

Repossessing Home: A Postcolonial Study of *The Schooner Flight* by Derek Walcott

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the African Diaspora as lived and experienced in the West Indies in Derek Walcott's poem The Schooner Flight. This research paper investigates the protagonist's feelings of exile within home by comparing it with African nationhood as expressed in African Literature in the theoretical framework of postcolonialism. The problems regarding home and belonging faced by the generations of the Africans in the Caribbean resulting in an attitude of escape and rejection, disillusionment and defiance, frustration and hopelessness, also of revisions and revivals as portrayed in their literature have been scrutinized. The causes of the Afro- Caribbeans' sense of self- alienation, self- doubt and an unavoidable state of self- exile in the poem under discussion have been analyzed. This paper focuses on the possibilities of acceptance, a coming to terms with, reconciliation and a repossession of their life and rightful place in the world. The paper concludes by highlighting the persona's achievement (in Walcott's poem) of a profound sense of home and belonging not just in the Caribbean but in the vast universe mainly through poetic language and a creative understanding of his sufferings.*

Keywords: Colonialism, postcolonialism, African Diaspora, recuperating and rewriting history, creolization, hybridity, cosmopolitanism.

Introduction:

Derek Walcott (1934-) is the most distinguished Caribbean writer. Born to an English father and an African mother in St. Lucia, a former British colony, his poetry is vibrant with the conflict between the native African and the Caribbean heritage which is an amalgam of African, indigenous Caribbean, Dutch and English traditions. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1992. Derek Walcott is a postcolonial writer in both senses of the word 'post' i.e. 'after' and 'against' the colonial empire. He holds a significant position for portraying vividly the experience of the Afro-Caribbeans in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Sea is part of the Atlantic Ocean with more than seven thousand islands also known as the West Indies. Walcott in his *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (1986) addresses his abiding concerns with the predicament of a Caribbean poet facing a conflict between his European culture and Black folk culture of native Caribbean. As a theorist his essay on art and the crisis of rootlessness in the West Indies titled as *What the Twilight Says: An Overture* (1998) analyzes the confusion caused by the poverty, and mindless exploitation rampant in his islands even in the post-colonial era, "Slaves, the children of slaves, colonials, the pathetic, unpunctual nationalists, what have we to celebrate?"(21). He criticizes not only the colonial rule but the moral, social and economic degradation of his fellow countrymen also, "...the corruption of slaves into tyrant."(13) He resolves to use the hybridity of "black skins and blue eyes" (9) and the linguistic dexterity of the Caribbean artist acquired through his immersion in European, native West Indian and African cultures. He declares, "The future of West Indian militancy lies in art" (18). He has written about twenty plays. However he is best known for his poetry and his latest collection titled as *White Egrets* (2010).

The Schooner Flight by Derek Walcott is a poem which depicts the natives' unique experience of mixed race in the Caribbean, the conflict and the anguish it entails, through an adequate form, style, language and landscape to redefine their sense of home. This research work outlines reasons for the speaker's problematic relationship with his home, his inability to love his home naturally without disgust, guilt and anger. In the light of postcolonial discourse, the natives' perspective of life in the former colonies is historically silenced, muted and erased by the colonial powers, leading to an unavoidable state of physical, psychological and spiritual oppression and inertia. The burden of experience as not allowed to be expressed due to centuries of slavery has resulted in an inescapable

state of uncertainty rendering the very existence of the Caribbeans into question. This extremely paradoxical feeling of self-doubt, alienation and exile within their homeland and an equally urgent attempt at self-definition is analyzed with reference to Walcott's portrayal of a fluid sense of history, identity and a concept of home in . The protagonist meets the challenge by revisiting and confronting the demons from the past. The aim is to investigate the Afro- Caribbeans' experience of dispossession and loss of a home and identity on account of their history of slavery and mixed racial origins which makes them feel homeless and in continuous exile from their land and self in the framework of postcolonial theory .

In an article titled *Derek Walcott: History as Dis-Ease* by Robert Elliot Fox, the author calls this region "a pepper pot of languages, races, cultures" (331) because the indigenous population which consisted of the Amerindian tribes, the Arawaks and the Caribs who were either enslaved or killed by the European colonizing powers like the Spanish, the Dutch, the French and the British. Therefore a large number of slaves and indentured laborers were imported mainly from Africa and also from China and India to work in the sugar plantations owned by the colonizers throughout the Caribbean Islands. The aboriginals, Africans, Europeans, Asians and the mixed-race on account of the co- existence of these ethnic groups now are the inhabitants in these Islands. For Elliot, the "history of the region is, then, inevitably a compilation of histories, each distinct and yet inseparable from the rest" (331). However, the present article focuses on the African history of slavery in the islands and its impact on the Afro- Caribbeans' existence.

An understanding of the geography and history of the Caribbean Islands is a pre-requisite to grasp the tension in the Afro- Caribbeans' perception of a 'home'. Uprooted from their homes in Africa, traded and brought in the slave ships across the Atlantic Ocean/the Middle Passage to the Americas, the Africans were subjected to the history's worst disgrace. In his 1970 essay on art "*What the Twilight Says: An Overture*", Walcott addresses the challenges for a West- Indian artist who has to deal with the burden of colonial history comprising of slavery, genocide, poverty, cultural and economic degradation, a twilight of doubt, self- exile, an unavoidable sense of loss and estrangement from their environment, land and people, "If there was nothing, there was everything to be made. With this prodigious ambition one began" (4).

Paradoxically, Afro-Caribbeans' historylessness for having no heroic achievements but a history of 'slavery, racism and violent conquest' (King 3) is challenged by Walcott's depiction of Afro-Caribbean heritage and a cherishing of roots no matter how fluid in the poem. In her introduction to *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* (1986), Paula Burnett writes that the Caribbean Islands are uniquely located 'at the meeting-point between three continents _ Europe, Africa and America _ and between three poetic traditions _ the British, the West African and the North American'.(xxiii) Historically, colonization took place in at least three forms. The first form of colonization is observed in the British Empire in South Asian countries where the British ruled from the distance. Secondly the kind of colonization observed in America, West Indies, Australia and Canada where the European colonizers went to claim the land, killed the native population and occupied the place to settle forever. The third and the worst form of colonization was perpetrated when the Africans were hunted and brought through the Middle Passage to the Americas to be sold as slaves. Not only was their homeland snatched away from under their feet, they were subjected to the most unimaginable misery by living in chains in the foreign lands for centuries to come working on sugar plantations in the most hostile conditions due to extreme humid and hot climate.

Diaspora, in the postcolonial experience, means a paradoxical state of being both at home and displaced, a sense of belonging and alienation. African diaspora can be explained as double Diaspora which is a condition specific to the generation of Atlantic Slave Trade victims like the Afro-Caribbeans suffering since the sixteenth century. Firstly they are displaced far away from their land. Secondly on account of suffering from years of displacement, descendants of African slaves have lost and forgotten their African heritage, culture, traditions, the whole African way of life. This double loss of their land and roots both deprives them of a secure sense of home as well as justly motivates them to reinvent a new home and identity as in the poem by Walcott 'The Sea is History',

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History (364).

In the contemporary world, these Africans are caught up in double Diaspora in which they are born and brought up in West Indies both a

foreign land and a home to them, living their former masters' i.e., the British way of life. Therefore, they have to take into account the perilous journey of dispossession and self-doubt to embrace and repossess the land of their torture, rejection and humiliation as their home.

Literature Review

The most obvious dissimilarity after the colonization in the condition of the Africans in Africa and in West Indies is that the Africans in Africa were made to feel alien to their homeland through systematic strategies of psycho-physical violence and abuse of the natives. Whereas the generations of Afro-Caribbeans suffered from an even worse fate far away from their homeland. Not only were they physically removed from their homeland, they were also made to suffer from the pain of self-doubt and exile not only from self but land too. The slave owners did not allow them to feel at home in the West-Indies by making it the land of their persecution and exploitation. Therefore the Afro-Caribbeans' troubled concept of home and the crisis of identity are inseparable from each other. This one geographical difference in the Africans' history that they were not uprooted but ruled by the British Empire from the distance lends a remarkably distinct sense of rootedness and belonging to motherland in the Africans.

In the works of African writers like Achebe and Ben Okri, the tone is quiet and controlled and the themes analyzed consist of the colonial and postcolonial history and the disorientation in the African politics on account of intolerance, lack of education and unpreparedness of the African nations to deal with the post-independence challenges. Whereas the tone in the Caribbean literature by Walcott, Wilson Harris, Brathwaite is both controlled and urgent. Their writings center on the postcolonial strategies of rewriting history to reclaim the past to understand and accept it in order to repossess home and make positive progress in life in the Caribbean where the Africans were brought in chains to work on the sugar plantations.

This colonial and postcolonial history with their profound sense of home has been depicted in the works of African writers like Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) and Ben Okri (1959). Chinua Achebe's first three novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964) are set in Igbo villages in Nigeria. *Things Fall Apart* portrays and celebrates the land, rituals and culture of Igbo tribe in Nigeria in a vivid manner. The novel depicts the Igbo tribe's unbending love, devotion and

sacrifice for their homeland, culture and traditions through the protagonist Okonkwo. Similar feelings of love and belonging, being rooted despite political and economic instabilities are common to the other foremost African writers Ben Okri and Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian writer. Soyinka's collection of poetry *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1989) not only pays tribute to the unbending will and determination of Nelson Mandela to assert the dignity and freedom of the Africans but also their sense of belonging and unquestionable rootedness to the land despite the pangs of slavery and its aftermath. The refrain "Your logic frightens me, Mandela" in the poem of the same title reveals that the bond between the Africans and their land possesses the magical powers to nurture and rejuvenate the natives, "I know your blood/ Sagely warms and cools with seasons,/ Responds to the lightest breeze"(5).

Ben Okri's poems in *An African Elegy* (1992) also affirm faith, love and hope in Africa as homeland, "We walked home/ And the rain laughed around us/With its insistent benediction" (You Walked Gently Towards Me 60). Their homeland is the center which reconnects them with "All the lights of the sky/ And the salt of the waves/ And the myths in the air" (And If You Should Leave Me 59). In these poems, the crisis of identity is juxtaposed with the strong feeling of being rooted to the land. Even the bewilderment of the natives evident in their political and economic experiments for self-rule after independence cannot diminish their undivided love for the motherland.

However, as opposed to the Africans in Africa who are firmly grounded in their motherland, the Caribbeans of African descent in the West Indian Islands are surrounded by water and also feel challenged by their claim to the land as their motherland. The root cause of the problem of having to deal with the colonial legacy of disgrace and exploitation resulting in an alienation from the land for the Afro- Caribbeans lies in the historical fact of their forced immigration as slaves. The preoccupation with a sense of exile from land and self on account of their shared history of slavery is the central concern of Afro-Caribbean writers like Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris, Brathwaite.

The theme of quest for home is focused more urgently in African-Caribbean literature than in purely African literature. Historically there is no going back to the land of their ancestors. Although the New World should be their new home now, yet they are made to feel as aliens and strangers in their new home. The African slaves' anguish on their entrapment in the Caribbean is frequently rendered in the Caribbean

verse. Walcott's contemporary and a major Caribbean poet, Kamau Brathwaite(1930-) also captures this mad wish in the islanders to run away from their birthplace in his poem "South", "Since then I have travelled: moved far/ from the beaches:"

In Walcott's poem under discussion, *The Schooner Flight*, the protagonist is neither pure black nor pure white. Therefore his rejection by both the white Europeans and black Negroes intensifies his isolation and his reality of being an outcast in his own birthplace. This research work first examines the protagonist's feelings of displacement and the resulting frustration and bitterness as depicted in the first nine parts of the poem. Next the possibilities of reconciliation and the solution to the existential dilemma Shabine faces, as suggested in the last two parts of the poem, are critically analyzed. The article concludes by evaluating Walcott's experimentation with form and language as means of rediscovering his home, reconnecting with the world, the universe and with himself.

Research Methodology

This research work is anchored in the postcolonial literary theory. Analytic comparison between the concept of home in African and Afro-Caribbean literature has been undertaken. The article adopts a qualitative, inductive and interpretive approach which is informed by the case study of Shabine, the protagonist. The root causes of his troubled consciousness and the accompanying sense of alienation from his relationships especially his homeland, an unspecified place in the Caribbean islands, has been investigated.

The data for qualitative research comprises of textual evidence in the form of words, quotes, images, symbols, description of particular events, episodes, historical and socio-political facts.

Therefore Derek Walcott's poem *The Schooner Flight* is the primary unit of analysis for the theme of African Diaspora.

Internet, research journals, Walcott's theory of art as propounded in his essay "What the Twilight Says", a selection of poems by the Caribbean writers Brathwaite and Wilson Harris, two novels *Things Fall Apart*, *A Man of the People* and a collection of poetry titled *Beware Soul Brother* by the African writer Chinua Achebe, *Mendela's Earth* by Wole Soyinka and *An African Elegy* by Ben Okri have been utilized as secondary sources.

The stylistic analysis comprises of Walcott's nativization of language

called creolization, reworking of epic form and its conventions, division of the poem with titles in eleven parts, linguistic and verbal structures, the realistic tone, intense mood, effect of using place names, marine imagery, the dramatic device of monologue (dialogue with self) and the cumulative impact of these stylistic innovations in the text.

Exile within Home

The Schooner Flight is included in Derek Walcott's collection of poems titled "The Star- Apple Kingdom" (1979). This epic poem is divided in eleven sections. The first part titled as 'Adios, Carenage' suggests the pain and guilt that the protagonist, Shabine experiences by saying farewell to his motherland, Trinidad, personified as Maria evocative also of the woman in his life. In order to escape from an unbearable situation, he also has to give up the vital sources of nurturing and nourishment for man i.e., motherland. His natural, patriotic love is inextricable from the sense of disgrace, abuse and exploitation his homeland has been subjected to first by the white colonial masters and after independence by the native but corrupt politicians and uneducated and irrational, though enthusiastic, masses in part three, "Young men without flags/ using shirts, their chests waiting for holes" (351).

Through this poem, Walcott addresses and grapples with the complex of political, socio- economic, moral and religious issues as part of the colonial legacy called neo- colonialism. By confronting the most degrading aspects of his life, the failures as an individual and as a nation, a native sailor named Shabine strives to exorcize the ghosts of his soul as well as his national history. The poem revolves around the plight of the speaker agonized by the conflict about his roots, "I have Dutch, nigger and English in me, / and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation" (346). Despite having 'a sound colonial education', he is considered inferior both by the whites and his own countrymen because he "... wasn't black enough for their pride" (350). Not having a pure and definite identity shapes his whole attitude to life, 'that there would be no rest, there would be no forgetting' (346).

The persona is face to face with the most crucial dilemma of his life. The problem of having to deal with the strong feelings of displacement, alienation, guilt and exile within his own homeland is nerve- wrecking. As the poem opens, the mood of profound distress and quiet disappointment is powerfully evoked, "In Idle August, while the sea

soft,/ and leaves of brown islands stick to the rim/ of this Caribbean” (345). The potential tension in the poem is introduced when it opens with the protagonist feeling torn between boundless love and excruciating pain for his island country. He weeps bitterly “for the houses, the streets, the whole fucking island” (345) depicting disgust and resentment both with himself and the land. In fact his feeling of both loving these islands as well as not being able to love them purely turns out to be his ‘load’ (345).

The poem’s argument has been developed both as a monologue and as a dialogue with self, “and I look in the rearview and see a man/ exactly like me,” (345). The protagonist’s soul becomes the battle ground for the contesting thoughts about a degrading history resulting in the despoiling of his natural love and patriotic feeling for his motherland. The recurring reference to Maria, both the woman in his life and his motherland, reflects the speaker’s profound commitment to her.

Paradoxically, his urgent need of escape from his guilt and disgust with life in his homeland originates in his rootedness and unquestionable love for it as is evident from his intimate knowledge about the moods, climatic changes of his land personified as the woman. Maria Concepcion as “dark- haired evening” has been lovingly compared with a woman he knows closely, putting on “her bright silk at sunset, and, folding the sea,/ sidled under the sheet with her starry laugh” (345).

In fact for Shabine, the role of a Caribbean poet is similar to the role of a sailor who has to venture into the tractless, open sea hence the title of the next section “Raptures of the Deep”. He soon assumes the role of a poet alongside a sailor and the parallel activities of exploration of the sea and the Caribbean history and consciousness take place simultaneously. He compares a well-written, perfectly poised poem with a schooner on the sea and engages in the composition of poetry with a resolve to delve deep into the oceanic history of Atlantic slave trade of Africans. He calls the common and simple language of Afro- Caribbeans as the most suitable wind needed to help sail the schooner and the poem, “in simple speech/ my common language go be the wind,/ my pages the sails of the schooner Flight” (347). As the sails help balance and ensure the progress of a ship, likewise Shabine has to struggle to master the art of sailing in water as well as master the fluidity of language in order to survive well. The conflict between the corrupt world, Shabine’s personal failures as well as his imagination and patriotism is both agonizing and inspiring. The reference to Maria’s “laces and silks” evoke the sailor’s fine

sensibilities, his wish to redefine his relationship with his heritage, history, language and geography.

In the last part of the first section, Shabine directly addresses the readers taking them into confidence to share the most intimate experience of composing poetry which gives him a sense of direction and a greater self- confidence. The tone is conversational, “You ever look up from some lonely beach/ and see a far schooner?” (347). The persona smoothly shifts in one fluid movement from sailing in water to the exploration and re- evaluation of linguistic and historical resources.

The part two graphically traces Shabine’s historical, political, psychological and personal reasons for leaving his homeland. This part depicts and analyzes the chaos and crisis in Shabine’s private and public worlds, his struggle both to escape and to have a sense of direction in the troubled waters of his life, “...the window I can look from that frames my life” (350). The title “Raptures of the Deep” suggests the wonderful joys of the Caribbean Ocean. The corruption in power politics, economy and organized crime in the post- independent Trinidad ‘the Limers’ Republic’ (348) affect the persona’s love for Maria who represents all positive and meaningful relationships in his life. The surreal animal imagery has been used to describe the ‘minister-monster’s face “thick with powder, the warts, the stone lids/ like a dinosaur caked with primordial ooze” (348) suggestive of their lust and criminal hypocrisy leading to a crisis of leadership in the Third World countries in general also.

The underwater sea scape is significant. In the depths of the sea, the surreal images of “ brain, fire.../ dead- men’s fingers, and then, the dead men” (349), their bones converted into powdery sand encapsulate the island’s legacy of slavery, exploitation and disgraceful deaths of the African slaves on the slave ships across the “Middle Passage” of the Atlantic Ocean. Tired of his state of self- exile, fatigued with his battle with the self in order to have peace and equanimity, he desperately turns to spiritual succor, “Where is my rest place, Jesus ?.../ Where is the pillow I will not have to pay for” (350).

His true love enables him to make the best of his situation by making a new start, “I had no nation now but the imagination” (350) in part three. The need for the recuperation of the natives’ history becomes more urgent when the persona realizes the entrapment of “a parchment Creole” like him in history written from the white man’s perspective suggested

by the images “of a grille balcony; cream linen, cream hat” (350). Therefore the task of rewriting history to reinvestigate the historical truths is crucial since “...that’s all them bastards have left us: words” (350).

On his journey of self- discovery, Shabine passes through different Caribbean islands. Blanchisseuse is a village and a sea resort in Trinidad. The fourth part is very brief but greatly imagistic. Shabine’s escape is, paradoxically, both away from and into himself evoked by the image of “dark hand start pulling in the seine/ of the dark sea, deep inland” (352). The dark hands make the inscrutable ‘dark sea’ (352) of life their own by the metaphoric gesture of pulling in the fishing net for scrutiny to set themselves free.

The visionary experience in the early morning in the fifth section presents a dream-like state in which Shabine sees a ‘galley’ (352), a low, long slave ship from the past surrounded by fog. He suddenly becomes aware of the vision’s simultaneous horror and beauty. Horrifying like the deadly vision of the generations of negro slaves facing death on the Middle Passage in part two, here too, Shabine sees a ‘forest’ of slave ships and slave traders, “men with rusty eye-holes like cannons” (352). The vision is beautiful because of its miraculous power to present the history of slavery with “every ship pouring like a wooden bucket/ dredged from the deep.” Shabine sees the mighty admirals called “Rodney, Nelson, de Grasse” (352) commanding the shabines representing negro slaves, sailors, poets and historians who have been at the beck and call of these white masters. The image of the “forest of masts” sailing right through the Flight evokes the shock and immediacy of the history of slavery. The seventh and eighth parts condemn the abuse of man by man on the basis of color and power and defend the sanctity of poetry as the source of strengthening the universal values of moral integrity, truth and love.

Part nine engages with the relationship between slavery and progress, “Progress leaving all we small islands behind.” The sound of “The jet that was screeching over the Flight” (355) emblemizes power, speed and progress in the First World countries. The persona realizes that the way to overcome the demons from the past is to run, not away, but straight through the “memory of smoke” and “the screams of burning children” (356). The macabre and ominous elements in the speaker’s dream about himself running “like a painted bird”, hearing “a screaming parrot” (356), getting drowned in an ocean of black smoke portray the

sufferings of the Afro- Caribbeans. The part ends with redefinitions of the concept of progress. True progress is not just visible, material advancement and success but the growth and cultivation of inner self by nurturing the values of sacrifice, honesty and self- respect. The poet-sailor, Shabine, reaffirms the creative power of the words “the sea’s shining shield!” (358) as stronger than any weapons to fight the cause of a dignified life for the Caribbeans.

Homecoming

The poem opens on the turbulent note of the protagonist’s discontent on account of his experience and memories of slavery. In the first nine sections of the poem, he honestly takes into account their collective failure as a nation in the bond of love, sacrifice and duty to the motherland by freely indulging in corruption, nepotism, abuse of power, exploitation of their own land and its resources in the post- independent era. However there is a growing sense of direction and self- confidence through intensive soul- searching in the persona by the ninth part which is tested by an unexpected storm. The upheavals in the personal, emotional, psychological and national life of the persona have been concretized in this storm at sea. These closing two parts portray the climax and the resolution in the drama of Shabine’s life.

The animal imagery of a dog pouncing on a pigeon to break its neck and tempestuous waves rising like Leviathan, (359) the mythical sea-giant emblemize the threats to the existence of the ship and the sailor, the Caribbean people and the poet. His culminating pain and anguish are concretized in the ferocious storm threatening to destroy his ship, the Flight. Faced with unflinching death, the protagonist has a sudden moment of illumination and a revival of faith in God, sea and islands, “My first friend was the sea. Now, my last” (361).

His love and devotion for the sea, his journey and his sea bath help him learn and master the art of letting go, of coming to terms with the pain in history, both private and national. “There’s a fresh light that follow the storm/ While the whole sea still havoc” (360). The metaphor of Maria marrying the sea and departing with her bridal train of white seagulls, “I wanted nothing after that day” (360) evoke the themes of reconciliation, resignation and acceptance after a tumultuous confrontation. The persona compares his bright and happy face with sun, “a light rain was falling, with the sea calm” (360).

After the visionary experience, the remaining part of the last section of the poem is almost a prayer in which the speaker invokes the rain, the sun, the sea, the sky, and the white clouds to refresh and revive the purity of the islands thereby balancing the dominant themes of rape and abuse in the poem. The sea is personified as a girl showering in rain. The mission of expressing the inexplicable grief, hatred and anger through poetry becomes an honorable and the most valuable contribution to heal the wounds of a whole race. In the process of writing this epic poem, Walcott analyzes the pain and burden of West- Indian history to increase his people's understanding of the progress which is not just material but also moral, intellectual and spiritual, "[...]I am satisfied/ if my hand gave voice to one people's grief" (360). He realizes the futility of his search for the perfect state of innocence as unachievable, "vain search for one island that heals with its harbor/ and a guiltless horizon" (361). The purity of water, clouds and moonlight at night compensate for the harshness in his life. The closing lines portray the poet/ sailor/ seer contemplating in solitude. The formation of a true West-Indian identity cannot be simple but can only be composed through a complex process of fluid and multiple identities "...just as this earth is one/ island in archipelagoes of stars" (361). The imagery of light and direction at the end is significant as the poet turns towards his home with a renewed sense of love and reconciliation. The burden is lifted, the door is open as the journey on the sea also becomes the journey of soul-searching conveyed through the romantic images: "...the moon open/ a cloud like a door, and the light over me/ is a road in white moonlight taking me home" (361).

The tension between all the home islands' deprivation (economic and moral) and progress of the powerful nations is resolved as he forms a diasporic identity composed of an awareness and acceptance of mixed and multiple origins as opposed to a simple one. He declares all the Caribbean islands as well as the whole world his home and perceives himself as the citizen of the world. He makes not just the Caribbean but the sea, the whole world, in fact the entire universe his home. The expansion in his vision frees him from the immediate pressures of his personal life and helps him to associate with the sea which is the home to countless islands and a symbol of life and of all times.

The problem of the West- Indian identity and the disgrace it implies can be resolved by accepting their roots and history and viewing it from the perspective of Shabine, the sailor. The calm and peace after the storm at

sea reflect Shabine's own peace and equanimity he has gained by bravely accepting the challenge of confronting and coming to terms with the history of disgrace, by reviving hope and faith in God, in the regenerative potential of the Caribbean sea and islands, by creating self-respect through moral understanding, by expanding his vision and seeing the Caribbean history as part of a natural cycle of rise and fall and Caribbean islands as although only the components yet integral parts of an enormous universe.

Language of Home

For Walcott, the quest for home involves a search for the adequate linguistic and verbal structures, image patterns, metaphors that can encapsulate and carry the weight of Caribbean experience. An in-depth discourse analysis of the poem reveals Walcott's poetic innovations as he reworks the epic conventions in the European literary tradition to write the story of a creole sailor instead of a grand hero like Beowulf or John Milton's Adam and Satan. Shabine is not the Adam in the Paradise but "a red nigger who love the sea" (346) in the West Indies who is plagued by his retrospection of the time "when these slums of empire was paradise" (346).

By setting out on the journey of the Caribbean Sea, Shabine metaphorically undertakes the task of recuperating and rewriting history (Wisker 159) to highlight the significance of writing history from the native's perspective as opposed to the whites', the outsiders' angle which presents their exploitation of the natives and their resources as a heroic enterprise in the European literature. By using a creole protagonist, creole language and by reworking the epic form, Walcott displays the possibilities of breaking free from the European literary tradition and experimentation for a Caribbean artist. As opposed to European literary conventions of an epic defined as a long, narrative poem in grand style, about the exploits and adventures of a superhuman hero, Walcott's poem in question revolves around an ordinary hero, a native sailor who is apparently on an ordinary journey of the Caribbean Sea. Walcott's epic poem is not as long as the classic Greek epics, *The Odyssey* and *Iliad* by Homer. He has experimented with an epic poem in eleven sections of great precision about the fate, history and future of the Caribbeans. As opposed to the classical epic tradition of seeking help from Muse, the goddess of poetry, Walcott invokes the indigenous landscape, the rain, the sea, the sky, the white clouds to reinvigorate his spirit and poetic endeavor.

Instead of using grand language, Walcott uses patois or creole language, the Caribbean/ indigenized version of English language. In an essay *The Caribbean* by Melanie Otto in *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, the author illustrates creolization as a cultural and linguistic process. Patois is not the standard English. It is the unrefined, uncultivated version of British English evolved by the use of the uneducated generations of slaves and their mixed races to meet the needs of their day to day interaction with one another (Otto 97- 100). Nativization of the white masters' language, English, has been accomplished through indigenous landscape and incorporating passionate devotion to it, "if loving these islands must be my load,/ out of corruption my soul takes wings" (346). By using indigenous place names e.g., "...this Caribbean" (345), Maria Concepcion, St. Vincent, Trinidad, the Limers' Republic, a Beach resort in Trinidad, Blanchisseuse, Castries etc. he sets the action in the native landscape as the Flight sails through the Caribbean Sea and passes by different island countries and places. Walcott exploits the literary value of patois throughout the poem by using such epithets as "coolie, nigger, Syrian, and French Creole," 'the limey'. As the descendant of the rejected and disgraced race, he has to shout to the personified history in part three in order to be heard, "Sir, is Shabine!/ They say I'se your grandson" (350). Shabine expresses his fear of the storm at sea in the tenth part in the most intense patois, "Where Cap'n heading? Like the man gone blind!"/ "If we's to drong, we go drong, Vince, fock- it!"/ 'Kick- Em- Jenny' (358).

The figure of Shabine becomes Odyssean and his journey epic for emblemizing the Caribbean poets as sailors in search of an idiom and expression appropriate for the Caribbean experience and consciousness. The poem is written from the perspective / filters through the consciousness of Shabine, The tension owing to his complicated situation is balanced by the speaker's self- confidence. The plight of the sailor is portrayed in terms of the problems he encounters in relating with his land, people, history and above all with himself. What lends this ordinary journey of an ordinary sailor epic dimensions is his courage and the urgency of his need to confront the truth about himself and his homeland.

In the early part of the poem, the rejection and humiliation faced by the protagonist as 'a red nigger'(345) depicts the horror at hybridity or creolization suggesting a mixture or impurity that refers to the mixed parentage, cultural diversity, hybridity as inferior and unacceptable.

Later in the poem, after traversing through the waters, the persona is able to recognize the positive force in the cultural and linguistic diversity. Forging a new identity through language in order to make sense of the Diaspora is a pre-requisite for a West-Indian writer. The quest for a home, peace and equanimity, self-definition, reconciliation with self and land are closely interlinked with the realization of the power and potential in their mother tongue i.e., patois or creole language.

The marine imagery of schooners, islands, boats, sails, fog, flags, masts and the Caribbean sea depict a verbal sea scape painted in the poem concretely and graphically. The sea is personified as a female figure of productivity, fecundity and regenerative powers, "Is no use repeating / that the sea has more fish" (347). The ship is the central metaphor for a mobile, not fixed, point of analysis, an anchor in water that provides the possibility of a daring journey through the unconscious of the protagonist. Caribbean Sea is the space where this drama of his homecoming is played out through the liquid movement of his ship in the Caribbean Ocean.

Imagery of Crucifixion and Resurrection, loss and hope, the sorrowful and the miraculous is embedded in the entire poem. The mood in the poem is redolent with a sense of something extraordinary, "I swear to you all, by my mother's milk,/by the stars that shall fly from tonight's furnace,/ That I loved them, my children, my wife, my home;/ that kills them, as drowned sailors the sea" (347). The imagery of harbor and schooner implies that only by bravely going through the turbulent oceans of life with all their challenges and mysteries can one hope to arrive at the 'harbor' symbolizing rest and peace, harmony and understanding.

Conclusion

The postcolonial writings frequently address the issues of colonial history, home, identity, hybridity and independence. This article focuses on the questions of 'home' and 'identity', "divided to the vein" (18) to put it in Walcott's words in his poem, "A Far Cry from Africa", as more complex and urgent in the postcolonial Caribbean literature with reference to Walcott's poem *A Schooner Flight* than in purely African literature. This study also diagnoses and pinpoints the causes of socio-political chaos, religious crises and moral degradation in many formerly colonized, now independent Caribbean islands in particular and in other countries with the history of slavery in general. Shabine, the sailor sets out on a journey of escape as the poem opens. His exploration of the sea symbolizes his exploration of the fluidity of time, history, human consciousness and language itself.

Paradoxically by running away from his home and country he develops closer ties not only with his country but with the whole world and the entire human race. The reference to 'door' in the closing verses of the poem "...the moon open/ a cloud like a door" (361) suggests that the problems caused by the psychological internalization of inferiority by the formerly colonized as an aftermath of slavery, injustices, political instabilities in the West Indies can be grappled with and overcome by cultivating faith in the Creator of the universe and its grand Design. The imagery of 'white moonlight' and a door opening offer a quiet affirmation of the spirit of perseverance and tenacity of the Caribbean people as well as the mystical and regenerative potential of their islands and the ocean. The poem ends with Walcott's renewed faith in the Caribbean writer's faculty to redefine his relationship with the indigenous landscape of islands and beaches and to create fresh metaphors replete with fresh meanings. Poetry becomes even vital in reviving self-respect and psychic equilibrium in the whole race of the Caribbeans enslaved for centuries. The poem points to the possibility of addressing the crisis of an upright leadership in the Caribbean and many formerly colonized countries by cultivating moral values in the masses. The hope for these countries resides in true education that can create morally upright character of the common man having a vision of dignity.

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