. Walcott uses a two plot structure which reinforces his dramatic message. Part I entitled “Conquest” conflates over two centuries of history from Columbus’ first European contact with the region to the arrival of the English, symbolized by Walter Raleigh and his band of privateers. Part II begins circa 1791 and continues through the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica into present time as carnival provides the closing frame for the play. Part II, with its focus on two bloody episodes of nationalist assertion, namely the Haitian Revolution and the Morant Bay Rebellion, may be considered a meditation on the cost and dangers which accompany the application of notions of nationalism. Arguably, Haiti becomes for Walcott a trope – the *cause célèbre* – for the birth of the Caribbean nation. On one side of the issue is Jean-Jacques Dessalines’ assertion, “It is a new age, the black man’s turn to kill” (*Drums* 72). This is countered by the studied wisdom of both Henri Christophe: “Then we are no better, revenge, / Is quite tiring” and Toussaint L’Ouverture: “revenge is nothing....peace is harder” (*Drums* 73).

Drums and Colours may be regarded as a nationalistic work specifically as it illustrates Walcott’s ongoing reformulations of the concept of race in the service of an imagined Caribbean sociality in which various races and ethnicities have their place. Given the deterministic influence that regional history has had on conceptions of race and class relationships, it is understandable that any discussion of history will ipso facto include a discussion of the definition of race and its place in Caribbean social formation. The notion of a “usable” and congenial past is only possible through a reformulation of the notion of race. Walcott’s reformulations on race are therefore deployed within an overarching humanism that is epic in scope. *Drums and Colours* posits that “history teaches that all races and nations are alike, that revenge is wrong, [and] that empires and personal lives end in failure and tragedy” (King, 2000, 138). Comparatively, although his earlier play, *Henri Christophe* (1950), also deals directly with the subject of regional history as hubristic discourse, *Drums and Colours* is the first play that offers a blueprint for national racial and social harmony. Through the play, John Thieme argues that Walcott fashioned an allegorical reading of Caribbean historiography that “embodied the cross-cultural political promise

offered by the federation and his own beliefs about the direction West Indian society should be taking” (13). Like *Henri Christophe*, it advocates a rejection of revenge for the wrongs of history and proffers, as the dominant thematic preoccupation, a vision of West Indian society based on acceptance and affirmation, if not equality, for all races and complexions.

When the character Anton speaks of “that republic / And that act in which complexions do not matter,” he articulates the playwright’s vision of a benign, multiracial and integrated sociality for which the calypso mass which frames the play becomes a trope (*Drums* 65). If this depiction appears utopian, the grand finale of the pageant is an ahistorical maroon scene comprising a syncretic composite of African warriors, an East Indian tactician, a Chinese cook, and a ruined European planter now turned preacher, all of whom are led by a commander known for his “various multi-coloured aliases” including “Commander Emmanuel Mano,” “Cudjoe,” “John Orr,” and “Fedon” (*Drums* 276). Anton’s treatise on the syncretic republic identifies miscegenation as the foundation of New World syncretism, a point General Yu endorses when he remarks, “Sex being the great republic” (*Drums* 92). To this end, significant characters and episodes in the plot abounds with characters of mixed racial and ethnic stock. The cabin boy, Paco, featured in episodes one, two, and five of Part I is mestizo. In Part II, Anton, the nephew/son of a prominent Haitian plantation owner, is a mulatto, and the slaughter of the mulatto forces under Rigaud is referenced as cautionary meditation on the necessity of forgiveness and renewal in the birth of nationhood. Walcott conveys this message of love and forgiveness through the conventional wisdom associated with the Chorus, “How shall we love, till we have known love’s cost,...How shall our brothers love, till we forgive? ...How shall we live, till these ghosts bid us live?” (*Drums* 57). Likewise, Yette, a contemporary character involved in the frame narrative, claims to have coloured blood in her. Perhaps the most prominent mulatto character in Part II of the plot is the Jamaican George William Gordon. Like Anton, he is mistakenly martyred in the cause of a nationalism that advocates equity and justice for all. The suffering of both Anton and Gordon is depicted as irrigating the tree of nationhood; a point Spanish Governor de Berrio insightfully makes on the fellowship of suffering – “suffering binds men together” (*Drums* 51).

Dramatic resolution in *Drums and Colours* is made subservient to Walcott’s reformulation of the notion of race which, at this point in his philosophical development, is heavily influenced by T.S. Eliot’s notions and use of the constructs of race and tribe. Eliot’s 1956 statement that “poetry differs from every other art in having a value for the people of the poet’s race and language, which it can have for no other,” infers “race” to mean national and linguistic community and not necessarily notions of biological lineage or cultural ancestry (18). My contention here is that Walcott appropriated and modified this claim to apply to

the arts in general and not narrowly to poetry. By so doing, he expanded the definition of these two constructs to include the literary tradition to which the poet and his audience subscribe and belong. Given his later warning against teaching “art as race,” we have to accept that Walcott’s notion of race here may also mean the human race. In this latter sense, Walcott conceives poetry (and by extension the arts) to be the “collective memory of the entire race” (Hamner 30).

Walcott's preoccupation with issues of race and colour in his poetic and dramatic work leading up to the production of *Drums* marks the ideological genesis of an aesthetic that posits syncretism as the definitive paradigm for New World literature and culture.¹ The polyvalence implicit in his use of “race”, does not so much invoke but rather interrogate the historically burdened and essentialist doctrines associated with it. The essentialist and atavistic view of race posits it as the sine qua non of Caribbean identity and subjectivity, imputing to the non-black segment of the population a monopoly of oppression and victimization. Walcott debunks this notion of monopoly by highlighting the suffering of the victimizer in Part I of the play– Columbus is sent back to Spain in chains and Walter Raleigh experiences the death of his son while Governor de Berrio mourns the death of his nephew. Walcott’s notion of race, therefore, is strategic and ideologically deliberate in its rejection of the insularity that constitutes atavism. This is the earliest signal that Walcott perceives the Caribbean as the potential site for a humanism, if not an egalitarianism, that is counter to historical notions of causation and dominance. In *Henri Christophe* political leadership is depicted as unwilling or unable to transform the state into a self-respecting autonomous entity, preferring instead to focus on redressing past social and racial wrongs. If *Henri Christophe*, however, prescribed what was wrong with so conceiving the Caribbean nation, *Drums* proposes what is possible in such a conception. This notion of a regional civilization and culture was earlier hinted at in “Canto VII” of *Epitaph for the Young*. Here, Walcott proffers a cultural and national polity that is not simply syncretic but which transcends ethnocentric notions of race in the service of progress for all its peoples:

¹ A cursory review of Walcott’s first three collections of poems reveal his preoccupation with issues of “complexion” and by extension miscegenation. In *25 Poems*, direct reference is made to inter-racial unions in eleven of the twenty-five poems. In *Epitaph for the Young*, three of the twelve Cantos treat with this theme and in *Poems*, eight of the thirty-one poems explicate the poet’s engagement with this concern. Walcott’s posture here is admittedly defensive in repudiating the ethnocentric notion of racial and cultural purity at this stage but later in his development he will extol racial and cultural hybridity as a strength. This preoccupation in the poetry informed Walcott theory of ethno-cultural syncretism, cogently set out in *Drums and Colours*, as answer to historical patterns of divisions within the region.

I praise those who see a world among these islands...
All those who dream against reason, who will make us
More powerful than stones in the Atlantic tributary,
But powerless, permanent, lovely and human,
Proud not of overcoming complexion,
But climbing poet and labourer nearer the tireless sun.
(*Epitaph*, Canto VII: 20-21, emphasis supplied)

It is in *Drums and Colours* that Walcott first posits the region as a syncretizing locus of disparate energies, ethnicities and cultures with racial tolerance and integration as necessary preconditions. He also suggests that in such a fusion the individual can become the synecdoche for cultural and social diversity. In the celebratory funeral scene which ends the play, Mano eulogizes Pompey as synthesizing trope – “all the nations of the earth is compounded in one man” (*Drums* 98). But this is a concept which finds its strongest affirmation in this final scene after being gradually deployed in earlier episodes of the play. For example, in Part II, General Le Clerc, Napoleon’s brother-in-law, sent to put down the Haitian slave rebellion, makes one of the most poignant statements on nationhood in the play by positing the synecdoche of the good man as the symbol of the nation – “show me a good man and I will show you a good nation. Do you know what will happen if your revolution succeeds? / There will not be liberty but mere patterns of revenge. / The history of man is founded on human nature, and we cannot exorcise the guilt of original sin.” (*Drums* 61). The quality of leadership and the nation is dependent on the individual.

The fractious and non-conformist figure of Pompey, after the wisdom of his seemingly obligatory death-bed call for a tolerant brotherhood, is eulogized by Mano as an “everythingist” and “nowherian.” Walcott sends his clearest signal yet that New World identity is not monolithic and that identity must include what he later calls in the “Muse of History” the “assimilation of the features of every ancestor” (128). Pompey affirms this notion of fluid identification as a result of shared experience when he declares “We all the same in the dark. We all in the same descending darkness” (*Drums* 95). The implied rejection of unitary identification that Walcott makes in *Drums and Colours*, by Mano’s reference to an “everythingist” and “nowherian” is further expanded in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, a play also completed in 1958. Some have argued that the implied protean identification here runs the risk of divesting the potentially beneficial effects of atavism. But Jean Paul Sartre seems to suggest the inescapability of atavism in his “colourless nudity” construct when he argues that “it is not only nor above the blossoming of atavistic instincts, it represents going beyond” (328-329). The introduction of the Bolom in *Ti-Jean* as a protean character is Walcott’s dramatic illustration of his belief in interchangeable identity and his rejection of

binary notions of personality. In the course of the play, the Bolom is among other things Devil's agent, victim of the mother's indiscretion, brother to Ti-Jean, unborn and finally alive. Similarly, the Old Man is Papa Bois, the figure from St. Lucian folklore, the Planter, the Devil, antagonist to the mother and her sons, and victim of the fall from heaven.

This trope of man as synecdoche and confluence of regional disparity here predates Walcott's subsequent casting the protean Crusoe figure and later the figure of the mulatto in this role. The figure of the mulatto, as victim, is extensively featured in *Henri Christophe* to emphasize the insensate racial discrimination and violence, as is the case with Dessalines' ethnic cleansing and Pétion's perpetuation of the cycle when he attains power. In *Drums and Colours*, the mulatto is also a victim of discrimination (as with Paco and George William Gordon) or deracination as exemplified by the tortured and tragic figure of Anton commenting on the practice of negro-baiting:

Why madam? I will tell you why.
Because I am torn to pieces with them, I am myself a division.
By the fact that I am half African and half French,
I must become both spectator and victim. (227)

Progressively in later works Walcott appropriates the symbol of the mulatto as the site of convergence of contexts; specifically cross-cultural interweaving. The mulatto becomes Walcott's synonym for hybridity and his self-designation as "the mulatto of style" bears the impress of his use of this trope as a vehicle for transfiguring diverse energies and domains as well as facilitating the fusion of disparate styles and expressive modes ("What the Twilight Says" 9). In a real sense, Walcott's work exemplifies his self-designation specifically as he mixes, blends and ultimately transforms European and African styles and genres to create his "New World aesthetic." But such invention seeks to circumvent the fact that the mulatto trope as a hybrid site of stability and convergence is problematic at several levels. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, for example, the mulatto constable and protagonist, Lestrade, engages a schizophrenic battle of self-identification in which he places both halves of himself on trial. Ironically, that which offers Lestrade a potential sense of belonging and inclusion (the consciousness of resistance to the White myth) loses its effectiveness and currency once its Manichean opposite is eliminated. Consequently, Lestrade calls for the indictment and conviction of Western literature, art, science and philosophy in clamoring for the death of the white muse: "She is the colour of law, religion, paper, art...Venus, the Virgin, the Sleeping Beauty" (*Dream* 319). In his rage for revenge, Lestrade paradoxically denounces a catalogue of historical figures including peoples of mixed ancestry like himself. His oscillation between rabid

white identification in Part One of the play and rabid black identification in Part Two permits Walcott to ideologically register double consciousness as a possible site for psychic wholeness.

The mulatto, therefore, in eliminating the seduction myth of the white superiority needs also to jettison the black reaction to that illusion. The reversal of racial hierarchies is no safeguard against racist discourse or racism. Walcott in this play suggests that the predictive, sterile and reactive posturing of the colonized against the colonizer needs to give way to the “splendours of imagination” and here he indirectly posits the symbol of the syncretic mulatto whose hybrid status rescues the region from the unproductive white/black thesis/antithesis. The potentially rescuing synthesis which his mulatto construct offers is predicated on Walcott, over time, re-conceptualizing this mulatto symbol as politically neutral, thereby cancelling out all status based inequalities and atavistic aesthetic peculiarity in the process of realizing his New World human brotherhood. But, in “Emergence of a Caribbean Literature,” Roberto Marquez questions the veracity of any such historical claim when he argues that the mulatto has proved uncertain as a national symbol of a syncretic ethos. He insists that hybridity does not produce or guarantee a resolution of the contradictions and oppositions within Caribbean society and psyche. Unlike Walcott, Marquez finds only a leitmotif of “anguished consciousness of irresolution and continuing contradiction” to emerge from the figure of the syncretic mulatto (315).

Drums and Colours anticipates Walcott’s rejection of exclusive identification based on the process of cross-cultural interweaving as we later see in both *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. This process is a function of place and historical experience in the context of *Drums*. In Part I, during the Middle Passage, a Jew on board a Spanish slaver pays the ransom for an African child and by that act conflates the victims of African and Jewish diasporas in a common New World cause:

JEW (*With CHILD*)

Come stand with me; perhaps we shall be taken,
But we shall find roots in the new land together.
Come, move out of this danger of the battle.
I will take care of thee, as my own son,
For we are outcasts together in one sorrow. (*Drums* 176)

The fact that the Jew fleeing persecutions desires of the region “a place a Jew can live in peace” foregrounds, for the playwright, not the actuality of the region as a site of brutality and exploitation but the potentiality of an unencumbered new beginning (*Drums* 23). The Jew therefore functions as a choric character bridging diasporas: “Because they have wrenched my people from the roots, / I am like a

shattered timber cast adrift. O God, / The shores of the new land will soon be known. Preserve my faith, O Lord, comfort Thy people” (*Drums* 30). But he also advocates syncretism as the basis for this new nationhood. The Jew becomes a prototype spokesman for a regional creolization that privileges all those “victims of civilization” when he comments to the cynical sailors on the cargo of slaves:

JEW (*Softly*)

The stranger that dwelleth with you, saith the prophet,
Shall be unto you as one born among you,
And thou shalt love him as thyself. (*Drums* 175)

If in *Drums and Colours*, Walcott introduces the notion of an elemental brotherhood, in *Ti Jean and His Brothers*, he proposes how it may be realized. Forgiveness is stated as the route out of an endless cycle of recrimination and conflict when Ti Jean asks for life for the Bolom. Only then is a disencumbered new beginning possible. Compassion is offered not simply as a defense against bitterness but as a necessary precondition for the erasure of the politics of exclusion.

Walcott elaboration on the nature of that act and “republic in which complexion does not matter” comes more than a decade later in 1970 in his manifesto for a West Indian theatre and style “What the Twilight Says: An Overture.” In this seminal essay, he attempts to codify the cultural significance of the folk input for a national aesthetics and indirectly to affirm that the inducement for unity in the republic he envisions is neither economic nor political but aesthetic. He claims that “the true vision” is to create a republic “devoted neither to power nor to money but to art” (“What the Twilight Says” 40). This commitment is to a neo-Platonic-cum-Romantic view of aesthetics as the supreme form of politics. But in his postulation of a Platonic notion of a “Republic devoted to the industry of art” as a governing principle, Walcott’s aesthetic de-contextualized the socio-political realities of the lives of the folk (“What the Twilight Says” 7). In effect this romanticizes their value to his Republic as, at best, raw material and fodder for his artistic and imaginative machinery, or at worse, as vassals to be refined and ennobled. This is not to obfuscate the fact that in the ideologically turbulent 1970s, Walcott did, on occasion, embrace overt political posturing as a concomitant of his evolving aesthetic stance on the role and function of the poet/artist. In “Meanings” (1970), for example, he affirmed: “the only hope is the communal effort, just as I think some form of socialism, evolved from our political history, is the only hope for the archipelago” (50).

The prevailing socio-political context in the Caribbean leading up to the creation of *Drums and Colours* invariably influenced its composition. The play’s insistent calls for forgiveness, unity and tolerance were just as necessary for

reconceiving the historic past not as it was, but by imagining a federated future in a multi-racial and multi-cultural cosmopolitan Trinidad and by extension the wider Caribbean. This multiplicity offered the potential to hold in harmonious balance the various ethnic, religious and social cleavages. Particularly in Trinidad, federation did indeed hold out the prospect of an imagined sense of national unity, evidenced in the fact that as soon as it became clear that the federal experiment was destined to fail, there was a corresponding uptick in community tensions within this cosmopolis. The then minority Hindu community began to vocalize its unease at being vulnerable to the black majority in an independent Trinidad. As a pro-federation member of the middle class and an artist that benefitted from patronage of the governing elite, it is fair to believe that Walcott was aware of the inter-ethnic and class sensitivities that influenced the desire for the success of the federation. The aspirations of some regional leaders like Eric Williams for the federation went beyond narrow sectarian interests, however pressing, to embrace a wider vision of Caribbean modernity. In a 1956 lecture in Woodford Square he proclaimed the urgency of a federation, “if the British Caribbean territories are to cease to parade themselves to the twentieth century world as eighteenth century anachronisms” (Williams 11-12).

By the time, however, that the pageant was staged in Port-of-Spain, Jamaican nationalism, which had been stoked by the labour riots of the late 1930s but had since subsided, flared again. This awakening was not however, directed against Britain as before but against “the new menace that had arisen in the dim and distant regions of the eastern Caribbean – the federal government. The realization that the federal government was a separate entity whose actions could affect Jamaica was a shocking experience for a large number of Jamaicans” (Springer 200-201). And no issue was to prove more divisive than the prospect of retroactive taxation on profits and dividends especially when Jamaica would comprise 59% of the territory and 53% of the population but would only have 38% of the seats in the Federal parliament (Domingo). Expectations and perceptions about federation had to be managed. After all, the British government’s attempt to federate Barbados with the Windward Islands in 1876 had ended in failure, and the resulting ‘Federation Riots’ left substantial loss of life and destruction of property (Domingo 180). It seemed that a sense of synthetic oneness could generate an emotional support of federation but in practical and substantive ways the identity of economic interest was not a sufficient inducement for regional federation.

After signing Jamaica’s entry into the federation in London, Jamaica’s Chief Minister Norman Manley (lawyer and chief architect of the federation), all too aware of the strength of the opposition to federation even within his People’s National Party, remarked that the opponents of federation had “logic, arguments and common sense” on their side while his supporters possessed an abundance of

“faith” (Domingo 166). The “logic” and “common sense” to which Norman Manley referred was the concern that West Indian territories lacked viability as independent states hence the perceived need to combine autonomy. Walcott too, in the play, was careful not to overstate the potential of this new nation through the character Ram: “We only a poor barefoot nation, small, a sprinkling of islands, with a canoe navy, a John Crow air force, and a fete father philosophy” (*Drums* 99). The ending of the play suggests that unity was indeed still possible despite the many contradictory and fractious approaches to religion and burial rights. This is a message reinforced in Part II in Deacon Sale’s folk sermon on the cohesive benefits of love and forgiveness to the components of nation building: “There are midwives to this labour, preachers and patriots, who know that love and not revenge is the meaning of mankind” (*Drums* 81).

While it is fair to conclude that Walcott would have been aware of and responsive to the political foment leading up to federation, there were other influences contributing to his conceptualization of the play and the nature of the federation in St. Lucian society. Personal experience also formed part of the back story that influenced the form and content of *Drums and Colours*. The Roman Catholic Church’s condemnation of Roderick Walcott’s play *The Banjo Man* as subversive and immoral (which the St Lucia Arts Guild had hoped would have been that territory’s entry in the West Indian Festival of the Arts) only served to deepen the longstanding perception of censorship and sabotage held by Walcott and his twin brother, Roderick, against the Roman Catholic church in St. Lucia. The opposition effectively stymied the play as the producers were denied the ability to stage the play in a church school hall and church members were forbidden to participate in the cast. Walcott’s mentor Harold Simmons responded on behalf of the artist guild in *The Voice of St Lucia* in which he warned that censorship was inimical to a syncretic local theatre and style that reflected “the experience” and “way of life” of the region: “[T]here can be no great art unless there is the freedom to weld the international traditions of culture with that of our local expressions or style” (4). Charles Gachet, the Bishop of Castries, proffered an uncompromising rebuttal that was not just personal but entailed differing visions of the nature and benefit of the Federation to the society. He cast the conflict in terms of a clash of civilizations in which the thinking associated with federation represented the new and subversive while the church represented the traditional and the proven, arguing “[s]ome have taken advantage of this incident to defend false notions of Freedom and Nationalism ... we ask all good Catholics to stand firm in the defense of Christian civilization” (qtd in King, 2000, 132). Bruce King opines that uncertainty over the future status of the Church in St Lucia could have informed the antagonism associated with the thinking linked to federation. King explains that over the decades the British administrators and the Church had learned to live together, but could the St. Lucian church still be given

such consideration in a West Indian Federation? (King, 2000, 135). It seemed that the nascent West Indian theatre, instead of being the bonding agent joining the various peoples and religions of the region together into a shared culture, had become the flash point for conflict between segments of the new nation.

Fifty years on, *Drums and Colours* is undoubtedly seminal in signaling the aesthetic trajectory of key issues that are to be posited, contested and even contradicted in Walcott's oeuvre. The passage of half a century has not diminished the force or necessity of his syncretizing vision for Caribbean society which he first set out in comprehensive detail in *Drums and Colours*. Walcott's republic "in which complexions do not matter" is as much a cultural and political necessity today as it was in 1958. Those who doubt this fact only have to consider the Trinidadian fiftieth anniversary conflict between the ruling United National Congress of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the opposition, People's National Movement founded by Eric Williams, over appropriate ways to acknowledge and honour contributions to nation building. When the dust settled, the twin island republic which has as its national motto, "Together we aspire, together we achieve," had conducted two separate national celebrations (some say along racial lines) to honour those patriots on whose efforts the nation had been founded. The opposition PNM decided to go it alone after it argued that the seminal contribution of its founder and first prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago had been undervalued by the governing UNC. Attainment of "that republic in which complexions do not matter" yet remains a hopeful enterprise.

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