Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum. 24 (2): 825 – 838 (2016)

PERTANIKA JOURNALS

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

Journal homepage: http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/

Achille and the Unhomely Pull of Atavistic Homeland in Derek Walcott's Omeros

Zargarzadeh, H.[1,2]

[1]*Department of English, Faculty of Literature and Humanlities, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran*
[2]*Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

Pan-Africanists and proponents of Négritude associate home with Africa. However, Derek Walcott detours from this essentialist belief. My interpretation of his epic poem, *Omeros* (1990), provides a detailed analysis of Walcott's negative attitude toward Négritude. Among the characters in *Omeros*, this paper focuses on Achille's quest for self and identity in Africa. Taking Homi Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely" as an analytical tool, I will show how Walcott critically illustrates the unhomeliness of Africa as home for Afro-Caribbeans. Even though essentially Africa is regarded as the ancestral homeland for people of African descent, the uncanny feeling it creates, negates this association. Yet, *Omeros* proposes that the New World itself, in spite of its ambivalences, can be home for the New World inhabitants as it could create a sense of familiarity—or what Yi-Fu Tuan terms "topophilia"—and a communal sense of relatedness. As I will argue, these features can be taken as characteristics of home and can create, albeit not a true home, but a sense of at-homeness with the context of the new location.

Keywords: Walcott, *Omeros*, Achille, homecoming, Bhabha, topophilia, community relatedness

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to argue that Derek Walcott's engagement with Négritude is to show the problematic of this race-based theory and highlight Africa's distance from the lived reality of the Caribbean together with its unhomeliness, estrangement, and alienating sense. Furthermore, through the character of Achille in *Omeros*, the paper will examine the ways in which Walcott reconceptualises a model of home and homecoming for the hybrid New World

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 2 April 2015
Accepted: 22 June 2015

E-mail address:
hale.zargarzadeh@gmail.com (Zargarzadeh, H.)

ISSN: 0128-7702

inhabitants.[1] In what follows, I will first focus on Achille's hallucinatory journey to Africa and then analyse the unhomeliness of Africa in various perspectives through Homi Bhabha's concept of the unhomely. Since the early nineteenth century, Africa has been regarded as home for African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. In the twentieth century, the Négritude movement also inspired the back-to-Africa campaign. This movement was founded in Paris in the 1930s by the Martinican Aimé Césaire, the Senegalese Léopold Senghor and the Guianian Léon Damas, under the influence of the Harlem Renaissance, a 1920s African American arts movement. As a literary, cultural and ideological movement, Négritude evoked different responses from Afro-Caribbean writers, Édouard Glissant, Chinua Achebe, John P. Clark, and Wole Soyinka who rejected Négritude. Correspondingly, Walcott distances himself from Négritude and its celebration of precolonial Africa. However, some scholars like Rei Terada (1992, p. 27), Jahan Ramazani (2001, p. 59) and Shane Graham (2011, p. 109) argue that in spite of its repudiation, Walcott engages with Négritude in *Omeros*.

The quest for ancestral land, roots, home and filiation is a central theme in *Omeros* as most of the characters in *Omeros* are Afro-Caribbean but each deals with Africa in a different way. Ma Kilman, the owner of No Pain Café, pursues her African roots by locating an African plant which has been brought to the Caribbean. A former fisherman, Philoctete, is also tied to Africa by the wound in his shin. Likewise, Achille, another fisherman and the focal character of this paper, is preoccupied with Africa to the extent that in a visionary journey he travels to that continent. However, it is not only the African presence that hovers in the backstage of this poem, tourism as the dynamics of neo-colonialism also affects the life of the villagers in one way or another. Unlike other characters, Achille cannot come to terms with the rhythms of life in the touristic island of St. Lucia. Hector is a fisherman who sells his canoe to buy a passenger van for transporting tourists around the island. Helen works in the hotel industry.

To demonstrate the corrupting presence of tourists in the Caribbean, Walcott describes a Friday night blockorama, a festival in the village in which tourists mingle with the islanders and dance, eat and revel. Achille does not go to this festival but he indignantly watches Helen, as she whores herself among the tourists. The intrusive presence of the tourists has isolated Achille from island activities and the islanders. He resorts to the sea as he foresees a gloomy future. The following day, Achille goes fishing, lost in his thoughts of Helen. But this time, he goes to the sea to fish for his name and soul. In fact, this is his dream journey to Africa where, in a reversed Middle Passage, a sea-swift takes him to

[1] The New World is a term which, as the OED defines, is referred to North and South America collectively "in relation to Europe, especially after the early voyages of European explorers."

Africa.[2] At the outset of the journey Achille is happy that he is going home. However, as the story unfolds, he has a weird sense of unhomeliness, a concept which Sigmund Freud develops as "*unheimlich*" (or "uncanny" as in English translation) and Bhabha as "unhomely."

In the chapter entitled "Unhomely Lives: The Literature of Recognition" in *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (2004) reworks Freud's notion of the "*unheimlich*" and extends its application from psycho-analytical discourse to that of postcolonial theory. In his 1919 paper, "The Uncanny", Freud surveys the dictionary meaning of *un/heimlich* — a concept related to "the qualities of feeling" which deals with restrained and "subdued emotional impulses." Definitively associated with something that provokes a sense of fear and horror (p. 219), *unheimlich* sometimes also ambivalently overlaps with its opposite, *heimlich* (p. 226). The formulations suggested for this term are as follows: the uncanny "is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (p. 220). Uncanny can also refer to everything that should remain undisclosed but has been revealed (p. 224). Bhabha constructs his notion of "unhomely" on this formulation. Finally, Freud takes uncanny as "something which is secretly familiar ... which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition" (p. 245).

By investigating all these formulations, it becomes clear that the common denominator among them is the idea of repression, which Freud relates to personal emotions, fears, feelings, and memories repressed during infancy or childhood. He believes the recurrence of the repressed sensation creates a kind of anxiety that leads to the uncanny situation. While Freud relates repressed feelings of the past to the individual's personal experiences and anxieties, Bhabha extends the frame of reference of this concept from psychological experience to historical, racial and cultural dimensions. The past, for Bhabha, does not merely refer to the individual's past, or to the anxieties experienced personally at early ages, it encompasses traumas experienced not only personally but also collectively. The traumas of history, colonisation, massive migrations, involuntary transplantations, uprootings, diaspora and exile are the themes which haunt Bhabha's theorising. From time to time, memories of the past resurface and stir "unhomely" emotions/ desires.

Apart from expanding the scale of Freud's notion of "the repressed" from personal to collective experience, Bhabha's postulation of the "uncanny" has further implications. As discussed earlier, "unhomely" for Bhabha (2004) refers to everything that ought to have remained

[2] According to the OED, the Middle Passage is a "journey across the Atlantic by ship as part of the slave trade. Ships travelled from Britain to Africa, where the slaves were bought and then taken to be sold in America or the West Indies. Conditions on the journey were terrible and many slaves died during it."

concealed but has come to light (pp. 14-15); it can then be inferred that the realm of privacy has been invaded. In these unhomely circumstances, the boundaries between binary oppositions are blurred and "private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy" (p. 19). As the past is tormenting for the colonised subject, its intervention and interruption of the present flow of time through memories is damaging. Such interactions and intimacies question "binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed" and "are linked through an 'in-between' temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history" (p. 19). Hence, it can be inferred that the world is "unhomely" for the colonised; the anxiety created in such a situation affects the mind and the psyche of the individual who struggles with the uncanny until s/he manages to somehow bring about some changes or settle down the issues. However, sometimes the weight of the past is beyond control and leads to madness, a concept which Edouard Glissant examines in the domain of language as *delire verbal* (verbal delirium).

In this way, Bhabha postcolonises Freud's psychological notion in order to equip himself with a critical lens enabling the reading of unhomely moments experienced by colonised peoples; those who deal with temporal and spatial relocations and those who suffer the vicissitudes of history. Now, before reading Achille's trajectory of homecoming through Bhabha's theoretical framework, one particular point should be discussed. As Britton argues, the concept of the unhomely is generally associated with women because of their traditional association with the private sphere of the home (p. 120). In like manner, Bhabha, himself, zooms his analytical lens on female characters. However, in this analysis, I want to suggest that both genders can come across and experience the uncanny while returning to their estranged but once familiar homes or homelands. Hence, as will be demonstrated, the context for such feelings and sensations is wide enough to encompass the experiences of both genders. Therefore, in this paper, I will read Achille's hallucinatory journey to Africa through Bhabha's concept of the unhomely to investigate how Achille comes to accommodate himself with that experience. Although, ancestrally, Achille belongs to Africa, this atavistic homeland looks unfamiliar to his hybrid Caribbean eyes in the same way that he himself looks strange to his tribesmen. Essentially speaking, home is associated with familiarity but the home/homeland Walcott presents to Achille is unhomely. It is not only the scenery, his garments or the people, but above all, it is his arc of mind that differs from the Africans as it is shaped in the socio-cultural context of the Caribbean. In what follows, I will trace the manifold reverberations of the unhomely in his homeland.

CULTURAL UNHOMELINESS

The very first trial Achille encounters in Africa is the question of his identity and his name which is featured as an important topic both in postcolonial studies, as well as in Walcott's works. In "The Schooner *Flight*", Shabine, the sailor-narrator, believes that as the Middle Passage has fragmented nations, tribes, and families, the question of roots, origin as well as name go unanswered:

> *Next we pass slave ships. Flags of all nations,*
> *our fathers below deck too deep, I suppose,*
> *to hear us shouting. So we stop shouting. Who knows*
> *who his grandfather is, much less his name?* (Walcott, 2014, p. 244)

In another poem, "Names," Walcott (1986) describes how his race entered the New World without a "horizon" and how empty-handed they were left on the shores of the alien world with their names erased by the waves (p. 306). In his African journey in *Omeros*, Achille meets his father, Afolabe, who has forgotten the name he has given to his son, so he questions Achille of his name.[3] Achille tells his name to his "life-giver" (Walcott, 1990, p. 136); then Afolabe inquires its meaning. Achille says:

> *Well, I too have forgotten.*
>
> *Everything was forgotten. You also. I do not know.*
>
> *The deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave us; trees, men, we yearn for a sound that is missing.*[4] (p. 137)

He blames the sea for this loss and oblivion but this does not convince his father. Afolabe believes there is a philosophy and a virtue behind each name; if a person does not know the meaning of his name, that person is almost "nothing." In "Reflections on 'Omeros'", Walcott (1997) writes about the importance of names for many cultures:

> *There are cultures that would ask, "What is "Joe"? ... What is the meaning of that sound?" For somebody not to know the meaning of the sound of his or her name is to be nameless, not to have an identity. These are cultures in which the meaning of names is just absolutely crucial. What has been the experience in this part of the world of losing your name, of changing your name?* (p. 238)

Achille is brought up in the Caribbean, an archipelago which has stood the worst brutalities of colonialism ever (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 144), a context in which people still struggle with the

[3] Breslin (2001) also takes Afolabe and Achille's discussion of naming and its meaning as "the most extended discussion of language in *Omeros*": "The sundering from Africa," he maintains, "has left not only empty hands but empty words as well" (p. 266). For a detailed discussion of the importance of naming in *Omeros* as well as in The *Odyssey* see McConnell, 2013, pp.124-26; Burian, 1997, p. 368; Figueroa, 2009, pp. 163-64; Moffet, 2005, pp. 14-16; Walcott, 1997, pp. 238-39; Ciocia, 2000, p. 92; Sickle, 1999, pp. 8 and 23.

[4] As Hofmeister (1994) contents the missing sound is symptom of "the deracination of the tribe" (p. 119).

legacies of colonialism and its ensuing neo-colonial dynamics. In such a context, the question of naming may not sound important for the people let alone its meaning.[5] Achille has never thought of the meaning of his name and his lineage until the time Afolabe questions him. This itself indicates a cultural clash between Africa and the New World. Achille's unconvincing remarks bring the tribe to the verge of grief who fear the amnesia. Achille is dumb as he could not justify his father:

> *There was no answer to this, as in life. Achille nodded,*
>
> *the tears glazing his eyes, where the past was reflected*
>
> *as well as the future. The white foam lowered its head.* (Walcott, 1990, p. 139)

He nods and this means that he accepts his father's reasoning. This lack of knowledge, though may sound unimportant in the Caribbean, seems to be problematic in the African context. Now that Achille is back home, this cultural clash stirs an unhomely moment, whereas supposedly an individual should be familiar with his/her indigenous cultural values while in Africa Achille comes to understand that he does not have such a familiarity. In other words, his engagement with the Telemachus-motif in Africa situates him in the interstitial state somewhere between two geographic spaces; Africa and the Caribbean; two value systems: Old World and the New. This dialectic in-betweenness makes Africa unhomely as his consciousness has just awakened to his long-forgotten African values. The idea of oblivion or indifference to one's indigenous values along with the internalized sense of inferiority and passive submission are all the herald of life under the colonial system. This is quite evident in Achille's speech:

> *I do not know what the name means. It means something,*
>
> *maybe. What's the difference? In the world I come from*
>
> *we accept the sounds we were given. Men, trees, water.* (p. 138)

Through the character of Achille and the unhomely sense of life he experiences, Walcott portrays how colonialism has castrated the Africans from their cultural heritage. Lack of correlation between one's name and its meaning, between a signifier and its signified, is like a "social death" similar to slavery (Breslin, 2001, p. 266). Though Achille still has no idea about the connotation of a name he carries, this conversation deepens his perception of the importance of naming.

[5]Upon arrival slaves were renamed by the slave owners. By giving new names for the slaves, as McConnell (2013) notes, the colonial masters deprived them of their identity. After shattering their sense of individuality, they targeted family units and then, in a measured way, they separated groups who spoke one language. Through these calculated and planned techniques, colonizers intended to confuse the slaves and to "transform them into a blank canvas for their owner's wishes" (p. 125).

RELIGIOUS UNHOMELINESS

In the colonial era, colonisers not only imposed their language on their colonies, religion was also another herald of this invasion. Once at dawn, Achille climbs a track of yams to get to the *"*sacred circle of clear ground / where the gods assembled*"* (Walcott, 1990, p. 140). He stands there and calls out the names of the African gods but much to his disappointment, there is no reply to his recitation. Then, to his embarrassment, he sees "a tree-hole, raw in the uprooted ground" (p. 140). This "uprooted ground" reminds Achille and the readers, as well of the very opening scene of the poem (pp. 3-8), where Achille along with other Afro-Caribbean fishermen unknowingly wound and kill these long-standing sacred pillars in order to carve them into the canoes for work and provision. This is how the story begins:

> *"Once wind bring the news*
>
> *to the laurier-cannelles, their leaves start shaking*
>
> *the minute the axe of sunlight hit the cedars,*
>
> *because they could see the axes in our own eyes.*
>
> *Wind lift the ferns. They sound like the sea that feed us*
>
> *fishermen all our life, and the ferns nodded 'Yes,*
>
> *the trees have to die.' So, fists jam in our jacket,*
>
> *cause the heights was cold and our breath making feathers*
>
> *like the mist, we pass the rum. When it came back, it*
>
> *give us the spirit to turn into murderers."* (Walcott, 1990, p. 3)

Felling cedars in St. Lucia for canoes is not regarded as blasphemy whereas trees are worshiped as gods in African spiritual beliefs. These Afro-Caribbean people have lost their faith in these elements due to the intervention of colonialism. Achille has been unwittingly engaged with this religious sacrilege as he was raised under Roman Catholicism in his island and is unaware of his ancestors' pagan and polytheistic practices. In Africa, Achille becomes stuck between two religious systems: the African gods and "an albino god" (p. 139). His memory does not assist him in recalling his African gods; an amnesia which unwittingly engages him in blasphemous act of wounding tree gods. On the other hand, he does not have a strong and supported belief in the colonial God, an issue which I am relating to the misspelling on his canoe, "*In God We Troust*". If he whole-heartedly believed in the "albino god", he would *trust* him and would not suffer the oblivion of African gods. Here is how Edward Said's (1996) contention of exilic life strikes an echo with Achille's state in St. Lucia: Achille is "in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half involvements and half detachments" (p. 49). This statement clearly describes Achille's or other Achille like individuals who are in the interstices of hybridity and

exilic life. Being half-way between African and the Caribbean religious beliefs makes Africa unhomely to Achille. He should have been familiar with his home religion but his postcolonial upbringing has torn the links to this securing element. Therefore, religion is another factor which alienates him from other Africans and makes him unhappy in his homeland. This religious experience further intensifies his burden; when gods ignore his incantation, Achille painfully notices that he is unwanted in Africa, in his atavistic homeland and this makes him sick.

TEMPORAL UNHOMELINESS

The sense of the unhomely can be experienced with respect to the timespan as well. This is because Achille has travelled to the past of Africa, to three centuries ago and his cognizance of the future course of events intensifies his pain. Once at dawn when Achille wakes up:

> *The sadness sank into him slowly that he was home_*
>
> *that dawn-sadness which ghosts have for their graves,*
>
> *because the future reversed itself in him.*
>
> *He was his own memory, the shadow under the pier.* (Walcott, 1990, p. 141)

Ironically—instead of happiness, a sense of security, and familiarity—his ancestral homeland makes him melancholic and forlorn. This time his gloomy state is related to his temporal in-betweenness. Achille's mind hovers between the past and the future, memory and prediction, as he has travelled to the past of Africa. The past torments in the same way that the future hurts as he is aware of the atrocities which would befall his fellow tribesmen. On the one hand, as Walcott describes, Achille is like "a limb [trying to] remember the body from which it has been severed" (Walcott, 1993, pp. 261-62), on the other hand, he tries to forget the future though these two dimensions of time are confusingly interrelated at this portion of the story. His awareness of the upcoming events and the temporal in-betweenness further disturbs his soul and separates him from his African brothers. In order to forget the horrifying future-in-the-past or past-in-the-future and to change his gloomy mood, he decides to engage with the activities of the village. He goes fishing,

> *with the other shadows, saying, "Make me happier,*
>
> *make me forget the future." He laughed whenever*
>
> *the men laughed in their language which was his*
>
> *also. They entered the river, waist-deep. They spread*
>
> *in a half-circle, with the looped net. There was peace*
>
> *on the waveless river, but the surf roared in his head.* (Walcott, 1990, p. 141)

He joins the fishermen while trying to imitate them as their language is ironically opaque to him. As an African, he is expected to know his indigenous

language; however, as he is raised in the Caribbean, he is not familiar with this African language. So deeply he is lost in his thoughts that the other fishermen desert him. He could not forget the destiny of his people, the ruptures of the Middle Passage, the balls and chains. He could not even drink to forget the traumas of history for a short while:

> *but the moment Achille wet*
>
> *his memory with it, tears stung his eyes. The taste*
>
> *of the bitter drink showed him Philoctete*
>
> *standing in green seawater up to his waist,*
>
> *hauling the canoe in, slowly, fist over fist.* (p. 141)

The fusion of the past with the future has agitated him. Though drinking is a private activity, it reminds him of the collective, of history, of slavery, of Philoctete, whose stinking wound reeks of rusted balls and chains.[6] In this scene, Walcott shows the entanglement of the private life with the public; it shows how historical traumas contaminate the present; how even after political and national independence, people suffer the violence of the past. The unhomely feeling stirs at this moment when the boundaries between personal and public collapse. Bhabha (1992) argues:

> *Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an "in-between" temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double-edge which [...] represents a hybridity, a difference "within," a subject that inhabits the rim of an "in-between" reality.* (p. 148)

This is how the collapse of temporal boundaries and disrupted timelines ruin the balance of Achille's mind and intensify his sense of unhomeliness in his ancestral homeland. Africa is unhomely not only in terms of time but in the religious, cultural, and historical senses. The unhomeliness results from the fact that Achille is not a "true" African but a hybrid Afro-Caribbean whose exile from Africa has developed a "double perspective" in him (Said, 1996, p. 60). This perspective intervenes when Achille wants to locate his home and determine his sense of self, identity and roots. That is why, his *nostos* (homecoming) to Africa proves to be unhomely as he comes to experience the "estranging sense of relocation of home and world that is the

[6]For a discussion of wound and its various forms whether in nature (canoe-making at the outset of the poem) or in characters or the narrator refer to Breslin, 2001, pp. 251-69; Doring, 2003, pp. 177-78; Dougherty, 1997, pp. 339-47; Ramazani, 1997; Hardwick, 2004, pp. 97-113; McConnell, 2013, pp. 131-34. Heaney (1991) also refigures Philoctete as an allegorical agent of postcolonial affliction in *The Cure at Troy*.

condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" and results from long periods of geographical and temporal absence (Bhabha, 2004, p. 13).

HOMECOMING WITH HOME

Having experienced the unhomely sense of home in his homeland along with the shame of amnesia, Achille comes to understand that Africa cannot be his home. Hence, Walcott sets the stage for his return to St. Lucia but with a renewed sense of identity, self, community, and home. Indeed Achille has his precursor in Walcott's *Dream on a Monkey Mountain* (1967), in which Makak, a "black, ugly, poor worse than nothing" (237) protagonist of the drama, dreams of a white woman who reveals his lineage to him that goes back to "the family of lions and kings" (p. 236). This dream, as Tejumola Olaniyan (1995) makes clear, frees Makak of his "inferiority complex" (p. 104) and prompts him to return to Africa. In Africa, he becomes a wealthy and powerful king but when he realizes the incongruities in his dream, "he 'returns' awake to his poor but now psychologically liberated West Indian self" (p. 104). Similar to Makak, Achille undergoes a deep mental metamorphosis to the extent that when his canoe turns toward Gros Ilet, he becomes overwhelmed with happiness as he is going to embrace St. Lucia as his home:

> *This was the shout on which each odyssey pivots,*
>
> *that silent cry for a reef, or familiar bird,*
>
> *not the outcry of battle, not the tangled plots*
>
> *of a fishnet, but when a wave rhymes with one's grave,*
>
> *a canoe with a coffin, once that parallel*
>
> *is crossed, and cancels the line of master and slave.*
>
> *Then an uplifted oar is stronger than marble*
>
> *Caesar's arresting palm, and a swift outrigger*
>
> *fleeter than his galleys in its skittering bliss.* (Walcott, 1990, p. 159) *(emphasis added)*

Walcott celebrates Achille's homecoming with familiarity and makes him gratified by familiar scenes. Yi-Fu Tuan (1990) likewise argues that "[f]amiliarity breeds affection" (p. 99). This Chinese-American human geographer coins the concept of "topophilia" to examine people's response to the *environment* which is "emotionally charged" in the eyes of the individual (pp. 92-3) (emphasis added). This delight results from the sense of attachment and belonging people have to their accustomed environment. Hence, place is significant because people are attached to it "because it is familiar, because it is home and incarnates the past because it provokes pride of ownership and creation" (p. 93). Tuan's associating of the sense of familiarity and attachment, together with the visual and emotional pleasure to place, resonates precisely with the moment Achille approaches the village where its

birds, reef and shore all evoke a sense of delight in him. He passes the Barrel of Beef and reaches his village where "he can see the white / balconies of the hotel dipping with the bow" (Walcott, 1990, p. 160). This is how by deviating from the Négritude's essentialist view of home in the ancestral homeland, Walcott demonstrates how a delightful sense of familiarity can be one of the crucial features of a true home. Walcott celebrates Achille's *nostos* with the "white" colour in a reminder of the white/ black dichotomy of the colonial era and neo-colonial image of tourists (hotels); he submits that these familiar but neo-colonial scenes could have been accommodated more easily than the unbearable distancing sense of estrangement and unhomeliness of Africa. This is how, through Achille's happy *retour* (return) to St. Lucia, Walcott underscores familiarity as one of the important features of home. As in his *nostos* to St. Lucia, Achille does not experience "the estranging sense of relocation of the home" which Bhabha describes for the "unhomely" homecomings. This familiarity gives a sense of security to the homecomer. Hence, St. Lucia *can* be regarded as Achille's home as it is familiar to his tired soul. This does not imply that Walcott wants to represent the Caribbean a true home for the diasporic Africans in the New World; rather, it means that this island can embrace *at least* some features of a true home. Paula Burnett (2005) likewise argues that Achille's restless quest for home is finally fulfilled when he realises that "home is already possessed, that it is the here and now, the elation of life in the Caribbean" (p. 183).

Sharing a sense of community and relatedness in a given community can also be regarded as another important feature of home which Walcott suggests. As discussed earlier, Helen has not been loyal to Achille throughout the poem and at this sequence, she lives with Hector. Nonetheless, Walcott describes her as desperate and unsettled because she is worried about Achille: "A single noon was as long as ten years, / because [Achille] had not come back, because they had gone / from yesterday" (Walcott, 1990, p. 153). Philoctete is also anxious but the blind Seven Seas comforts him that Achille has not drowned; he is in the sea in search of "his name and his soul" (p. 154). When a conch-shell blows, the villagers are all notified of Achille's safe *retour* from the sea. The fishermen:

> *ran down the hot street to pull the tired pirogue.*
>
> *Achille let the mate wave back. Then he saw Helen.*
>
> *But he said nothing. He sculled with a single oar.*
>
> *He watched her leave. The mate hoisted the albacore.* (p. 160)

This is how Walcott underscores the importance of relatedness in the community. Being an extension of a family, community can create a sense of security among its members. Achille, who has suffered the distancing, uncanny and alienating homeland, enjoys the welcoming and comforting sense of community on

the island through the greeting of Helen and the other fishermen. Hence, it can be inferred that the island can be Achille's home though not a "true home" as Justine McConnell argues in her book (2013, p. 120); this conclusion is based on the idea that the dynamics of neo-colonialism and tourism still keep affecting the life of the islanders.

CONCLUSION

This hallucinatory journey, as Walcott demonstrates in *Omeros*, radically transforms Achille's understanding of self, home, roots and filiation. In the first place, the unhomely Africa makes Achille realise that Africa cannot accommodate Afro-Caribbeans as their hybrid perception intervenes in locating their homes and determining their sense of self, identity and roots. Achille is not a true African; he is an Afro-Caribbean and his identity is constructed in the context of the New World. Secondly, by deviating from Négritude's essentialist view of home in the ancestral homeland, Walcott demonstrates how a delightful sense of familiarity can be one of the crucial features of a true home. This is represented through Achille's happy *retour* to St. Lucia. In his *nostos* to the island, Achille does not experience *"*the estranging sense of relocation of the home*"* which Bhabha describes for the unhomely homecomings. This familiarity gives a sense of security to the homecomer. Hence, this Caribbean island *can* be regarded as Achille's home as it is familiar to his tired soul. However, this does not imply that Walcott intends to represent the Caribbean as a true home for the diasporic Africans in the New World; rather, it means that this island can represent *at least* some features of a true home. Finally, as Walcott makes clear, the communal sense of relatedness can also create a sense of home or a feeling of *"*at-homeness*"* in the returning individual.

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