

CONSTRUCTION OF DIASPORIC IDENTITY: HOME AND
BELONGING IN CARYL PHILLIPS'S *HIGHER GROUND*, *THE
NATURE OF BLOOD*, AND *CROSSING THE RIVER*

Thesis submitted to the
Institute of Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English Language and Literature

by

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March 2009

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Thesis Date: March 2009

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1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.
2. The advanced study in the English Language and Literature graduate program of which this thesis is part has consisted of:
 - i) Research Methods courses both in the undergraduate and graduate programs.
 - ii) English Literature as well as American Literature including novel, poetry and drama studies, a comparative approach to world literatures, and examination of several literary theories as well as critical approaches which have contributed to this thesis in an effective way.
3. This thesis is composed of the main sources including several books by the major authors discussed in comparison; and the secondary sources including scholarly articles from academic journals, and theoretical books on the history and improvement of the postcolonial movement.

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March, 2009

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Degree Awarded and Date: M.A., March 2009

ABSTRACT

CONSTRUCTION OF DIASPORIC IDENTITY: HOME AND BELONGING IN CARYL PHILLIPS'S *HIGHER GROUND*, *THE NATURE OF BLOOD*, AND *CROSSING THE RIVER*

Ayşe Tuba Demirel SUCU

This thesis analyzes the construction of diaspora identity in three of Caryl Phillips' novels: *Higher Ground*, *Crossing the River*, and *The Nature of Blood*. The study looks at the processes of cultural identity development and the construction of the concept of home by analysing and investigating various characters from the novels in the framework of Stuart Hall's notion of diaspora identity and Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. I argue that Phillips' own displacement from a single "home" provokes him to construct new notions of home and belonging. Further Phillips' double displacement as a result of his Caribbean identity allows him to connect various national diasporas in his fictional works. Finally, the thesis examines correspondences between African and Jewish diaspora in the three novels, all of which establish a location independent from dominant literary traditions.

Key words: Diaspora identity, Diaspora, Home, Belonging, Slavery, African diaspora, Jewish diaspora, Cultural identity

Üniversite: Fatih Üniversitesi
Enstitü: Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü
Anabilim Dalı : İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
Tez Danışmanı : Yrd. Doç Dr. Philipp A Constant Barbe
Verilen Unvan ve Tez Tarihi : M. A., Mart 2009

KISA ÖZET

DİASPORA KİMLİĞİNİN OLUŞUMU: CARYL PHILLIPS'İN ROMANLARINDA YURT VE AİDİYET OLGUSU

Ayşe Tuba DEMİREL SUCU

Bu tez Caryl Phillips'in *Higher Ground*, *Crossing the River* ve *The Nature of Blood* romanlarındaki diaspora kimliğinin oluşumunu incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, romanlardaki birçok karakterden yola çıkarak kültürel kimliğin gelişim süreçlerini ve yurt konseptinin oluşumunu Stuart Hall'ın diaspora kimliği ve Paul Gilroy'un Black Atlantic kavramları çerçevesinde incelemekte ve Phillips'in bir yurttan uzak oluşunun , yeni yurt ve aidiyet kavramlarının oluşmasına yol açtığını öne sürmektedir. Ayrıca, Phillips'in Karayip kimliğinin sonucu olan "çift yerdeğişimi"nin, romanlarında farklı ulusal diasporaları ilişkilendirmesine yol açtığı öne sürülmektedir. Son olarak bu tez, yazarın egemen edebi tarzlardan bağımsız bir alan oluşturan üç romanındaki Afrika ve Yahudi diasporası arasındaki bağlantıları incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Aidiyet, Diaspora kimliği, Diaspora, Kültürel kimlik, Kölelik, Afrika diasporası, Yahudi diasporası, Yurt

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my Adviser Philipp Constant Barbe for all of his advice during the process. I am also deeply indebted to my dearest friends Canan Akbaba, Başak Melike Güven, Fadime Yılmaz and who guided and supported me through the academic process.

I could not imagine writing this thesis without the whole hearted love and encouragement provided by my husband Berat Sucu, who has always been an undying source of love. Finally, I must thank my parents, Zebure and Hasan Hüseyin, and the sweetest sister on earth, Güzin Demirel for words of encouragement and comfort they provide, for the excitement over my progress.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	
DIASPORA PAST AND PRESENT	3
CHAPTER 2	
DIASPORA IDENTITY	12
2.1 Definitions of Diaspora	13
2.2 African Diaspora	16
2.3 Paul Gilroy and The Black Atlantic Identity	18
2.4 Stuart Hall and Diaspora Identity	20
2.5 The Cross-pollinated Author: Caryl Phillips	23
CHAPTER 3	
AN INCESSANT SEARCH: CONSTRUCTING HOME AND IDENTITY	31
CHAPTER 4	
SURVIVOR GUILT AND TRAUMA	69
CHAPTER 5	
DIASPORAN MEMORY AND THE THIRD SPACE	78
CONCLUSION	91
WORKS CITED	92

INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyzes the development of diasporic identity and examines Caryl Phillips's writing in the black Atlantic literature context through his three novels: *Higher Ground*, *Crossing the River*, and *The Nature of Blood*. The study shows the process of the construction of home and identity in the following sections.

The first chapter deals with the significance of diaspora in postcolonial theory and why the term *diaspora* is gradually gaining a new place in the field of postcolonial studies. This development represents a change of perspective in postcolonial studies as a result of the rejection of binary oppositions in analysing the postcolonial nature of a subject, of society.

In the second chapter "Diaspora Identity", the term diaspora is explained thoroughly and definitions are provided to elaborate the demonstration of diaspora identity in the novels. Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall's notions of diaspora and diaspora identity are examined in detail and the chapter concludes with an appreciation of Caryl Phillips in light of Revathi Krishnaswamy's notion of cross-pollinated author.

The third chapter, "Incessant Search," investigates the ways that Phillips uses several overlapping contexts simultaneously to construct an identity and a 'home' for his characters. The characters in the three novels are in an incessant search, or series of interrelated searches: the search for cultural identity; the search for home and just what 'home' means; the search for familial ties and how to regain them. An analysis of the characters, their motivations, their successes and failures, combined with an examination of the structure and language used by Phillips in the three novels, allows

us to see that Phillips' concept of diaspora identity goes way beyond the simplistic categorisation offered by conventional binary oppositions.

“Survivor Guilt and Trauma” is the fourth chapter and deals with the ways that trauma causes a search for identity and need for belonging in the diaspora identity. Drawing parallels between various characters from the separate novels provides a detailed picture of their disconnection and unbelonging, eventually leading to their estrangement from society. In this process, both forgetting and remembering becomes unbearable but inescapable actions for the diaspora subjects.

The fifth and final chapter, “Diasporan Memory and the Third Space”, draws examples from Phillips's characters, connecting them with Paul Gilroy's theories. It discusses the ways Phillips constructs a third space through the connection of Jewish and African diasporas, how he reflects a universal understanding of diaspora and how his postcoloniality is revealed through these notions of “cross-pollinated” themes. Rather than choosing to identify himself with conventional oppositions, Phillips prefers and displays a third critical position between, or outside of, binary oppositions.

CHAPTER 1

DIASPORA PAST AND PRESENT

In an era of global relocations and diasporisation of the world, it is important to stop and think about the influence that the exodus of immigrant peoples has on individuals, communities and nation states. Whenever peoples with cultural traditions, shared values, and racial/ethnic identities move to new locations, there emerges a new culture bearing their traditions modulated by the ongoing struggle to cope with the dominant society. Such exoduses are marked by varying degrees of violence. Within mainstream literary studies, terms like diaspora and homelessness have a significant place. Diaspora is the generally violent and compulsory migration of peoples from their homeland to other regions. However, the concept of ‘diaspora identity’ is part of a new debate in postcolonial theory. A new culture, a new lifestyle and the change in people’s locations of course creates new identities and new cultural structures, institutions and identifications. What is important is these new identities, how they constructed and how they are passed on to following generations. Their identity is both their self-perception and the ways they relate themselves to the real or imaginary homeland. I approach this topic with this in mind, as well as a great interest in belonging and diasporic memory.

Early discussions of diaspora were restricted to the Jewish diaspora. Some dictionary definitions of diaspora still illustrate and define the word with reference only to the Jewish case and do not include others. The term “diaspora”, according to Taylor and Spencer, was originally applied to the exodus of Jews from Palestine;

“is now widely used to characterise communities of people who have left their ancestral homes and settled in foreign countries, but who

preserve the memory of and links with the land of their fathers or forefathers” (Taylor and Spencer 201).

As debates of diasporas began to proliferate, these debates principally remained oriented to this Jewish *abstract* homeland.

Why have debates concerning diasporas begun to proliferate then? In the last century, the notion of diaspora has gained different associations both in political and in cultural studies. The world has entered a phase where notions such as transnational migration and cultural hybridity are frequently debated. What was the turning point that caused other dislocated communities to be labelled “diaspora” and thereby associated with the Jewish community? More importantly, what is the underlying relationship between diaspora and postcolonial studies? Is diaspora part of postcolonialism? Is not postcolonial literature restricted to the struggle of the colonised against the coloniser? Can we extend postcolonial theory to former colonising countries which are now hosting formerly colonised people and treat the literature produced by those communities?

To answer these questions we must first take a close look at the recent burgeoning of diaspora studies in the postcolonial field.

This new trend in postcolonial theory has only emerging in the last few years. In the 1995 first edition of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin did not include a chapter on diaspora. The essays chosen for the 2006, and now current, second edition of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* are rather different from those included in the first edition (reprinted eight times from 1995 through 2004). Important additions to the new edition are sections on “Race”, “Environment”, “Globalisation”, “Diaspora” and “The Sacred”. In other words, the

text has inaugurated other lines of inquiry. These new sections display a diversification of ideas in postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial theory has already acquired a seminal place in discourses on globalisation. It is always ready to incorporate ground-breaking shifts and new theories. Due to the increasing movement of peoples, postcolonial theory witnesses new directions: new modes of production through the contact of global technologies, the reshaping of culture by globalisation. Postcolonial theory is changing in reaction to these developments alongside the goals and concerns of writers. There are of course many reasons for this: national liberation movements in colonies and neo-colonies, new social movements, waves of migration from former colonised regions, all of which have stimulated investigate of identity of both the coloniser and the colonised.

The emergence of postcolonial literature is generally thought to have occurred at the beginning of the 1950s when independence movements began in many colonised countries. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin formulated a criteria for postcolonial literature with their 1989 study entitled *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. They attempted to draw into one category many different cultural contexts from works produced in what had become known as Commonwealth Literature and New Literature in English. This work was enthusiastically received and deemed a significant work in the field of English studies. In their book, postcolonial literature is defined as any literature which written as a counteraction to the workings of any colonial power:

What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonisation and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this that makes them distinctively postcolonial. (2)

According to this definition, literature that “writes back” draws a sharp distinction between the coloniser and the colonised and claims opposition to the centre of “empire” by reversing the terms used in colonial discourse. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin also noted that postcolonial literature can be distinguished by its rebellious nature, claiming that

a study of the subversive strategies employed by postcolonial writers would reveal both the configurations of domination and the imaginative and creative responses to this condition. (32)

Nevertheless, defining the term ‘postcolonial’ has become a subject of some controversy. Firstly, the category is so broad that it is rather challenging to agree on sensible boundaries. At other times the complexities of postcolonialism and decolonisation represented in the works of many writers remained unnoticed due to restrictive categorisation. More current theorists of postcolonial literature such as Homi Bhabha and Anne McClintock have suggested alternative understandings of this field of study that are more multidimensional. They claim that neither colonisation nor postcolonialism are clear cut processes but rather are distinguished by many complications and intricacies. These writers have focused on the ambiguity and doubleness which is always present in postcolonial literature. While Ashcroft,

Griffiths and Tiffin took the position that postcolonial writings were the production of resistance in formerly colonised countries, Bhabha and McClintock tried to bring a more exact perspective to this area of study by exploring actual conditions experienced in postcolonial contexts.

At the very beginning of this research into the postcolonial condition, the approach was quite clear-cut. The binaries self-other, coloniser-colonised, centre-periphery, masculine-feminine, good-bad, light-dark were not sufficient to explain and deal with the complexities of both the colonial world and the postcolonial condition of millions of people. Many contradictory factors have influenced both the colonial project and the resistance to colonialism. Anne McClintock suggests that “more complex terms and analyses of alternative times, histories and causalities are required to deal with complexities that cannot be served under the single rubric of postcolonialism”. She continues,

imperialism emerged as a contradictory and ambiguous project, shaped as much by tensions within metropolitan policy and conflicts within colonial administrations – at best, ad hoc and opportunistic affairs – as by the varied cultures and circumstances into which colonials intruded and the conflicting responses and resistances with which they were met. For this reason, I am unconvinced that the sanctioned binaries – coloniser-colonised, self-other, dominance-resistance, metropolis-colony, colonial-postcolonial – are adequate to the task of accounting for, let alone strategically opposing, the tenacious legacies of imperialism. (6)

Later, “postcolonialism” came to be defined in a more ambiguous sense. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, claims that postcolonial cultures are marked by “an ambivalence that is neither the contestation of contradictions nor the antagonism of dialectical opposition” (187). He locates ambivalence in “the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised” (Ashcroft Griffiths and Tiffin 1998:12, 118). The colonial subject is never simply and completely opposed to the coloniser; rather, complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject (119). Bhabha’s theory of ambivalence disrupts the clear-cut authority of the modernist notion of domination because it deconstructs the simple, underestimated relationship between coloniser and colonised. There is a far more complicated relationship between the two.

Similarly, rejecting the overly simplistic idea of binary oppositions between the coloniser and the colonised, periphery and centre, and master and slave; diaspora interweaves the ideas of the centre (mother country) and the periphery (the new land), the minority and the majority, the integration and discrimination experienced by diaspora people. Diaspora is always between the lines. The people in diaspora are conscious of their exile and the memory of the original place, as well as the myth of an eventual return.

As postcolonial theory is moving away from a strict binary system, space for an ambivalent and hybrid subject arises. In fact, diaspora is a completely postcolonial issue for it incorporates debates of belonging, rootlessness, home and dislocation. It is a field in which ambivalence and identity related issues are dominant, as opposed to the binary opposition which form the centre of structuralist analysis. Diaspora is a

deconstructed notion. Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg remark that Europe's homogeneity and superiority have been fractured, both by forces from without – Third World nationalisms and revolutionary movements – and by forces within – movements of civil rights, women, immigrants, gays and lesbians. Diaspora has a profoundly disruptive affect upon the whole structure of European epistemological and political power because it disrupts modernity, it disrupts the idea of nation and national identity, it disrupts the notion of unity and coherence to rational subjectivity and it becomes a major feature of a contemporary postcolonial world (216). The “savage” is no longer out “there” but has invaded the “home” here and has fissured it in the process. Diaspora was once a “savage” out there, but it is interesting to observe that the people who once resisted the colonising countries are now willingly relocating to the countries of their colonisers, seeking work, settling lives and trying to be part of the former coloniser's culture. So diaspora also problematises the concept of a national identity:

The cutting across national boundaries, the dispersion, the spreading out, the diffusion through space and the occupation of many different kinds of national groups disrupts the process, so important to nationalism, of establishing metaphysical links with a particular geographic location with a particular community that lives within those borders. (Ashcroft et al., *Reader* 426)

Diaspora then becomes both a process and a condition. As a process it is constantly being reconstructed through transfer, relocation, and travel, as well as imagined through thought, cultural production, and political struggle. As a condition, it is directly tied to the process by which it is being constructed and reconstructed.

Narratives of relocation, displacement and migrancy continue to be central in contemporary notions of diaspora. The term also associates the labour immigrants who have constructed emotional and familial ties with their homeland. Emigrant groups of the global world have started being seen as diaspora communities even when they have been largely assimilated into the countries they relocated. In the preface of the Diaspora chapter in the second edition of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write that diaspora is a term of growing relevance to postcolonial studies. Although today almost any group of people living in a new country seem willing to be labelled “diaspora”, we cannot name them such. The question is one of power. We cannot describe a group diasporic when they attain global dominance. This dominance can be in the form of language, culture or lifestyle. Diaspora means a cultural minority (Ashcroft et al., *Reader* 425). How far-reaching common usage has elasticised the term ‘diaspora’ is not in question in this thesis. In my searches I met with many and varied types of ‘diasporas’ including ethnic diasporas such as Iranian, Iraqi, Ethiopian, and Turkish diaspora, as well as other sorts of diaspora not related to race, such as queer diaspora, digital diaspora and terrorist diaspora. Many members of diaspora see themselves as an oppressed “nation” without a homeland, or they imagine a country as their future home. The term which once described Jewish dispersion now extends to a larger domain and includes notions like immigrant, refugee and guest worker. Briefly, almost any minority that is scattered from its homeland, regardless of the conditions leading to the dispersion, is capable of being labelled diaspora. Are all communities which are away from their homelands diasporic? Humans are a species that spread and move,

and so everyone is in some respect, in some remote way, able to be considered diasporic, but such as loose application of the word would render it all but useless.

CHAPTER 2

DIASPORA IDENTITY

The term “diaspora” is originally linked to the Hebrew Scriptures (Paraschivescu 22). Historically it referred to people dislocated from their homelands through migration or exile. According to Paraschivescu; Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, in *Theorizing Diaspora*, associate contemporary forms of diasporic movement, from travel to exile, with questions including identity, nation, and homeland (23). To them, the term “diaspora” reveals certain ambiguities: the term has a negative implication since it refers to “communities of people dislocated from their native homelands through migration, immigration or exile as a consequence of colonial expansion” (23).

However, etymologically, *diaspora*, from the Hellenistic Greek *διασπορά* ‘dispersion’, has a positive significance, suggesting “fertility of dispersion, dissemination and the scattering of seeds” (4). Thus, it has both a positive and a negative connotation.

Diaspora identity is more intricate than the former postcolonial notion of identities. Any sense of a diasporic identity among black peoples in the New World, Europe, and Africa is conditional and constantly shifting. The diasporic subject’s position with respect to the native country and to the host country is in a state of constant flux. R. Radhakrishnan, in his essay “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora,” identifies the ‘symptoms’ of a diasporan citizen: he or she reacts to the looming presence of homogenisation in the host country by resorting to “some mythic” homeland: “We turn our diasporan gaze back to the home country. Often that gaze is

uncritical and nostalgic” (qtd in Mannur and Braziel 128) While the diaspora is not contained within an autonomous region with established borders, and while it has no official language, there nevertheless still seems to be a concerted effort to locate a single culture with singular, monolithic historical roots, although these historical roots are essentially mythical.

2.1 Definitions of Diaspora

In one of the first and most methodical efforts to define the concept, William Safran argued that the concept of “diaspora” is linked to those communities which share some or all of the a number of certain characteristics. According to Safran, the constituent elements of a diaspora consciousness include dispersal from a homeland, often by violent forces, the making of a memory and a vision of that homeland, marginalisation in the new location, a commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland, and desire for return and a continuing relationship and identity with the homeland that shapes the consciousness and solidarity of the group (Safran 83-84). This definition underlines the transnational character of diaspora and both the symbolic and material importance of a homeland and the imagining of an eventual return. This description would apply to any ethnic group or a sub-category of a nation. Robin Cohen offers a more detailed and nuanced definition as follows:

Normally, diasporas exhibit several of the following features: (1) dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically; (2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; (3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland; (4) an idealisation of the

supposed ancestral home; (5) a return movement; (6) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time; (7) a troubled relationship with host societies; (8) a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries; and (9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries. (qtd in Taylor and Spencer 203)

Cohen is clearly attempting to move the discussion forward by not only highlighting the transnational character of diasporas but also by revealing the importance of their ‘transnationality’ in the production of new constructions and blends. Thus he reveals a ‘more positive’ aspect of diasporic communities. He acknowledges that diasporic communities not only construct a collective identity that links their homeland and their new location, but they also conceive a common identity with members or communities of the same ethnic background in other countries. ‘Active engagement’ in politics is another feature of diasporic identities. Indeed, it can be claimed that this very element – engagement in politics – is what differentiates ‘ethnic’ and ‘diasporic’ identity: all scattered communities cannot be labelled diasporas merely based on a common ethnicity or a common origin. According to Cohen, the defining feature is their willingness to take on the structuring of an imagination and a connection to the homeland.

In the above definitions the characteristics of current diasporas do not map to the original signification of the word, that is, the world-wide dispersal or scattering of the Jews. The Zionist return movement was a core idea for the Jewish diaspora. In our modern age, with the muddying of definitive borders between the countries fading away under the effects of globalisation, the potential for realising such a

project again in the future is becoming more and more remote. The impracticality of realising this core notion of a return and reconstruction of an original homeland undermines the attempt to delineate a precise or comprehensive definition of diaspora.

Another point which makes providing a comprehensive definition for diaspora difficult is the deconstructive sense of the term. Although the traditional notion of diaspora embodies a separated centre and periphery, from a postcolonial perspective the “centre” is forever lost and a return is forever impossible. Traditionally a diasporic community is ready to return to their homeland at any time, but a return to the original homeland may not be relevant, the line between the attachment and detachment to the homeland and to the relocated country is not very clear in postcolonial diaspora. The immigrant’s country is not a country to be loved or to be hated and homeland is and is not the place where you can locate your yearning and ideals. Returning is acknowledged as a “mythical” theme in postcolonial literature especially in the literature of diaspora. It is a myth because it is impossible to regain the previous condition. A lack of desire to return to the original homeland is an notable feature in diasporic texts which often portray the idea as merely fanciful, sometimes ridiculously so.

Another criterion to define diaspora is diaspora’s orientation to a real or imagined homeland as a strong basis of value and identity. In an often quoted remark by Stuart Hall, the

diaspora experience is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a

conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity* (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 235)

While Safran puts the emphasis on the importance of diasporic communities preserving a strong identification with the “homeland”, Hall notes that the connection between these communities and their ‘homeland’ or the possibility of a return to the homeland are much more tenuous than is usually thought (“Culture, Community and Nation” 355), since the place designated by the term *homeland* will have become transformed beyond recognition. Diasporas are greatly influenced by their location at the centre of contemporary globalisation trends. In that sense, there is no going ‘home’ again. There is no return. As David Morley expresses in *Home Territories: Media, Mobility, Identity*: “diasporas and diasporic experiences should not be dismissed as backward-looking, because they are consistently constituting new transnational spaces of experience” (qtd in Tsagarousianou 57). As a conclusion, similarly Colin Palmer states in *Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora* that the construction of a diaspora, then, is an organic process involving movement from an ancestral land, settlement in new lands, and sometimes renewed movement and resettlement elsewhere (Palmer). Thus, each stage of this process is interconnected.

2.2 African Diaspora

The term “African diaspora”, more the focus of this thesis than the Jewish diaspora, emerged as a topic of concerted study in the 1950s and 1960s. It was used in scholarly debates both as a political term emphasising the unifying experiences of African peoples scattered by the slave trade, and as an analytical term that enabled

scholars to talk about black communities across national boundaries (Patterson 5). The dispersion of Africans as a source of labour both during and after the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is known as African diaspora. People of African descent with their own communities outside the African continent are also referred to as part of this diaspora. There have been numerous attempts to identify and make sense of the African diaspora. Stuart Hall states in *Negotiating Caribbean Identities* that:

The African diasporas of the New World have been in one way or another incapable of finding a place in modern history without the symbolic return to Africa. It has taken many forms, it has been embodied in many movements both intellectual and popular. (286)

Returning to Africa and (re)gaining a genuine African identity has in numerous cases been the ultimate aim of African diasporas. But most of these attempts – including Rastafarianism, Negritude and Negro-Zionism – led to what Paul Gilroy criticises as “absolutism”. He further argues that cultural nationalisms of all sorts easily devolve into fascism and ethnic absolutism (Chariandy). Ethnic absolutism is, as Gilroy put it,

a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable. (*Small Acts* 65)

Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic* urges us to recognise cultural hybridity and plurality. This book is in this sense an attempt to understand racialised culture.

2.3 Paul Gilroy and *The Black Atlantic* Identity

Gilroy claims that the value of diaspora lies in its emphasis on “the fact that there can be no pure, uncontaminated or essential blackness anchored in an unsullied originary moment” (*Small Acts* 309). He is critical of the homogenisation of African diaspora by earlier critical formations. According to Gilroy these formations see any African diasporic individual, irrespective of how far they may be scattered from any other individuals, as inevitably linked by a common history, culture, descent and heritage. This homogenisation of African diaspora leads to “ethnic absolutism”. Gilroy uses the term *diaspora* to describe the “new structure of cultural exchange” in the twentieth century which has been “built up across the imperial networks which once played host to the triangular trade of sugar, slaves and capital” (*There Ain't* 157). Gilroy turns to “the framework of a diaspora as an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in ‘racial,’ ethnic or national essences” (155). Similarly, Patterson and Kelly state that “[d]iaspora has always been employed (invoked) in such a way as to hide the differences and discontinuities” (11).

The very concept of diaspora has been extracted from peoples' lived experiences and then molded into metaphors for alienation, outsidership, home, and various binary relationships such as alien/native. The metaphor has come to represent those experiences

and, in so doing, erases the complexities and contradictions as it seeks to fit all within the metaphor.” (11)

Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* is commonly regarded as the “origin” of a transnational focus in Black cultural criticism. “Black Atlantic” as a term, according to Gilroy, is dangerous for it often takes the space that might be reserved for *diaspora*. He holds that Black Atlantic culture is not specifically African American, Caribbean or British, but it is all of these at once. The themes of the Black Atlantic culture go beyond ethnicity and nationality to produce something new. His definition of the Black Atlantic is closely linked to the concept of hybridity, positing an anti-essentialist, split subjectivity. For Gilroy, diaspora is not a sense of exile in which one always desires to return “home,” rather diaspora is about the ways that culture, ideas and productions flow to and around diaspora communities. As Dacia Mitchell states, Gilroy presents a “Black Atlantic” where black identity in the postcolonial world is a process of travel, exchange and production across the Atlantic. In an effort to understand its relationship to Western modernity he evaluates it in terms of the systemic slavery and trauma of which modernity is comprised. A national identity is also a political identity. It is a product of the relationship between citizen and state. However, a diasporic identity is rooted in history and collective memory.

Gilroy's image of ship is used for its connection to the Middle Passage:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for enterprise and as my starting point. ... The image of the ship – a living, microcultural, micropolitical system in motion – is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons.

Ships immediately focus attention on the Middle Passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts[.] (*Black 4*)

The image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, Africa, America and the Caribbean conceptualises a black identity constructed out of multiple consciousnesses across the diaspora.

Caryl Phillips's narratives of diaspora reveal remarkable parallels to the theories of Paul Gilroy. Gilroy offers the most influential theoretical account of the black diaspora in *Black Atlantic*. Phillips's fictional works provide the most engaged and sustained interest with the subject. Both writers share doubts about identity politics and racially constructed identities. Instead they promote non-racial and hybrid notions of diaspora. While they search for a politics beyond race and nation, both writers have emphasised the need to connect and relate black definitions of diaspora with Jewish ones, which will be dealt with in detail in the final chapter.

2.4 Stuart Hall and Diaspora Identity

Diaspora is understood by Stuart Hall not as a reality to be analysed, but as a figurative notion. So it is a special agent for social change:

I use this term [diaspora] here metaphorically not literally: [Diaspora] does not refer us those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is

the old, the imperializing, the hegemonising form of ethnicity.

(“Cultural Identity” 14)

Most of Hall’s criticism proceeds through the discussion of cultural identity in diaspora. Hybridity and heterogeneity are inevitable for the diasporic subject. A diaspora identity is generally evaluated by theorists within the discourse of difference and discontinuity. In “Negotiating Caribbean Identities,” Hall states that “no cultural identity is produced out of thin air.” Rather it is produced out of historical experiences, cultural traditions, lost and marginal languages; marginalised experiences, peoples and histories which remain unwritten. The specific roots of identity, according to Hall, are all these resources. On the other hand, Hall states “identity itself is not the rediscovery of them, but what they as cultural resources allow a people to produce. Identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed” (“Negotiating” 291). Hall captures this double dynamic and stresses that cultural identity is not just the preservation of the past, but is a future-oriented process where you claim a space within the present. Therefore, alongside all these discourses, an authentic identity emerges. Hall identifies two opposing conceptions of identity in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” using Caribbean identities, including his own, to explain how the first position is necessary, but the second one is truer of postcolonial conditions.

The first position defines cultural identity in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect their common historical

experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people,’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (223)

Hall argues that recent diasporic black cultural production is putting the issue of cultural identity in question. Rather than assuming that identity is already an accomplished fact, we might see it as a “production” (222). From this perspective identity is never complete, it is always in process, and constituted within representation. For Hall cultural identity is

a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. (225)

Hall goes on to argue that this essentialising project was central to anti-colonial and pan-Africanist movements and counter hegemonic in a fundamental way, “imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is

the history of all enforced diasporas” (224). Hall notes that identity is linked to culture:

Histories come and go, situations change, but somewhere down there is throbbing the culture to which we all belong. It provides a kind of ground for our identities, something to which we can return, something solid, something fixed, something stabilized, around which we can organize our identities and our sense of belongingness.

(“Negotiating” 282)

But, it does not necessarily follow that culture is linked to place or some specific location. Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall theorise different black identities through an unavoidable process of resistance. They claim that these identities resist both stereotyping and generalisations. They do not focus on uni-dimensional transition from one location to another; rather they discuss multi-locational travelling subjects. They both argue movement between roots and routes is mutual. Roots signify the state of being tied to a single place while routes signify movement and displacement. They both use concepts such as hybridity to verbalise immigrant identities as a fusion of memories, local traditions from the homeland and values of the adopted countries.

2.5 The Cross-pollinated Author: Caryl Phillips

The historical construction of the African diaspora has been an area of considerable academic interest by intellectuals and authors, dealing with the development of diasporic identity and its manifestations in society, culture, and politics and the continual reconstruction of Africa and African diaspora through migrations and transformations in fictional works. Caryl Phillips’s novels can be

located within this academic debate. They form an imaginative counterpart to the debates outlined above.

Through their narratives, authors translate their identities and experiences into language that rewrite their originary culture as a space where creativity and invention are possible. Therefore, the identity reflected in the writings of diasporan authors has also changed. In her article “Mythologies of Migrancy: Postcolonialism, Postmodernism and the Politics of (Dis)location” Revathi Krishnaswamy discusses what she labels as the ‘cross-pollinated writer’ who operates at the intersection of the postcolonial and the postmodern:

A new type of “Third World” intellectual, cross-pollinated by postmodernism and postcolonialism, has arrived: a migrant who, having dispensed with territorial affiliations, travels unencumbered through the cultures of the world bearing only the burden of a unique yet representative sensibility that refracts the fragmented and contingent condition of both postmodernity and postcoloniality. Journeying from the “peripheries” to the metropolitan “center” this itinerant intellectual becomes an international figure who at once feels at home nowhere and everywhere. No longer disempowered by cultural schizophrenia or confined within collectives such as race, class, or nation, the nomadic postcolonial intellectual is said to “write back” to the empire in the name of all dispossessed peoples, denouncing both colonialism and nationalism as equally coercive constructs. (125)

Cross-pollination of cultures is what gradually happens through the course of generations. New cultural, social and religious identities are always created during every course of generation, together with the generations following each other not only in a single country but in more than one country. Therefore the society always keeps changing because several new components and features are always integrated into these various identities. Krishnaswamy maintains that the cross-pollinated writer is becoming the spokesperson for postcolonial people everywhere. She finds that in the writings of diasporan authors, complex local histories are neutralised into a version of postmodern diversity and postmodern theories of power and identity are revealed. The migrant writer is *dislocated* and able to be in alternative locations, therefore “legitimizing the pleasures of non-attachment and non-commitment” (Krishnaswamy 10) central to postmodernism.

Caryl Phillips is one of those cross-pollinated authors who reinvent diasporic identity within contemporary cultural production by drawing attention to the cultural hybridity of racial identities and their shifting, multiple boundaries. His novels represent postcolonial identity problems experienced by millions by discarding binarisms and creating a third diasporic space. According to Phillips, home is within the displaced person, and integrity comes from plurality and coherence of experience.

Caryl Phillips’s novels are particularly relevant to diaspora studies as diaspora is the main theme in his novels. More importantly, he does not discuss diaspora from only one perspective. His point of view is not restricted to one century, one character, one racial group, or one generation. One reason he is able to do this is that Phillips himself is doubly-displaced. The term “doubly displaced” emphasises

his Caribbean identity. He is racially an Afro-Caribbean who is doubly displaced in Britain, in the first place displaced by the violent rupture forced by slavery which brought Africans in large numbers and deprived them of elements of African culture, and in the second place displaced by a relocation to an unwelcoming white society in the United Kingdom. As an Afro-Caribbean in Britain he and his family had to overcome great obstacles of racial discrimination, and an overwhelming difficulty in answering the question “What am I?” This “double displacement” gives Phillips the ability to criticise both the slaves and the masters from a definite distance.

Phillips is a prolific writer whose novels are situated in postcolonial settings and are concerned with postcolonial themes. However, his writing is more aligned with a refusal to work under the binary oppositions approach as he does not adopt a master-slave, colonizer-colonized understanding of these power conflicts. He is able to move from one value to the other and to break the binary oppositions that sustain such values as mutually exclusive entities. His novels rather focus on the estrangement of the individual from the society as a result of the trauma which Fanon notes in *Black Skins, White Masks* arises as the consequence of colonisation and enslavement. Phillips searches out the ambiguities and not the certainties surrounding postcolonial existence, bringing to life the ambivalences and contradictions of a diaspora identity.

Phillips was born in 1958 in St. Kitts, West Indies and went to England with his family when he was four months old. As an African in ancestry, Caribbean by birth, British by upbringing, and American by residence, he embraces what Paul Gilroy has termed the “Black Atlantic.” Due to his multicultural background, in his

novels he explicitly observes and explores the ambivalent notions of home, belonging and identity mainly from the perspective of black diaspora.¹

His parents' generation was experiencing a great migration of black Caribbean labour to Britain beginning in 1948 and lasting until 1962. Britain, for the Caribbean immigrant, was seen as a mother country because they were already familiar to the language, culture and religion. They planned to begin their lives in Britain with great expectations, especially for their children who would have better opportunities than they could have in the Caribbean. However, due to racial discrimination the lives of the immigrants in Britain were not easy. Phillips did not visit the Caribbean until he was a young adult so he never fully described himself as Caribbean. Yet, at the same time, he was never comfortable with identification with Britain because he grew up in the midst of British hostility towards Caribbean immigrants. He allows himself be called either a Caribbean or a British writer and has chosen to switch between his two cultural backgrounds.

Phillips presents the reader with the notions of cultural memory from the perspective of alternatives and contradictions. He develops various voices which play amongst the stereotypical discourses shaped by history, and these voices create a vivid scene in which the reader may observe the complicatedness of the past. With disturbing memories of individuals, the landscape and the discourse he has drawn represents postcolonial identity problems experienced by millions of people. He looks for common ground and humanity between different identities throughout his novels. His attempts definitely come from his very experiences as an immigrant.

¹ I owe the biographical details to Phillips' book *A New World Order*.

In his novels, Phillips uses a different narrator to tell each story. By this polyphonic narration, the perspective of several different characters is given. His novels are structured around memory, journals, letters and discontinuities in history which make sense through being part of these loosely connected stories. Each story holds its own value, yet each connects with the others. Although there is disunity in the text due to this multi-vocality, it has an involving quality. The characters reverberate from different centuries and locations, but their experiences link together perfectly.

The most distinguishing feature of Caryl Phillips's writing is the fragmentation of his narratives. He often segments his fiction into multiple, often unrelated stories. These individual stories are designed to stand alone when split but they gain extra meaning when put together. This fragmentation affects the form of the writing as much as it does the content. By dividing his novels into fragmented parts in varied voices, he exposes readers to different points of view and contrasting discourses. Although his novels are fragmented, the integrity provided by the plurality gives us an insight to his point of view. The ambivalence of cultural encounter, the impossibility of negotiating human otherness and dislocation in the past provides the reader with a rather pessimistic view. However, this pessimism can be considered productive within the multicultural postmodern style.

Fragmentation is an element of style that is often used in postmodern literature to signal rejection of authority. Many postmodern writers do not provide story lines that proceed smoothly from beginning to middle to end, but rather present narratives that jump from time to time and from place to place. By undermining the continuity of the story, the postmodern writer's aim is to indicate that writing can

create the illusion of reality. Fragmentation is often found in Phillips' novels, but it is used chiefly to represent people of the African diaspora whose lives have been disrupted by slavery, racism and migration. He seeks to portray the historical and contemporary realities of the African diaspora, people dislocated from families, from place, and from the past.

Though Phillips often represents the Caribbean, his writing also reflects another, more European, side which comes from his experience in Britain as part of a black British literary tradition. Phillips's Caribbean background has given him an impulse to rewrite the history of people of the African diaspora while his experience as a black British has encouraged him to write about racism and history of racism.

Identity is not a fixed notion according to Phillips. The characters in the novels belong to a diaspora that suffers from racial discrimination and displacement, and thus are constantly searching for their home, their identities, a sense of belonging, and familial ties. Characters from different novels are united by the things they investigate: Where is home? What am I? What is belonging? Phillips's interest is in how individuals survive, or yield to, historical storms and social pathologies. His novels articulate the search of the African diaspora, scattered all over the globe, they are stories of both belonging and homelessness. The construction of cultural and minority identities, of identities that are multiple and split, are intertwined in every voice. These voices form a phenomenon of belonging and home which is free from race, colour, region, and religion. In all these narrations the notion of "home" transgresses geopolitical boundaries. The transnational identities of Phillips' novels rest on the idea that an individual has ties to more than one national or territorial

home. Rootlessness, homelessness and displacement are problems commonly experienced by all his characters.

CHAPTER 3

AN INCESSANT SEARCH: CONSTRUCTING HOME AND IDENTITY

In the early 1900s, W.E.B. Du Bois predicted the “problem of the twentieth century as the problem of the colour line” and articulated problems relating to race, identity, and dual consciousness – a divided sense of self among African Americans.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois)

A person having a dual consciousness crosses borders of Black and White, is never fixed and constantly travels between borders. The notion of dual consciousness has been the subject of much academic debate but now, one hundred years later, this debate has moved away from the dual and turned its gaze on multiple consciousness. A person with a multiple consciousness not only crosses the borders of Black and White but all the borders of the Black Atlantic.

In this study, I have taken *identity* to mean a sense of self or personhood, the process and manner in which individuals, groups, communities, cultures, and institutions define themselves. It also refers to self-definition. There is a direct

relationship between identity and the ability to identify self. Identities rely on processes of identification and are found within messages communicated in daily relations. Everyday communicative experiences are essential to the way we build up and our sense of being an individual within the spaces we share with others. Every definition of self involves culture. A sense of identity and belonging is present in every human being and recognition of the connection between self and the other is essential in construction of that identity. Stuart Hall reminds us in *Negotiating Caribbean Identities* that questions of identity are always questions about representation. They are always questions about the invention, not simply the discovery of tradition. They are always in selective memory and they almost always involve the silencing of something in order to allow something else to speak (281–82).

Identity is not only a story, a narrative which we tell ourselves about ourselves, it is stories which change with historical circumstances. And identity shifts with the way in which we think and hear them and experience them. Identities actually come from outside, they are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of recognitions which others give us. Without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition. (*Negotiating* 286)

What is home? What am I? to where do I belong? These are the questions that echo throughout the writing of Phillips. These works are fragmented into at least three separate sections highlighting different narrative voices. Since the characters call from a wide variety of historical and cultural settings, these novels bring to light the complexities of identity by featuring protagonists who are deeply frustrated by their

inability to connect with the society because they are fragmented from their past, present and future. All his characters, both black and white are in the middle of a double sense of belonging and unbelonging. The marginal characters, women, blacks, Jews, African Americans and those who are oppressed, are all in search for rootedness, a place called 'home', and identity. These characters, in the process of self-identification, articulate a versatile discontinuous diasporic identity that marks their difference. They are all alienated between a painful past and a hostile present, unable to find a place they can definitely call 'home'. Phillips writes in his insightful essay *Necessary Journeys* that "for people of the African Diaspora, 'home' is a word that is often burdened with a complicated historical and geographical weight" (6).

Multiple dwellings, multiple consciousnesses are shaping people's identity both culturally and personally, and are refiguring the idea of what 'home' is. Multiple, and sometimes conflicting senses of belonging, of course, cannot be collected solely under the title "home". Home is already a complicated term. However, Marije Braakman states that there is a long academic tradition of perceiving the national borders of the country left-behind as

"not only the normal but the ideal habitat for any person. This place of origin is referred to as 'home' or the 'homeland'. The return to the homeland in order to once again belong to where they came from is the ultimate wish of all displaced people" (Braakman 56).

Home not only refers to the place where you feel safe, it is also the culture in which you feel yourself safe. The word homeland is thus equivalent to a place of origin. Especially in diaspora studies, this is a notion of central importance. These perspectives are closely related to assumptions of ethnic, local and national

belonging. In these terms, identity is assumed to be stagnant and bound to a specific territory. But what if a person has more than one home and more than one consciousness? What happens to the definition of *home/homeland* in this situation?

Identifying with a particular culture gives people twin feelings of belonging and security. However, in adjusting, adapting and attempting to form a sense of belonging to new group identity enters a new phase. People create their own personal identity using their cultural identity. One can negotiate cultural identity based upon the cultural spaces one occupies. This relates to the extent to which one is a representative of a given culture behaviourally. Ronald Jackson avers that negotiation of cultural identity is a process in which one judges the gain, loss, or exchange of their ability to construct their own reality or worldview (Jackson 10).

In an essay on new Caribbean cinema, Stuart Hall argues that recent diasporic Black cultural production is putting the issue of cultural identity in question. He reformulates identities and focuses on the question of what is meant by cultural identity, using the example of black diaspora identities.

Who is this emergent, new subject of the cinema? From where does he/ she speak? Practices of representation always implicate the position from which we speak or write – the position of *enunciation*. What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say, “in our own name”, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place. (“Cultural” 51)

Hall's thesis is that rather than thinking of identity as an "already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent" (222), we should think "identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (222). Hall points out that there are two major ways of thinking about (cultural) identity. The traditional model perceives identity

in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This 'oneness', underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of 'Caribbeanness', of the black experience. It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through cinematic representation. ("Cultural" 223)

Hall acknowledges that the "rediscovery of this identity is often the object of what Frantz Fanon once called a 'passionate research'" (223). However, he asks whether such a vision simply entails "unearthing that which the colonial experience buried and overlaid" (224). For him, it is better to imagine a "quite different practice" (224), one built on "not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity. Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the *re-telling* of the past" (224). This perspective involves acknowledging that this is an "act of imaginative rediscovery"

(393), one which involves “imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas” (394).

Hall favours this second model of (cultural) identity. He acknowledges the “critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’” (394). He continues:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (394)

Hall’s argument emphasises the fluidity of identity. He conceptualises cultural identity as “a matter of becoming” and “being”. He acknowledges that, in laying claim to it we reconstruct it. If identity exists within the connection of being and becoming, then a person is not only positioned by identity, but is also able to position him- or herself and reconstruct an identity. Hall’s argument not only focuses on the

fluidity of identity but also makes cultural identity an active agent. Similarly, according to Chris Weedon, cultural identity is constantly reproduced.

[C]ultural identity is neither one thing nor static, it is a key focus of cultural political struggle: it is constantly produced and reproduced in practices of everyday life, in education, the media, the museum and heritage sectors, the arts, history and literature. It is textually constructed in the narratives of these discourses and institutions and performed by individuals who assume the modes of subjectivity and identity that the discourses offer them. (Weedon 155)

Such a conception of cultural identity can be seen in Phillips novels, indeed, plays a critical role in these novels. His characters need to rediscover and reclaim the past to begin piecing their lives together into a whole. Rudi, Collaborator, Irene (*Higher Ground*) Eva and Malka (*The Nature of Blood*), Nash, Martha and Travis (*Crossing the River*) all desire to relocate themselves in their former homes, and so the novels present the perspective that it is only through a return to lost origins – both personal and collective – that characters can hope to restore order to their lives. Although certain of Phillips' characters believe in the return myth, the novels present a much more complex picture than this; closer to what Hall believes is how diasporic identity is actually created. Mannur and Braziel note in *Theorizing Diaspora* that

diasporic subjects experience double (and even plural) identifications that are constitutive of hybrid forms of identity; hybrid national (and transnational) identities are positioned with other identity categories and severed from an essentialized, nativist identity that is affiliated with constructions of the nation or homeland.” (5)

The cultural identity in diaspora is shifting, flexible and anti-essentialist. Of course essentialist views such as Afrocentrism and Negritude have emerged from time to time, dragging diaspora communities into the dangerous waters of identity politics. Formerly, conceptions of diaspora were controlled by notions such as homeland, scattering and return to the homeland helping these essentialist views emerge most of which hypothesize an organic link to Africa. Yogita Goyal states that theorists of diaspora claim that nationalist discourses such as Negritude and Afrocentrism failed to prevent racist binaries of goods and evil, black and white, and to counter this assign great value to hybridity (Goyal 1). Paul Gilroy, similarly, claims that diaspora's value lies in its emphasis on "the fact that there can be no pure, uncontaminated or essential blackness anchored in an unsullied originary moment." ("Small Acts" 309).

The relation between identity and diaspora reveals an obvious interconnectedness and involves a profound examination and meticulous explanation. For Phillips, neither of the hotly debated postcolonial issues is fixed: "Our identities are fluid. Belonging is a contested state. Home is a place riddled with vexing questions" (*New World* 6). How can one speak of a single 'home', if he is African in ancestry, Caribbean by birth, British in upbringing, and American in residence? Can they all form one harmonious entity? In this plurality of identities can we talk anymore of clichés of nationality or race? Or just because someone says they are or are not part of a given culture, does that make it so? Who really decides? Hybridity of the diasporic identity is also emphasised by Stuart Hall, who defines the diaspora experience, not by essence or purity, but "by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and

through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*.” According to Hall, diaspora identities are those which are “constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (qtd in Woodward 58).

Phillips uses several overlapping contexts simultaneously to construct an identity and home for his characters. The characters in the three novels are in an incessant search; the search for cultural identity, and adoption of it; the search for home and just what ‘home’ means, the search for familial ties and trying to repossess them. An analysis of the characters, their motivations, their successes and failures, combined with an examination of the structure and language used by Phillips in *Higher Ground*, *The Nature of Blood* and *Crossing the River*, we can see that Phillips’ concept of diaspora identity goes way beyond the simplistic categorisation offered by conventional binary oppositions.

Caryl Phillips’s 1989 novel *Higher Ground* displays how a diasporic writer brings into literature the question of identity through tension, ambivalence, contradiction and complicated construction of belonging. *Higher Ground* consists of three separate stories. The first, “Heartland,” is told by a “collaborator”, an African who assists in the slave trade. The second “Cargo Rap” is told by Rudi, a prisoner kept in a maximum security prison in the United States during 1960s. The last narrative is told by Irene, a Polish woman, who has fled from the horrors of Nazi Germany to Britain.

Crossing the River (1993) spans two and a half centuries of the African diaspora. It portrays the descendants of the diaspora in various locations and temporalities. The novel opens with an African father lamenting his “shameful intercourse”: he exchanges his three children – Nash, Martha, and Travis, whose

stories we read in the rest of the novel – for “cold goods” to a slave trader. The novel is framed by the narrative of this father looking for the stories of his lost and scattered children. These narratives explore four different moments of the African diaspora. The first section “The Pagan Coast” opens in Liberia in the 1830s. This section centres on Nash, a slave sent to Liberia for missionary aims. Nash slowly ‘goes native’. His former master Edward Williams travels to Liberia when he is informed about his death to find Nash’s remains. The second section, “West,” moves to Martha, a former fugitive slave journeying westward. Martha’s dream is reuniting with her daughter who was sold during the slavery period. She dies in Denver, lonely and without a name. The third section, “Crossing the River”, presents the journal of James Hamilton who is a Christian Captain of a slave ship in 1752. The fourth section, “Somewhere in England”, is set in World War II Britain. Joyce, who is mistreated by her husband, divorces him and falls in love with Travis, an African-American soldier. She gives birth to Greer, an interracial child who is then given into adoption; Travis dies fighting in Italy.

Phillips’s sixth novel, *The Nature of Blood* (1997) is composed of non-sequential narratives, with neither a heading nor a break between them. The first narrative is of Eva Stern, who has fled from the horrors of a Nazi camp in Germany. The second narrative is written in the third person and tells about the fifteenth century town of Portobuffole, near Venice, detailing bloody acts perpetrated against the Jewish people. The third is a slightly different version of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, set in sixteenth century Venice. These accounts are opened and enclosed by a fourth narrator, Eva Stern’s uncle, Stephan. He leaves Europe and his family for Palestine

in the 1930s to establish Israel. The novel ends with him in Israel, where he encounters a Falasha who has been brought to Israel by Operation Moses in 1980s.

Higher Ground first presents us an African collaborator who plays an role in the slave trade as an interpreter. “Heartland” is a story of an African slave who becomes a translator for the slave traders. His sole aim is surviving the horrors of colonial period. He is responsible for the sale of many African slaves to the white traders. He is accused of as being a traitor by his own people. He cooperates with the enemy and thus becomes disrespected, losing the respected of both his own people and the colonisers. In the beginning, he collaborates with a prurient and cruel slave trader named Price and helps him purchase an African girl, the daughter of the head man of a local village, as a sex slave. Later, the collaborator discovers the inhumane treatment the girl received from Price. He decides to save this young woman from not only from the abuse of Price but also from her own society who now regard her as dirty. He enters into a relationship with her and secretly invites her to live in his meagre accommodation, a hovel that he shares with Lewis, a poor white who works in a menial position in the slaver camp. Despite the collaborator’s best efforts to rescue and protect the girl she is still subject to sexual abuse when she is raped by Lewis. The collaborator walks in on this scene, but is powerless to do anything about it, lest his slaver bosses find out about his hiding the girl. In the end both he and the girl are shackled and shipped off to far-away American shores. “Heartland” tells of a black man’s separation and estrangement firstly from his own people, and then again from his adopted people.

The next narrative, “Cargo Rap,” starts centuries after the colonial period in a maximum security prison in the United States. Although slavery has long been

abolished black people still can not be free of their chains. Rudi is an African-American whose only desire is ‘homecoming’ – an eventual return to Africa. He is a captive “in a primitive capitalist state” falsely accused of robbing a white man (67). The psychological connection between two chapters is interesting when they are thought of in their historical context. Rudi is the great-great-great grandson of the collaborator and his dream is returning to Africa after gaining his freedom. Actually, Rudi’s last letter reveals this connection. While Collaborator’s chapter ended with a promise to return to Africa, Rudi’s chapter ends with a letter to Africa

The overseer has a horse named “Ginger.” The plantation is wide and stretches beyond the horizon. The days are hard and long. We toil from “can’t see” in the morning to “can’t see” at night. The master is cruel, but nobody “knows” him better than his slaves. There is strength in this. I have had to learn a new language so forgive me if I make errors while attempting to temporarily claim our own. How are the crops? Have the rains come? Father, sister, are they safe? Thirty feet above me a man sits on a watchtower with a rifle. I remain agile in mind, and fleet of foot, so you must live in the hope that one day you will see me and hold me again. Remember we who survived are the fittest. Many perished (*Higher Ground* 172).

His only medium for consolation is to seek help via letters. He is writing letters because all other avenues for help are closed. He claims that “Words are power; they capture things; sunsets, storms, people” (68); however, his words do not provide him with any kind of power in the end; all his writing futile. Although he feels that he has learned to “eradicate” love and emotional attachments of any kind to

anybody or anything (68), in the end it is seen that his suppressed emotional attachment to his mother has not died yet. With her death and the insufficiency of his words to affect any change, writing letters, his only source of power, becomes unbearable for him.

Unlike the African-American character Nash in *Crossing the River*, who is proud of his African-American identity, Rudi constantly rejects his American identity although he and even his grandfather were born in America. He assumes that it is simply a form of mental chain and always refers to himself as African. His “main man” is Muhammad Ali (Phillips, *Higher* 142) who he considers “one of our greatest African-American heroes.” Rudi writes his sister that Ali is “somebody on whom the younger generation of males should seriously consider modelling their lives (89). Obviously, “Cargo Rap” recalls the writings of Malcolm X and the Soledad Brothers of 1960s. According to Wendy Walters “the idea that America is a prison for black people has a long history, beginning, of course, in the “prison-house of bondage” that was racial slavery (62). Malcolm X told his audience in 1963, “Don’t be shocked when I say that I was in prison. You’re still in prison. That’s what America means.” (qtd in Walters 62). Rudi is actually in a prison within a prison. We find that Rudy leads himself to believe that anything a white man thinks must be evil and anything a black man does or believes is good.

He is seeking to uncover the “truth” about his past and thereby strengthen his identity through the “oneness” of a shared African history and culture. He romanticises Africa as a just and free society in his “imagined” homeland; he imagines settling in Ghana, in “the mother country of African independence”, and believing in an African religion. These are all parts of his attempts to construct his

cultural identity in search of his personal identity. Rudi's vision of Africa is belittled and mocked by Phillips. His African heroes are Lumumba, Nyerere, and Kenyatta – all failed African leaders.

The return to Africa is a theme running through both *Higher Ground* and *Crossing the River*. Both Rudi of *Higher Ground* and Nash of *Crossing the River*, have the same dream of returning to their original lands. Although occupying different centuries, Nash, the missionary Black in Liberia of the 1830s, and Rudi, the prisoner in 1960s America have a number of similarities. It might not be just a coincidence that their surnames are both *Williams*. Perhaps Phillips is trying to construct some intertextual grand narrative in his novels, an intriguing possibility that would require further research beyond the scope of the present thesis.

These two characters, whose African-American identities are in the foreground, differ in their approach to constructing their identities, in the processes they experience. While Rudi spurns his American identity and wishes to return to Africa to fulfil his dreams of homeland, Nash's sole aim in going to Africa is for missionary reasons. Nash constantly thanks God for sending him to Liberia. At first, Liberia is for Nash

the beautiful land of my forefathers, is a place where persons of color may enjoy their freedom. It is the home for our race, and a country in which industry and perseverance are required to make a man happy and wealthy... Liberia is the star in the East for the free colored man.

It is truly our only home. (Phillips, *Crossing* 18)

While he initially admires Liberia and is appreciative of his master in the first letters he sends back to his master, he slowly changes his mind over the course of the

novel. His letters first display only contempt for Africans and he expresses gratitude for his Christian identity, distancing himself from the “robes of ignorance which drape the shoulders of my fellow blacks” (Crossing the River 21). In every letter, Nash’s sentiments evolve from distaste to delight of Africa and this eventually takes the shape of nativism. The “civilized” (24) becomes “so-called civilized” (31) and the “much-maligned” (31) native people become “my colored friends” (62). He seems to shift from one set of identifications to another. He swings from being a puritan ex-slave and a person in “asylum” (26) to freely choose to live the life of the African (62). Rudi, as an African-American born and raised in the violent racism of the mid-twentieth century America, never felt at home in the United States. He is actually afraid of being rooted to American soil.

Both Rudi and Nash lay a claim to their cultural identity and their past. But the past they are claiming is not an untransformed past but a past that undergoes constant transformation. Rudi believes that cultural identity is a fixed essence, lying unchanged outside history and culture. Both are unaware that they are unable to go back to their imagined Africas. As Hall points “the original Africa is no longer there. It too has been transformed. History is, in that sense, irreversible” (“Cultural” 231). Hall classifies Caribbean identity into three presences: *Présence Africaine*, *Présence Européenne*, and *Présence Américaine*. *Présence Africaine* is the site of the repressed people, silenced by the memories of their experience of slavery. This profound culture, Africa, is composed of metaphors, figures or signifiers. According to Hall, these figures and metaphors are “grounded in an ‘old’ Africa” and discovering this deferred identity is a “spiritual journey to one’s own identity” (“Cultural” 398). “Freezing Africa into some timeless zone of the primitive, unchanging past”, inhibits

one from negotiating his identity and coming to terms with the origin of his identity. (399) Hall mentions in “Negotiating Caribbean Identities” how some people, following the Negritude movement, went back to Africa, but soon realised that that was not the Africa they had been talking about. He states that between the Africa that their ancestors came from and the Africa that they wanted to go back to, some “absolutely critical things had intervened” (289). Africa had moved on. Africa was not stuck in the fifteenth or seventeenth century, waiting for them to “roll back across the Atlantic and rediscover it in its tribal purity” (289).

There is no fifteenth-century Mother waiting there to succour her children. So in that literal sense, they wanted to go somewhere else, they wanted to go to other place that had intervened, that other Africa which was constructed in the language and the rituals of Rastafarianism. (289)

Hall avers that they have no voice, they have no history, and they have come from a place to which they cannot go back and which they have never seen. They used to speak a language which they can no longer speak. They had ancestors whom they cannot find; they worshipped gods whose names they do not know. (289) Similarly, Rudi and Nash mentally freeze Africa into a timeless zone with an unchanging past. Speaking about tradition Paul Gilroy notes that it becomes “the means to demonstrate contiguity of selected contemporary phenomena with an African past that shaped them but which they no longer recognise and only slightly resemble” (“Black Atlantic” 191). For the following generations who are displaced several times, Africa is “retained as one special measure of authenticity” (191). For Rudi, Africa is “the name of the missing term, the great aporia” (Hall, “Cultural” 224).

Aporia is a term which is studied commonly by post structuralist theorists. Nicholas Royle states in *Jacques Derrida*, that for Derrida, “aporia means a sort of “absolute blockage, a “No Way” (“aporia” ... coming from ancient Greek, a “without”, porous “way” or “passage”). (Royle, *Jacques Derrida* 92) Aporia is “a non-road” (92). To cope with the fragmentation of their identities, Rudi and Nash seek a return to a lost past – the great aporia of Africa. It is missing because Rudi has never been there, never seen, only knows it by listening to legends and descriptions of landscapes, traditional stories. Nash is not accustomed to that “dark and benighted country” (31) he likes so much after settling there. But as Hall states, it lies at the centre of their cultural identity and gives it the meaning it lacked (“Cultural” 224). Cultural identity is based on

mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. (“Cultural” 225)

Rudi tries to defend and assert the distinctiveness of his identity in the present. As Kathryn Woodward puts it “this recovery of the past is part of the process of constructing identity which is taking place at this moment in time and which, it appears, is characterised by conflict, contestation and possible crisis.” (11) Rudi’s construction of identity never seems to reach a point of maturity, however. From the perspective of oppositions, there was no middle path for Rudi. Similarly Nash’s notion that “Liberia is the only home for the black race” (Phillips, *Crossing* 18) is based on a strictly racial construction of nationhood:

Perhaps you imagine that this Liberia has corrupted my person, transforming me from the good Christian colored *gentleman* who left your home, into this heathen whom you barely recognise. ... Liberia is the finest country for the colored man, for here he may live by the sweat of his brow, although everything remains scarce and high[.] (61-2)

In the remainder of this letter his words form the basis of an African-centred politics and hence Negro Zionism:

We, the colored man, have been oppressed long enough. We need to contend for our rights, stand our ground, and feel the love of liberty that can never be found in your America. Far from corrupting my soul, this Commonwealth of Liberia has provided me with the opportunity to open up my eyes and cast off the garb of ignorance which has encompassed me all too securely the whole course of my life. (61-62)

This reminds us of Rudi, who, two hundred years later, takes the same path. While Nash's detachment from the country he grew up in and the need to attach himself to a new society and culture led him to construct a new identity and home; Rudi's detachment of identity from community and place leads to resistance. In both cases, it strengthens their sense of identity. Rudi is proud of his blackness, his roots; his race in every aspect. He is angry with the members of his family. This anger rises in every letter he writes, step by unbearable step. He is angry with his grandfather who "was a slave, behaved like a slave, lived and died like one" (Phillips, *Higher* 73). He is angry when his mother calls black people "troublemakers", as he thinks that this

displays her “slave mentality” (64). He is also critical of the role offered to black people by the white power structure: “the lazy, shiftless nigger” (75). Another dimension in his construction of his “African identity” is explicitly exposed when he writes to his lawyer telling his narrative of modern enslavement and captivity:

Name: Homo Africanus / Occupation: Survivor / Age: 200-300 years / Parents: Africans captured and made slaves / Education: American School Life / Distinctions\Awards: Breath in my body / Recreation: Not reading Ebony / Anything else of relevance: I can dunk, punt and bunt. Sing, shimmy and slide. I can also kill, you dig? / The alleged crime: At the age of nineteen manchild years I am supposed to have asked a white man, at the point of .38, to pay some overdue wages. I did not harm a gray hair on his gray body. I swear to God (a God) the man wasn't scared[.] (91-92)

In the end, “home” becomes a term related to “mother” both for Rudi and Nash, a link that is as old as the term “motherland”. For Rudi, the death of his mother breaks the final bounds of endurance and moves him to the point of losing a great part of his identity. He writes a letter to her. He always dreamt of an eventual return and imagines that the real Africa will be the same as the Africa in his dreams. In the letter he writes to his dead mother, Rudi transplants by substitution the modern-day prison in USA with a “plantation” that “is wide and stretches beyond the horizon” (172). White domination and discrimination is substituted for “the master” who is cruel and “nobody knows him better than his slaves” (172). His wife and daughter are sold to a neighbouring estate. He even regrets that he learned the coloniser’s language. Even though he does not physically go back to his African homeland he is

nevertheless indulging in an imagined journey and assumes that he is an African who has learnt “a new language” (172). He asks how the crops and rains are. He transforms the crime for which he was sent to jail, from an armed hold-up to being caught while he gathering wood. Thus, he skips a generation of slaves who willingly migrated to America, including people of his parents’ era. Rudi fails to go back to his imagined homeland and his narrative ends with an empty promise to return one day. Taking ‘mother’ as the origin of a person, through the death of his mother Rudi has lost the chance of returning to the ‘motherland’. There is no clue as to what fate eventually befalls Rudi, though there is an implication that he is losing his mind. The import of this lack of narrative closure is to highlight that nothing would change even if he survived prison and was able to return to Africa. He would not adapt to Africa. He may have been able to free himself from both his real chains and from the “United Snakes of America” (92), but there are grave doubts that he could have ever fully assimilated to the real-world Africa.

On the other hand, Nash, upon learning of his mother’s death, writes “I was very sorry to hear that my mother was dead, but I take great consolation in knowing that she has gone ‘home’” (Phillips, *Crossing* 35). A few lines later he adds that “I have been in Africa a long time and I wish to come home as soon as possible” (35). In the end, we learn that Nash Williams dies of African fever in the village he had retreated to. Both Rudi and Nash desire to be with their “mother.” Reconnecting with mother via death becomes a metaphor for returning to homeland/motherland. Rudi tried to achieve it in his mind to the detriment of his sanity. Nash constructed his cultural identity anew by changing his mind after initially arriving in Liberia with missionary aims. Although he thinks that he has returned to his forefather’s

homeland he is mistaken. Poignantly, he dies of African fever, a disease which generally kills white people. Although he claims an identity and tries to conform to his newly adopted society, he fails. He is an African-American and it is impossible to change this, as it is with Rudi Williams.

The first two parts of *Higher Ground*, “Cargo Rap” and “Heartland”, when read together, present how Phillips sought in his writing both a place free from the romanticisation of Africa as homeland and a space of ambivalence for the colonised. Both of these novels of Phillips refuse to romanticise Africa in the absence of history. His work consistently traces out the genealogies of slavery, the complicated connections between multiple national identities. His work entails multiple perspectives as he develops characters like Rudi Williams and Nash Williams who romanticised Africa. Phillips both narrates forgotten histories of slavery and the reconstruction of black identities in our age. Hall states that it was not the literal Africa that people wanted to return to, it was the language, and it was a metaphor, a symbolic language, an “imagined community” of Africa that can only be symbolically reconstructed. (“Negotiating” 290)

Indeed the most intensely moving passage of *Higher Ground* comes at the nexus between the first and second narratives. Phillips presents a view of homecoming from two temporal perspectives. The ending of “Heartland” gives the reader insight into the very beginnings of diaspora:

We are all saying the same thing; we are all promising one day to return; irrespective of what might happen to us in whatever land or lands we eventually travel to; we are promising ourselves that we will return to our people and reclaim the lives that are being snatched

away from us. And the promise comes from deep inside our souls, it comes from a region where it is impossible to pretend, it comes from the heart. (59-60)

These are the words of the collaborator, who has lost the respect of his own people as well as that of the slavers, spoken when taking a last look at the shores of Africa. This is the point when the notion of diaspora starts for Africans, emphasised in the text by the deliberate repetition of “we” and thus reminding us of Anderson’s (Anderson 32) well-known notion of “imagined communities”. The phrase “whatever land or lands” points to the variety of eventual diasporic messages, varying from the Caribbean to the United States to Britain. The launching of the ship is symbolic of the launch of the notion of diaspora. This is a critical moment in the journey of diaspora identity. The narrative ends with a vision of the future when the collaborator promises to return “irrespective of what might happen ... in whatever land or lands” (Phillips, *Higher Ground* 60). Talk of the future is limited solely to “homecoming” promises in the name of race, encompassing all the Black communities all around the world. He looks back to the shores he left and “the past has fled over the horizon and out of sight” (60). His present “has finally fractured” (60). The future in front of him is ambiguous.

This is immediately followed up with “Cargo Rap,” two hundreds years in the future, with the new narrator as nostalgic as the previous one. However, Phillips reveals the flaws in this type of nostalgia.

It is obvious that Rudi’s struggle, the collaborator’s promises and Nash’s efforts to adopt an identity, all of them endeavour to construct cultural identity, have failed. Returning seems impossible. The reason Rudi and Nash fail in constructing

home and identity lies in their method, their simplistic construction of monolithic ideals, their insistent adherence to the missing term, the *aporia*. In *Caribbean Discourse: Reversion and Diversion*, Edouard Glissant describes the demand for a single origin as “reversion”. It is the obsession with a single origin: “one must not alter the absolute state of being” (345). As Stuart Hall notes, “the past is not waiting for us back there to recoup our identities against. *It is always retold, rediscovered, reinvented*. We go to our own pasts through history, through memory, through desire, not as a literal fact” (qtd in Walters 36). Hall sees in diaspora identities the narrative of displacement, an endless desire to return to “lost origins”, the desire to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning” (qtd in Woodward 58).

Another reason for Rudi’s failure is his insistence on constantly viewing himself in the colonial context and the slave-master structure. His narrative is bound by such false binarisms as African/Western, slave/master, white/black, Muslim/Christian. He tried to reconstruct his identity around the thought that he is pure ‘African’, and that race is the only determinant factor in his identity. He dangerously accepts concepts of cultural purity and essential Africanness. Rudi turns to his origins, to Africa and to a “Negro Zionism” (Phillips *Higher Ground* 124). Phillips underscores the impossibility of the construction of an essentialist point of view in terms of identity. As he reminds us in *A New World Order*, “race is scientifically a matter of a few physical characteristics that bear no relationship to intelligence or behaviour.” (16) Nonetheless, as Paul Gilroy states in *The Black Atlantic*, “appeal to and for roots” and “rootedness” is a prominent characteristic of black cultural forms. He goes on to say:

It is possible that to argue that the acquisition of roots became an urgent issue only when diaspora blacks sought to construct a political agenda in which the ideal of rootedness was identified as a prerequisite for the forms of cultural integrity that could guarantee nationhood and statehood to which they aspired. The need to locate cultural or ethnic roots and then to use the idea of being in touch with them as a means to refigure the cartography of dispersal and exile is perhaps best understood as a simple and direct response to the varieties of racism which have denied the historical characters of black experience and the integrity of black cultures. (112)

Phillips and Gilroy both reject the notion of “race” as a particular bond that inevitably ties people to Africa. Black essentialism may be justified by the continued existence of white racism, but Phillips claims that this is no proper justification. What is different and crucial here is that Phillips sees that ambivalence and a type of rootless identity is the common point share by him and his diasporic characters.

Another seeker of ‘home’ is Martha in *Crossing the River*, one of the children sold by the soliloquising father at the beginning of the novel. She is searching for her daughter. Her daughter Elizabeth shares the same fate as her mother; sold into slavery in the United States as a child. Martha finds herself

assaulted by loneliness, and drifting into middle age without a family.

Voices from the past. Some she recognised. Some she did not. But nevertheless, she listened. (79)

Martha decides to journey westward with a band of “coloured pioneers” hoping to reach California. She dreams of meeting her daughter there but dies in

Denver, lonely and nameless. She manages to get only as far as Colorado, where she remains under the blue sky, tired and sick. Still she dreams of moving on, searching for her daughter and husband. She is bitter and miserable, but free in mind. About to die, she had the dream of meeting her daughter in California:

Eliza Mae insisted that her mother should stay and live with them. But Martha was reluctant. All was not right. There was still no news of Lucas, and her Eliza Mae now called herself Cleo. Martha refused to call her daughter by this name, and insisted on calling her a name that her children and husband found puzzling. Soon it was time for Martha to leave, but her daughter simply forbade her mother to return east. Martha, feeling old and tired, sat down and wept openly, and in front of her grandchildren. She would not be going any place. She would never again head east. To Kansas. To Virginia. Or to beyond. She had a westward soul which has found its natural-born home in the bosom of her daughter. (94)

For Martha, her “natural-born home” is in the bosom of her daughter. She assures herself that she will not be going any place, feeling that she has reached home at last after many years. But it is only in her imagination. There is a sad irony to her return which resembles Rudi’s letter to his mother. Rudi, upon learning of his mother’s death went back to the plantation era in his imagination; Martha, does not go to the past, but to an imagined future. Home is in Martha’s imagination, resembling Rudi’s imagined home.

In these novels of Phillips, African characters form the central characters though there are characters from other races, most importantly Jewish people. The

notion of home, however, does not change according to every race. “Home” is the place when you are happy with the loved ones, and a place where you can feel welcome, comfortable and free.

The Nature of Blood begins with the narrative of Stephan Stern, the uncle of Eva. He is in Cyprus engaged in preparing expelled and dislocated Jewish immigrants for their life in Israel, their new country. At the very beginning of the novel, the author poses questions of what and where home is, and what the name ‘homeland’ means. Stern does not feel at home in his new country. He hopes that the young Moshe, a man he is assisting to immigrate to Israel, will feel at home in time: “Israel. Our country will be called Israel.” But, at the same time, he is not convinced whether this is a place that he himself feels is home. Moshe asks and Stephan answers:

“Tell me, what will be the name of the country?”... “Israel. Palestine. He knew of no such country. As yet, none of them did. Only in their minds.” (7)

For most of the Jewish characters in the book, major or minor, the notion of home is simply equivalent to the Promised Land. And yet, the concept of “home” does indeed have different meanings for a number of the Jewish characters. Whereas Uncle Stephan is struggling for his strong belief in this land, to prepare this land which they bought from the Arabs for large-scale settlement and to bequeath it to the following generations, Eva’s parents call it a “so-called Promised Land” (73). They do not take it very seriously and disapprove of Uncle Stephan for leaving his child and wife behind in America and for breaking off his medical studies for the sake of this so-called Promised Land.

[Had they] forgotten that they were Jews? That they remained the only people on the face of the earth without their own home? Did he know this? (76)

For Eva, home is a place where “one feels a welcome”. (37) His father asks Stephan “Why create another home?” (10) For these Jewish people, their home is where they are settled, and have survived until now. By the end of the novel we see that Stephan is still confronted with the same question when an Ethiopian Jewish woman named Malka, brought from Ethiopia by the Israeli government, desperately asks the now-aged Stephan: “Is this home?” (209) I want to call attention here to Phillips’s dual theme of “race” and “religion”. Both of these ideas are deconstructed in the novel since they move from at first being used as a unifying power to eventually becoming a disuniting factor at the novel’s end.

The Falashas, an ancient Jewish black community of Ethiopian ethnic origins who have lived isolated from the rest of the Jewish world until the twentieth century, play a major role in *The Nature of Blood*. They shared the same dream of Zion as the rest of the Jewish people, passed down the generations for centuries. In the twentieth century, the majority of them do return to this ‘mythic’ homeland, however, the return is not very blissful. Malka sums up the initial zeal the Falashas:

My sister and I wondered, in this new land, would our babies be born white? We, the people of the house of Israel, we were going home. No longer landless. When we arrived and stepped down off the plane, we all kissed the ground. We thanked God for returning us to Zion. (203)

While these people believed in the holiness of this dream, after a time they begin to ask questions about the truth of this homeland. Malka always compares her past and

present as a result of the ambivalence she has experienced. She oscillates between “our” country (Ethiopia) and “here”, (Israel) examining and questioning the concept of “homeland” in her mind. Uncle Stephan, almost fifty years later, appears in Israel with Malka, aware of the absurd and pointless situation experienced by the Falashas. He criticises the movement to the homeland:

Dragging these people from their primitive world into this one, and in such a fashion, was not a policy with which he had agreed. They belonged to another place. (212)

Stephan was an idealistic young man when he joined the Jewish paramilitary group Haganah, a secret underground organisation that assisted the founding of Israel. However, as time passes, he sees that this is not a true “home”. Although the white Jewish people have the same dream and religion as the Falashas, and although they share a collective consciousness, due to racist attitudes, the Falashas were not absorbed into Israeli society, but were instead translocated to the poorest part of Israel. Within the white Jewish society their primary role is ethnic decoration, for example, they are commonly employed in hotels and the like performing traditional dances.

Similar to the Jews in Europe they live in the ghettos of the city:

Have you seen the ugly housing at the edges of the city where we live? Is this home? ... You say you rescued me. Gently plucked me from one century, helped me to cross two or more, and then placed me in this time. Here. Now. But why? (209)

In the novel, Malka and the other Falashas are not pure enough to be deemed *real* Jews; they are total strangers in their new land. They are disliked and their customs are viewed as primitive.

Returning home is not only a literal return to the originary homeland throughout Phillips' novels. While the characters may express a wish for a literal return, actually they are looking for some type of compensatory effect that can make them feel at home, something that can alleviate their pain. To negotiate and cope with their fragmented identities, some characters try to become reunited with their lost or expelled family members, their children who are sold to slavery. Searching for a family member becomes a metaphor for searching for "home", returning to the past also means "going home" for them. In their imagination, the past always waits unchanged and fixed. Lost family members and past familiar faces are part of this unchanged past. This unchanged past becomes a "home" for them as they are aware that they cannot literally go back to their "home". A return to Africa or a return to the Promised Land, Israel, is often seen as a panacea for all the problems encountered in these diasporic groups, and is specifically related to being an immigrant or a slave. But it is obvious returning is either impossible or it is not a panacea. Constructed, imagined homelands fail to offer what is expected of them.

The texts presented here expand and complicate the conventional construction of identity and 'home' of global diasporic identities. They criticize the static categories of racial determinism in the context of identity and enable us to see how diasporic writing becomes a way to construct an identity and construct an imagined homeland outside of national boundaries. Phillips describes identities that are created by both oppression and resistance to oppression. A common feature of

these identities is a lack of control over one's life, marked by trauma. A bewildering array of voices is presented in the context of racism, and these personal records of histories relate to the larger official history of diaspora and racism. All of Phillips's protagonists strive to negotiate their identities through an unearthing of their ethnic suffering histories, through traumatic memories of racist oppression or sometimes through an experience of anti-Semitic violence. Sarvan and Marhama describe Phillips as "a writer who can penetrate the inner being of people vastly different from himself in time, place, and gender, yet people very much like us all in the common and eternal human inheritance of pain and suffering" (40). Bénédicte Ledent, an academic who has focussed on Phillips, points out that Phillips's novels also focus on the tension between the desire to forget and the impossibility of forgetting the unforgettable, a tension that affects the children of the diaspora. "Forgetting and remembering, Phillips shows, are equally tormenting" states Ledent in his article "Ambiguous Visions of Home: The Paradoxes of Diasporic Belonging in Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*". Benedicte Ledent also emphasizes that Phillips's constant focus on the isolated individual is another feature of his novels where displacement is first of all lived in a personal mode, a painful experience that is always examined on a very concrete social and psychological basis (Ledent, *Ambiguous* 207). The good example for this kind of feeling is the Moor from *The Nature of Blood*. The journeying back and forth between positions of attachment and detachment, the constant tensions between distance and desire structure his attachment to life.

The Moor's story, which is the third narrative in *The Nature of Blood*, is a retelling of Shakespeare's *Othello* set in the Venice of the sixteenth century. The

Moor narrates his own European journey in the first person, exploring and commenting on European lifestyle as he does so. He is a stranger in Venice, notable by his blackness, and a victim of European prejudice and intolerance. The Moor explores sixteenth-century Venetian society as from the position of an “Other” of the European people. He is a successful stranger, rising in society and becoming assimilated. As a man of power, The Moor stands apart and slightly above the Jewish inhabitants of the ghettos of Venice, but at the same time, as a Moor he is completely isolated in Venice. He thinks that his reputation is going to help his problem of integration in the Venetian society:

I had made no friends among these people, and my standing in society rested solely upon my reputation in the field. My reputation. ... My reputation. Some among these people, both high and low, were teaching me to think of myself as a man less worthy than the person I knew myself to be ... Among the Venetians, all was confusion as I attempted to distinguish those who beheld my person with scorn and contempt, from those who simply looked upon me with the curiosity that one would associate with a child. (119)

He is to some extent obsessed with being respected in a land where he is a foreigner. He tries to learn Venetian traditions and lifestyles in minute detail, trying to be a true “Venetian” with his attitudes, behaviours, marriage, communication and manners:

I therefore decided to spend a good portion of what money I had accrued on acquiring a new costume in order that I might dress myself according to the Venetian fashion, as opposed to that of my native country. (120)

Nearly half of his narrative is about a Venetian lady Desdemona. He considers marriage to her the most essential thing to get somewhere in this society, to become a man of power. The Moor attempts to become assimilated in Venice society by successfully carrying out this aristocratic marriage, but he also knows that keeping the bloodlines *pure* is very important. The problems that the Moor experiences in the integration process are the result of the insistence on belonging and being accepted. Although he continually tries to assimilate with Venetian society, after some time he becomes estranged, and feels the ambivalence of both being lured to the centre and denying his race. He feels the change in his manners, costumes and speech. He compares his past condition to his present one:

Was I truly the same man who had arrived lonely and unannounced? The same man who had sailed in a state of spellbound wonder right into the heart of this city-state? The same man who had entertained a willing but subtle Venetian whore at the suggestion of my first “master”...? The same man who had initially struggled with the language, and who had, at times, wondered if he would ever settle among these strange and forbidding people? And now to be married, to the heart of the society. I wondered how such a change could be wrought in a man’s life, and in so short a period. (145)

The Moor, as a result of the comparison he makes, realises that he is not the same man of previous times and continually tries to cover up this feeling of guilt. He really enjoys his integration into Venetian society and waits for the day on which he will be fully admitted to the Venetian society. To evade his feelings of guilt for leaving his homeland the Moor’s sinks all his energies into his upcoming marriage:

I slowly discovered myself coming to terms with the fact that I might never again see the country of my birth. This proposed marriage did indeed mark me off from my past, and Venice; the birthplace of my wife, was a city that I might now have to consider home for what remained of my life. (147)

Unlike the people in his country of birth, now the Moor chooses the homeland of his new wife. Cutting loose his roots with his homeland for the sake of reputation and making place amongst the sophisticated people in this European society, the Moor chooses a new homeland for himself. He even thinks of his own people as being “degraded and without the sophistication and manners of these Venetians” (119). The Moor’s isolation and loneliness in Venice drives him towards assimilation. But he is not as self-confident he was formerly. He feels the tension between loneliness and belonging:

I also know that never again will I be fully trusted by those of my own world, both male and female, but some of this I have already anticipated. (148)

The final chapters of the Moor’s story see a change to the third person voice, filling in the story left blank by his initial rejection of his past. This voice is clearly from a different time and context than sixteenth-century, using language of the Africa-American slave experience, such as *Jim Crow*, and the Black Power movement of the twentieth century, such as *Brother* used as a term of address. This presence is new voice in the novel. The rhetoric and style of this voice reminds us of Rudi from *Higher Ground*. This shift in the narrative leaves the reader with questions about the Moor’s motivations. Maurizio Calbi states that Phillips’s text, does not propose that

the black general's true and proper aim should be that of retrieving his roots and identity (Calbi 48). Rather, it is challenged by the voice that emerges soon after the conclusion of this section. What happened to the Moor or whether he was a victim of the Venetian prejudice or intolerance is unknown to the reader:

And so you shadow her every move, attend to her every whim, like
the black Uncle Tom that you are. Fighting the white man's war for
him / Wide-receiver in the Venetian army / The republic's grinning
Satchmo hoisting his sword like a trumpet / You tuck your black skin
away beneath their epaulettes uniform, appropriate their words ...
their manners, worry your nappy woollen head with anxiety about
learning their ways, yet you conveniently forget your own family, and
thrust your wife and son to the back of your noble mind... (181–2)

The Moor is a sad black man, too weak to yoke his past with his present; too naïve to insist on both; too foolish to realise that to supplant one with the other can only lead to catastrophe (182). The voice is an outright intrusion from a wholly different perspective: "My friend, the Yoruba have a saying: the river that does not know its own source will dry up. You will do well to remember this" (182). Repelled by Venetian society, the Moor loses his sense of identity. He is reprimanded by the voice in a rare moment of intervention:

My friend, an African river bears no resemblance to a Venetian canal.
Only the strongest spirit can hold both together. Only the most
powerful heart can endure the pulse of two such disparate life-forces.
After a protracted struggle, most men will eventually relinquish one in
favour of the other. But you run like him Jim Crow and leap into their

creamy arms. Did you truly ever think of your wife's soft kiss? Or your son's eyes? Brother, you are weak. A figment of a Venetian imagination. While you still have time, jump from her bed and fly away home...No good can come from your foreign adventure. (183)

However, this Rudi-like voice, that seems to come from nowhere, is never explained or justified in the text of the novel. Is it Phillips' voice? There's no way of knowing. It harshly asserts that "the Moor is nothing but a white mask, tucking his black skin away in shame, disregarding the past, language, and family, and thus forgetting his origins" (Calbi 49). Self-betrayal, or the betrayal of one's identity, becomes the theme that is superimposed on the themes of diaspora, persecution and the ghetto.

If there is a home to go back to for the Moor, it is most certainly not Venice, but rather his "real home", as the black voice repeatedly insists: "Brother, jump from her bed and fly away home". *The Nature of Blood* offers the transformation of the racial positions into a fixed signifier of racist purity and discrimination on the world (Calbi 49). Which home is it meant here? I agree with Paul Semthurst's argument that the novel "deconstructs racial categories by refracting black experience through Jewish experience and vice-versa," and that the signifier "blackness" is attached "to any marginalised and oppressed subject" in the text (qtd in Calbi 49). "Home" is again the constant question. It is not an answer to the issue of identity and belonging. As Phillips puts it in *A New World Order*, "home is a place riddled with vexing questions" (6).

As the Moor was not strong enough not to submit to the Venetian lifestyle, because of loneliness and his worry of not being easily integrated in the society, he could not endure this kind of oppression. The Moor's mistake is that he wants to

assimilate so badly that he becomes ashamed of being a 'Moor'. His mimicry and ambivalence leads to his destruction and as a result he cannot carry his true identity. The shift from the Moor's first-person narrative to this third-person commentary underlines the importance of shifting perspectives on the construction of narratives. He suffers from degradation and the loss of selfhood and ends up awaiting orders in Cyprus. Much of the Moor's representation in the novel has to do with the phenomenology of alienation and solitude, something which across the distance of time, genre and cultural history Phillips is eager to explore.

The Moor arrived as a foreigner in Venetian society, and as a foreigner he remained. The Ethiopian Jew Malka, who is the symbolic descendent of the Moor, meets Stephan at the end of the novel. Phillips highlights the roots of racism against the people of African descent by drawing comparisons between the Moor's reception in sixteenth-century Venice and Malka's treatment in contemporary Israel. Both are marginalised in their societies. Stephan Stern is the symbolic descendant of Servadio, Moses and Giacobbe, the fifteenth-century Jews in Venice, characters who are accused of killing a Christian boy to use his blood for a Jewish holy day earlier in the text. Historical victims of racism and the geography of exclusion, these characters are estranged in racially arranged societies and politics. Phillips's text reveals that these discriminations, identity politics and ethnic based fights are repetitious, a recurrent fever in European history.

Malka, who appears in the final section of the text, after the Jews have found their Promised Land, recounts first of all the disappointment they experienced:

In our country [Israel], we did not eat in public. In our country, we had never seen a classroom. These things were difficult. In our

country, we were not used to relying on outsiders. And then, as we learnt the language and your ways, our parents felt as though they were losing us ... I ask you, is this home? ... This Holy Land did not deceive us. The people did ... You say you rescued me. Gently plucked me from one century, helped me to cross two more, and then placed me in this time. Here. No. But why? What are you trying to prove? (Phillips, *Nature* 209)

Stephan Stern returns later in the book in this section, no longer serving in Cyprus but now a pensioner in contemporary Israel. He has a brief, surprising affair with Malka, who lives as an outcast in this new country that is riddled with racism. All these desperate characters of diaspora are in a dilemma; whether to belong or not to belong. They need to belong as belonging is one of the deep-set embedded notions of humanity. We all need a place where we are accepted, understood and loved. When we feel we are in a place we belong, that is where hope begins. But hope never appears for diasporic characters as they cannot belong anywhere, although they try and even insist on this.

There is a fear, a deep fear of difference; a fear of the contamination of one's blood by strangers is felt in Europe. Caryl Phillips highlights the treatment that Europe has reserved for others, whether the Black or the Jewish, settling on her territory. He asks if there is really has been any progress in the modern age when bloodshed, terror, and bloody conflicts continue to follow humanity through the ages. In this new world order, nobody feels fully at home. Phillips outlined the reason for this in an interview in *The Enquirer*:

We're left as a society having to grapple with the ambiguities of race, the difficulties of race, and it all comes out of those seeds that were sewn a couple of hundred years ago. (Interview)

In his books, it is apparent that the roots of intolerance lie in history, in the colonial period, and it is still going on in the post colonial world. "The colonial, or postcolonial, model has collapsed," he writes. "In its place we have *A New World Order* in which there will soon be one global conversation with limited participation open to all, and full participation available to none. In this new world order nobody will feel fully at home." (*New World 5*)

At the Displaced Persons camp, a female psychiatrist interviews Eva Stern, a German Jew who has survived from the horrors of the Nazi camp in *The Nature of Blood*. Eva is irritated with the question "Do you intend to go home?" Eva is unwilling to forget and she does not want to move on. She refuses to answer to the questions regarding "home": "How can she use the word 'home'? ... I cannot call that place 'home'. 'Home' is a place where one feels a welcome" (Phillips, *Nature 37*).

Eva finally leaves the camp and travels to London, supposing falsely that—the soldier who found her—Gerry will marry her. This turns out to be a false hope; she suffers from trauma and eventually commits suicide in the mental hospital where she was taken. The result of her experiences is a fractured consciousness which caused severe problems with her ability to fit into society, she trusts no one, she becomes agoraphobic, her language deteriorates until she cannot even form sentences any longer. This brings about another important subject of diaspora: trauma.

CHAPTER 4

SURVIVOR GUILT AND TRAUMA

What constitutes trauma remains a problematical question, however it is observed that those who experience trauma are not willing to speak about it. The reason for trauma throughout these novels are always related problems with the characters' sense of belonging. A core element of the trauma is disconnection and unbelonging, leading to estrangement from society.

Thus, the insistence on belong and the necessity for belonging are the cause of the trauma. Stuart Hall writes "belonging is a tricky concept, requiring both identification and recognition". (*A Question of Identity*) The uncertain and fragmented nature of identity and sense of belonging is an ever mounting scholarly debate, and it is also studied through literature by Phillips. For Caryl Phillips his diasporic space becomes 'home', just as in his novel's coherence and intelligibility can only be achieved when all the disparate characters and plots are seen together. According to Jonathan Rutherford, only when we achieve a sense of personal integrity can we represent ourselves and be recognised – this is home, this is belonging (Rutherford 24).

The environment and the wish to emancipate also necessitate belonging. The environment necessitates this tricky state as they are under oppression and in a state of imprisonment. If they manage to belong they will attain some freedom. However belonging is a hard task to surmount. Rudi and Nash who insist on adopting a new homeland and a new identity fail. As long as they try to belong, they have to forget. As soon as they realise that they have to forget, they cannot avoid remembering.

Both forgetting and remembering at the same time is an impossible task. Trying to bury the past for the sake of the future does not work for the characters as their mind reacts with a desire to belong to their past. All this leads to trauma. Human beings need safety, order, love, and connection in their lives. If something happens that unsettles these foundations, people become traumatised.

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.

(Alexander et al. 1)

Collective trauma is felt by a nation, a group of people, or a community; on the other hand, trauma is not the result a direct experience of pain. It is the result of acute discomfort entering into the core of the collective sense of identity (10).

Another source of trauma is the profound feeling of guilt associated with surviving. The fact that they survived from the trauma creates a reason for the feeling of guilt. This is known as “survivor guilt”. The term refers to the guilt experienced by an individual whose parents or siblings had died, people who manage to survive when their friends or loved ones do not. The survivor feels tremendous guilt at being able to get on with their life. Why did I survive? Why am I the lucky one? they ask themselves. Forgetting, in this case becomes the worst thing to do. Such questions are ever-present in the mind of the character Irene in *Higher Ground* after she survived the Holocaust. When she is describing some people lucky enough to escape she is talking about this survivor guilt.

So out and over the cab of the truck they stared, concentrating on going forward, escaping, but even as they did so they realised that a deep guilt was being fused in their souls, a guilt that would be exposed were they now to falter and turn and look back. (209)

The theme of forgetting and remembering, which Phillips emphasises at many points, displays the kind of traumas these individuals' suffer and the feeling of "fragmented identity" and "split identity" experienced as a result of these actions. Significantly, one of the first utterances by Stephan in *The Nature of Blood*, is "Memory. That untidy room with unpredictable visiting hours. I am forever being thrust through the door and into that untidy room" (11). This analogy between memory and an untidy room continues to reappear throughout the novels. Almost all of the characters visit this *untidy room* frequently throughout the three novels to remember, to commemorate, to move on, and to forget. The visit to this untidy room is sometimes a result of an attempt to wipe away sorrowful events.

Stephan's memories haunt him in *The Nature of Blood*, but there is some hope of overcoming this type of difficulty when Stern realises that 'to remember too much is, indeed, a form of madness. And he understood that people are not made to live alone, neither when things are good, nor when they are bad' (212). Aleid Fokkema avers that he carries on, neither ignoring his past like the Moor, nor letting his memories threaten his sanity (Fokkema 287). The trauma of the characters is devastating, but they try to carry on nonetheless. In particular, Stephan Stern seems to survive because he is oriented towards the future, without forgetting the past. However the female characters Eva and Irene do not in the end survive the horrors of the Holocaust.

In *Higher Ground*, Irene's past endures and recurs in her present, an emotional state brought to the surface by Phillips's technique of nonlinear narration in three of the novels. Irene suffers from mental disintegration ever since the war when she was violently uprooted from her home. In the nearly twenty years of her life as an immigrant in England, she worked in a factory, got married because she was pregnant, and was abandoned by her husband when she had a miscarriage. The reason that "her once icicle-sharp mind had melted over the years and she no longer had full command of her senses" (182) is that she continues to be haunted by memories that are disarrayed and reflective of her confused state. Suffering from survivor guilt, she is caught between the need to forget the past and the inability to let it go. It is stated by Wendy Zierler that facts about Irene's past and the sufferings of her family as a result of Nazi occupation come together with memories of her journey to England, her failed marriage and miscarriage, and suicide attempt (Zierler 60). Her space of imprisonment in the hospital is similar to Rudi's cell in prison. Her parents in all likelihood probably became victims of the Nazi camps which Rudi so often mentions. In every narrative, Phillips displays the impossibility of getting rid of chains for people who are displaced, people who are in diaspora. Imprisonment always exists for them wherever they go; like a haunting memory.

Like the narrator of "Heartland", Irene attempts to delete her memory by always looking forward. Her resistance to the desire for the past could not, however, last long. She loses her mental health and spends ten years in at a mental hospital following a miscarriage and her attempted suicide. For Irene, remembering is "memory-haemorrhage": "She could not spend another winter in England staunching memories like blood from a punched nose" (Phillips, *Higher* 180). The question she

continuously asks herself is “Why has this happened to me?” recalling Rudy and the narrator of the “Heartland” who asks the equivalent question: What did I do to deserve this tragedy? For Irene, “survival is a painful exile” (Walters 128). She had “a mind tormented” permanently and had “a feeling that she was being punished” (202). Her solution to this situation is to leave her family behind and survive. Thus survival becomes the reason for her “mind tormented”. She feels she deserves this pain for choosing survival. She could have stayed there and died with her family, she could have touched her sister once more, she could have said goodbye.

Irene often cries, and this becomes an everyday part of her life: “crying myself to sleep, thought Irene, a habit that has become as depressingly familiar as washing my face or taking off my shoes” (184). At first “she could find nowhere inside that she might curl up, no corner in her soul that she might shelter in” (200).

Very often, she feels an iron handcuff around her head which gives her an unbearable pain. This iron handcuff actually represents the chains which she can never get rid of. She is, unlike other narrators, neither a slave nor black and she is free in England. However, the real problem does not lie in skin colour. The institution of slavery is not the only type of slavery which lasted for centuries and black people and slaves are not the only people handcuffed, imprisoned and chained. Ledent has pointed out that the image of the handcuff in particular echoes the “yokes, branding-irons, metal masks” (“Remembering” 15) described by the collaborator as the items that characterise the slave trade. The slavery that concludes the last narrative in *Higher Ground* is the slavery caused by our own suffering, the type of slavery that can cause people to lose their mind and their contact with real life. The first narrative was about slavery which displaced millions of people from their native

lands, chained and tormented physically. Rudi, in the next narrative talked about the chains we could not see but feel. And the closing narrative does not talk about any chains or slavery but instead the mental torment of a person displaced, separated from her family, her beloved sister left behind in a Nazi concentration camp. She has no desire to turn back, because she cannot. Thus, Phillips connects his narratives in a complex style, through the ideas of slavery and torment. In every narrative, diaspora identities are constructed and presented:

Irene did not want to believe or hope (and she did not want to remember but she did not want to forget). Hope, a single pure flame, rose slowly behind her eyes, then an unmarked, peopled, carriage shunted her mind on to a different track. She had travelled first by truck, then by train from Warsaw to Vienna. And then another train had taken her north to the sea. And then the ship. When they finally boarded the ship a man led them with jailer-like silence through riveted corridors which to Irina's tired eyes resembled long iron coffins. (Phillips, *Higher* 201)

This instance of memory fracture points to the disruption of both memory and narrative. In fact this attribute is shared by most survivors of trauma. Judith Lewis Herman writes that “long after the danger is past, traumatised people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts” (37). Similarly, Eva, in *The Nature of Blood*, facing death, struggling to survive the harsh physical conditions with her weakening body, experiences a kind of trauma – insanity brought on by witnessing death, torture and other dehumanising acts. She even tries to forget

her name at one point. When their physical appearances are being changed in the concentration camp, she experiences a kind of *dissociation of personality*:

I try to forget my name. I decide to put Eva away in some place for safe-keeping until all of this is over. But already Eva refuses to be hidden. There is no new name in my throat. Eva refuses to be hidden.

(165)

Her hair, everybody's hair is removed, they all look the same. She thinks that they are "grotesque figures, naked and without hair" (165) as a result of this act of dehumanisation. At this point we see that the task of forgetting is no easy task. She remembers her beautiful figure and compares it with this grotesque figure, naked and hairless. The task of forgetting results in the loss of identity, the loss of character. She oscillates between forgetting and remembering. The very act of watching or witnessing inhumane acts every day results in a "normalisation" of these very acts in Eva's minds for which she feels a terrible guilt. The doctor's report, as an outside, objective and scientific voice interrupting her memories, explains the satiation in depth:

Eventually, of course, we found a name for the collective suffering of those who survived. These unfortunate people have to endure a multitude of symptoms which include insomnia, shame, chronic anxiety, a tendency to suicide and an inability to communicate with others. They are often incapable of successful mourning, fearing that this act of self-expression involves a letting-go, and therefore a forgetting of the dead, ultimately committing the deceased, often loved ones, to oblivion... Naturally, their suffering is deeply

connected to memory. To move on is to forget. To forget is a crime.

How can they both remember and move on? This is no easy task.

(157)

Forgetting leads to feelings of guilt, so to expiate this guilt Eva must remember. But the constant memory of such horror inevitably leads to mental trauma. Eva calls this the violence of memory (33). At one point while in concentration camp Eva even forgets how to perform the mundane tasks of life: “And still I try to master these new gestures of life. How to use a toothbrush. How to fold toilet paper. How to say hello and goodbye. How to eat slowly. How to express joy” (32). She forgets these simple details of normal life even though she strives to remember them. Throughout the book, Eva remembers the past and suffers from the disjunction between her past and present condition. The doctor’s report, given between the other characters’ narratives, provides a name for Eva’s condition. The doctor is intrigued by the condition in the concentration camps and wants to do some research into it. He calls this condition *emotional anaesthesia* or *psychic numbing*:

These people’s conditions were generally chronic. They needed time to forget, on the one hand, and on the other hand time to learn to trust people again... I thought about doing a paper myself. About their clearly defined emotional anaesthesia, or psychic numbing. Eva, in fact all of them, they were so detached. (174)

What Eva and Irene does indeed, is the intertwining of the past and present, forgetting and remembering, insanity and sanity in the human mind brought on by the accumulation of unbearable, sorrowful incidents. This process, indeed, is what makes their memory so fragile, which drives them to attempt suicide. What we have

in their narrative is a process of recollection of the past written over observations of the present (Armstrong 9).

CHAPTER 5

DIASPORAN MEMORY AND THE THIRD SPACE

In many ways, the characters' kinship, belonging stories, their construction of homeland and cultural identity are represented as stories which are returned several times in their minds. The past is as important and essential as the present. Memory turns out to be a space where narrative is interrupted and dislocated. The characters' memories jump back and forth in time; flashbacks are common in almost every one of them. This emphasises memory as a circle, surrounding events in their lives. There is no escape from memory no matter how hard they try. It seems to haunt them at every turn. Home and identity have been important themes in recent work on people of mixed descent and on diaspora. Let us examine these in light of distinguished Black Atlantic theorist Paul Gilroy's idea that narratives of loss and exile serve as a musical performance.

It is integral, for example to the narratives of loss, exile, and journeying which, like particular elements of music performance, serve a mnemonic function: directing the consciousness of the group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and its social memory. The telling and retelling of these stories plays a special role, organising the consciousness of the "racial" group socially and striking the important balance between inside and outside activity – the different practices, cognitive, habitual, and performative, that are required to invent, maintain, and renew identity. These have

constituted *The Black Atlantic* as a non-traditional tradition, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable, and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the Manichean logic of binary coding. (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 198)

Gilroy uses music as a representation of the “spatial fluidity” of transnational culture across frontiers and racial barriers. Gail Low also notes that “Phillips’s invocation of stories and voices offers a similar poetics of performance that looks towards the ways in which suffering and survival can offer new routes to the future” (18).

Phillips’s choice of the Holocaust as an accompanying story to the history of racial slavery proceeds through the basic question: “Is a real survival possible after trauma?” *Higher Ground* and *The Nature of Blood* link the Jewish Holocaust and the African diaspora by representing the separation of family members, the questioning of survival, displacement and racism. Phillips asks the reader how people survive such traumatic separations. The links he establishes between Africans and Jews suggest many insights and reasons for the nature of intolerance. Race and religion are not the source of racial and religious intolerance. When a dominant group uses power arbitrarily to confirm its own sense of identity, intolerance is inescapable.

To give an example, in *Higher Ground* Rudi Williams, a non-Jewish man, uses Holocaust terminology frequently, and thus Phillips implies an implicit link throughout this narrative between the Holocaust and racial slavery. Rudi calls the prison guards “Gestapo Police” (127) with a “Gestapo-mentality” of cruelty and racism (162), and he wonders “if in Nazi Germany they used to keep the lights on as a form of torture” (72). He repeatedly calls Max Row “Belsen” (69; 84; 145). The

substitution of Bergsen for Belsen is significant. Moreover Rudi asks in his letters: “Does he know that here in America there are concentration camps?” (76) He draws parallels between the American Government and Nazi Germany. The reference to the Holocaust is also present when he writes “for white prisoners Belsen is a summer course in racialism” (84). Phillips found the Jewish Holocaust personally and positively identity forming. He writes in *The European Tribe* that “in British schools I was never offered a text that had been penned by a black person or that concerned the lives of black people” (1). Instead he says, “The Jews were the only minority group discussed with reference to exploitation and racialism, and for that reason, I naturally identified with them” (54).

The final chapter of *The Black Atlantic* by Paul Gilroy is a consideration of the reverberations of *diaspora* both in Jewish and in black New World thought, explained through readings of Caryl Phillips’s *The Nature of Blood* and *Crossing the River*. He handles a disregarded subject; the connection between the history of black suffering, displacement and diaspora and the Jewish diaspora. Katja Garloff states that Phillips suggests that the common element between the Jewish and black diaspora cultures is their accommodation of traumatic experience (Garloff 176) – or what he calls “the condition of being in pain” – and refers to the Holocaust as a major point of reference. We already know that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century black thinkers drew on Jewish concepts of diaspora for an identification of their situation and tried to construct a model based on the notion of diaspora after the Zionist model. Gilroy applies the concept of a negative sublime drawing from the Holocaust. According to Gilroy, the absence of a shared religion and genealogy among black is a distinguishing feature between blacks and Jews. He states that:

The idea that the suffering of both blacks and Jews has a special redemptive power, not for themselves alone but for humanity as a whole, is a ... common theme that has had some interesting consequences for modern black political thought. (*Black Atlantic* 208)

Gilroy discusses the issues which are inherent in both the Israeli political situation and the practices of the Afrocentric movement. These are, according to Gilroy, the status of ethnic identity, the power of cultural nationalism, and the manner in which “carefully preserved social histories of ethnocidal suffering can function to supply ethical and political legitimacy” (207). “To explore the fragmentary relationship between blacks and Jews and the difficult political questions to which it plays host ... the concept of diaspora provides an under-utilised device” (207, 213).

There are other more ambiguous and mythical ideas which connect these differently dislocated peoples according to Gilroy. The notion of a return to the point of origin is the first of these. The condition of exile provides a second linking theme.

[B]lack political culture does not attempt to distinguish between its different forms – willing and reluctant – or between forced bondage and the more stable forms of community that grow up outside an ancestral homeland, particularly when a transplanted people lose their desire to return there. In these circumstances, the memory of slavery becomes an open secret and dominates the post-slave experiences that are interpreted as its covert continuation. It is significant that for blacks the turn towards death is most vividly figured in the stories of slave suicide that appear intermittently in black literature... (208)

Gilroy points out that it was the Torahic and Biblical book of Exodus which provided the primary semantic resource in the elaboration of slave identity, slave historicity, and a distinctive sense of time. Albert Raboteau similarly describes this: “the appropriation of the Exodus story was for the slaves a way of articulating their sense of historical identity as a people” (qtd in Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 207) It can also be said that by placing stories of black and Jewish suffering alongside one another, Phillips in fact preserves the distance between them. Stef Craps states that the similarities between the narratives that Phillips juxtaposes in his novels should not blind us to the differences between them, both formal and thematic (197). Craps also claims that in Phillips the Holocaust was made to fill the lack of a reference point for the black experience in Britain (199).

Ledent similarly notes that “the parallels between the black and Jewish experiences have often been disregarded for reasons such as ethnocentrism (both black and Jewish) and the fear of cultural absorption” (70). Gilroy criticises the lack of discussion between Blacks and Jews. This lack of converse weakens our understanding of what modern racism is. If Black and Jewish writers had not missed “untold opportunities” to develop this critical dialogue, it would provide “constitutive power as a factor of social division in the modern world” (*Black Atlantic* 213). This is what Caryl Phillips brings not just into Black literature but also into Holocaust writing.

Phillips’ places the Jewish and Black experience side by side in his novels, especially *Higher Ground* and *The Nature of Blood*, and this portrayal of the isolation and estrangement of both Jewish and African characters reveals his recognition of the link between the black diaspora (including slavery) and the Jewish

diaspora. However, Phillips not only weaves this connection into his text by juxtaposition, for example in *Higher Ground* Irene's narrative contains references to the Middle Passage. While haunted by dreams of the Holocaust her description of the suffocation ambience recalls conditions on slave ships: "In her nightmare there was never any air. Bolted, suffocating, and trying to survive a journey. Then they waited and wept and asked for more water" (218). Again, in the Moor's story from *The Nature of Blood*, there is an intriguing resonance between these two worlds. When the Moor visits the Jewish ghetto in Venice, he finds there a scribe who reads and writes a reply to the letter the Moor received from his wife. In this scene the Jewish scribe mediates between the oppressive European power and the African figure. These relationships are important ways to make sense of modern racist beliefs. According to Gilroy:

exploring these relationships need not in any way undermine the uniqueness of the Holocaust. It is therefore essential not to use that invocation of uniqueness to close down the possibility that a combined if not comparative discussion of its horrors and their patterns of legitimation might be fruitful in making sense of modern racisms. (*Black Atlantic* 214)

Gilroy praises authors who link Black and Jewish experiences in their writing by stating "the link they reveal might contribute to a better political relationship between Jews and black at some distant future point" (206).

A Black Atlantic traveller is a person who goes back to the mythical homelands, the places what they hope to be home for them or look to learn more about themselves and their identities. Gilroy writes that the Black Atlantic transcends

“both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularly” (*Black Atlantic* 19). Caryl Phillips is one of these Black Atlantic travellers whose writing sounds like a ship setting from Britain heading for Africa and the Caribbean.

Phillips criticises identity politics through Rudi’s letters, and similarly Paul Gilroy is critical of ethnically absolute approaches. Gilroy develops the idea that “cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in discussions of the modern world and use it produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective”. For Gilroy, the idea of the Black Atlantic can be used to show that there are other claims to it which can be based on the structure of the African diaspora into the Western hemisphere (*Black Atlantic*15) In the last chapter to *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy argues for the prolific connection of space and time in the making of identity:

[T]he idea of diaspora [as] a utopian eruption of space into the linear temporal order of modern black politics which enforces the obligation that space and time must be considered relationally in their interarticulation with racialised being. (198)

He continues that the restlessness of spirit which makes that diaspora culture is revealed in the Black Atlantic. Continual movement of black people in the history of the Black Atlantic provides a means to re-examine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory. They all emerge from these shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected. Gilroy’s emphasis is this shift as diaspora is already a shift, not a fixed stable point. Caryl Phillips’s focus is also this shifting dynamic between fixed places (Gilroy qtd in Mannur and Braziel 65)

Beyond resonances and echoes, the tragic continuities of time, there is a particularly captivating pattern in Phillips's novels. We progress from the stories of disparate identities, different races who may be Venetian African, African-American, Black British, Polish Jew, German Jew, Jewish Venetian and so on. Jew becomes Venetian, African becomes Venetian, African-American moves to Africa and rejects his American identity. We can approach this chain in two ways: it is both a chain of combination and a chain of fragmentation. In Phillips's reflection of history, details change, but the result is always the same.

The novels are like a puzzle; the sentences are short, often fragmented and interrupted, sometimes consciously monotone and often lack humour. This fragmentation is emphasised by the conscious lack of headings or clear cut sections. Memories and real life events, space and time have been intertwined. Phillips narrates these stories from the point of view of a stunning array of voices, he switches from one point of view to another, changes narrator, changes the perspective. Phillips in one of his interviews says that:

A lot of the techniques I'm using in fiction – switching from one point of view to another, changing narrator, changing point of view – are to suggest that you always have to be vigilant about who is telling the story. I don't really trust those narratives that begin with one voice or one point of view and continue throughout without any sense of restlessness or any sense that the authorial master voice has been challenged.” (Interview)

By shifting the narrator and the point of view, Phillips evades authority in his narratives and makes space for marginal voices. One of the factors that gives his

novels a postcolonial feeling is the space given to several voices from different parts of the stories, to people from different centuries and social hierarchies. The narratives are the places where the centre is lost and the marginal comes to the centre. He takes the reader into a gas chamber with the dying, into the notes of a doctor who treats Eva, into the mind of a young Ethiopian Jewish woman in Israel, into the execution by fire of three Portobuffole Jews and, into the death-camp and out again with Eva. His postcoloniality is clearly rooted in the individuals' narratives, regardless of their race, gender or class. Although his characters are from different origins, these characters have a lot in common, above all their humanity. This is echoed by the structure of the novels in which a jumble of difference voices and narrative techniques all go together to form one consolidated text. His text is "an intertextual web that acts as a multiple marker of ambivalence, subversion, but also of cultural richness" (Ledent "Master of Ambiguity" 4). Thus, while reading Phillips, the reader is not allowed to get the entire meaning a once, but only after constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing.

In his introduction to *A New World Order*, Phillips discusses his adopted homelands, Africa, United States, Caribbean and Britain, one by one. At the end of each description, his remarks are touching: "I recognise the place, I feel at home here, but I don't belong. I am of and not of, this place" (1, 2, 3, 4). Such feelings are indicative of a new phase in a new world order where "nobody will feel fully at home" (5) He depicts distant, distinct, but overlapping diasporic identities from distant histories and backgrounds, aware that there is no real return to home only deep estrangement.

This rootlessness in all three novels is indebted to his distance from his ancestral cultural centre. As a displaced writer, Phillips has roots in several cultures. He knows from personal experience it does not have to be a single space, a single origin, a single homeland. The integrity is in its plurality and in its coherence. Home is within him. This is the new, third space. It is both the diaspora and the place where he feels he belongs. Rather than choosing to identify himself with conventional oppositions, Phillips prefers and displays a third critical position between, or outside of, binary oppositions. In the first chapter of this thesis, I proposed that he is a doubly displaced person; he is racially an Afro-Caribbean who is doubly displaced in Britain, in the first place displaced by the violent rupture forced by slavery which brought Africans in large numbers and deprived them of elements of African culture, and in the second place displaced by a relocation to an unwelcoming white society in the United Kingdom. I propose that, displacement from “home” causes Caryl Phillips to reconstruct new communities and in a further point that double displacement allows him to connect various national diasporas in his fictional works.

Tsunehiko Kato, states that the unique thing about Phillips is his depiction of history in which “he rejects the ‘essentialist’ point of view of race and culture, focusing on the diversity of the experiences of African diaspora.” (132) Phillips looks at various moments of Black world history, such as Black colonisation in Liberia, telling stories through such unexpected narrators as slave owners, slave traders and black colonisers. His fiction explains a more complex framework for understanding the diasporic experience. He uses multiple narrators and presents conflicting accounts. The concept of diaspora does not restrict him only to the black experience but drives him to the exploration of Jewish experiences such as the

persecution of the Jews in the Middle Ages, the sufferings of the Jewish people under Nazi regime, the subsequent Jewish experiences in concentration camps and the Zionist movement to establish a homeland in Palestine (132). Thus his novels have a transnational aspect in which there is not one determined, fixed, objective history.

By including so many different stories in his novels, Phillips allows the reader to experience the sense of fragmented, split and dissociated identity that his characters suffer from. In a postcolonial world, where shared rules and common codes have been called into question, his multiple settings also reflect a complex variety of representations of reality rather than one single reality. By highlighting disconnections, he indicates the fragmentation of the diasporic experience and thus he explores hidden dimensions of the processes following colonialism. His narratives cross time, gender, class and race. He reveals historical explanations and establishes connections.

Revathi Krishnaswamy argues that such cross-pollinated writers are unable to speak accurately about the postcolonial condition since they themselves are dislocated from any postcolonial space and because “they are complicit with hegemonic postmodern theories of power and identity” (138). However, Phillips wonderfully addresses the ambivalences and contradictions of the postcolonial world as he is not attached to any single context. Further, Phillips’s autobiography shows us the ways in which he formed his identity as a writer, the ways that writing became his third diasporic space, akin to his rootless condition. Unlike some of his characters, Phillips does not defend or try to perform a collective return to a particular home or country of origin. He avoids the ideas of fixity and boundedness. Thus, Caryl Phillips constructs a home in diaspora via his literary production.

The main element in Phillips's creative process is his Black Atlantic identity. Gilroy gives several examples from poets and novelists in his explication of the Black Atlantic identity. The connection he makes between W.E.B. Du Bois and Black Atlantic culture is also applicable to Caryl Phillips as a part of the Black Atlantic tradition:

Du Bois's travel experiences raise in the sharpest possible form a question common to the lives of almost all these figures who begin as African-Americans or Caribbean people and are then changed into something else which evades those specific labels and with them all fixed notions of national identity. Whether their experience of exile is enforced or chosen, temporary or permanent, these intellectuals and activists, writers, speakers, poets, and artists repeatedly articulate a desire to escape the restrictive bonds of ethnicity, national identification, and sometimes even "race" itself. (Gilroy qtd in Mannur and Braziel 65-6)

The strategies of literary postmodernism – fractured narratives, shifting points of view, the representation of unstable identities – are not reduced to one coherent vision. He creates fiction out of fragmented narratives (Kreilkamp 46) and points out to the importance of history. In other words, the novels do not report memories, but instead, bring them into being. In creating a structure that challenges traditional concepts of the novel, he allows postcolonial writing to open new spaces, news areas of discussion in identity and diaspora.

What makes Caryl Phillips independent of the borders of the Caribbean is his displacement. George Lamming asserts that this condition of "a third space" may be

the dilemma of the West Indian writer abroad: that he hungers for nourishment from a soil which he (as an ordinary citizen) could not at present endure (qtd in Welsh 260). Ali Suki avers that new ethnicities are not simply additions to existing forms, but that “they are evolved and metamorphosed in relation to “cultural hybrids”. She also notes that

Homi Bhabha suggests that cultural hybridity develops not from “two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity is “the third space” which enables the other positions to emerge” (10).

Similarly, Phillips’s hybridity derives from two original moments, a consequence of his double-displacement, and from this the third space emerges. This is where the author is free from oppositions and stereotyping, binaries and dualities. His works therefore do not proceed through the system of binary oppositions and dualities. Standing at this point of view and viewing from this third space is itself a diasporic space. A diaspora identity is free from opposition by nature. However, writing from a doubly-displaced diaspora, I mean, writing with Caribbeanness, Phillips allows other positions to emerge from this third space. These new spaces can be defined as new relations and new connections in diaspora. Constructing key links and allowing it to speak to the reader, Phillips offers a space where different diaspora identities can meet.

CONCLUSION

The concept of diaspora identity is not a new one; whenever peoples with cultural traditions, shared values, and racial/ethnic identities are scattered into new locations, there emerges a culture bearing former traditions intermingled with new traditions that arise within the ongoing struggle to cope with the dominant society. Phillips's novels reveal that diaspora identity as is fragmented and traumatic. The novels I analyze emphasize the instability and artificiality of mono-cultural identities and thereby question the absolute standards of racial or national purity implied by rigid categories. My discussions of these texts are framed by Stuart Hall's notions of diasporic identity and Paul Gilroy's theoretical analysis of the Black Atlantic. Caryl Phillips re-invents "diaspora identity" within contemporary cultural production by drawing attention to the cultural hybridity of racial identities and their shifting, multiple boundaries. The Holocaust becomes a connection point for the relevance between the African and Jewish communities causing trauma and thence a constant process of remembering which is experienced by all diaspora subjects in the novels. Phillips' novels represent postcolonial identity problems experienced by millions by discarding simple binarisms and creating a third diasporic space. Home is within the displaced person, and integrity comes from plurality and coherence of experience. These novels present the development of a self-chosen cultural identity as the path to a transnational society, criticizing the static categories of racial determinism in the context of identity.

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