

From Displacement to Identity: Tidalectic Patterns in *The Arrivants*

Faisal Mahmud Fahad¹

¹Dept. of English, Bangladesh Army University of Engineering & Technology (BAUET), Qadirabad, Natore-6431, Bangladesh

Abstract: This paper explores Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* through the framework of tidalectics, a neologism coined by Brathwaite himself to describe a cyclical, rhythmic, and non-linear process of cultural and historical evolution. *The Arrivants* comprising *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969) unfolds the journey of the African diaspora, highlighting its movement from the trauma of displacement and enslavement to the complex cultural, historical, and psychological construction of Caribbean identity. Drawing on postcolonial trauma theory, Black Atlantic theory, and postmemory studies, the paper argues that Brathwaite's poetic structure mirrors the ebb and flow of tides, reflecting the fragmented yet continuous formation of Caribbean identity. Through a close reading of selected poems, this paper demonstrates how Brathwaite incorporates African oral traditions, music, and creole languages to express both cultural dislocation and creative revival. Though this paper is primarily based on Brathwaite's neologism "tidalectics", it intersects with Black Atlantic theory, postcolonial trauma theory, and postmemory studies to present a comprehensive picture of Brathwaite's attempt to preserve the predicaments of the Caribbean people. Thus, this paper shows how *The Arrivants* creates a site where poetic expression becomes a space for historical negotiation, memory reconstruction, and identity formation.

Keywords: *Tidalectics; Diaspora; Postcolonial Trauma; Black Atlantic; Slave Trade*

Introduction: "making/with their/rhythms some-thing torn/and new" this line from Brathwaite encapsulates the central theme of *The Arrivants*, where historical fragmentation gives rise to new forms of cultural identity. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, one of the foundational figures in Caribbean literature, introduces the term "tidalectics" to propose a new way of understanding diasporic identity, rejecting the linear, Eurocentric model of Hegelian dialectics [2]. Instead of a historical progression from thesis to synthesis, tidalectics embraces the cyclical ebb and flow of tides, symbolic of the diasporic experience and the constant negotiation between loss and recovery, past and present [4]. *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* comprising *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969) maps the journey of the African diaspora through slavery, exile, and cultural disintegration, ultimately toward a reconstituted Caribbean identity. Brathwaite employs a hybrid poetic form, integrating African oral traditions, Caribbean dialects, and experimental typography to represent the fractured yet resilient consciousness of postcolonial subjects [3]. The form and structure of the trilogy resonate with what Paul Gilroy terms the "Black Atlantic" a space of continuous cultural exchange and transformation born out of the transatlantic slave trade [8].

This paper argues that *The Arrivants* functions as a tidalectic trilogy that reveals the psychological, cultural, and historical dynamics of Caribbean identity formation. By incorporating elements from trauma theory especially the notion of post-trauma and postmemory, it shows how Brathwaite's poetic voice oscillates between remembrance and reinvention [9]. This introduction sets the stage for a deeper analysis of the trilogy's three volumes, each reflecting a different stage of the diasporic journey and identity reconstruction. Through the appearing, retreating, and returning movement of tides, Brathwaite maps a poetics of survival and self-definition. Ultimately, *The Arrivants* becomes a poetic realm where historical trauma is transformed into creative possibility, and where the Caribbean subject is continuously reshaped by the ebb and flow of memory, history, and imagination [13].

Literature Review: Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* has long been recognized as a cornerstone in Caribbean and postcolonial literary studies, particularly for its pioneering exploration of diasporic identity, historical trauma, and cultural hybridity [3]. *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* that includes *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969), offers a poetic journey that reshapes the understanding of Caribbean identity through a distinctly non-Western lens [1]. First published together in 1973, the trilogy has attracted significant critical attention for its subversive use of poetic form and postcolonial content [6]. Its trilogy structure chronicles a historical and psychological journey from displacement to identity. Brathwaite's interviews and critical essays make clear that his trilogy is intentionally structured around a question-answer-resolution pattern, yet this structure resists the closure of Hegelian dialectics [5].

Nathaniel Mackey's in-depth interview with Brathwaite reveals the trilogy's structural logic as a sequential but non-linear exploration of diasporic questions. Nathaniel Mackey asked, "if you could speak to the issue of the trilogy as a form, an organizing principle, in your body of work". Brathwaite replied, "It was really a matter of raising an issue, replying to that

Article history:

Received: 06 July 2025

Received in revised form: 04 December 2025

Accepted: 08 December 2025

Available online: 15 December 2025

Corresponding author details: Faisal Mahmud Fahad

E-mail address: mfahad44675@gmail.com

Tel: +8801755861999

Copyright © 2025 BAUET, all rights reserved

issue and trying to create a synthesis. In other words, the first question, which is in *Rights of Passage*, is: How did we get into the Caribbean? Our people, the black people of the Caribbean – what was the origin of their presence in the Caribbean? And the answer to that which emerged was that they came out of migration, out of Africa, we came out of Africa. Hence, *Masks*. And then, we came out of Africa and went into the New World. Hence, *Islands*. So, the trilogic form is based upon the question, an answer and resolution of that answer into a third book” [5]. *The Arrivants: A new world trilogy* “deserves close reading before one can appreciate the creativity and vision behind Brathwaite’s poetic project” [15]. *The Arrivants* is central to “Brathwaite’s response to the slave trade and colonial history in Africa” through “the concept of tidalectics which he effectively deploys in the excavation of that history” [15]. Furthermore, the idea of “tidalectics”, Brathwaite’s unique contribution to cultural theory, stands as a critique of Western epistemology. Rather than synthesizing contradictions into a unified whole, tidalectics preserves contradiction and oscillation. As Carmen Llenín-Figueroa asserts, “the tide is never exactly the same nor does it retreat or return to the same spot of origin” [4]. This observation is vital in understanding Brathwaite’s aesthetic: identity in *The Arrivants* is not fixed or unified but oscillatory and evolving. This insight emphasizes the unpredictability of cultural memory and identity, especially under the impact of slavery and colonialism. Brathwaite’s image of the old woman sweeping her yard, as described in *ConVERSations*, symbolizes the tidalectic process. Her repetitive act of sweeping the sand, “walking on the water,” evokes the perpetual return to ancestral memory, not to preserve it statically but to reinterpret it through lived Caribbean realities [2].

Anna Reckin further expands the idea of tidalectics by showing how Brathwaite’s poetry works not only through meaning but through sound. She points out that “even the word-play between these terms, with its unsettling near-anagramming of ‘tida-’ and ‘dia-,’ seems to perform a tidalectic movement in microcosm” [6]. This observation highlights how Brathwaite builds the idea of tidalectics directly into the rhythm and structure of his language. For Reckin, the poetry itself moves like a tide, shifting back and forth through sound, repetition, and musical flow. By drawing on African oral traditions and the performative energy of Caribbean speech, Brathwaite disrupts conventional Western literary patterns. His poems become living, sounding spaces where cultural memory is carried through voice, rhythm, and movement. This sonic dimension strengthens the tidalectic idea by showing that Caribbean history and identity are not only written but also performed and felt.

Brathwaite’s poetics also aligns closely with Paul Gilroy’s Black Atlantic theory, which frames the Atlantic as a site of hybrid cultural production formed through the legacy of slavery. Gilroy’s transnational approach to black identity resonates with Brathwaite’s rejection of fixed, national histories in favor of rhythmic, migratory, and creolized forms [8]. Gilroy (1993) asserts, “The Black Atlantic... constitutes a counterculture of modernity, a complex and continuous flow of people, cultures, and ideas” [8]. Brathwaite’s hybrid poetic forms which combine African oral traditions, Caribbean dialects, and musical rhythms mirror this transatlantic flow, and highlight the interconnectedness of African, Caribbean, and diasporic cultural identities. The Black Atlantic framework situates Brathwaite’s tidalectic vision within a global historical context, revealing how Caribbean identity is continually reshaped through cross-cultural contact and historical memory.

Again, postmemory studies add another layer to this analysis by showing how trauma passes from one generation to the next. Marianne Hirsch (2012) defines postmemory as “the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before” [9]. Postmemory refers to the way later generations inherit the emotional weight and stories of traumatic events they did not personally experience. This idea helps explain why memory appears repeatedly throughout *The Arrivants*. Brathwaite’s poet-persona carries the pain of earlier generations and uses it to shape a sense of diasporic identity. In the trilogy, the past is not just remembered, it is reimagined and reshaped. This blending of past and present allows inherited trauma to become part of a new understanding of self and cultural identity.

Similarly, Postcolonial trauma theory helps explain how the experiences of slavery and colonialism continue to shape both the mind and culture of the Caribbean. Dominick LaCapra (2001) emphasizes that trauma resists linear narration: “Trauma is not simply experienced; it is acted out in repetition, representation, and recollection” [13]. This idea helps us understand how Brathwaite’s poetry expresses the deep wounds of displacement and enslavement. In *The Arrivants*, memories appear in pieces, moving back and forth like waves, showing how the past keeps returning even when it cannot be fully resolved. The trilogy’s repeated images, rhythms, and circular patterns reflect the ongoing struggle to work through this inherited pain. At the same time, these repetitions also open space for creativity, transformation, and renewal. The repeated motifs and oscillatory structures within *The Arrivants* illustrate what LaCapra terms “acting out” of trauma. Brathwaite turns traumatic memory into a source of cultural strength. He allows the poems to both remember the past and imagine new possibilities for identity. Here memory is revisited but not resolved.

In *Routes and Roots*, DeLoughrey argues that island literatures change the way we think about history and identity. She calls the “tidalectic,” a cyclical interaction between land and sea, roots and routes, instead of following a straight, linear narrative of origin. She notes that this tidalectic “foregrounds a cyclical model of history and resists the teleology of a Hegelian dialectical synthesis,” which challenges usual ideas about fixed national, ethnic, or regional identities [14]. This idea connects closely to the patterns in *The Arrivants*, where displacement, migration, and memory of the diaspora mix with cultural roots to create hybrid identities. By applying DeLoughrey’s tidalectic lens, one can see *The Arrivants* not just as a story of exile and movement, but as a living space where arrival and departure, past and future, constantly interact, thus shape identities that are rooted yet always in flux. The poems act as sites of post-traumatic expression where memory is fragmented, recycled, and transformed. As Wilson-Tagoe explains, *The Arrivants* “offers a poetic vision that recognizes the Caribbean’s violent history as a source of strength” [7].

Collectively, these perspectives show that Brathwaite's poetics cannot be understood through a single theoretical lens. Tidalectics provides the structural logic of movement, while Black Atlantic theory situates that movement within transoceanic histories. Trauma and postmemory theories reveal how the emotional and historical weight of slavery shapes the poet-persona's consciousness, and Sound-based or sonic readings highlight how Brathwaite uses rhythm, voice, and performance to express this history. Together, these frameworks demonstrate that *The Arrivants* is both an historical excavation and a creative reconstruction of Caribbean identity.

Theoretical Framework: This study is primarily grounded on Kamau Brathwaite's concept of tidalectics, which provides a cyclical, fluid, and non-linear approach to understanding history, memory, and identity in the Caribbean and diasporic context. Tidalectics serves as the central lens through which the structural rhythm, movement, and oscillations of *The Arrivants* are analyzed. To enrich this primary framework, the study also draws on certain notions from Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic theory, postcolonial trauma theory, Marianne Hirsch's postmemory, and Homi Bhabha's hybridity. These supporting perspectives help situate tidalectics within broader historical, cultural, and transnational contexts, allowing for a more nuanced examination of how Brathwaite's poetry engages with displacement, historical trauma, and the ongoing negotiation of memory, voice, and Caribbean identity.

This study is primarily based on the idea of tidalectics, a neologism introduced by the Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite. The term was introduced as a counter to the Eurocentric frameworks of dialectics. It is metaphorically anchored in the tidal movements of the ocean. While traditional models follow a straight line of conflict and resolution, tidalectics works like the rhythm of the sea, with its ebb and flow. Tidalectics presents a cyclical, non-linear way of understanding history and culture. Importantly, Brathwaite explicitly challenges the traditional Hegelian dialectic framework, replacing it with his concept of tidalectics, which frames history and identity as cyclical, fluid, and unresolved rather than linear and synthetic [10]. This rejection of teleological historicism is crucial for understanding the Caribbean's complex cultural and historical consciousness, where colonial rupture precludes simple resolution. Although *The Arrivants*'s question-answer-resolution pattern may seem to echo the Hegelian dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, Brathwaite deliberately distances his work from that tradition, asserting instead the concept of "tidalectics" a dialectics "with my difference" [10]. Tidalectics replaces linear historical resolution with cyclical fluidity, drawing its inspiration from the sea tides. Brathwaite clarifies: "I go for a concept I call 'tide-alectic' which is the ripple and the two tide movement" [10]. Unlike the determinism of the dialectic, tidalectics recognizes a form of cultural movement that is recursive, incomplete, and open-ended. The Caribbean, constituted by rupture and creolization, demands such a model [2]. Brathwaite's use of the term roots from his exploration of Caribbean culture and history. He explores the effects of colonization, slavery, and displacement in the process of Caribbean identity formation. The sea becomes a symbol of connection and disruption, linking the Caribbean to Africa while also representing the trauma of the Middle Passage; the forced transatlantic migration of enslaved people. It reflects the lived experiences of Caribbean and diasporic communities. Their identities are shaped by repetition, rupture, and return rather than a single, linear story. This approach helps analyze the three volumes of *The Arrivants* as different stages in an ongoing negotiation of memory, trauma, and identity.

The framework also draws on certain notions of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, which sees the Atlantic not as a barrier but as a space of cultural exchange shaped by slavery, forced migration, colonial violence, and ongoing connections across continents. Gilroy argues that Black identity in the Atlantic world is not fixed or tied to one place. It emerges from routes, the movement of people, ideas, and cultural practices rather than from rooted, static origins. This perspective rejects the idea of pure or essential identities and highlights hybridity, creolization, and intercultural exchange as central to Black Atlantic life. Gilroy describes the Black Atlantic as a "counterculture of modernity," showing that the slave trade and forced migrations played a key role in shaping global modern culture. In this way, the Atlantic is seen as a living, flowing system rather than a set of fixed boundaries. I see Brathwaite's poetry as reflecting this Black Atlantic vision. Through Caribbean nation language, Creole rhythms, oral traditions, and imagery of the sea, journeys, displacement, and return, Brathwaite makes the Atlantic a living, ongoing space of identity formation. In *The Arrivants*, the Atlantic is more than a setting; it is a space where memory, trauma, and cultural creativity converge across continents and generations. By combining Gilroy's theory with tidalectics, I can show how Brathwaite structures displacement and return while situating this movement within a broader historical and transnational context of diaspora, hybridity, and cultural exchange.

Postcolonial trauma theory is a key part of the theoretical framework, especially Dominick LaCapra's ideas of "acting out" and "working through". LaCapra explains that when trauma is "acted out," it keeps repeating itself without resolution, trapping individuals or communities in the same painful experiences. On the other hand, "working through" allows people to face and process traumatic histories in a way that leads to understanding, healing, and even transformation. I apply this idea to analyze how the poet-persona in *The Arrivants* experiences the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and forced displacement. The poetry shows trauma returning like waves, sometimes unresolved and painful, but the poet does not simply repeat the past. Instead, he reflects on it, remembers it in different ways, and uses these memories to reshape identity and culture. In this way, the trilogy not only acknowledges historical wounds but also turns them into a source of creative strength, allowing the poet to explore Caribbean history, memory, and the ongoing search for a sense of home in a fractured world.

Marianne Hirsch's (2012) postmemory theory is another key part of my framework. Postmemory focuses on how later generations those who did not personally experience traumatic events can still inherit the memories, emotions, and effects of those experiences from their ancestors. I use this idea to understand how Brathwaite's poetry engages with diasporic memory.

The poet-persona carries the weight of historical trauma, slavery, and displacement even though he did not directly live through these events. In *The Arrivants*, this inherited memory shapes identity, cultural consciousness, and creative expression. By exploring postmemory, I can show how Caribbean identity is transmitted across generations, how historical pain is remembered and reinterpreted, and how creative acts like poetry allow these inherited experiences to be reflected, transformed, and integrated into a living cultural memory.

Finally, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity helps me understand that cultural identity is never fixed or static. Instead, it is always shaped through negotiation, interaction, and adaptation. I use this idea to read Brathwaite's poetry as reflecting a Caribbean identity that is constantly evolving, blending African roots, New World experiences, and diasporic influences into a dynamic, creolized whole. The poems show that identity is created through ongoing dialogue between past and present, memory and lived reality, rather than returning to a single, pure origin.

Together, tidalectics, Black Atlantic theory, postcolonial trauma studies, postmemory, and hybridity provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how *The Arrivants* represents the complexities of Caribbean identity formation. Tidalectics provides the central framework for understanding the cyclical, fluid, and non-linear movement of history, memory, and identity in Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*. By combining this primary lens with insights from Black Atlantic theory, postcolonial trauma studies, postmemory, and hybridity, the framework situates the trilogy within a wider historical, cultural, and transnational context. Together, these perspectives highlight how Brathwaite's poetry navigates displacement, historical trauma, and the ongoing negotiation of Caribbean identity, showing it as a site of creative memory, cultural resilience, and continuous transformation rather than a fixed or linear narrative.

Methodology: This study uses a qualitative, text-based approach to analyze Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*. The research focuses on close reading of selected poems from each of the trilogy's three volumes: *Rights of Passage*, *Masks*, and *Islands* to examine how Brathwaite constructs Caribbean identity through tidalectic patterns. Careful attention is paid to language, imagery, rhythm, and structure to explore how the poet represents memory, historical trauma, and cultural hybridity. Both primary and secondary sources are utilized. The primary material consists of the poems in the trilogy, while secondary sources include critical essays, books, interviews, and theoretical studies that provide insight into Brathwaite's poetics and the wider Caribbean and diasporic context.

The methodology is guided by Brathwaite's own concept of tidalectics, which emphasizes cyclical and non-linear movements. This approach allows the analysis to follow the ebb and flow of themes across the trilogy rather than treating the texts as a strictly linear narrative. Patterns of displacement, return, and reinvention are traced to understand how Caribbean identity is negotiated and reshaped. In addition, the study draws on theoretical frameworks including postcolonial trauma theory, Black Atlantic theory, postmemory, and hybridity. Postcolonial trauma theory helps analyze the psychological and historical impact of slavery and colonialism on the African diaspora. Black Atlantic theory situates the poems in a transnational and intercultural context and highlights cultural exchange and hybridity. Postmemory theory provides insight into the intergenerational transmission of trauma, while hybridity illuminates the ongoing process of cultural blending and creolization.

By combining close textual analysis with these interdisciplinary perspectives, the methodology captures both the poetic and theoretical dimensions of *The Arrivants*. It allows for an understanding of how Brathwaite's use of sound, rhythm, oral tradition, and experimental language transforms historical displacement into a dynamic space for memory, creativity, and Caribbean identity formation.

Findings and Discussion:

Rights of Passage: The First Wave: *Rights of Passage*, the first volume of the trilogy, addresses the historical trauma of the Middle Passage and the early experiences of displacement faced by the African diaspora in the Caribbean. *Rights of Passage* serves as a poetic documentation of traumatic displacement, capturing the psychic scars inflicted by the Middle Passage and the existential rupture that defines the African-Caribbean condition. The poem spans across the Middle Passage, the United States, and the Caribbean islands. The speaker, who is part of the diaspora, moves through a broken world of cultural loss and forced migration. This reflects Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic idea, where identity is not fixed but formed through difficult and painful historical experiences [8]. The poet-persona's consciousness oscillates between despair and hopeful survival, reflecting the traumatic legacy of enslavement and forced migration. The poems traverse physical and psychic landscapes, from Africa's tribal conflicts and captivity to the harrowing voyage across the Atlantic and the emergence of a new, precarious identity in the New World.

The poems within this section narrate the transformation of the African subject from warrior to captive, charting a painful descent into slavery and cultural disintegration. The title "New World A-Comin'" alludes ironically to Duke Ellington's optimistic vision of a better world, while instead dramatizing the speaker's harrowing passage into captivity and the resultant loss of communal coherence [7]. The poem's depiction of "chained and welcoming port" captures the ambivalence of enforced arrival, an entry marked by both captivity and a fragile survival instinct. The poet-persona's internalization of this trauma aligns with postcolonial theories of psychic wounding and fractured memory [12]. The poem "Tom" draws on African-American spirituals, using the hidden language that enslaved people used to express hope and strength in their struggle for freedom. Similarly, "Folkways" exposes internalized racial hatred and cultural stereotyping, underscoring the psychological impact of colonial domination and racism [7]. The poem's vivid expression, "This is the hate that makes my skin stink", articulates the corrosive effects of racial

hatred while asserting poetic agency through raw expression. In the poem “South”, the poet-persona reaches a major turning point. He starts to understand that the Caribbean’s painful past, though full of violence, can also give strength and a sense of continuity. The ocean becomes a symbol of hope. The phrase “limitless mornings” suggests fresh beginnings and the possibility of renewal [7]. Brathwaite’s tidalectic style is clear in this poem. The poet moves back and forth between memories of loss and hopes for the future. The flowing river symbolizes a return to ancestral roots and rhythms. As Wilson-Tagoe explains, this moment shows that “continuity is possible” and that the exile can now “look forward to infinite possibilities” [7].

In its entirety, *Rights of Passage* functions as the inaugural tide in the trilogy’s rhythmic structure. It stages a painful coming-into-consciousness, a dislocation that initiates the tidalectic cycle of return and reformation. The setting spans the Middle Passage, the United States, and the Caribbean to show the journey of displacement and survival that shapes the African diaspora. The speaker’s shifting emotions, sometimes troubled and sometimes hopeful, express the mental burden of exile. At the same time, the poem imagines Africa as a place where identity, belonging, and a sense of wholeness might be restored. The speaker’s vision of Africa as both origin and solution to the existential crisis remains unresolved, setting the stage for the subsequent quest in *Masks*.

Masks: The Receding Tide: *Masks*, the second movement in *The Arrivants* trilogy, chronicles the poet-persona’s journey across Africa in search of ancestral roots, lost histories, and cultural restoration. This section performs a complex negotiation between idealized memory and myth, historical reality and imagination. It reveals how hard it is for the diaspora to recover a genuine pre-colonial identity. The journey exposes the cracks within diasporic self-understanding and the persistent trauma of colonial history. Brathwaite’s tidalectic pattern appears through the idea of return but this return does not bring comfort or closure, instead, it deepens the speaker’s sense of disappointment and loss. The quester’s encounter with Africa is mediated by inherited trauma and distorted memory, echoing postcolonial trauma theory’s claim that historical wounds resist linear healing [13].

At first, Africa seems like a hopeful place where lost identity can be regained, but it soon becomes a space of confusion and cultural distance. In “The Making of the Drum,” this shift becomes clear. The poem shows the making of a drum as both a sign of preparation and a ritual that calls on ancestral memory. Since drums are traditionally used to connect with gods and ancestors, their creation symbolizes the Caribbean person’s effort to reconnect with a shared past through African traditions. However, the act of preparing the drum also shows that this recovery is unfinished, reminding us how difficult it is to rebuild broken histories and identities. “Atumpan,” centered on the talking drum, dramatizes Brathwaite’s fusion of African orality with Caribbean poetics. The drum speaks in rhythms and tones, turning sound into a layered record of history. It is something felt and heard rather than written in a straight, linear form. As Abiola Irele notes, the poet strives to collapse the dichotomy between oral and written traditions, crafting a hybrid form that resists Western literary norms [3]. In a broader diasporic context, this reflects Gilroy’s Black Atlantic concept of cultural hybridity and transnational exchange [8]. The poem illustrates how diasporic cultures remix African forms in the context of transatlantic modernity. Similarly, “Mmenson,” invoking an orchestra of ceremonial horns used to narrate history, stages an African mode of historiography. The poet tries to connect with the stories and memories carried through oral traditions i.e. tales of empires, journeys, and migrations. But this search is limited because the past cannot be reached in a pure or untouched form. The line “whose ancestor am I?” from “The New Ship” distills the speaker’s alienation: Africa neither recognizes nor fully embraces the Caribbean returnee, a poignant articulation of disconnection from African origins [13]. The ritualistic drum “Korabra,” literally meaning “go and come back,” encapsulates the paradox of tidalectic return. As the speaker steps onto ancestral soil, he admits, “I have come home / but home is not home”. This reveals the speaker’s dual position as both a returning descendant and an outsider. The speaker occupies a dual role as both a returning descendant and an outsider. He is at once embraced and alienated, caught between a desire for belonging and the reality of cultural displacement. He reflects further, “the soil is mine / yet I walk as a stranger,” emphasizing the tension between belonging and alienation. His journey mirrors the tide receding from Africa even as it reaches toward it. “Bosomptra” intensifies this ambivalence. The poet retraces the route inland from the coast, uncovering complicity in the slave trade and confronting the corruption of the Ashanti Empire. This sober recognition destabilizes idealized visions of Africa, replacing nostalgia with a nuanced consciousness of historical complexity and rupture. Here, the poet acquires a new consciousness, shaped not by idealization but by a sobering awareness of rupture. As the speaker realizes the dissonance between memory and history, he also reconfigures his subjectivity within the fractured continuum of the diaspora.

The African setting, at once spiritual homeland and unfamiliar terrain, fails to reconcile the poet’s psychic fragmentation. Postcolonial trauma theory elucidates the compulsive revisiting of history in *Masks*, portraying the return as an “acting out” rather than a healing reconciliation [12]. The poet-persona’s psychic fragmentation remains unresolved, and Africa emerges as a contested and ambivalent space. The return to Africa becomes less a homecoming than a necessary passage through disillusionment toward a reconstructed identity. Ultimately, *Masks* functions as the ebbing tide in Brathwaite’s tidalectic arc. It registers the failure of simple reconnection, foregrounding the necessity of cultural reinvention. The quester returns not with recovered origins but with a deepened awareness of hybridity, setting the stage for the final movement in *Islands*, where the fragments of Africa and the Caribbean are poetically remixed into a new form of belonging.

Islands: The Returning Wave: *Islands*, the culminating section of *The Arrivants*, depicts the poet-persona’s return to the Caribbean, no longer as a seeker of ancestral origins, but as a reconfigured subject who now embraces cultural hybridity and creolization. This movement marks a synthesis not in the Hegelian sense of dialectical closure, but in the tidalectic rhythm of return, reflection, and renewal. The Caribbean emerges as a space where ancestral dislocation intersects with creative cultural

renewal, aligning with Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, which highlights the dynamic and transnational flow of cultural exchange across Africa and the Caribbean [8].

The opening poem "Jah" signals the beginning of a renewed New World consciousness. The poet-persona's ambivalence gives way to a mature negotiation with Caribbean Creole culture. The imagery of "male elephants uncurling their trumpets" invokes mmmenson, the ceremonial African horns, implying a symbolic continuity with *Masks*. However, this continuity is now framed through the auditory bridges that span the Atlantic: "bridges of sound" linking Nairobi, Havana, and Harlem. The "bridges of sound" metaphorically link Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States, suggesting a diasporic sonic geography that transcends dislocation [5]. These bridges suggest a diasporic unity forged through rhythm, music, and shared resistance. In "Homecoming," the poet's tone is no longer nostalgic or alienated; instead, it reflects maturity and determination. This poem reveals the poet-persona's renegotiation of "home," moving beyond previous idealizations and alienations toward an assertive and unmasked subjectivity. The persona is now unmasked, having relinquished the idealism of *Rights of Passage* and the disillusionment of *Masks*. His renewed engagement with Caribbean space is both critical and constructive. The fading romanticism and growing resolve mark a decisive turn in identity formation. This reterritorialization of identity affirms what Dominick LaCapra terms "working through" that is "the process that enables one to come to terms with the past, to engage trauma without compulsively repeating it" [13]. In the poem "Caliban," Brathwaite evokes the memory of slavery through the symbolic use of the limbo dance, portraying it as a representation of both historical pain and the resilience of cultural endurance. This rewriting of history through performative memory enacts a poetics of resistance [6]. In "Negus," Brathwaite engages with Rastafarian spirituality and linguistic disruption. The poem's deliberate fragmentation, including wordplay, stamnation, and verbal rupture, dramatizes resistance to colonial language structures. The poet's plea "I must be give words" is a demand for linguistic agency, an act of reclaiming voice in the face of historical deprivation. The closing invocation "open the door for me" resonates as both a spiritual plea and a cultural demand for space and recognition [6]. The poem "J'ouvert," meaning "dawn" in Caribbean Creole, metaphorically marks the beginning of a new cultural era. Its placement in the Beginning section of *Islands* signals rebirth through carnival, an Afro-Caribbean tradition of inversion and liberation. The line "making/with their/rhythms some-thing torn/and new" encapsulates Brathwaite's tidalectic vision: a culture born from fragmentation yet rhythmically generative, creating coherence out of historical rupture [1].

Ultimately, *Islands* completes the tidalectic arc not by resolving trauma or recovering origin, but by transforming loss into creative potential. The poet-persona arrives at a cultural selfhood that is not fixed but fluid, formed in the rhythmic pulse of memory, music, and imagination. In doing so, Brathwaite offers a vision of postcolonial identity as an ever-evolving tide: ebbing, returning, and continually remaking the Caribbean self. Here, the tidalectic cycle completes a transformative loop. Instead of trying to return to a single origin, identity grows through a mix of African heritage and New World experience. This idea connects with Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which he describes as "the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities," a condition that opens a "Third Space" where new cultural meanings and resistant identities can take shape [11]. This understanding of identity fits well with Brathwaite's tidalectic vision, where history moves in cycles and creates space for renewal and transformation.

Conclusion: Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* trilogy offers a powerful exploration of Caribbean identity through the concept of tidalectics, a cyclical and non-linear way of understanding history and culture. Rather than following a straight, linear narrative, the trilogy reflects the ebb and flow of diasporic experience, showing how identity is shaped by repetition, rupture, and return. The poet-persona's journey moves from the trauma of the Middle Passage in *Rights of Passage*, through the complex return to Africa in *Masks*, to the creolized, hybrid identities of *Islands*. Each stage illustrates how history, memory, and identity are constantly negotiated rather than fixed. *Rights of Passage* portrays the psychological and cultural scars left by slavery and displacement, while *Masks* highlights the challenges and alienation of reconnecting with ancestral origins. In *Islands*, Brathwaite presents identity as a living, creolized process that embraces hybridity, creativity, and resilience rather than seeking a single point of origin or resolution. Throughout the trilogy, Brathwaite uses African oral traditions, musical rhythms, ritualistic symbolism, and experimental language to reclaim diasporic histories and challenge Eurocentric narratives. The tidalectic structure emphasizes that Caribbean identity is always evolving, never static. By situating *The Arrivants* within the frameworks of Black Atlantic studies, postcolonial trauma theory, and concepts of hybridity, the trilogy demonstrates how historical trauma and displacement can be transformed into a creative and generative force. Brathwaite's work affirms that Caribbean identity is fluid, dynamic, and continuously reshaped by memory, history, and imagination. Ultimately, *The Arrivants* stands as a poetic testament to the resilience of the Caribbean self, showing how cultural memory and creative reconstruction allow identity to grow and adapt through the ongoing tides of history.

References:

- [1] E.K. Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1973.
- [2] E.K. Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, We Press, New York, 1999.
- [3] F.A. Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001.
- [4] C.L. Figueroa, Tidalectic memory: Kamau Brathwaite's poetics, *J. Caribb. Lit.*, 9(2) (2015) 45-67.
- [5] N. Mackey, An interview with Kamau Brathwaite, *Callaloo* 23(2) (2000) 455-472.
- [6] A. Reckin, Tidalectic lectures: Kamau Brathwaite's prose/poetry as sound space, *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 1(1) (2003) 1-16.

- [7] N.W. Tagoe, *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature*, Heinemann, London, 1997.
- [8] P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993.
- [9] M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012.
- [10] E.K. Brathwaite, Caliban's Guarden, *Wasafiri* 17(35) (2002) 5-12.
- [11] H.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994.
- [12] M. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2009.
- [13] D. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2001.
- [14] E. DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Islands Literature*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2007.
- [15] C. Nwadike, Tidalectics: Excavating history in Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*, *IAFOR J. Arts Humanit.* 7(1) (2020).