
Traumatic Memory, Diaspora and Caryl Phillips: *The Nature Of Blood, Higher Ground And Crossing The River*

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Abstract: The African experience in the New World was very traumatic in many ways. The forced immigration the destructive influence of the fear and dehumanization process that African people had to go through required a specific need for self-expression. Literary works that narrate the story of subaltern groups and the oppressed, include a wide variety of motifs on the subjects of humiliation, pain, and sufferance. This dehumanization period inevitably causes the people of diaspora to grow the feelings of self-contempt and loss of self-respect. It is precisely these subjects which have given rise to trauma studies. In this article it is intended to analyze traumatic memory and diaspora in the light of Caryl Phillips's "*The nature of bloods*", "*Higher Ground*", and "*Crossing The River*".

Criticizing the inhuman and inadequate conditions African people had to go through, Phillips argued that African people were imprisoned not because they were socially inadequate or devoid of social capacity but because of white prejudices that conspired against them. In his works, Phillips associates his characters with oppression and resistance, two factors that become a way for him to construct a variety of identities all marked by trauma. Phillips puts his reader in contact with a wide range of black and Jewish characters all suffering from traumatic memories of oppression and violence. In addition, Phillips's protagonists, provide an important reminder of attending to the political and cultural context in which the diasporic elements, construction of home and identity, develop similarities.

Keywords: Traumatic memory, diaspora, construction identity

As Charles Taylor states in his article "The Politics of Recognition", "A number of strands in contemporary politics turn on the need, sometimes the demand, for recognition" (Taylor 25). This need for recognition, Taylor continues, is one of the motives that inspire nationalist movements in politics. According to Taylor, "the demand for recognition...is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity." This would mean that "recognition or its absence" is responsible for identity-formation, namely "a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being." Taylor goes on to explain that such a thesis requires acknowledging the power of recognition over identity. In Taylor's words if "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others," then "a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves." In this case, one could be, as Taylor says, "imprison[ed]...in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being." (Multiculturalism 25).

At this point, we can speak of such a problem of recognition in the case of black people, who have had imposed on them a sense of inferiority, self-depreciation and humiliation by white

society for generations. For Taylor, “Their own self-depreciation... becomes one of the most potent instruments of their own oppression. Their first task ought to be to purge themselves of this imposed and destructive identity” (26). It is also of vital importance to mention the following explanation of recognition to get a better understanding of its weight and inevitable power. According to Taylor, “Within these perspectives, misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need” (26).

Literary works, which narrate the stories of subaltern groups and the oppressed, include a wide variety of motifs on the subjects of humiliation, pain, and suffering. It is precisely these subjects which have given rise to trauma studies. Works of trauma studies are , “cultural investigation[s] that came to prominence in the early-to-mid 1990s”, and predominantly focus on ‘real-world’ issues such as history, politics, and ethics” (Craps, Buelens 1+).

For Cathy Caruth, a leading name in trauma studies, “history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (Craps 191+). The predominant role of history in political and cultural analyses of societies and link to trauma studies can be appreciated in light of Caruth’s description of history and the role she assigns to it. She claims that critics can “gain access to extreme events and experiences that defy understanding and representation” through analyzing “cultural artifacts that bear witness to traumatic histories”. The modes of analysis which she finds suitable for such a profound task are psychoanalysis and deconstruction. (Craps, Buelens 1+)

Caruth, celebrating the importance of epistemological focus and history, connects the role of history in political and cultural analyses of societies to trauma studies for the sake of a better comprehension of different cultures. For Caruth, traumatic experiences are responsible for the “isolation [of] both individuals and cultures.” She argues that our world is a deeply traumatized one, what she calls a “catastrophic age”, and further points out that “the language of trauma... [with] its mute repetition of suffering”, offers a new possibility for creating a path between “disparate historical experiences... [thus] contributing to cross-cultural solidarity and to the creation of new forms of community.” For Caruth, the possibility for such a bridge comes through the act of listening to the traumatic stories of others. (qtd in Craps and Buelens 1+)

The need of the oppressed to be heard and “the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit” (Craps, Buelens 1+), are the most important driving forces behind the rise of the “reconceptualizing post-colonialism as a post-traumatic cultural formation” (qtd in Craps and Buelens 1+).

Despite its “stated commitment to the promotion of cross-cultural ethnical engagement” (Craps, Buelens 1+), trauma studies is criticized for its one-sided focus which “ignore[s] or marginalize[s] non-Western traumatic events and histories and non-Western theoretical work,” and for its “perpetuation of Eurocentric views and structures that maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world” (Craps, Buelens 1+).

Novels produced by or about people with traumatic experiences, such as “dispossession, forced migration, diaspora, slavery, segregation, racism, political violence and genocide” (Craps, Buelens 1+) give us the opportunity to access “the suffering engendered by colonial”

(Craps 191+) and diasporic oppression. Craps particularly mentions the work of British-Caribbean writer Caryl Phillips, insofar as Phillips introduces both black and Jewish protagonists, all “struggling traumatic memories of racist or anti-Semitic violence and oppression” (191+).

Phillips associates his characters with oppression and resistance, two factors that become a way for him to construct a variety of identities all marked by trauma. He puts his reader in contact with a wide range of black and Jewish characters all suffering from traumatic memories of oppression and violence, a common theme in diasporic history and narratives. As Sarvan and Marhama describe Phillips, he is “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 common and eternal human inheritance of pain and suffering” (40).

As Craps states in her article “Linking Legacies of Loss: Traumatic Histories and Cross-Cultural Empathy in Caryl Phillips’s *Higher Ground* and *The Nature of Blood*”, the experiences of a wide range of characters introduced to the readers in both *Higher Ground* and *The Nature of Blood* requires reading on an ethical dimension. *Higher Ground* is described as “a haunting triptych of the dispossessed and the abandoned of those whose very humanity is being stripped away” (Craps 191+). In the novel, the reader is met with three different stories. The first part “Heartland” tells the story of an unnamed African interpreter and agent working for a British slave-trading fort in the late eighteenth century. In the second part, “The Cargo Rap”, the reader meets Rudy Williams, a young black American imprisoned in a high-security prison for armed robbery. In his letters to his ex-wife, mother, brother, and sister, we get insight into his inner world, traveling with him as he questions his place and existence and as he loses hope and self-respect. He also conveys how he despises white, as well as, captivity “in a primitive capitalist state” (*Higher Ground* 66), ignorance, shortage of justice, white education, white danger ruining black identity, violation of private space, the myth of racial harmony, etc. Besides his hatred and outrage, he also conveys his ideas regarding the necessity of self-consciousness, self-awareness and female influence required in the African society of the future. “Higher Ground”, the last part is the story of Irina, “a Jewish refugee from Poland who escaped the Nazis on a children’s transport to England, and Louis, a West Indian man whom Irina meets hours before he is to return from London to Caribbean, disillusioned with British society” (Craps 191+). Through her story, the reader is presented with the meaning of being hurt, destruction of family, survival, disconnectedness, racism, insecurity, loneliness and hopelessness.

Crossing the River (1993), opens with the “shameful intercourse” of an African father, who exchanges his three children with money. Throughout four sections, Phillips introduces the lives of these scattered children to us. The first section “The Pagan Coast” invites the reader to meet Nash, a missionary slave sent to Liberia. Through his letters, we witness his quest back to his nativeness. The second part “West” shares the story of Martha, as a mother dreaming to find her daughter sold into slavery. Her end is no different from Nash’s, she dies. The third part is the collection of James Hamilton’s notes as the captain of a slave ship. The fourth section, “Somewhere in England” takes place during the World War II. The protagonist Joyce falls in love with Travis after her divorce. Travis and Joyce have a baby, Greer, who is later adopted. Travis shares the same end with his brother and sister, dying albeit in Italy. *The Nature of Blood*, as Craps states,

follows an even more winding path through space and time, exploring the Nazi persecution of the Jews of Europe through the story of Eva Stern, a young German Holocaust survivor; retelling the story of Othello, the Moorish general brought to Venice to wage war against the Turks; recounting the story of a blood libel and the ensuing public execution of three Jews in a town near Venice in the late fifteenth century; and following the life of Stephan Stern, Eva's uncle, who left Germany in the 1930s to help found the state of Israel where in his old age he has a brief encounter with Malka, an Ethiopian Jew suffering racism at the hand of her white coreligionists. (Craps 191+)

The words, motifs and themes which form the foundation of Phillips's novels help us appreciate the similarity and the relation between the black and Jewish experience of diaspora. The physical and psychological captivity of African slaves and black convicts in 1960s America is, as Craps expresses, "made explicit by the protagonists of the second section, who, in letters to his relatives and would-be legal representatives, constantly filters his own situation through the prisms of both the Holocaust and African American slavery" (191+). In her essay, she emphasizes this connection as expressed through words and phrases in the protagonist's essays.

Rudy repeatedly uses Holocaust terminology to describe his own experience of incarceration, calling the prison in which he is kept 'Belsen'; referring to the wardens as 'the Gestapo Police'; and wondering, while being held in solitary confinement with twenty-four-hour light, whether 'in Nazi Germany they used to keep the lights on as a form of torture'. He also employs images of slavery to depict his detention, and black US citizenship in general, as similar states of imprisonment. For example, he regards the US as a 'plantation society' in which emancipation has yet to happen. Having been released from the maximum-security wing into the main prison population, he writes, 'Restrictions still apply, but to me they are as welcome and as liberal as the emancipation proclamation that we have yet to hear'. Rudy's current predicament and the past experience of slavery are linked most memorably in the deranged letter to his dead mother with which this section ends, which brings prison life and plantation atrocities together in a hallucinatory fusion. (Craps 191+)

Craps also expresses her appreciation for the links between different characters in *The Nature of Blood*. She claims the parallels to be "numerous and conspicuous" (191+), and cites the departures of German Jew Eva and black Ethiopian Jew Malka as a supportive factor. Malka's memory of "being 'herded ... on the buses' and being 'stored like thinning cattle' on the Israeli embassy compound, where she and the other Ethiopian Jews were left to 'glaz[e] on concrete' before being air-lifted to Israel" parallels Eva's portrayal of "the people treated like cattle" and the image of "crowded boxcar trains "in which she and her parents had been forced to travel, like animals, to the concentration camp" (Craps 191+). Moreover, the prejudice and suspicion that Malka suffers in Israel and Eva suffers in England frustrate both Malka's and Eva's hopes to rebuild their lives.

Craps describes the similar experiences of two other characters to support her argument, Stephen Stern and the African General symbolizing Othello.

Both characters leave behind their homeland, a wife, and a child to start a new life in a different country. Each passes through the island of Cyprus, on the border between the East and the West, and forms a romantic attachment across the color line. Moreover, each is deluded by a naive idealism: Stephan is disappointed to find that the new homeland for which he had fought as a young man and that he had imagined as a haven for ‘the displaced and the dispossessed’ is not free from exclusionary practices; Othello similarly underestimates the forces of nationalism and racism militating against his dream of being accepted into Venetian society and beginning ‘a new life of peace’, although he, unlike Stephan, does not quite seem to have realized this yet when his narrative suddenly breaks off. (Craps 191+)

Phillips, one of the most influential novelists of our day, points to the surprisingly similar experiences of humanity, and invites his reader “to recognize a common human essence that persists across space and time” (Craps 191+). Phillips primarily aimed to reveal the fact that “differences between people ... are to be only skin-deep” (Craps 191+). He asserts that “[t]he equation between different historical experiences ... can be interpreted as evidence of Phillips’s adherence to the confident humanist universalism...” (qtd. in Craps 191+). Another motive that drives Craps to claim this may be Phillips’s effective first-hand narration, in other words his “inhabit[ing] the minds and voices of his characters”. “It seems as if neither chronological or spatial distance nor race or gender differences are allowed to set limits to the power of the sympathetic imagination, which goes inside the characters, no matter how deeply they may be traumatized, without meeting any obstacles” (191+). Thanks to Phillip’s embracing the common experiences and traits of separate people in distance space and time, Phillips’s works are of great importance when it comes to insights into the vulnerable personalities and memories of people who have to endure various historical catastrophes.

On the one hand, Phillips is appreciated for his remarkable success in bridging “the divide between the outside and the inside”, for offering his reader “a glimpse of what otherwise remains ‘secret and inaccessible’”, and for envisioning “a unique interaction between one and the other for the sake of a basic continuity of human experience” (Craps 191+). On the other hand, his works are criticized by some trauma theorists such as LaCapra, Bennette and Mantel. Mantel, for example, objects that the author, a Black male from Britain, affects “the voice of a white female Jewish victim of the Holocaust”, and further disapproves to the novels “juxtaposition” of the sufferings of the Jews and blacks, insofar as such a proximity threatens to level them. (Craps 191+) She writes:

This is the devil's sentimentality: it is demented coziness, that denies the differences between people, denies how easily the interests of human beings become divided. It is indecent to lay claim to other people's suffering: it is a colonial impulse, dressed up as altruism. The heart may be pure, but more than heart is

needed; good motives sometimes paralyze thought. (qtd. in Craps 191+)

Benedicte Ledent, however, objects Mantel's point of view and accuses her criticism of being racist and of encouraging a "literary tribalism" which assaults artistic freedom.

... in taking the Holocaust as his subject, and in writing much of the novel in the voice of a white Jewish woman, Mr. Phillips also challenges the current literary tribalism, pervasive in this age of identity politics, that would mark off black experience as the domain of blacks, restrict the telling of women's lives to other women, and leave the Holocaust to the Jews. (qtd. in Craps 191+)

Ledent goes further and claims that "a black writer receives censure for conduct that is considered acceptable when displayed by white writers like Thomas Hardy, Tolstoy, or Shakespeare" (qtd. in Craps 191+).

I argue that identity is not only how we see ourselves but also a collection of our interaction with others. As Charles Taylor states, "human identity is created dialogically, in response to our relations, including our actual dialogues, with others" (7). Since every individual has a notion of identity and belonging, and this notion can only be achieved through attempts in establishing links between self and the other, multi-dimensional descriptions of identity from different point of views can only contribute to the construction of that notion. As Craps puts it, "we should stand against the simple and undifferentiated continuity of 'blackness' or of the black experience across the ages" (191+).

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-recognition. (Hall 286)

Moreover, Phillips's interest in the Jews can be best understood in the light of his background in Britain. In an essay, he states: "As a child, in what seemed to me a hostile country, the Jews were the only minority group discussed with reference to exploitation and racialism, and for that reason, I naturally identified with them" (qtd. in Craps 191+). Through his courageous attempt to describe the persecution of the Jews he, in a way, intends to shift light on his own history: "The bloody excesses of colonialism, the pillage and rape of modern Africa, the transportation of 11 million black people to the Americas, and their subsequent bondage were not on the curriculum, and certainly not on the television screen. As a result I vicariously channelled a part of my hurt and frustration through the Jewish experience" (qtd. in Craps 191+).

In the pages in which Phillips tells Eva's story, he invites the reader to gain insight into the world of a refugee who had to experience the worst atrocities, humiliation and fear caused during the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Not surprisingly, the successful portrayal of Eva, a Holocaust survivor, Phillips's performance was appreciated by J.M. Coetzee, who remarked that the "pages of Eva's story seem to come straight from hell, striking one with appalling

power” (qtd in Craps 191+). For Craps, “[t]his power derives at least in part from the experimental modes of representation that Phillips employs in these sections of the novel, which register the shocking and unassimilable nature of the traumatic historical events they portray” (191+). The following lines are of great importance to comprehend the destructive influence of the fear and dehumanization process that the Holocaust survivors had to go through.

... And it is a dark night. I lie suspended without sound, without sight, without distraction. Focusing on myself and my fears. Worried about everything. Simply about everything. The tinned meat. A layer of lard on top, the meat underneath. Should I eat it? Can I eat it? And does the weight of the dead add itself to the earth? And if so, will the earth stop moving? Will it? Mama. Papa. There is not even a place where I might wear an uneven circle into the matted grass around your graves. 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. The rediscovery of smell. The smell of a tree. The smell of damp. The smell of rain. I worry about smell. A flower’s perfume would knock me over. I worry about everything. (*The Nature of Blood* 32)

The Nature of Blood is different from other novels by Phillips in terms of structure. It is a collection of narratives without chapter headings and any certain sequence of events. The first narrative introduces Eva Stern, a Holocaust survivor who has experienced the horror and oppression of a Nazi camp. The second is a third person narration telling about the bloody and inhuman acts the Jewish people were exposed to in Portobuffole during the fifteenth century. Before the fourth narration in which we learn about Eva’s uncle, Stephan, who leaves his family in 1930 to establish Israel, (and ends in Israel), we are presented with a narration reminding us of Shakespeare’s Othello with slight differences. The pessimism and psychological destruction that echo throughout the writing of Phillips are brought to light in the following lines:

It was a long hot summer that second year, and the heat served only to increase the stench and the sadness. People continued to fall dead in the street from starvation, but an increasingly common practice was the taking of one’s own life, and that of one’s family. Jumping from a high window was a popular individual method, while rat poison administered to food was a common way of dispatching a household at one sitting. By utilizing these and other procedures, one remained master of life and death. A precious gift. (*The Nature of Blood* 66)

This dehumanization period inevitably causes the Jews to grow the feelings of self-contempt and loss of self-respect.

‘Some among us are behaving like animals but we are human beings.’
And then he lowered his eyes. Papa’s heavily fortified personality lay in ruins.

‘It is written in the Holy Books,’ he began, ‘that a time will come when the living shall envy the dead.’ (*The Nature of Blood* 67)

The wide variety of historical and cultural settings gives the reader the opportunity to share their deep frustration and their inability and impossibility to connect with the society in which they live. Eva’s alienation from her community not only weakens her but also enfeebles the image of her past, present and the future in her mind.

... Cunning was a skill worth acquiring. As was endurance. Community formed the basis of our lives, but then came the long march, and yet another train, and then this place, which offered not community, no planning, no hope for survival. No work. Merely death. And waiting. And here, without community, without routine, only the strongest can survive. Everyday I have stared death in the face. To become weak is to disappear. And eventually I felt myself becoming different. we have forgotten how to think of tomorrow.

...

The sun rises, gloriously ignorant of the fact that a new day is not necessarily a good day. As though I want to survive. I remind myself that this sunrise has already happened in some other place. And later, our sunset will be somebody else’s sunrise. (*The Nature of Blood* 17-18)

The Holocaust survivors’ lack of the opportunity to identify themselves with a particular society gives them twin burdens of disconnection and insecurity. In addition to their loss of self-respect, hope, home, the repetition of unbearable humiliation and deprivation positions the reader in close proximity to the suffering of Holocaust victims.

Papa had already been forbidden to practise medicine,... . Like Papa, he [Papa’s friend] was no longer permitted to practise as a doctor and, his elderly mother apart, had no family. What else was there?

There was humiliation. There was the daily anxiety of being easy prey to groups of men who ran through the streets yelling slogans. There was the fear of being betrayed by the gesture, a slip of the tongue, or an accent. There was waiting and worrying. There was the constant bullying. [Remove your hat!] ... There was blackmail. And everybody dreamt of escape to America. But in the meantime, there was humiliation. Forbidden to ride on a trolley-car. Forbidden to sit in a park. Permitted to breathe. Permitted to cry. (*The Nature of Blood* 85-86)

The conversation of the mother with her daughters in the novel helps Phillips challenge the popularized and essentialized image of the Jews as figures less than human, in other words animals, and supports his refusal to portray Eva, Margot and the mother as characters totally isolated from daily life, and from the context of issues of gender and society current to their lives.

Three boys had pushed me and kicked me and called me names, but it appeared that all Mama wanted to talk about were her daughters. About how different we were from each other, and how I was the more studious and determined, and Margot the more fanciful. And then, when Margot returned from her club, the three of us sat together and Mama told us about the problems of young girls, and how they differed from the problems of young boys. And then, looking closely back at Margot, she began to share with us her understanding of the many difficulties of love, and other advice as to how best to cope with boys. (*The Nature of Blood* 89)

One of the common characteristics of Phillips's protagonists is their questioning their identity, as aforementioned, and the notion of home, in other words, the need to belong somewhere. Regardless of their color, gender, social and historical background, all his characters suffer from the ambivalence of belonging and unbelonging. For his characters, the search for a place to belong, namely home, "is a word that is often burdened with a complicated historical and geographical weight" (*Necessary Journeys* 6). Driven out of their places all the marginal characters in Phillips's novels,-women, blacks, African Americans and Jews-are forced to inhabit multiple places, develop multiple consciousnesses and reshape their notion of home. "The old world is dead. The survivors are here. Up there, gathered together on a hillside in Cyprus. The new world is just beginning, Moshe. And you are a part of it" (*The Nature of Blood* 9).

This reshaped image of home, however, causes no relief but burden, uncertainty and humiliation.

I could smell food and I now wanted to eat. Not this food. I wanted to eat the food that my wife would cook for me when I came home from the university at the end of the day. Waiting for me with our small daughter. In the old country. Before Palestine. Before America. In the old country, sitting with student friends in one of the small bars near the apartment. ... We had a country into whose life we slipped like a hand into a glove. I remember. ... We now had to sit at the back, near the door. (*The Nature of Blood* 9-10)

Identifying with a particular place and having a specific place in the world are of vital importance to having a direct connection with lived life. Phillips, in his novel *Crossing the River*, reveals this vital link between having a place and having one's own life through the protagonist's observations of other's lives.

The fronts of their houses were often blown clean off, leaving the furniture still arranged, books and crockery in place. In one house, a hole in the back of a cabinet, that must have been previously hidden against a wall, was now revealed for all to see. Nearly, everybody's roofing slates had slid down and into the street, exposing sad, gaping lattice work. Some had been really unlucky. The insides of their houses had collapsed, mixing bricks, wood and glass with papers, curtains and clothes. (*Crossing The River* 183)

Their longing for the familiar voices of home is the ultimate wish of all driven out of their home; in other words, they desire to return to the homeland. In diaspora studies, “leaving home” and “returning home”, known as the “myth of return”, are of central focus because the notion of home goes beyond being a place to inhabit but becomes a metaphor for self-identification, rootedness, belonging and connection to one’s past, present and future. As in the case of the unnamed African protagonist in the novel *Higher Ground*, his loss of boundedness to his people and territory leaves him unnamed, a metaphor for the loss of self-consciousness, which results in alienation from his own culture. The conversation between the African interpreter and the village girl sold to the British emphasizes the “contamination” and “moral corruption” that the black people underwent during the diasporic experience.

Rudi’s questioning of his identity, however, differs from Nash’s quest in terms of his resistance against white imposition of black identity and his outrage. Unlike Nash’s submission to the supremacy of Christianity and white dominance, Rudi rejects the possibility of a middle path. In his letters, he voices anger at his family members who do not mind being “a slave, behave[ing] like a slave, live[ing] and die[ing] like one” (*Higher Ground* 73). Rudi also rejects the traditional black role assigned by white oppression as “the lazy, shiftless nigger” (*Higher Ground* 75). His description of the “African identity” is of importance to voice the suffering of African people in general.

Name: Home Africanus / *Occupation:* Survivor / *Age:* 200-300 years / *Parents:* Africans captured and made slaves / *Education:* American Schools Life / *Distinctions-Awards:* Breath in my body / *Recreation:* Nor 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 grey hair on his grey body. I swear to God (a God) the man wasn’t scared[.] (91-92)

A parallel reading of Rudi’s and Nash’s stories gives us an insight into Phillips’s realistic perception of slavery, Africa as homeland and the “myth of return”. Divorced from romanticisation, Phillips aims to reconstruct black identity in light of multiple identities developed by black people during the absence of identity-consciousness. The following passage takes place at the end of “Heartland”, and helps the protagonist convey their ultimate goals; the notion of returning home as strictly dependent on the development of self-consciousness and cultural identity.

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. (*Higher Ground* 59-60)

For Hall, however, what these diasporic characters dream about is not the literal Africa, but an “imagined community” which exists symbolically. (Hall 20) Given the common suffering of

diaspora, it is not surprising that Rudi, Nash and the collaborator, all struggling to construct cultural identity and develop the image of home, have failed. In his book *Caribbean Discourse: Reversing and Diversion*, Edward Glissant emphasizes the impossibility of identity development when one is obsessed with the notion of “pure Africanism”. Stuart Hall mentions the organic nature of history and its close relation with identity development. “The past is not waiting for us back there to recoup our identities. *It is always retold, rediscovered, reinvented.* We got out our own past through history, through memory, through desire, not as a literal fact” (qtd. in Walters 36). At this point, Phillips’s perception of black identity is worth mentioning. Phillips rejects the idea of a pure African race, and regards it as a paraphrased expression of black essentialism established by whites. According to Phillips, “race is scientifically a matter of a few physical characteristics that bear no relationship to intelligence or behaviour” (*A New World Order* 16).

In Phillips’s novels, the concepts of returning home and origin are symbolized by certain characters. Just like Rudi and Nash, who desperately want to see their mothers, Martha associates the image of her daughter with her vision of home.

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. (*Crossing the River* 94)

Besides African protagonists in search for a “home”, Phillips also invites his reader to share the Jewish experience of dislocation. In the novel *The Nature of Blood*, the notion of home simply refers to the Promised Land. While Uncle Stephen is strictly loyal to the possibility of the Promised Land, Eva’s parents take this term with a grain of salt. For them, it is only the “so-called Promised Land” (*The Nature of Blood* 73). Additionally, for Eva, “home is a place where one feels a welcome” (37). At the end of the novel, however, the notion of home remains indefinable.

To conclude, in analyzing Phillips’s novels, the presentation of the experiences of a wide range of characters and the typical notions related to Phillips’s protagonists, provide an important reminder of attending to the political and cultural context in which the diasporic elements, construction of home and identity, develop similarities. Caryl Phillips, who introduces a new perspective to the issue of diasporic identity in relation to traumatic experience, aims at the reconsideration of issues such as cultural identity followed by the achievement of individual identity, belonging, and loss of human intellect. As Jonathan Rutherford emphasizes, it is a sense of personal integrity that can lead us to self-representation and recognition, which is home and belonging (24). As Jeffrey Alexander explains, cultural trauma is caused by an atrocious event which scars the lives of the “members of a collectivity” insofar as the group consciousness is permanently stained by the

memory of that event, thereby altering their identities in “fundamental and irrevocable ways”(1).

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