CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

What is behind Myth and History in Derek Walcott’s Omeros?

Raj Kumar Baral¹* and Heena Shrestha²

Abstract: Derek Walcott’s epic Omeros focuses on its representation of myth and history; narrates the story of St. Lucia with reference to the history of wars and slavery and relates mythical references with common people of St. Lucia. This article analyzes the politics behind the use of myth and history of Caribbean by using alternative modernity vis-à-vis Caribbean discourse. Through mythical references, Walcott revives the native history of St. Lucia as an alternative to Western modernity resulted by the history of imperialism. This research concludes that Walcott, in this epic, valorizes the rich cultural heritage of St. Lucia and highlights the significance of ancestral legacy and the need of cultural revival against the domination of Western culture.

Subjects: Cultural Studies; Language & Linguistics; Literature

Keywords: Alternative modernity; culture; history; myth; identity

As an attempt to preserve Caribbean culture, Derek Walcott (1990), in Omeros, especially focuses St. Lucia, and structures his epic resembling Trojan myth for the formation of St. Lucian identity and to show that as present is connected to past, people are connected to their ancestral roots. By bringing mythical references of Trojan War through the characters like Philoctete, Hector, Helen and Achille,

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Raj Kumar Baral is an MPhil. in English Literature from Tribhuvan University. He has been teaching at Tribhuvan University as an Assistant Professor for ten years. He received a BA in 2002 and an MA in 2005 from Tribhuvan University. His research interests span from literature, language, cultural studies and education policy. He also has interest in creative writing, criticism and translation. His literary career began right from his school days and continuously writing poems, doing translations and publishing critical opinions on language and literature on different newspapers and journals. He is the Editor of Discovery Dynamics: A Peer Reviewed Journal of Research and Development (ISSN 239-23989). Currently he teaches at Central Department of English, TU, Kirtipur.
In this article, Walcott advocates the need to return to traditions in order to challenge the modernity born out of colonialism

Heena Shrestha is a graduate in English Literature from Tribhuvan University. She completed her Master’s degree (MA) in 2020. Her research area includes culture, language and literature.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Upon realizing the vital role of myth and history in human civilization, Derek Walcott focuses on the same of traditional Caribbean people at the time when many countries are affected by western modern lifestyle. As history acts as a foundation of human’s present existence, and myth expresses the beliefs and values held by a society, Walcott feels the need of remembering and acknowledging the value of myth and history when Western modernity is detaching people and society from these values. This research on Omeros, an epic structured on Trojan myth and centered on history of the Africans living in St. Lucia as natives, concludes that by using myth and history, Walcott intends to revive the forgotten traditional culture and identity of St. Lucia. It also reveals that as Western modernity cannot be applicable in every society, the non-West societies must seek for cultural modernity as an alternative to Western modernity.
and by presenting the wounded history of St. Lucia, created by the history of wars and slavery, Walcott intends to travel back to his ancestors where he can gain necessary wisdom and experience in order to initiate cultural renewal as a part of cultural healing among the wounded St. Lucians. Also, through the employment of common people, he emphasizes on the celebration of the beauty of small moments of everyday life not affected by modernity. Moreover, he indicates over the significance of returning to one’s traditional lifestyle as it is the way that upholds one’s identity and existence.

By modernity, we understand Euro/American or Western modernity that has been built as the canonical structure of modernity throughout the world. But Western modernity cannot accumulate the ethos of non-Western countries because of cultural differences and different sets of values and beliefs they possess. Therefore, in the era of capitalism and globalization, non-Western countries seek for an alternative to Western modernity.

Walcott’s St. Lucia is not an exception vis-à-vis the effects of Modernity. Walcott, in this epic, depicts the feeling of rootlessness, frustration, and identity crisis among modernity-led St. Lucians. They possess their own distinct native values and culture which Western modernity fails to keep intact. Their love for nature and wilderness is not acknowledged by Western modernity that prioritizes a concrete city built for capitalist motives. Their values and beliefs are more spiritual than material. So, as St. Lucia is a West dominated society, to preserve the essence of St. Lucian cultural heritage and its root, it is essential to seek for a counterculture to Western modernity.

Walcott, born in the family of English, African, and Dutch descents, inherited mixed cultures. However, being born and raised in St. Lucia, he felt rooted to Africa. As he was living away from Africa, the central theme in most of his plays and poems is the search for identity and cultural root, which was shattered by the slavery system. Moreover, because his grandfathers were whites and his grandmothers were the descendants of slaves, he inherited hybrid culture, which led him to muse upon the need of identity in his works. Also, while in St. Lucia, he encountered the effect of colonialism that brought modernity along with it. This wounded Caribbean culture as people got busy in trying to afford modernity and worried less about traditional cultural practices. As the natives and majority of the Caribbean are African descendants, Walcott values African culture in Caribbean islands realizing it to be different from Western modern culture. His works are mainly concerned with the idea that cultural heritage is the source of identity, and hence, it is essential to remain attached to one’s own ancestral root.

Due to the confrontation with two different cultures, he seems to be in dilemma in his literary works; which one to choose. He searches for his cultural identity and its root, mostly his African root. In his poem, “The Sea is History,” for instance, Walcott questions the Caribbean people about their history and culture. He claims that sea carries their history that had drowned their culture and ancestors during slave trade. Similarly, in “A Far Cry from Africa,” his split identity is explicit when he writes that he cannot abandon neither English nor Caribbean culture because he has inherited both. He often feels identity-less and searches for a proper identity along with the pangs and suffering of racial and colonial struggle of Caribbean people.

In Omeros too, Walcott reveals the struggle of traditional St. Lucian to escape Western modernity and points the need to return to traditions. He stresses on the Western modernity born out of colonialism in St. Lucia which negatively impacted its native culture. He recreates the history of slavery and wars that had distressed blacks and altered their culture. He shows how the culture of colonizers made the native culture of St. Lucia to be faded. By revising history, he reflects the suffering of the St. Lucian and aspires to heal it through the revival of their ancestral culture as an alternative to Western modernity. He emphasizes the significance of cultural root to ensure the existence of his people with cultural identity that carries the values and beliefs of the community that have existed from the prehistoric time, and to give it continuation.
Walcott reflects the problem of modernity and globalization resulting to fragmentation and isolation in the lives of common people. He shows the problem of modernity as city problems, where too powerful technology, consumerist culture, a rootless population living in crowded conditions, and other factors add to the condition where people get themselves to the state of isolation due to declining interest in tradition and communal values.

Jahan Ramazani (1997) in “The Wound of History: Walcott’s Omeros and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction” focuses on Philoctete’s wound in Omeros that symbolizes Caribbeans’ suffering; in past through slavery and colonialism, and at present through imposed history, culture and language by the oppressors that do not acknowledge native Caribbean culture. He states, “Early on in Omeros, Walcott uses one of Philoctete’s seizures to suggest that the inexpressible physical suffering of enslaved Africans is retained in the bodies of their descendants and that the pain still presses urgently for an impossible verbal release” (406). Walcott victimizes Philoctete to remind his readers that the Caribbeans have been victimized by the colonizers like Britain and France, and the suffering continues due to lack of recognition of Caribbean’s pre-historic identity.

Jonathan (1992) in “Nightmare History: Derek Walcott’s Omeros,” criticizes Omeros as lacking aesthetics of art and revolving around history and facts. He mentions, “Omeros is seriously a flawed work of art, and its failures are directly related to its author’s tragic obsession with the demons of history” (202). Walcott is related with a Greek tragic hero as he is fated to settle things that he did not mess. Martin further mentions, “Omeros marks no new access of freedom for its author from the coils of history, and the poem offers no evidence that Walcott has resolved the antinomies of his birth and dual heritage” (204). Throughout the epic, Walcott is submerged in the suffering of Caribbean created by history and even at the end, the author is not able to hint over the resolution of the suffering of hybridity.

The major characters, Philoctete, Hector, Achille, and Helen, in Omeros are common natives of St. Lucia but have been provided European names to signal over the effect of Western imperialism on the island. James V. Morrison (1999) in his article “Homer Travels to the Caribbean: Teaching Walcott’s ‘Omeros,’” informs “Walcott’s decision to tell the story of his native island in terms of the classical models of European culture has been seen ... as reinforcing the cultural imperialism of the West” (92). Walcott presents the consequence of Western imperialism that has affected everyday life of the natives of St. Lucia, resulting to the state of hybridity with the mixture of black and white culture that provides no specific cultural identity to St. Lucian.

This state of hybridity that Homi K. Bhabha (2009) describes as a “third space” or “in-between space” means “neither the one nor the other but something else besides, in between” (41). His concept on hybridity is mainly against canonical, colonial or hegemonic discourse that excludes the subjects and issues of margin or the colonized. The “third space,” for Bhaba, is a creative arena that provides a space for resistance against hegemonic power. Walcott himself being in in-between position creates hybrid consciousness in characters of Omeros. The characters’ position in the epic constitutes Walcott’s own fragmented state that he desires to fix by returning to tradition that accommodates pre-historic identity of his African community. Raj Kumar Baral (2018) in his research, on the hybrid consciousness in Walcott, “The Images of ‘In-Between’ in Derek Walcott’s Poetry,” observes, “Walcott is a poet situated on the in-between location with hybrid prototypes of his own creation in order to evoke discourse on the cultural root and identity” whose “poems are the examples of a hybrid poet’s muse on cultural duality and its simultaneously poetic resolution” (29). Walcott’s Omeros also recreates the cultural duality of St. Lucian with the need to find what has been lost, and to get connected with own ancestral roots and culture by maintaining proper distance with alien culture.

Walcott, to reveal how Africans landed in St. Lucia, moves back centuries before when white soldiers attacked Achille’s village in Africa. The unarmed black men, women and children were all held captives by the armed white soldiers and were taken to the other side of the world through
Transatlantic Slave Trade. Those who died of starvation and weakness during the voyage were thrown in the Atlantic Ocean, and those who survived were sold and taken to different parts of the New World: “So there went the Ashanti one way, the Mandingo another,/the Ibo another, the Guinea. Now each man was a nation/in himself, without mother, father, brother” (Walcott 150). They were separated from their families and scattered far from Africa.

After being traded to different parts of the world, they were forced to intense labour. Walcott describes how the slaves were abused to build St. Lucia:

Hell was built on those hills. In that country of coal without fire, that inferno the same colour
as their skins and shadows, every laboring soul
climbed with her hundredweight basket, every load for
one copper penny, balanced erect on their necks
that were tight as the liner’s hawser from the weight. (74)

Caribbean slaves were forced to do more than they could. They could not revolt because the armed whites were way more powerful. They were restricted to enjoy their culture. White culture and religion were imposed upon them. Due to this intense torture, they were detached from their culture and slowly forgot what was their original:

Their whole world was moving,
or a large part of the world, and what began dissolving
was the fading sound of their tribal name for the rain,
the bright sound for the sun, a hissing noun for the river. (Walcott 152)

Their world was shattered, and their tribal language began to fade away due to the intensified suppression.

Regarding slavery, Edouard Glissant (1989), in his Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays, views, “Slavery was accompanied by reification: all history seemed to come to a halt in the Caribbean, and the peoples transplanted there had no alternative but to subject themselves to History with a capital H, all equally subjected to the hegemony of Europe” (248). Blacks’ history was obliterated, and their new history began after European brought them to Caribbean to make them so-called civilized. They could do nothing but accept what the whites told. Then, they had no history, no ancestry, no culture and no identity. They struggled under horrifying conditions. For three long centuries, injustice prevailed when the blacks lived hellish life on earth.

To explore the brutality of whites during colonialism, Walcott spends few pages of his epic to review the Wounded Knee Massacre as well. During colonial expansion, non-whites were under terrible threat. Colonizers did not leave any chance to suppress tribal communities and disseminate white culture all over. For the same reason, US force captured the Red Indians in South Dakota, while they were preparing for the Ghost Dance, and exterminated hundreds of natives obliterating their voice, freedom and their culture. Red Indians were all covered with the whites of the snow of the winter of 1890. Walcott fears, “What would not remain/was not only the season but the tribes themselves” (176). He presents the threat of colonialism. African tribes in St. Lucia were also degrading, they were made rootless, stuck in between black and white culture. Therefore, Walcott wishes to retrieve his pre-historic identity that slavery and colonialism took away from him and the natives.

Walcott continues to explore the history of colonialism through different wars that directly affected St. Lucians, where they were forced to fight but were never counted. In Omeros, the St. Lucians fight for the British troop in the Battle of the Saintes under the leadership of Admiral George Rodney. After the battle is won, “It was then that the small admiral with a cloud/on his head renamed Afolabe ‘Achilles,’ which to keep things simple, he let himself be called” (Walcott
Walcott reveals that St. Lucians were frequently used by colonizers for their benefit while the blacks’ identity kept changing. They were given European names and were called whatever colonizers wanted. Till then Africans were made to accept that they were meant to be ruled by Europeans, and therefore, changed themselves accordingly.

Similarly, Walcott refreshes the memories of Second World War in the epic through one of the characters, Major Dennis Plunkett, a retired British soldier who fought in the Second World War. He is living his retired days in St. Lucia, but the wound that he got during the war has not healed as the memories are still fresh, and frequently, he recalls those days. He remembers the war field where thousands of soldiers died horribly indicating the long-term effect and suffering caused by war. Moreover, during the war, people from different places settled in Caribbean countries as safe haven, and after the war, people from around the world settled there. As a result, diversified population increased in St. Lucia, which further affected the culture of the natives.

During colonialism, only few of the Western countries were powerful which had threatened the entire world. Glissant observes, “One of the most disturbing consequences of colonization could well be this notion of a single History, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on others by the West” (93). History was written by those in power which showed West as superior and non-West as inferior. Due to the threat West had created and maintained, whatever it claimed, was the canon which no one could challenge. He further asserts, “History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone ‘made’ the history of the world” (64). At that time, power was totally in the grip of the West when it alone decided what to mention and what to obliterate. In the process, it obliterated the history of St. Lucia as well.

Walcott also agrees that during West domination in St. Lucia, “History was fact, History was a cannon, not a lizard ...” (92). Historians wrote history of St. Lucia after the Europeans found it. The indigenous tribe of St. Lucia got no space on the pages of history. They were presented as if they had been dropped from sky; no history, no ancestors, just as found by Europeans during colonial mission. According to the history, St. Lucia was made through wars, cannons and fires, not by the natives there. History of different events and wars was written. Europeans valorized their bravery while fighting for St. Lucia but gave no space to the cultural history of the island.

Regarding the suppressive history, Glissant remarks, “We can be the victims of History when we submit passively to it—never managing to escape its harrowing power. History (like Literature) is capable of quarrying deep within us, as a consciousness or the emergence of a consciousness, as a neurosis (symptom of loss) and a contraction of the self” (70). History creates identity which is responsible in forming consciousness of a community and individual. Letting other write one’s history is to let them to control to recognize who one is. So, St. Lucians, to establish their dignity, must challenge West by writing their own history. And if it is rewritten, even the whites know that they will be shown as evil. Plunkett fears:

... History will be revised, and we'll be its villians, fading from the map
... And when it's over we'll be the bastards! ... (Walcott 92)

For this kind of attempt of challenging history, Simon Gikandi (1992) in Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature asserts, “What Caribbean writers have done is to weaken the foundation of the Western narrative, expose what Laclau calls ‘the metaphysical of rationalist pretensions of Western modernity and its absolutist theory of history’ (253). By presenting the domination of West while writing history, Walcott intends to encourage St. Lucians to dig into the history to show the West that they have the history of their own, by bringing out their pre-historic identity attached with their culture that existed long before canons were written.
To further elucidate what the history of colonialism resulted in St. Lucia, Walcott analyzes West's encroachment upon their religion. Churches were built and everyone had to follow Catholic path, which Walcott did not enjoy. He criticizes:

... The Church of Immaculate Conception was numbering the Angelus. With lace frills on, balconies stood upright, as did the false pillars of the Georgian library; each citizen stood paralyzed as the bell counted the hours. (120)

To be able to change people's religion is to be able to change people's daily courses. St. Lucians had to leave their age-old religion and had to follow Christianity that was alien for them. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992) in *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosopahy of Culture* views, “All aspects of contemporary African cultural life ... have been influenced, often powerfully, by the transition of African societies through colonialism ...” (149). Now they must pray, eat and work according to the rituals of the colonizers. Church bells ring the Angelus to mark the time of their daily activities. This has paralyzed the natives as if diseased and marked desolation of St. Lucia. Those false pillars of British Empire serve no favourable purpose to the St. Lucians.

Moreover, Walcott mentions about the schools in St. Lucia where the children of the natives learn English and speak in American accent, which is devolving their native language. Highlighting the importance of language, Hans Kohn (1967), in *The Idea of Nationalism* brings Johann Gottfried Herder's notion and quotes that language does not only act as “a tool of the arts and sciences [but is] a part of them. Whoever writes about the literature of a country must not neglect its language” (qtd. in Kohn 431). Though Walcott writes *Omeros* in the language of white people, which shows his in-betweenness, he does not want his language to get lost. He worries that the future generation of St. Lucia may understand nothing of the native language. After all, “... the spirit of a nation [is] expressed above all in its language, its Sprachgeist” (Appiah 20). Language is one of the emblems of nation that signifies one's nationality, without having to tell. So, he wishes his ancestral language to be passed on to the later generation with equal importance.

Also, students in St. Lucia learn the history written by their colonizers. They are taught about the wars of British victory. Victorious Admiral Rodney from British troop is praised for the victory in Battle of the Saintes but the blacks who fought in the frontline in that war are not mentioned. Walcott writes, “School-texts rustle to the oval portrait of a/cloud-wigged Rodney but the builders’ names are not there/not Hector’s ancestors, Philoctete’s, nor Achille’s” (315). They learn nothing about their African ancestors at school.

During colonialism, modernity entered St. Lucia along with Europeans, which changed St. Lucia religiously, institutionally, and structurally. In the epic, Walcott, as a narrator, visits St. Lucia after several years and is not happy with the changes he observes. As he passes through the highway, he sees the wilderness of St. Lucia destroyed to build a modern city. Transformation of “the wild savannah into moderate pastures/ ... hotel development ...” have resulted to the “Old earlocks/and rusting fretsaw” (Walcott 227). Modernity is shining while tradition is getting rusted. Glissant remarks, “Building a nation means today thinking first and foremost of systems of production, [and] profitable commercial exchanges ...” (235). Whites have done the same to St. Lucia. In the process of building a modern nation, profitable exchanges are made, and large portion of wild vegetation is being destroyed to build hotels:

... On the charred field, the massive sawn trunks burnt slowly like towers, and the great indigo dusk slowly plumed down, devouring the still leaves, igniting the firefly huts, lifting the panicky egret. (Walcott 234)
People see money in the burnt leaves of trees. Wildlife and vegetation are all under threat.

Walcott stresses over the negative impacts of Western modernity in St. Lucia. Natural environment is destroyed to build a concrete city. The country has become tourists' holiday destination, and big hotels are built for their accommodation. But while changing St. Lucia into a modern city, it is made like every other city in Europe. The island looks like any other island made for tourist destination. Walcott is saddened in St. Lucia seeing the “... beach that now looked just like everywhere else,/Greece or Hawaii. Now the goddamn souvenir/felt absurd, excessive” (229). In adherence, Supriya Nair (1996) claims, “The average North American or European can no more tell them apart, or in some cases whether they are in Caribbean or Micronesia ...” (75). Now, there is nothing unique about the Caribbean islands. Tourists visit there for recreation just like they go to any other island. Souvenir now seems absurd as there is no uniqueness to resemble its distinctiveness; there is nothing extra to take home as memento.

Nair claims, “The transformation of manufactured territory from sugar plantation to tourist plantation continues to shape the material destiny of these islands” (72). St. Lucians are now chained by material life and are controlled by capitalism. Walcott writes, “Who screams out our price? The crows of the Corn Exchange./Where are the pleasant pastures? A green baize-table/Who invests in our happiness? The Chartered Tour” (197). St. Lucians worth is set in numbers by companies. They are chained by material possession, so Walcott fears that St. Lucians have “dark future down darker street” (197).

Further, Nair views that “… lack of development of the agricultural sector, channeling the profits by multinational hotels into the countries of origin, control over the domestic sector by international monopolies of capital …” have extended the “… perpetuation of colonial inequalities” (76) in St. Lucia. St. Lucians continue to struggle to afford a modern life. Due to the replacement of agricultural land by hotels, natives of St. Lucia must rely on seasonal employment in tourism that has made their lives more difficult. Therefore, Walcott observes that Western modernity has not uplifted their lives but rather exacerbated. Paul Gilroy (1993) in The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness views, “Modernity is … defined above all through the consciousness of novelty that surrounds the emergence of civil society, the modern state, and industrial capitalism” (49). Walcott, in shows that this Western concept of modernity does not fit in the African milieu. Hence, Glissant seems to be in adherence when he observes that in Caribbean islands, “The monster of industrialization has perhaps broken the link with the land …” (160). The St. Lucians enjoy wilderness, not the concrete blocks; modernity that destroys natural habitat is destroying St. Lucia.

Walcott criticizes cultural changes brought by modernity. As he visits there, he feels confused: “It was another country, whose excitable/gestures I knew but could not connect with my mind” (167). He does not understand the creole language that his people are speaking and feels connected only with their skin. He further sees the changed lifestyle as the villagers are having nightlife in dance bars. His peaceful village is draining in noise while European DJs are playing the song: “... we go rock this village till cock wake up!” (Walcott 110).

Walcott shows the island being morally corrupted when the black women are selling themselves to white tourists:

She was selling herself like the island, without any pain, and the village did not seem to care that it was dying in its change, the way it whored away a simple life that would soon disappear. (111)

Modernity has destroyed native values and people are doing anything and everything for money. Walcott worries that “One day the Mafia will spin these islands round like roulette” (29). Everyone
is being corrupted; Island and its people are under the rule of Western modernity. If this continues, Achille worries that the future of St. Lucia is going to be terrible because “the young took no interest in canoes/That was longtime shit. Once it came from Africa/And the sea would soon get accustomed to the noise” (112). Achille sees his culture and history being crushed, and he fears that it will continue till it is totally devoured by Western modernity. In this regard, Simon Gikandi states, “...the implication of [European] modernity for the natives of the islands and African slaves was nothing less than the loss of cultures, physical annihilation and historical displacement” (253). Western modernity made St. Lucians culturally and historically displaced.

Lots of changes have taken place in St. Lucia. Island and its people are becoming modern but “...the step from tradition to modernity did not parallel the distinction between primitive and civilized, or even the opposition between black and white” (Gilroy 162). Tourists still see the natives as primitive and sometimes another form of being, “as if they were horses, muscles made beautiful/ by working the sea ...” (Walcott 298). This prejudice enrages Achille because “the tourists came flying to them to capture the scene/like gulls fighting over a catch ...” (299). He is frustrated that their camera cannot capture the true virtues, simplicity and essence of St. Lucia.

Achille, exhausted by being compelled to listen to the loud European songs, prefers the songs composed by his own people. European songs are shallow but black music has depth in it; it has a story to tell, a history to explore, a suffering to express, and a struggle to reveal. Achille’s mind keeps playing “... a Marley reggae-/Buffalo soldier” (Walcott 161) which is the song about the search for identity amidst the suffering of blacks. The music keeps thudding in his head as he himself is in a similar situation. As Gilroy states, “... black music [is] the central sign of black cultural value, integrity, and autonomy” (90) and is “... the primary expression of cultural distinctiveness” (81–82), it is enriched with black culture and history, at the same time representing black experience and struggle that every black can relate to.

Walcott employs common people in his epic to present the reality of St. Lucia. St. Lucia is not made by the kings but by slaves, who now live as common people involved in fishing and other traditional occupations. Those common people are the ones who are keeping the native tradition alive. And as Walcott explores how the ancient culture of St. Lucia has been impacted by Western modernity, he presents the reality of the common people who are struggling like warriors to save their culture and identity against modernity. The traditional natives of St. Lucia continue to live their traditional life in the face of modernity. Walcott writes, “... Everything that was once theirs/ was given to us now ...” (119) but “A government that made no difference to Philoctete/to Achille ...” (119–20). St. Lucians who enjoy traditional life do not care what big changes happen around them. And even when a huge part of the world is changing due to modernity, the natives of St. Lucia who are preserving their culture continue to do what they have been doing.

Regarding Western modernity, Arif Dirlik (2013) in his article “Thinking Modernity Historically: Is ‘Alternative Modernity’ the Answer?” states, “It is at best the self-view that emerged in societies in Western Europe which in the seventeenth century began to think of themselves as an epochal improvement over their ancestors as well as other peoples, therefore claiming a break with the past and the Rest” (34). This notion was disseminated throughout the globe trying to make it universal. But as majority of the countries in non-West have the cultural values that are completely different from this notion, most of the non-Westerners think Western culture as ethically unacceptable. So, Western “Enlightenment assumptions about culture, cultural value, and aesthetics go on being tested by those who do not accept them as universal moral standards” (Gilroy 10). Similarly, Walcott, in the epic, challenges Western culture and stresses over their native cultural heritage as the remedy of the suffering of St. Lucia and takes Achille to a spiritual journey to his ancestral land Africa, marking his diversion from Western modernity.

To revive the forgotten African ancestral heritage, Walcott takes Achille in a revitalizing voyage to Africa. Though Achille maintains the traditional island life in St. Lucia and respects his culture,
he is bewildered by the domination of Western culture, and therefore, fails to remember the names of his gods, rivers, and trees. Achille resembles every St. Lucian who is stuck between two cultures, lacks proper identity, and feels rootless, which further leads to frustration and failure in life. Walcott feels the urgency to locate ancestral roots of black people that the European history has denied. Gilroy also presents similar view, when he remarks, “The need to locate cultural or ethnic roots and then to use the idea of being in touch with them as a means to refigure the cartography of dispersal and exile is perhaps best understood as a simple and direct response to the varieties of racism which have denied the historical character of black experience and the integrity of black cultures” (112). Practice of racism has shadowed black cultures and experiences throughout the history. So, Walcott intends to locate the roots of blacks in general and particularly of St. Lucia in his epic as a response to racism.

Walcott provides Achille a Christian name to emphasize on the influence of colonialism. When Achille fails to introduce himself properly to his ancestors, he realizes that the colonizer’s culture is not his culture. When his father asks him the meaning of his name, he replies, “I do not know what the name means. It means something maybe. What’s the difference? In the world I come from/we accept the sounds we were given ...” (Walcott 138). These lines reflect the condition of St. Lucians’ identity. They are so tired of the suffering from the whites that they do not fight for their identity. They accept the way whites identify them. Walcott signifies the importance of name in African culture when he, through Achille’s father, stresses, “… you nameless son, are only the ghost/of a name ...” (138–39). Similarly, Appiah differentiates precolonial African culture guided by religion, and modern culture guided by science. He explains, “Precolonial African cultures … are inclined to suppose that events in the world have meaning; they worry not about the possibility of the unexplained … but of the meaningless (what has no function, no point)” whereas “… the scientific worldview … accepts that not everything happens has a human meaning” (124). Africans believe in reason for everything that happens. Walcott stresses over their meaningful culture of naming everything with a proper meaning. Their names signify their qualities and characters. They believe that if the name has no meaning, the person has no identity, and hence, has no existence.

Also, through Achille’s journey to Africa, Walcott delivers that Caribbean is rooted to Africa when he writes “... two worlds mirrored there ...” (136) in the meeting of Achille and his ancestors. In Africa, with his ancestors, Achille learns his culture; he learns African language, listens to the myth and folk stories, learns to eat and drink traditionally, and learns African names. As the postulation “there’s more than just slavery to the history, we have dignity” (2:56-3:03) made by Rebel (1991) in his track “Soul Rebel,” Achille learns that his community has its own civilization and customs shared by its people. Glissant observes, “… we discover daily in the world that one … needs a sense of a collective personality, of what is called dignity or specificity, without which the nation would precisely be stripped of meaning” (235). Collective identity helps us to recognize our origin, hence identifying who we are and where we belong. It can be gained only through the respect of our origin. Walcott here tries to show what it is to be an African.

Walcott, through Achille, targets every African who was separated from their land and people. Like St. Lucian, every other person of African origin cannot create a space in the world and its history unless has a specific identity. Concerning this issue, Stuart Hall (1995) in “Negotiating Caribbean Identities,” claims, “The African diasporas of the New World have been in one way or another incapable of finding a place in modern history without the symbolic return to Africa” (9). To be capable to get that space, one must exist and to prove the existence, one must have an identity. And to have that identity, every person of African origin must return to their tradition and stay connected with their African root, wherever they may be.

The questions that Achille asks to himself that who he is and where he belongs to are answered after he learns his culture. Walcott signals that by discovering self-identity, one learns the values of one’s being, and this heals much of the psychological suffering as it guides the person to live under certain values and beliefs. Achille gets healed through the process of knowing his ancestors and
culture. When he is back to St. Lucia, he no more has jealousy, hatred and rivalry against Hector. He now respects every one of his tribe as he has learnt communal values from his ancestors.

Walcott favouring tradition further criticizes modernity by revealing the impact of capitalism in ecology of St. Lucia. As Arif Dirlik mentions that global capitalism has brought several problems among which the “foremost ... problems are ecological destruction and the concentration of wealth in fewer hands across the globe” (8), Walcott criticizes that natives and nature of St. Lucia are suffering due to global capitalism. Due to modern techniques of fishing for business, the sea is becoming empty of fishes—there are “… no more lobsters on the seabed” (Walcott 300), “… the shrimp were finished ...” (301). Devastated Achille asks, “was he the only fisherman left in the world/using the old ways, who believed his work was prayer/who caught only enough, since the sea had to live” (301). Capitalism does not care about others’ lives. All it cares about is market domination. It has targeted Caribbean Sea as well. The people involved in this business are only getting richer whereas people like Achille and Philoctete, who only earn enough to live as they respect and worship nature, are suffering in crisis. Further, Walcott signals on unnatural climatic changes due to capitalism when he writes:

[Achille] had never seen such strange weather; the surprise of a tempestuous January that churned the foreshore brown with remarkable, bursting seas convinced him that “somewhere people interfering with the course of nature” .... (299)

Human encroachment into nature has changed its course. Exhusted Achille who cherishes traditional life thinks “… He might have to leave/the village for good ... /far from the discos, the transports, the greed, the noise” (Walcott 301). Referring to similar context, Dirlik asserts, “Culturally conceived notions of alternatives ignore the common structural context of a globalized capitalism which generates but also sets limits to difference” (6). Achille does not get tempted by the capitalistic motives but decides to continue his own tradition.

Further, Walcott raises the problem created by modernity in social relations. Appiah observes that “… industrialization and urbanization have made social relations puzzling and problematic” (122). In Omeros, Helen is a native of St. Lucia with African origin but has been influenced by Western modernity, and thus, does not have a good social relation. She cannot stick to one lover and keeps switching side between two lovers and even sells herself to tourists in nightclubs. Many people do not like her because they think “she too proud!” (Walcott 24). Hotel managers do not want to employ her because “… she was too rude” (33). Her social relation seems more problematic when she is also denied of work as a housemaid by her former mistress Maud Plunkett:

.... Of course you dare, come back looking for work after ruining two men, after trying on my wardrobe, after driving Hector crazy with a cutlass, you dare come, that what you mean? “We’ve no work, Helen.” (Walcott 124)

Natives of St. Lucia do not prefer this kind of life influenced by Western modernity because they have their own ethnic values which are different from modern values. In this regard, Gilroy views that the conception of ethnic cultures to counter modernity:

... looks ... for an artistic practice that can disabuse the mass of black people of the illusions into which they have been seduced by their condition of exile and unthinking consumption of inappropriate cultural objects like ... pop music, and western clothing. The community is felt to be on the wrong road, and it is the intellectual’s job to give them a new direction, firstly by recovering and then by donating the racial awareness that the masses seem to lack. (32)
Walcott, through his artistic creation Omeros, makes people aware of the values and aesthetics of their own culture.

Walcott expresses that Western modernity is not suitable for traditional St. Lucians who are guided by their ancient religion and culture. So, he attempts to revive the traditional culture and religion that Western modernity has shadowed, and believes that in St. Lucia, suffering caused by domination can be solved by returning to the ancestral tradition because “like law ... culture articulates conflicts and alternatively legitimizes, displaces or controls the superior force” (De Certeau, 1986: xvii). Culture can be a form of resistance to domination, so Walcott emphasizes on St. Lucian culture to resist Western imposition of modernity. Relating similar concern to alternative modernity, Arif Dirlik views that alternative modernity “… focuses on cultural renovation of human subjectivities in the course of global struggles against the anti-democratic politics of capitalism in all its local variations” (14). Walcott, by emphasizing on cultural revival, is seeking for an alternative to Western modernity in St. Lucia.

To present ancestral tradition as the source of healing, Walcott characterizes Philoctete as a wounded fisherman with a wound on his ankle that represents the cultural wound inflicted by slavery and colonialism upon the natives of St. Lucia. The wound has been inherited from his ancestors, which was created by rusted chain used by whites to chain blacks as slaves. He remains wounded almost throughout the epic and is healed only towards the end. In the epic, all the major characters have either physical or psychological wound created by the history of imperialism, but Walcott especially focuses on Philoctete’s wound to heal it with the help of his ancestors.

Philoctete leads tourists in St. Lucia to show the place around as a tourist guide. Though he is working as a guide to earn extra money, he has not left fishing which is the traditional occupation of the natives of that island. His wound is very old and has not found any cure yet. Time and again, he is haunted and hurt by the wound. So, he believes that the wound is inherited from his slave ancestors. Walcott writes:

He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure? That the cross he carried was not only the anchor’s but that of his race, for a village black and poor as the pigs that rooted in its burning garbage, then were hooked on the anchors of the abattoir. (19)

The wound reflects the suffering of the blacks inflicted by slavery. Historian C.L.R. James (1989) in The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution discusses the harrowing ways to mistreat Caribbean slaves like “salt, pepper, citron, cinders, aloes, and hot ashes were poured on the bleeding wounds” (12). This kind of terrifying treatment of the slaves did not let their suffering to be healed but it passed on to their descendants.

Glissant discusses the slave trade as “… being snatched away from our original matrix. The journey that has fixed in us the unceasing tug of Africa against which we must paradoxically struggle today in order to take root in our rightful land. The motherland is also for us the inaccessible land” (160–61). Slavery system shattered cultural identity of the blacks, and the descendants became unaware of their original culture making them feel rootless. The descendants like Philoctete struggle in between the colonizer’s culture and their native culture, without a proper identity of their own. His struggle and failure outburst his frustration of rootlessness:

… a fierce cluster of arrows targeted the sore, and he screamed in the yam rows. He stretched out the foot. He edged the razor-sharp steel Through pleading finger and thumb. The yam leaves recoiled
in a cold sweat. He hacked every root at the heel. He hacked them at the heel, noticing how the curled, head-down without their roots. He cursed the yams: “Salope! You all see what it’s like without roots in this world?” Then sobbed, his face down in the slaughtered leaves … (Walcott 21)

Walcott, in these lines, expresses the inexpressible suffering of enslaved Africans that has passed on to their descendants. As the wound keeps hurting, Philoctete remembers his painful past and gets frustrated towards slavery and colonialism for cutting his roots and degrading his culture. He also feels ashamed of forgetting his culture that has made the existence of his community to be insignificant in the world resulting to his inaccessibility to his motherland. For the Africans, who are known to be enriched with traditional and communal values, to be rootless can be devastating. Philoctete’s wound resembles the cultural wound of St. Lucians that keeps haunting and hurting them.

Development of scientific study about human body and illness, modern equipment to cure disease and manufactured medicines have made people to turn away from traditional way of treatment through natural herbs. In this context, to support the inclination of Africans towards traditional natural remedy that can be effective and sometimes irreplaceable, Walcott heals Philoctete through traditional method. Philoctete keeps applying manufactured ointment but it does not help him. He then realizes his disrespect towards his culture and ancestry for not being able to preserve these. He has a “… tribal shame/A shame for the loss of the words, and a language tired/of accepting that loss …” (Walcott 248). After all, he was healed by the help of his ancestors and their traditional practice. After the recognition, he cries and cleanses his soul, and is reborn. Walcott emphasizes on healing cultural wound through culture. This must be done by the victims themselves. Like Philoctete, every St. Lucian is encouraged to get healed and to get their freedom back because as Gilroy remarks, “… slavery … [is] a cluster of negative associations that are best left behind” (189).

Philocete is helped to heal by Ma Kilman, a “… sibyl, obeah-woman/webbed with a spider’s knowledge of an after-life” (Walcott 58). She is an old woman whom villagers see as a guardian with the mystic knowledge of after-life and can connect with the invisible forces. As Appiah asserts that in Africa, “… traditional people regularly appeal to the invisible agencies of their religions in their explanations of events in what we would call the natural world” (116), Ma Kilman is a traditional African woman preserving the mysticism of traditional Africa. She is also not untouched by Western modernity, yet she has not left practicing African beliefs.

Ma Kilman runs “the oldest bar in the village” (Walcott 17), NO PAIN CAFÉ, where she sells Coca-Cola and western stuffs, and helps people communicate with the dead and consoles their families as an obeah. She relieves both the pain of loss and thirst of people. Bill Ashcroft (2009) in “Alternative Modernities: Globalization and the Post-Colonial,” discusses that alternative forms of modernity “… emerge out of a relation to other modernities and the processes of appropriation, adaptation, and transformation have been their characteristic features” (83–84). Similarly, Ma Kilman has appropriated and adapted Western products to help her continue healing people with her traditional knowledge. When more tourists come to her café for Coca-Cola, she can have more customers for her traditional occupation as sibyl and obeah.

However, due to Western imposition of Christianity, Ma Kilman struggles to remember the traditional recipe to cure wound that her grandmother used to make. As she learned Christian names, she slowly forgot the African names and now she does not know where she can find that flower: “by the weight of a different prayer, had lost their names and therefore, considerable presence …” (Walcott 242). She tries to preserve her tradition but goes to church as well. She cannot remember traditional way because of its distortion by Christian values. In this regard, Paul Gilroy argues, “Though African linguistic tropes and political and philosophical themes are still visible for those who wish to see them, they have often been transformed and adapted by their New World locations to a new point where
the dangerous issues of purified essences and simple origins lose all meaning” (48). African cultures have been transformed by New World values. Though there are majority of Africans in St. Lucia living as the natives, they could not resist the imposition of western values which caused their culture, language and thoughts to be in distorted form.

Walcott, to suggest the natives to remove the veil of Western culture and to bring out the inherent Caribbeanness, makes Ma Kilman to take off her hat and wig while she also “... unbuttoned the small bone buttons/of her church dress ...” then “... she rubbed dirt in her hair, she prayed/in the language of ants and her grandmother, to lift/the sore from its roots in Philoctete’s rotting shin” (Walcott 244). Right after she takes off her wig and Christian dress, ants climb over her body passing the ancestral knowledge to her. Now she understands their language. As she starts praying in her ancestral language, Philoctete feels the pain draining out of his body. Here, Walcott suggests that the complications of modernity brought by Western colonialism can be healed through the spirit of ancestral culture.

To further support tradition over Western modernity in St. Lucia, Walcott employs Hector to be the victim of Western modernity. As for Western modernity, Dirlik asserts that “... modernization discourse ... perceived modernization as progress from tradition (culture) to a modernity ruled by technological rationality and, therefore, implicitly cultureless” (11). Along with modernity and importation of technology “the Space Age had come to the island” (Walcott 117). This further departed people from their tradition. As “... modernity celebrates distance from our predecessors, while the traditional world celebrates cognitive continuity” (Appiah 125), Hector chooses modernity abandoning his tradition with the hope of earning more to afford a modern life. He gives up his traditional occupation of fishing and distances himself from his culture for modern way of earning.

J. Michael Dash (1989), in the “Introduction” section of Glissant’s Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays, asserts that “... the suppression of local self-supporting productivity ... make[s] the disintegration of a collective identity and creative sterility inevitable” (xviii). Hector sells his canoe to buy a taxi. Canoe is not just a tool to help fishermen for fishing, rather it is the continuation of their tradition through which they are identified in St. Lucia. So, Hector selling his canoe means destroying his collective identity. But as Dash remarks, “The individual self has no future without a collective destiny” (xx), Hector soon realizes that his new life is giving him no happiness because technology in St. Lucia had given traditional people an “... Icarian future they could not control” (Walcott 117).

At the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, professor Abiola Irele (1992) in his lecture on “In Praise of Alienation” explains, “We are wedged uncomfortably between the values of our traditional culture and those of the West. The process of change which we are going through has created a dualism of forms of life which we experience at the moment less as a mode of challenging complexity than as one of confused disparities” (212–13). Hector is in a similar situation. When he feels that there is no dignity in modern life and he is not happy anymore, he reaches the state of confusion, stuck between two cultures:

... he was making money,
but all of that money was making him ashamed
of the long afternoons of shouting by the wharf
hustling passengers. He missed the uncertain sand
under his feet, he sighed for the trough of a wave,
and the jerk of the oar when it turned in his hand,
and the rose conch sunset with its low pelicans. (Walcott 231)

Finally, as a comet falls brightly in speed but shortly disappears, Hector not being able to control himself in the pace of modernity, his Comet, the taxi, was also fated to end. Walcott writes, “He’d paid the penalty of giving up the sea/as graceless and as treacherous as it had seemed/for the taxi-business” (231). Hector dies of speed; punished for selling his tradition to buy modernity.
Walcott seems not to let his ancestral heritage fade away, and therefore, keeps digging out their traditional practices. Myth-making is also one of the ancient practices of Africans, and mythical stories are one of their ancient heritages. To give special significance to myth as a part of African heritage, Walcott structures the story of his main characters in the frame of Trojan Myth. He borrows and reworks the Greek myth and appropriates it in St. Lucian context. Alongside, Horton asserts that African belief system has dynamic and “open” way of thought in which they “devise explanations for novel elements in... experience,” and have “...capacity to borrow, re-work and integrate alien ideas in the course of elaborating such explanation” (qtd. in Appiah 127). This highlights the adaptability of African world which helps for its continuation even during changes in different epochs.

Myth is adaptable, thus universal, eternal and rich in meaning and knowledge. At the same time, as Glissant views, “Myth disguises while conferring meaning, obscures and brings to light, mystifies as well as clarifies and intensifies that which emerges, fixed in time and space, between men and their world. It explores the known-unknown” (71). Walcott brings Trojan Myth in Omeros in a disguised form to give light to the identity of St. Lucia that has been lost because of the exploitation of its natural land as a result of modernity. St. Lucia is known as the “Helen of West Indies” for its immense beauty and naturalness. But that identity is shadowed because it is no more natural and unique. Seeing no beauty of St. Lucia, people “... all turned their back/on the claim” about St. Lucia as the “Helen/of the West Indies ...” (Walcott 311). This identity of St. Lucia that it had in the past is now forgotten. Walcott stresses on the original beauty of St. Lucia and its identity by relating it with the beauty of mythical Helen. This way, he informs that the identity of St. Lucia is in its naturalness, not in the artificiality of Western modernity.

Moreover, Walcott creates the story of his major characters resembling the story of the mythical characters of Trojan War to show that the suffering and struggle of the natives of St. Lucia is also immense as those of the great warriors in the myth. But the history ignores their suffering by taking slavery as the mission of civilizing blacks. The wounded character, Philoctetes resembles great suffering as that of Philoctetes of Trojan War. Slavery inflicted immense suffering on blacks which is immensely difficult to heal. The natives of St. Lucia, who are trying to cope up with the suffering, are the warriors like the Trojan warrior Philoctetes. Besides, through the love triangle between Helen, Hector, and Achille, Walcott intends to show that present is related to past. Through these characters, Walcott revises and recreates the love triangle of Trojan myth. There is the echo of “… Trojan War/in two fishermen ...” (Walcott 271). This connection between these two stories of modern world and ancient mythical world shows that present society is related to its past world, and present human society is the developed figure of the past. One cannot distance the self from his/her origin. Walcott, in this way, criticizes Western modernity for detaching itself from the past.

Similarly, to stress over how past makes way for future possibilities, Walcott uses myth as a means to create history. As Glissant views, “… myth anticipates history as much as it inevitably repeats the accidents that it has glorified; that means it is in turn a producer of history” (71). Trojan Myth produced the history of Battle of the Saintses. Naval war fought between Britain and France to win St. Lucia in 1782 is connected by Walcott with the Trojan War fought between the Trojans and Greeks for Helen in ancient mythical time. This also signals over the reliability of myths created by ancient people. It has the tendency to prefigure the upcoming possible time and events. So, he valorizes ancient time, people and events.

By reviving the forgotten identity of St. Lucia and by linking present with past, both through the use of myth, Walcott signals over reviving the ancient traditions of Africa in St. Lucia at present. Cultural nationalist Dr. Maulana Karenga (1992) believes that Africans “… must rescue and reconstruct African history and culture to re-vitalize African culture today ... [and] stress the need for a reorientation of values to borrow the collective life-affirming ones from our past and use them to enrich our present” (11). Walcott reminds St. Lucians that during Christmas, they have their own African festival. After Achille returns from his spiritual journey to Africa, he is more eager to explore
African tradition and to share it with his people. The day after Christmas, Achille and Philoctete get ready for the dance in disguise. Walcott writes:

Achille explained that he and Philo had done this every Boxing Day, and not because of Christmas, but for something older; something that he had seen in Africa .... (275)

Africans have their own ancient festival that many St. Lucians have forgotten. Because of Western imperialism, St. Lucians are turned to Christians and must celebrate Christmas which is an alien festival to them. Through Omeros, Walcott shares that St. Lucians have their own native ceremony during the time of Christmas, and encourages them to celebrate it and save it from being overshadowed by foreign culture.

Helen of Omeros does not know about the ritual that Achille and Philoctete are about to perform. It was performed by Achille’s ancestors, which he wants to continue. But like Helen, many people now no more know about the significance of this ritual: “At first she laughed ...” (Walcott 275) but after Achille informs her about it, she realizes its importance and becomes serious, then “She did not laugh anymore, but she helped him lift/the bamboo frame with its ribbons and spread them out/from the frame, and everything she did was serious” (275). Walcott encourages St. Lucians to celebrate their culture and let others know about it so that their ancient tradition continues to live on. In relation, Glissant remarks:

What is called almost everywhere the acceleration of history, which is a consequence of the saturation of Sameness, like a liquid overflowing its vessel, has everywhere released the pent-up force of Diversity. This acceleration ... has suddenly allowed peoples, who yesterday inhabited the hidden side of the earth ... to assert themselves in the face of a total world culture. If they do not assert themselves, they deprive the world of a part of itself. (99)

West, through its canonical history, repressed the history of several tribes. It imposed its values and cultures upon them. Due to long repression, people have now moved forward to show their cultural uniqueness. Acknowledging its necessity, Appiah views, “... not to address this issue is to leave the outcome in the hands not of reason but of chance; or, perhaps, to leave the intellectual future of the ... Africans, to be decided by the fact of the technological superiority of the already hegemonic cultures of the metropolitan world” (98). If they don’t do this, their identity and diversity will be lost. So, Walcott encourages St. Lucians to stand for their identity and their ancestral heritage.

Walcott challenges Western modernity that does not fit in traditional St. Lucia, through nativism. As Appiah views, “Nativism invites us to conceive of the nation as an organic community, bound together by the Sprachgeist, by the shared norms that are the legacy of tradition, struggling to throw off the shackles of alien modes of life and thought” (72), Walcott, through the characters of his epic, revives African traditional culture by rejecting the alien culture. Towards the end of the epic, Achille is able to awaken nativism within him. On the day of carnival, Achille was ready to dance the ritual dance in disguise through which he revived his true-self and his freedom. On the ceremony, “... he was African, his own epitaph,/his own resurrection” (Walcott 273). He was born with his new identity, the real one.

Similarly, Achille, after realizing the significance of native language and tradition, decides to provide his child with an African name. He does not want his child to have a dual identity like his. With an African name, his child will have an African identity, and with this the child will carry on the legacy of their ancestral tradition. Through the child, Achille and Ma Kilman want to remind Helen, the mother of the child who is much influenced by Western modernity, of her root and the values. Walcott views, “... Helen must learn/where she came from” (318). In relation, Gilroy asserts that the “... disputes over the contending values of traditional and universal cultures ... has
extended into the active reinvention of the rituals and rites of lost African traditions. African names are acquired, and African garments are worn” (193). African descendants are reviving African traditions through African practices to challenge the Western imposition.

Moreover, Glissant observes, “… emergence of the Caribbean is … capable of carrying forward our people to self-renewal and of providing them with renewed ambition, by making them possess their world and their lived experience (wherein a Caribbean identity is present) and by making them fall into step with those who also share the same space …” (223–24). Caribbean coming together to renew their culture can heal themselves and experience their Caribbeanness. At the same time, other people can be encouraged to do the same. In Omeros, Achille and Philoctete, through their ritual dance, bring out their reality- their Caribbeanness. Though they are in disguise, they are reflecting their real identity. They experience it themselves and influence other by making them experience their culture.

In this way, Walcott shows his love towards his nation, culture, and nature. In Omeros, as rain clears away the impurities of St. Lucia, nativism clears away alien culture. After the rain stopped, “... there was a different brightness/in everything, in the leaves, in the horses' eyes” (Walcott 222). He again hopes for the naturalness of the past in St. Lucia at present. The narrator of the epic gets connected with the natural surrounding and local foods of St. Lucia which he cannot find in city. Walcott seems to be close to Glissant’s view that “The creative link between nature and culture is vital to the formation of a community” (63). People in capitalist world often see nature as commodity. They shape and reshape landscape according to the demand of people for pleasure. In the process, culture lags. While befitting oneself with modernity, people leave their tradition behind as it is too old. Due to this, community does not remain whole anymore. Walcott focuses on preserving both nature and culture for the identification of a place and community. Thus, he prefers traditional society because the capitalist motives of modern society destroy these both. In this relation, Dirlirk explains “… in the weight they give to cultural persistence ... they are easily distinguishable from the politically and socially conceived search for alternative modernities ...” (14). Walcott explains the significance of culture and valorizes it throughout the epic, where he criticizes and challenges cultureless Western modernity. He also stresses that art lives in history, tradition, and naturalness, not in the artificiality of modernity. So, in the epic, he seeks for an alternative to Western modernity in St. Lucia that can keep its tradition alive, so that it can have a proper cultural identity of its own.

Finally, Walcott, through this epic, not only encourages St. Lucians to revive their cultural heritage but also urges all Africans scattered in different parts of the world to come together to preserve African culture as they share common ancestry and are connected as a family with the same race. Though slavery scattered blacks to different places, they are always connected through racial history and characteristics. Walcott appeals black people to carry Africa wherever they are and preserve their traditional African culture as the counterculture of modernity.

Walcott presents St. Lucians as rooted to Africa; they have their own ancestral culture and identity. With centuries long settlement and struggle of Africans in St. Lucia, they have built and accepted it as another home. The two lands are connected through their people and common ancestral culture. But encroachment of Western modernity has affected various aspects of St. Lucian life like occupation, lifestyle, education, etc., which has degraded their African ancestral heritage and their identity. Walcott showing concern on the fading native culture of St. Lucia urges St. Lucians to search for counterculture to Western modernity, not to let their cultural heritage be contaminated by modernity and preserve their ancestral culture and identity.

Due to the history of slavery and different wars during the period of colonialism, identity of St. Lucians was dislocated. Walcott first introduces the sources of suffering, recreates it and later proposes solution with the hope of a better future. He shows that the history of imperialism inflicted immense suffering, both physical and psychological, in St. Lucians by erasing their cultural identity. And through mythical references, he attempts to heal the wound by connecting present
with the past, thus connecting the natives of St. Lucia with their ancestral heritage to revive their identity that has been fragmented by the impact of modernity.

Moreover, Walcott presents that in material world, everyone is in the race to win, everyone is in hurry to earn more, but that kind of world is not favourable for everyone. For traditional people, modern world can be the world of insecurity, uncertainty, crowd, chaos, unfaithfulness and lust. And those who cannot co-operate with these are led to tragedy. Walcott, therefore, warns not to be departed from one's root because it is the major part that keeps all other remaining parts alive and helps them grow.

Finally, stressing much on the significance of traditional culture and by criticizing the impact of Western modernity in St. Lucia, Walcott is seeking for an alternative to counter the hegemonic culture of Western modernity. He desires to revive the fading identity of St. Lucia with the continuation of its native culture that is different from the modern culture of West. Following Western culture will decay the traditional world of St. Lucia, so by returning to tradition, he is sure to keep up the spirit of the culture of St. Lucia alive. He wishes to present the tourists, visiting St. Lucia, the uniqueness, naturalness, simplicity and elegance of St. Lucia, not what they have been seeing and experiencing in other modern cities of Europe and America.

**Funding**
The authors received no direct funding for this research.

**Author details**
Raj Kumar Baral
E-mail: raj.baral@cden.tu.edu.np
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2279-3526
Heena Shrestha
E-mail: heenastothkvt@gmail.com
1 Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.
2 Graduate from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

**Citation information**
Cite this article as: What is behind Myth and History in Derek Walcott’s Omeros, Raj Kumar Baral & Heena Shrestha, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2020), 7: 1776945.

**References**
Appiah, K. A. (1992). In my father’s house: Africa in the philosophy of culture. Oxford University Press.
Ashcroft, B. (2009). Alternative Modernities: Globalization and the Post-Colonial. ARIEL, 40(1), 81–105.
Baral, R. K. (2018). The images of “in-between” in Derek Walcott’s poetry. Discovery Dynamics, 5(1), 24–30.
Bhabha, H. K. (2009). The Location of Culture. Routledge.
Dash, J. M. (1989). “Introduction.” Caribbean discourse: Selected essays. Translated by J. Michael Dash. University Press of Virginia.
de Certeau, M. (1986). Heterologies: Discourse on the other. Translated by Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press.
Dirlik, A. (2013). “Thinking modernity historically: Is “alternative modernity” the answer?”. Asian Review of World Histories, 1(1), 5–44. https://doi.org/10.12773/arwh.2013.1.1.005
Gikandi, S. (1992). Writing in limbo: Modernism and caribbean literature. Cornell UP.
Gilroy, P. (1993). The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness. Verso.
Glissant, E. (1989). Caribbean discourse: Selected essays. Translated by J. Michael Dash. University Press of Virginia P.
Hall, S. (1995). Negotiating Caribbean identities. New Left Review, (209), 3–14. https://newleftreview.org/issues/1209/articles/stuart-hall-negotiating-caribbean-identities
Irele, A. (1992). In praise of alienation. In V. Y. Mudimbe (Ed.), Surreptitious Speech (pp. 201–226). University of Chicago Press.
James, C. L. R. (1989). The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo revolution. Vintage.
Jonathan, M. (1992). Nightmare History: Derek Walcott’s ‘Omeros.’. The Kenyon Review, 14 (4), 197–204, JSTOR. www.jstor.org/stable/4336789
Karenga, M. (1992). A dialogue with karenga. Emerge, 3 (3), 11.
Kohn, H. (1967). The idea of nationalism. Collier Books.
Morison, J. V. (1999). Homer travels to the Caribbean: Teaching Walcott’s ‘Omeros.’. The Classical World, 93 (1), 83–99. JSTOR. www.jstor.org/stable/4352373
Nair, S. (1996). Expressive countercultures and postmodern utopia: A Caribbean context. Research in African Literatures, 27 (4), 71–87. JSTOR. www.jstor.org/stable/3819985
Ramazani, J. (1997). The wound of history: Walcott’s Omeros and the postcolonial poetics of affliction. PMLA, 112 (3), 405–417. JSTOR. www.jstor.org/stable/462949
Rebel, M. C. (1991). Soul Rebel. In Black meaning good. Desire Record. https://youtu.be/0XM1mb3In4M
Walcott, D. (1994). Omeros. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
