

## Tidalectics: Excavating History in Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*

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### Abstract

Poetry, as can be seen in Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants: A new world trilogy*, is a captivating, entertaining and informative form of literature. It is also in this capacity that it can be deployed to perform specific functions in society. *The Arrivants* is a poetic project in which Brathwaite vigorously both establishes his concept of tidalectics and undertakes what is described in this essay as an excavation of history. Events in history brought up for excavation to highlight their features and social impacts include the slave trade and the colonial era. By means of a critical approach, this essay points out that full appreciation of the circumstances of the slave trade requires it to be treated alongside the era of colonialism since these two events began, interacted and ended almost at the same time. Furthermore, from a close study of all the poems in the work under study, this essay shows that these poems achieve their common objective of foregrounding the experiences of African slaves during those dehumanizing centuries and spotlighting challenges people of African descent in the Caribbean islands and elsewhere continue to face in the modern world. In other words, Brathwaite's excavation of this tidalectic history furnishes a strong argument that modern society should engage in meaningful dialogue with this past rather than pretend further discussions are not needed and that it is by so doing that the modern world can checkmate repetition of those mistakes in the forms of neo-slavery and neo-colonialism which are already undermining multiculturalism.

*Keywords:* Brathwaite, Caribbean, colonialism, poetry, tidalectics, transatlantic slave trade

## **Introduction: Some Preliminary Considerations Concerning Brathwaite's *The Arrivants***

In an important work, “Transubstantiating the intimate: the role of autobiographical elements in the poetry of Kamau Brathwaite,” Vettorato (2013/14, p. 497) points out that Kamau Brathwaite's personal experiences or personal encounters played decisive roles in shaping his thought. For instance, in a work entitled “Timehri,” Brathwaite reflects on how the eight years he spent in Ghana served as a catalyst for his intellectual awakening and how it motivated his call for a “nation language” as part of the struggle for decolonization in the multicultural Caribbean world.

Similarly, in a relevant essay, “The poetics of multiculturalism in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poetry: A study of selected poems,” Abd-Aun and Abdulridha (2017) underscore the point that interwoven with Brathwaite's poetic project is his deep interest in the exploration of the impacts of cultural dislocation, multiculturalism, identity politics, the politics of difference and the politics of recognition on African societies and on the African psyche in the modern world. This also comes in affirmation of the levels of changes and transformations that have emerged in many parts of the world especially since the Age of Discovery and the Industrial Revolution.

“Caliban playing Pan: A note on the metamorphoses of Caliban in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's ‘Caliban’” is a work in which Doumerc (2014) argues that Brathwaite's use of terms and names in his poetic project cannot rightly be considered random but are rather meant to achieve stated objectives by playing allegorical roles in a work. An overarching objective of Brathwaite's poetry is the criticism of all human activities and social structures that enslave or undermine the independent human integrity of people of African descent or jeopardize their ability to stand on a strong footing with respect to the rest of humanity.

However, it must be taken into consideration that while a number of scholars have expressed views similar to those of Kamau Brathwaite, he still brings in something unique to the table by reason of the features of his poetic style and vision. Nevertheless, while Brathwaite invents and introduces the captivating neologism of tidalectics as a framework for the interpretation of a certain class of demographic movements and historical events -that took place during the entire era of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries- he does not fully succeed in establishing a distinction between tidalectics and dialectics, as will be shown in this essay. In addition, it would be futile to presume that Brathwaite's personal experiences as well as his personal viewpoints on certain historical realities provide sufficient grounds to approach those social realities based on those perspectives.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite (1930-2020) hailed from Barbados and was one of the most important and award-winning poets of the English-speaking Caribbean islands. As part of his personal project of reconnecting with his African roots, he felt a strong pull towards Ghana and actually spent some years working at the Ministry of Education of Ghana (1955-62) teaching and writing. During that time, his presence and contributions were specially recognized by the Ghanaian government. When paying a visit to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in Kenya, the scholar's mother had cause to name him “Kamau”, which became an essential part of his reconnected African identity.

Brathwaite's understanding of the importance of exploring the era of slave trade and its impacts on people of African descent led to the collection of poems entitled *Rights of passage*, which was published in 1967. Another collection of poems entitled *Masks* was published in 1968,

while a third collection entitled *Islands* was published in 1969. These three poetry collections make up the trilogy called *The Arrivants*, published in 1973.

*The Arrivants: A new world trilogy: Rights of passage, islands, masks* is a work that deserves close reading before one can appreciate the creativity and vision behind Braithwaite's poetic project. Central to Braithwaite's response to the slave trade and colonial history in Africa is his concept of tidalectics which he effectively deploys in the excavation of that history.

As Braithwaite's poetry indicates, the era of colonialism also has to be brought into the picture since both the periods of European-led transatlantic slave trade and colonialism began and ended almost at the same time. There was an important interaction between these two events because the same social structures that functioned for colonialism also served the interests of the transatlantic slave trade.

The work under study, *The Arrivants*, is divided into themes, sections, poems, and parts of poems. When our discussion is about a poem (particularly, "Prelude") that happens to share a title in common with another poem in another section of the work, the theme and section in which it occurs will be included and written in italics but separated by a colon, while the title of the poem will be in quotation marks. Parts of the poem and lines relevant to the citation are written out. This comprehensive approach is necessary for clarity of citation in-text.

### **Understanding Tidalectics and Dialectics**

Tidal dynamics is basically about waves surging forward, hitting shores, rolling around and retreating to the sea only to repeat this process for as long as the tide lasts, whether in high tide or low. Applied to symbolize the era of slave trade, it is important to note that these tidal dynamics did not originate from the shores of Africa, as many are wont to assume, but from Europe. This is because it was from the shores of Europe that the first forward tides conveyed sea vessels (ships deployed for purposes of slave trade and colonialism) across the ocean to shores on African coastlines. On arriving at Africa's shores, same tide rolls around a bit, which depicts the dynamics during which Africans were captured, bought or tricked into captivity ("blackbirding") and herded out in chains back to those sea ports. It also depicts the dynamics during which colonial transmissions (personnel, information, and materials) were moved to and from the ports.

Thereafter, same tide retreating back to the sea depicts next sea voyage of those vessels laden with human and material cargoes across the Atlantic to chosen destinations on the other side of the ocean. The Middle Passage is the triangular trade whereby ships left Europe or British North America (New England for instance) with manufactured goods for West African (or African) markets, traded them for African slaves there, shipped those slaves to the New World (European colonies in the Americas and Caribbean Islands) to be traded for money and/or raw materials and which in turn were shipped back to Europe. It is with respect to this historical development that Gargaillo (2018, p. 159) points out that, "The obvious historical reference here is to the West Indian slave trade, and the distinctly sinister transformation implied in the voyage to a new life in chains."

It is also significant that the worldview of tidalectics has inspired a number of art exhibitions, a significant one being the TBA21-Augarten in Vienna which was organised by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Academy with Stefanie Hessler as curator from June 2–November 19, 2017. This art exhibition entitled, *Tidalectics*, showcased works by thirteen

artists and was considered an “experiment to formulate an oceanic worldview, a different way of engaging with the oceans and the world we inhabit. Unbound by land-based modes of thinking and living, the exhibition is reflective of the rhythmic fluidity of water and the incessant swelling and receding of tides” (2017, n.p.).

Brathwaite’s poetry usually has to be situated within the background of colonialism and its impacts on people of African descent (an impact that includes neocolonialism) before it can be meaningfully understood. According to Kpanah (2017, p. 68), the experience of colonialism and slavery left some psychic wounds in the consciousness of their African victims and created a crisis of identity among people of African descent.

Many of Brathwaite’s poems are reflections on the colonial era (16th to mid-20th century) during which Europeans engaged in the forceful takeover of non-European territories in Africa, the Americas, and Asia/Pacific principally for their economic and political interests. There was the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, also known as the “Scramble for Africa” conference at which European powers made deals between themselves in order to avoid military conflicts during seizures of parts of Africa. The colonial era was complemented by approximately four centuries of transatlantic slave trade (16th-19th century) during which 10 to 15 million Africans were forcibly shackled and transported to the New World and some parts of Europe while 2 million or more died en route and in Africa as a result of the practice. Denmark was the first country to end its participation in the Atlantic slave trade in 1802, followed by England in 1807, the United States in 1808, Holland in 1814, France in 1818, Spain in 1820, and Portugal in 1832.

In “The Cracked Mother,” part 4, lines 13-16, Brathwaite (1973, p. 183) establishes tidalectics in a verse descriptive of dynamics between beaches, the rolling tides of the sea, and the conveyance, dropping and/or picking up of stuff (human and material):

We wished the sea as it should be:  
coming and going on the beaches  
leaving a line of dried moss and black  
sticks at its uttermost reaches.

This phenomenon can be considered connected with cargo cult practice in Melanesia (Papua New Guinea), where since the nineteenth century it has been believed that performing certain rituals would bring in a haul of Western goods (industrial products and wealth) through the help of ancestors in ways similar to how, in bygone times, Europeans brought in loads of Western goods by means of ships, aeroplanes and vehicles. Cargo cult emerged in the wake of colonial contacts between Europeans and indigenous populations of Melanesia.

One has to acknowledge that there can be no certainty as to whether tidal dynamics are characteristically circular or perpendicular or whatever other form one can construe in relation to space and time. This is because shorelines come in different shapes and sizes just as tidal waves and it will be an error to impose just one form on them. Thus, contrary to the view of critics like Dalleo (2004, p. 6) for whom “The image of ebb and flow emphasizes the circular and the repetitive, rather than the progressive and teleological” and DeLoughrey (2007, p. 2) who considers tidalectics as operating with “a cyclical model,” the rather fluid tidalectic indeterminacy in time and space can be read into a verse from Brathwaite (1973, p. 122) which is found in “The White River,” part 2, lines 2-4:

This was at last the last;  
 this was the limit of motion;  
 voyages ended;  
 time stopped where its movement began.

Brathwaite's *Barabajan Poems* (1994) provide good insights about tidalectics. In respect of social processes to be best understood from the angle of their tidalectic interaction with sea vessels and ocean tides, DeLoughrey (2007, p. 6) maintains that,

It is by insisting on the tidalectics between land and sea and by remapping the Caribbean and the Pacific alongside each other that particular discourses of diaspora, indigeneity, and sovereignty can be examined in ways that challenge and complement each other, foregrounding the need for simultaneous attention to maritime routes and roots."

In addition, as DeLoughrey (2007, p. 43) says, "The concept of the vessel renders tidalectics visible – it is the principal way in which roots are connected to routes, and islands connected to the sea."

While Glissant uses arrow-like movement, Brathwaite (as cited in Dalleo 2004, p. 6), describes European culture as a missile (such as in "History," line 33: "We came across the Atlantic in this space capsule within the missile of the Europeans") and opposes the use of imageries such as womb and pebble which, according to Galleo, all share a concavity and circularity like Glissant's circular nomadism. For Dalleo (2004, p. 6), all of this "represents a progress-driven movement foreign to the Caribbean reality of what Brathwaite calls tidalectics and Glissant describes as the interplay of the beach and the ocean."

Brathwaite (as cited in Reckin, 2003, p. 1), declares that tidalectics is a "rejection of the notion of dialectic, which is three—the resolution in the third. Now I go for a concept I call 'tide-alectic' which is the ripple and the two tide movement." For Reckin (2003, p. 1):

Even the word-play between these terms, with its unsettling near-anagramming of "tida-" and "dia-," seems to perform a tidalectic movement in microcosm. On a larger scale, Brathwaite has suggested that it describes the structure of trilogies such as *Mother Poem*, *Sun Poem*, and *X/Self*, and the reprise of these three in *Ancestors* shows the "tidalectic" as a creative process....The tidalectic also describes a nexus of historical process and landscape, as in the following passage in *ConVERsations* [1999] which provides a defining image of the Caribbean and its origins, an "on-going answer" in Brathwaite's words (29): the image of an old woman sweeping the sand from her yard very early in the morning.

DeLoughrey (2007, p. 2) understands tidalectics as a "geopoetic model of history" and a methodological tool that foregrounds how a dynamic model of geography can elucidate island history and cultural production, providing the framework for exploring the complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, and routes and roots.

In addition, as DeLoughrey (2007, p. 2) opines,

Tidalectics engage what Brathwaite calls an 'alter/native' historiography to linear models of colonial progress. This 'tidal dialectic' resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking the continual movement

and rhythm of the ocean. Tidalectics also foregrounds alter/native epistemologies to western colonialism and its linear and materialist biases.

Dialectics, an ancient concept in philosophy elaborately used by Plato, G. W. F Hegel and Karl Marx, is a scenario whereby forces or factors within a system come in conflict with one another and from this generate something higher or different in the general format of thesis–antithesis–synthesis. Brathwaite’s tidalectics neither displaces, replaces nor excludes a dialectical reading of social history. On the contrary, dialectics plays out in tidalectics just as tidalectics plays out in dialectics as can be seen in circumstances whereby forces at work on one shore, namely, Europe (the unfolding of the age of exploration and the rise of the age of industrialization which heightened the demand for labour and markets overseas) proceed to come into conflict with forces on an opposite shore, namely, Africa (which was largely agrarian and communitarian) by means of the sea and sea vessels moving with the tides to synthesize a new form of social reality (transatlantic slave trade, slave labour, colonialism and multiculturalism).

Although forms of slavery have been in practice in some cultures from ancient times, it was never at that intercontinental magnitude seen in the tidalectic European operation in Africa. This point of view also dovetails with Reckin’s (2003, p. 2) description of tidalectics:

In terms of connecting lines, back and forth, not only across the surface of the ocean—and there are clear parallels here with Glissant’s “poetics of relation” and the shipping routes that Paul Gilroy discusses in his *Black Atlantic*—but also in the form of airwaves and “bridges of sound” (radio broadcasts and sound recordings, for example) that connect colony with colony and colony with metropole, often enacting tidalectic echoes.

About this new social reality and its psycho-social challenges, Dalleo (2004, p. 6) states,

For Martí as much as for Glissant or Brathwaite, the chaos brought on by economic and cultural exchange ([or] globalization) simultaneously threatens Caribbean identity and cultural production, while highlighting its possibilities. As an example of this dialectic, in a chapter of *Poetics of Relation*...Glissant discusses the role of the computer in freeing the world from its scribal prison.

### **A Tidalectic Excavation of History in *The Arrivants***

A critical exploration of Brathwaite’s application of tidalectics in *The Arrivants* in his project to excavate history will require looking at constitutive poems to uncover what they say about ocean tides, ships, and shores in relation to social processes and slavery. For instance, Brathwaite (1973, p. 35) uses the word-imagery of a tidalectics “that tides us to hell” (“The Journeys,” part 1, line 26) to refer to the human costs of that notorious trans-Atlantic interaction between Europe and Africa. By means of slave ships and colonial ships, African peoples came to be subjected to exploitative rule by foreigners who had divided up the continent. 10 to 15 million Africans were carried off to slavery while 15% or more of them (2 million or more) died en route and in Africa as a consequence of that practice. In this wise, as Brathwaite says (1973, p. 164), “The sea is a divider. It is not a life-giver” (“Jah,” part 2, line 11).

Brathwaite (1973, p. 189) also talks about the symbolism and horrors associated with slave routes connecting African homesteads with harbours and the sea. In this wise, he says, “their cross is the street / that runs down to the harbour; / it is cobbled with voices” (“Shepherd,” part

2, lines 20-22). In addition, “The streets’ root is in the sea / in the deep harbours” (lines 24-25). These lines of poetry hit at the trauma of a new social reality that saw African families and communities ripped apart by slave raiders, slave traders, and their local accomplices. Brathwaite has a point then in describing slave sea vessels and sea routes as symbols of the utmost debasement of the African person.

African slaves were treated like disposable cargoes and crammed together in dark or poorly lit cargo holds with little or no room for the head and legs or pinned to floorboards. Slave traders fastened them to the ship with chains on the legs and/or necks and wantonly exposed them to unhygienic conditions, hunger, dehydration and diseases (mostly amoebic dysentery, scurvy, smallpox, syphilis, and measles). Olaudah Equiano is among the few former slaves who had the opportunity to write an account of such appalling conditions. The many that died on the way were usually thrown overboard. There was also the matter of suicides from slaves jumping overboard or refusing to eat or to take medicines. The *Slave Trade Act 1788* of the parliament of the United Kingdom, which was introduced by Sir William Dolben, an abolition advocate, was the first time the British government stepped in to regulate conditions under which slaves were transported. The Quakers led the slave abolitionist movement.

Indeed, such a cargo experience, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 232) says, makes the sea “deep mourning waters under the mornes” (“Coral,” line 7). Furthermore, in Brathwaite’s (1973, p. 35-36) opinion, this tidalectic interaction between sea-faring Europeans and African shores unfolded like “Hell / in the water” (“The Journeys,” part 1, lines 27-28). In the midst of all this, “salt of the wave-gullied / Ferdinand’s sea” (lines 33-34), one might hope for some light at the end of the tunnel, as it is said. On the contrary, the forlorn reality that faced many African slaves was that there was (as in lines 38-40):

...no Noah  
or dove to promise us, grim  
though it was, the simple sal-  
vation of love.

For Braithwaite (1973, pp. 208–209), the plight of slaves couriered across the ocean and the tsunami of unforeseen circumstances that hardly gave them a second chance to hit reset on their lives cried out in surrender to that sea vessel which was a symbol of this ordeal, “Ship / house on the water / I salute you” (“Wake,” lines 1-3), “I am a bale of straw / swish of your cask’s laughter / darkest cling of your gudgeon” (lines 4-6) and “there are shadows about me / eyes like mine / pores sweating fears like mine” (lines 7-9). This also includes a plea to that sea vessel as it returns to the shores of Africa for more slaves, “and on arrival / if someone should ask you how you left us / we on these islands” (“Wake,” lines 29-31), say “that you left us / eyes still closed / fists still curled” (lines 34-36) and “tell our never-returning grandfathers of old / that the houses are damp, the verandahs are cold / with the wind weeping in from the sea” (lines 51-53) but in hope, “let there be rain” (line 55).

The Middle Passage is a term that refers to that enclosed pattern drawn by ships deployed to trade in manufactured goods and slaves as they travelled from Europe to Africa, from Africa to the New World, and then back to Europe. Brathwaite (1973, p. 194) provides an insight into the conditions of slaves during the Middle Passage, an experience that includes occasional suicides by jumping overboard and the dead being discarded into the water: “long dark deck and the water surrounding me / long dark deck and the water is over me” (“Caliban,” part 3, lines 16-17). As all this unfolded, it was like that which makes the entire human race *human*

has been suspended and time paused: “*limbo / limbo like me*” (lines 18-19) so long as “stick is the whip / and the dark deck is slavery” (lines 20-21).

It was an overwhelming experience for many Africans, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 11) puts it, as they saw themselves being herded out and marching in chained lines in a silence imposed by shock and broken only by the clank of metal, the crack of a whip, agonizing voices, and a slave driver’s commands: “and we filed down the path / linked in a new / clinked silence of iron” (“New World A-Coming,” part 1, lines 72-74). In this wise, Brathwaite (1973, pp. 4 and 81) establishes a connection between the frequent “drum skin whiplash” and “I shout / I groan / I dream” (*Rites of Passage: Work Songs and Blues*, “Prelude,” lines 1-9, and “Epilogue,” lines 1-9).

Brathwaite (1973, p. 18) further highlights the grave psychological impacts of their ordeal which each of them found so humiliating personally that even “my own mock / me; my own seed” (“All God’s Chillun,” part 2, lines 4-5) who “struggle / to strike me” (lines 7-8). In addition, the racist oppression and exploitation they faced at every level of social existence, as he (1973, p. 30) affirms, also triggered self-loathing in many African slaves: “I am a fuck- / in’ negro, / man, hole” (“Folkways” part 1, lines 1-3) “in my head, / brains in / my belly” (lines 4-6).

When Brathwaite (1973, pp. 57 and 48) says, “By these shores I was born” (“South,” line 4), he refers to generations of African slaves born in slave colonies and by whose slave labours “The islands roared into green plantations” (“Calypso,” part 2, line 1). He also says of those descendants of slaves that later got an opportunity to travel, “Since then I have travelled; moved far from the beaches” (“South,” line 7), but who met a world crippled by racism and injustices. It is about such an unfair world that continues even to this day that Brathwaite (1973, p. 55) says, “Once when we went to Europe, a rich old lady asked: / Have you no language of your own / no way of doing things” (“The Emigrants,” part 5, lines 1-3) while “a bow-legged workman / said: This country’s getting pretty flat / with *nègres en Switzerland*” (lines 7-9).

It is arguable that oppressed people display a deeper understanding of humanism than their oppressors, despite the oppressors’ claim to superior knowledge. In addition, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 7) puts it, African peoples terrorized by slavery and colonialism and traumatized that “It will be a long long time before we see / this land again, these trees” (“New World A-Coming,” part 2, lines 1-2) stridently prayed to God for wholesome release “from robbers and from those who plot / and poison while they dip / into our dish” (*Rites of Passage: Work Songs and Blues*, “Prelude,” lines 136-138), and for “warm fires, good / wives and grateful children” (lines 139-140).

Brathwaite’s poetry incorporates a highlight about the close connection between human suffering and religious sentiments particularly in relation to African slaves and their descendants. For him (1973, p. 68), even when unforeseen circumstances keep sabotaging one’s best efforts and good intentions, if every new day, “Yuh does get up, walk ’bout, / praise God that yuh body / intturnin’ to stone” (“The Dust,” lines 184-186). As a matter of fact, religion provided many African slaves with the hope and determination they needed to live through every horrible and arduous day and to wait and long for a better day. This religious sensibility was of course a derivative of the characteristic strong religious disposition of Africans in contradistinction with their enslaving and exploitative European contemporaries.

In a sense, neither oppressor nor oppressive circumstances have internal access to confiscate one's power to dream or to hope for better times. However, some schools of thought disparage religion for playing that role in society, that is to say, for helping the poor and oppressed cope with and in a way accept their painful existence. Marxism, for instance, considers divinities as natural forces deified and religion as an illusion that will inevitably fade away at the dawn of a perfect, that is, communist society. Marxism also notably describes religion as inspired by human suffering and about which Karl Marx famously declares, "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (as cited in *On Religion*, p. 39).

Brathwaite (1973) makes the point that African slaves really went to great lengths to move on with their lives despite their traumatic experiences. There were feelings of anger and hatred for their oppressors, but apart from occasional acts of resistance or rebellion while being force-marched, at the harbours, inside slave ships, or in the plantations, they also accepted they lacked sufficient resources and access to social institutions by which to fight back. In other words, African slaves and their descendants realized they have to come to terms with their situation and overlook their sufferings.

In this respect, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 22) describes it, each of them has to honestly or conveniently "smother" that bitterness and hate "to the bone / to suit the part / I am playing" ("Didn't He Ramble," part 1, lines 5-7). This was a necessary step and any of them might even get to travelling to other parts of the world when the opportunity turns up: "So to New York London / I finally come / hope in my belly" (lines 1-3).

Brathwaite (1973) insists that the modern world has to be honest about its past and do more to create a better future from its mistakes. But if the modern world rather chooses to pretend that those centuries of slavery and colonialism do not deserve the attention some Africans and Diaspora are calling for especially while core indices of that continue in the form of neo-slavery and neo-colonialism, then, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 28) puts it, "Memories are smoke" (*Rites of Passage: The Spades*, "Prelude," line 1) and "no dreams / for us / no hopes" (lines 13-15).

A scenario like that, as Brathwaite (1973, pp. 28-29) points out, will only jeopardize peaceful and humane coexistence in societies around the world: "Just give us / what we earn" (*Rites of Passage: The Spades*, "Prelude," lines 26-27) or "we / smash / and grab" them (lines 30-32) and "To hell / with Af- / rica" (lines 34-36) and "Eu- / rope too" (lines 38-39). In addition, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 71) indicates, in a neo-colonial world where "No one / knows Tom now, no one cares. / Slave's days are past" ("The Cabin," part 1, lines 49-51) probably but what about if they are still "un- / forgiven"? (lines 54-55). Society no doubt will be on a better footing by engaging in meaningful dialogue with the past and not by hurriedly or arrogantly shoving it under the carpet. Brathwaite (1973, p. 164) underscores the fact that failure in this regard will only worsen the threats the modern world is facing in the wake of globalization and multiculturalism, "For the land has lost the memory of the most secret places" ("Jah," part 2, line 1).

For Brathwaite (1973, pp. 42-43), a modern world torn asunder by the double-standards of powerful countries and groups predispose Third World peoples to rise and confront the world: "Brother Man the Rasta / man, hair full of lichens / head hot as ice" ("Wings of a Dove," part 1, lines 14-16) "reached for his peace / and the pipe of his ganja" (19-20). "And I / Rastafar-I" (lines 27-28) "hear my people / cry, my people / shout" (38-40) against the "con / man" (lines

43-44) saying “Down down / white / man, con / man” (lines 41-43) and “Rise rise / locks- / man” (lines 54-56).

Countries and people with the means to do so may decide to go on playing God with other people’s lives, just as slave masters and colonial masters did. Brathwaite (1973, p. 73) notes that Africans were sucked into “the pain of waiting for the whip rope / tamarind lash, hurled by the thick / necked sweating God who ruled” (“Mammon,” part 1, lines 19-22), but the fact remains that craze for wealth and power can never justify dehumanizing people. In this wise, Brathwaite (1973, p. 106) argues, “And what wealth here, what / riches, when the gold returns / to dust” (“Timbuctu,” lines 14-16). Indeed, all of world’s vanities can be summed up as “the immemorial legacies of dust” (“Mammon,” part 1, line 28).

Brathwaite (1973) joins his voice to that of scholars and pro-Africanists who foreground the necessity and capability of Africans to celebrate their socio-cultural heritages and to derive a characteristic worldview and spirituality that will sufficiently empower them to step up to their rightful position in global politics (“Masks,” *Masks: Libation*, “Prelude,” “The Making of the Drum,” and “Atumpan”). In this sense, an African renaissance will be like a return back from slavery and colonialism (“The New Ships,” “The Awakening,” and “Homecoming”).

The project of neo-Africanism is relevant to modern society even though, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 216) remarks, “Such history we write / is stripped and torn / by whip, by wind” (“Unrighteousness of Mammon,” lines 7-9). Success of the project will require Africa coming to terms with its pre-transatlantic slave trade/pre-colonial past as well as facing up to the challenges of the post-colonial times (“Cane”). It will also require Africans to equip themselves sufficiently to (re-) create their future (“Negus”).

With all these in mind then, like a leopard defying the confines of its cage, Africa must break free of its chains both on the domestic and international scenes and realize its potentials (“Leopard”). This line of thinking is equally advocated by the concept of decolonization explored by scholars like wa Thiong’o (1986), Smith (1999), and Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980), and by the concept of coloniality (the psycho-social impacts of colonialism on formerly colonized people) explored by scholars like Quijano (2000), Mignolo (2001) and Escobar (2004).

By saying that, “his- / tory bleeds / behind my hollowed eyes” (“Sunsum” lines 4-6), Brathwaite (1973, p. 148) makes the point that collaboration for an African renaissance extends to modern African Diaspora especially since many of them are still impacted by a past they “borrowed” (1973, p. 4) from bygone generations who had been sold off and enslaved by Europeans. The sudden arrival of Europeans on the shores of Africa and in the hinterlands triggered a significant level of disorientation and disunity among African peoples as many responded differently to the allure and threats associated with that phenomenon (“The New Ships”). But on the average, it left “the slave at the crossroads” (“Vèvè,” part 3, line 30), as Brathwaite puts it (1973, p. 263).

As a matter of fact, the same tide that conveyed slave ships and colonial ships stimulated more rapid development on both sides of the Atlantic (“The Cabin”). Peoples of African descent in modern times can effectively use this feature from their past to their advantage to emerge stronger in the modern world (“Epilogue,” and “Caliban”). In addition, humanism requires them not to treat fellow Africans and other people in the horrible way they were treated (“Axum, and “Legba”).

Though many Africans have chosen to follow foreign religions (“Korabra”), history underscores the point that the integrity of religion is undermined when religion is manipulated for material or selfish interests (“Trade-Winds” and “Legba”). Talk about the hot theological and politico-economic debate whether Africans have souls or are worthy of heaven! In description of this seriously prejudiced Euro-centric mindset, Brathwaite (1973, p. 66) says, “But you int got to call / the Lord name in vain / to make we swallow” (“The Dust,” lines 144-146) inhumanities meted out on Africans like it was God’s will or a natural law.

This critical point of view equally extends to tendentious legal frameworks such as the *Jim Crow* laws in the United States and the *Code noire* laws in France developed specifically to justify and protect social institutions of slavery and colonialism beyond moral judgements. However, all said and done, it can never be a crime for “Tom” (who typifies the African person and his/her struggles) to be a black man in a multi-racial world (“Postlude/Home”).

### **Conclusion**

Kamau Brathwaite’s work, *The Arrivants: A new world trilogy: Rights of passage, islands, masks* as well as his introduction of the neologism of tidalectics have provided an effective background and tool for the evaluation of the social impacts of the eras of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism on Africans. They also highlight the social circumstances of people of African descent in modern times wherever they reside around the world.

It is also in this wise that it comes highly recommended that the modern world should continue to engage in discussions concerning this historical event rather than try to gloss over it. Whatever lessons that have been learnt should be applied in respect of the current milieu of neo-slavery and neo-colonialism that are already leaving their own marks on the modern consciousness. Indeed, Caribbean people and all peoples of African descent should be unrelenting in their call for a more humane and fairer world.

Brathwaite’s vision and poetic art must be appreciated for contributing in no small measure to the advancement of literature and social criticism. They are captivating, informative and entertaining.

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