

DIÁSPORA IN CARYL PHILLIPS'S *A DISTANT SHORE*

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ABSTRACT: Diaspora theory is at present one of the most important items in Postcolonial discourse since it deals not only with pretransnational events but comprises current movements and events culminating in transculturation, identity and hybridity. Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*, published in 2003, portrays the diaspora phenomenon in the refugee and job-seeking modality in the case of the African Solomon/Gabriel who tries to find refuge and solace in an "imaginary welcoming" place called Britain, rife with racism and sexual bias. The Negro's awareness of homelessness is based on the historical colonial premises of diversity, othering and degradation. Paradoxically a different type of diaspora and homelessness is also felt by white British people in their own homeland. Even though circumstances have sometimes produced a breaking down of bias barriers, othering through loneliness and the overall environment against the different person create an unstable topos for the already split subjects. The tragic end of Solomon and the process of deeper frustration in Dorothy Jones seem to reveal not only a dead end in the friendship between these two different subjects but also symbolize, with its doubled loneliness and suffering, the fragmentation of the individual, Black or White, in a transnational world.

KEYWORDS: Diaspora; Caryl Phillips; Homelessness; Imaginary places; Othering; Split subject.

DIÁSPORA EM "UMA MARGEM DISTANTE", DE CARYL PHILLIPS

RESUMO: A diáspora e a teoria da diáspora são atualmente importantes itens discutidos nos Estudos Pós-coloniais, já que trata-se não apenas dos eventos pré-transnacionais mas também de acontecimentos que compreendem a transculturação, a identidade e o hibridismo. O romance

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Uma margem distante, de Caryl Phillips, publicado em 2003, retrata o fenômeno da diáspora em sua modalidade de tema sobre refugiados e procura de emprego referente ao africano Gabriel/Solomon. O refugiado africano procura abrigo num “lugar imaginariamente aconchegante” chamado Inglaterra, abarrotado de preconceitos sexuais e racistas. A consciência de estar-sem-lar do negro está baseada na premissa colonial histórica da diversidade, outremização e degradação. Outro tipo de diáspora e condição estar-sem-lar pertence paradoxalmente a certas pessoas, as quais, embora nascidas na Inglaterra, sentem-se deslocadas em seu próprio país. Embora às vezes algumas circunstâncias tenham causado a derrocada das barreiras do preconceito, a outremização como efeito da solidão e o ambiente hostil contra o outro criam um *topos* instável para sujeitos já fragmentados. Parece que o fim trágico de Solomon e o processo de frustração em Dorothy revelam não apenas o fim da amizade entre os dois sujeitos, mas também simbolizam a fragmentação do indivíduo, negro ou branco, num mundo transnacional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Diáspora; Caryl Phillips; Estar-sem-lar; Lugares imaginários; Outremização; Sujeito fragmentado.

STRANGERS IN FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS

Diaspora is perhaps one of the most harrowing historical facts in human history, with special regard to colonialism, and a crucial item in Post-Colonial Theory. In all literary post-colonial representations diaspora, displacement, home, identity, hybridity, transculturation, just to mention a few, are so linked up that it is practically impossible to analyze one without the other. It has also been a fact that the diaspora issue may be probably a common denominator in nearly all novels written in English, by British writers and by writers hailing from Britain's ex-colonies. Migrant populations in Britain are no novelty and a culturally diverse landscape in Britain is a fact. What is perhaps new in these post-colonial novels depicting shifting of borders, crossings and cultural fusion is the experience felt by othered populations of being in an identity maelstrom due to the effects and residues of slavery and of frustration when confronted with a still biased world.

Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* (2003) fits within diasporic writing that has become part of the mainstream British novel such as *The Pickup*, by Nadine Gordimer, *Transmission*, by Hari Kunzru, *Small Island*, by Andrea Levy, *Brick Lane*, by Monica Ali, *White Teeth*,

by Zadie Smith and *The Translator*, by Leila Aboulela. The diaspora theme has given emphasis to a number of different historical and cultural contexts and makes important interventions into how the literary landscape of Britain is imagined in the present.

A Distant Shore (2003) is the seventh novel by Caryl Phillips (born in St. Kitts in 1958), set in present day Britain, with analeptic episodes from Africa and from Britain, and deals with illegal migration, ethnicity, miscegenation, class transgressions, petty but lethal bias. The story explores the tentative friendship between Dorothy, an English lady and retired music teacher in her fifties, and 30-year-old (Gabriel) Solomon, a refugee from a war-ravaged African country. The two “meet” in a modest housing development of a northern English town where she lives and he works as a watchman. Their sporadic meetings turn out to be, for her part, a sort of therapy to surpass a mid-life crisis and, for his part, a help with racist threats from local white young people. However, the real action occurs in the past and with the personal histories of both in apparently jumbled up reminiscences shifting in place, time and point of view. The novel ends with the murder of Solomon by hooligans and with Dorothy’s struggle for saneness and comprehension.

The novel is divided into five parts with a constant alternation of focus. Whereas Dorothy is focused in the first, third and fifth part, the second and fourth parts belong to Solomon. On the other hand, the first, fourth and fifth parts focus present events and are first-person narratives. Parts two and three give detailed accounts of the protagonists’ past with a mixture of uncertain voices. The aim of this research is to analyze the effects of diaspora in Solomon, born in a civil war-torn country, and the similar shattering consequences of a white British lady in her struggle within and flight from loneliness. Going beyond the slave triangle scheme represented in *Crossing the River* and *Higher Ground*, Phillips delves into the problem of displacement and bias so that the modern problem of Negro identity and complex living could be focused upon and given voice.

2 DIASPORA

‘Diaspora’ is a term coined from the Greek verb *diaspeirein* (δια = from one side to another; σπειρειν = to spread), to disperse. It has been defined as an event “of catastrophic origin, [resulting in] the forcible dispersal and the estrangement of diasporic people in their places of settlement” (COHEN, 1997, p. 177). Since Antiquity the archetype of the

diaspora has been the Jewish Diaspora, referring to the Jewish communities among the Gentiles between the Babylonian Exile from the 8th Century B. C. E. and after the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E and the revolt of Simon bar Kochebah in 135 C.E. Although technically the term refers to the Jewish communities settled outside Palestine between the last century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., our analysis is a departure from the traditional diasporic literature and a refusal to see the Jewish diaspora as an archetype of the modern meaning of the term.

The two historical phases concerning the diaspora are placed respectively in the Modern and the Contemporary Periods. The Pre-transnational Diaspora occurred in the Modern Period (1500-1900) and involved the eleven million slaves transported from Africa to the New World (THOMAS, 1997) and the millions of indentured laborers, generally from India and Southeast Asia to the Caribbean during the late 19th century. The Transnational Diaspora has been occurring since the 1950s and is a late-modern world-wide phenomenon hitting First and Third World countries alike, albeit in a different manner (SPIVAK, 1996). The old or pre-transnational types of diaspora followed religious oppression, war, slavery, indenture labor, impoverishment by drought and famine of certain regions in some European countries (Ireland, Germany, Italy). The transnational diasporas are due to low-cost labor export, transport, border crossings, political asylum, job-seeking, trafficking in women, unemployment and sheer lack of opportunities in the homeland.

Defined as “multi-locale attachments, dwelling and traveling within and across nations” (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 306), the common features of a diaspora have been analyzed by Safran (1991) and may include some of the following items:

- (a) dispersal from a region or regions to foreign places;
- (b) collective memory (language, location, myths, history) of the original homeland;
- (c) ghetto-mentality as a consequence of partial non-acceptance of diasporic people by the host country;
- (d) mythologizing of the ancestral home;
- (e) insistence on the restoration of the ancestral homeland;
- (f) ethnic identity of the group within a foreign region.

The above features presuppose paradoxically (1) dual loyalty mentality towards home and towards the host country, (2) a sense of displacement and loss, and (3), according to Gilroy (1993) a great

possibility of intercultural exchange, cultures and identities. The diaspora described above is thus studied in the context of transnationalism and globalization (CORNWELL; STODDARD, 2001; MITTELMAN, 2001) as the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, decolonization, emancipatory social movements and, above all,

the profound technological revolution and information technology that created the conditions for increased cross-border communication and exchange, and, therefore, laid the basis for an expansion of economic transactions among states on a global scale” (HALL; BENN, 2001, p. 24).

However, the greatest cause for contemporary diaspora has been political conflict and strife in underdeveloped countries which have stimulated immense and complex flows of displaced persons, labor migrants and skilled professionals. Among the last, examples of opportunity-seeking diaspora people may be pinpointed. Their displacement may arise from traumatic situations or these may have triggered a pursuit of work and the seizing of opportunities to study or work abroad. In fact, recent global social movements of diasporic communities are the by-products of political upheaval and the collapse of political systems such as the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the massacres in Rwanda, the corruption in Nigeria, the end of apartheid in South Africa, the fall of various dictatorships and the employment crises in Latin America.

In the wake of globalization which by itself triggers an increase in social organizations, diversely denominated transnational, international, macro-regional, national, micro-regional, municipal and local, there are interstitial spaces inhabited by diaspora people, migrants, exiles, refugees, reaching a significant and certainly non-peripheral 80 million people. This latter fact indicates the centrality of the diaspora in its various forms (HALL, 2003; APPADURAI, 2003), shuns the notion of permanent rupture and shows a type of life style across national frontiers while bringing two societies into a single field which may constitute the formation of ‘transnational cultures’ (SMITH, 1991), ‘translocal *mélange* culture’ (PIETERSE, 2003), ‘hyphenated identities’ (LIPMAN, 1995) or ‘hybrid cultures’ (GILROY, 1993; BHABHA, 1998; HALL, 2003). Among the different types of world landscapes described by Appadurai (2003, p. 32), it seems that the most important for our current research is

ethnoscape, or rather, “the landscape of people who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers, and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree”.

Needless to say this brings us to the question of identity which may be viewed in two ways: (1) a concept of identity that unproblematically connects individuals who share some common trait or ‘identity’ as members of a particular group (ROUSE, 1995); (2) a second concept of identity as an “unstable formation constituted within webs of power relations” (NONINI; ONG, 1997, p. 24) and which is constantly negotiated and thus socially constructed (HALL, 2003; JACKSON; PENROSE, 1993). The latter is closely bound up with globalization since it is always negotiating a balance between global patterns and local conditions. Indeed, since diaspora incorporates metaphors of movement, it destabilizes ideas of essentialism, fixed identity and ethnocentricity (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1977).

At this point the terms nation and national consciousness are highly significant and at the same time elusive. Whereas national consciousness may be the shared image possessed by people living within any particular territory and boundaries (SHILS, 1995), Plamenatz (1973) further shows that national consciousness is a form of cultural identity in which one has a lively sense of what distinguishes one’s own from other people’s and includes the desire to preserve or enhance a people’s national and cultural identity when that identity is threatened or the desire to transform or recreate it where it is felt to be inadequate or lacking. Coining the term ‘imagined communities’, Anderson (1983, p. 15) argues that

nations are imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

On the other hand, they are indeed true communities because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship” (ANDERSON, 1983, p. 16). People in fact feel a sense of belonging to the nation. It is a “sense of unity, common solidarity and collective worth amongst the different peoples in a country and

securing their commitment to a set of ultimate national goals” (MUTALIB, 1994, p. 28-29).

3 VIOLENCE

Transnational diaspora is a postcolonial issue since it is the result of late capitalism’s reshuffling of populations, mixing of communities and deeply affecting changes in culture produced by the colonizers outside Europe. Part II of *A Distant Shore* is a stream-of-consciousness text in which Solomon, already in a prison cell in England, focuses on himself (as Gabriel) and on events occurring in the recent past in an unnamed African war-torn country in which he was born. A civil war is on: ethnically Gabriel is a member of the non-ruling tribe (and so a rebel) hunted by government soldiers. The text gives the reader a grim picture of civil war with its murders, cruelty, destroyed communities and shattered lives. After Gabriel being an eyewitness of the rape of his sisters and the murder of his family, events succeed quickly and logically: Gabriel finds his uncle Joshua, a broker in transference of refugees out of the country, urgently requires a life or death need to find two thousand dollars to flee the country, wounds and robs Felix, his former employer, even though the latter has been generous enough to help him, gives the money to Joshua to pay for his passage “beyond this nightmare and to a new place and a new beginning” (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 84).

Dealing with an African context, the terms country and identity are a construct of imperialism. The division of the country in several different districts with a somewhat unnatural distribution of peoples wrought not only havoc, as has been depicted in Lessing’s *This was the Old Chief’s Country*, Ben Okri’s *Laughter beneath the Bridge* and Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, but disrupted the ecological environment, displaced people to places they did not belong and constituted a hierarchy of tribes with concentric allegiances to the dominating European power. Even though he refrains from naming Solomon’s country, in an interview after the novel’s publication Phillips says that he had in mind Rwanda, Liberia, the Congo and Sierra Leone, notorious for their colonial residue which has caused suffering to the various communities owing to factions waging for power and control. Actually inter-tribal war was enhanced by the British so that a more effective control of the country could ensue for their own benefit. In fact, neither Gabriel nor anyone has ever been taught to close ranks with all factions for the greater benefit

and progress of the country's post-independence period. Colonialism has utilized the colonial subject for its own ends without any concern for the true development of his/her country.

Further, since throughout its history colonialism has been a violent issue, with violence only limited by strategic truces, colonized peoples were doubly motivated towards violence: appropriation of the weaker tribe by the ruling class and the introduction of the *comprador* mentality. In the first case, the bourgeoisie class or a smarter tribe or a privileged ethnic group appropriated itself of government power or economic power after the illusory demise of the colonial authorities and perpetuated the colonial rule in the same moulds as had been exemplified by the European colonial power.

We were the smaller tribe. We worked hard and we did not harm anybody. We tried to do what was best for ourselves and what was good for our young country. We wanted only to live in peace with our brothers, but it became clear that this was impossible. My father told me that they were jealous of us, for our people ran many businesses; not just in the capital city, but in our tribal land in the south. We formed the backbone of the economy, and therefore we had much influence (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 122).

Solomon's thoughts in his English prison reveal: (1) an irreconcilable we-and-they mentality: *we* means the ethnic group that has monetary power and *they* means the government (backed by the army) and the people, practically reduced to puppets in the hands of the monetary class; (2) an awareness of the natural trading instinct in a section of the population with the subsequent exclusion of the majority; (3) priority for what is best for the monetary ruling ethnic group and, perhaps as an afterthought, for what is best for the country; (4) an economical peace at the monetary ruling ethnic group's own exclusive terms; (5) the refusal of sharing the country's wealth among and benefiting the entire population. Therefore, when the 29-year-old Gabriel's father took him aside and explained to him their threatened position, he put into the young man's head the consolidation of a utopia of their own ethnic group and the urgent need to fight for such a cause. "For it is this day that we are dreaming of. It is this day that we are waiting for" (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 123). The country's good is forgotten and the ethnic group's paramount importance constituted as sole aim.

The novel also reveals the *comprador* or accomplice mentality in the government ruling class with its large foreign cars, constant traveling to Europe or to the United States, hosts of government female employees ("secretaries and typists") with a European mentality of whiteness and wealth, and imported products. A deep chasm exists in the ex-colony

between the former (actually the substitutes of the colonial authorities) and those that live on the outskirts of the capital city filled with corrugated tin shelters, rubbish dumps, tin-roofed slums, beggars and dirt. The countryside has been likewise abandoned by a government which ignores not only road repairs but the dire straits of “hundreds of displaced persons walking towards us with mattresses, cooking pots, and bundles of possessions on their heads” (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 124). On the microcosm plane, there is Felix, the hardware store owner, to whom Gabriel had been employed. Even though a member of the ruling ethnic group and class, Felix’s *comprador* mentality, simultaneously contemporizing with the government forces and with the rebels, has been up to now his safeguard in times of crisis and has saved him from further losses. However, he is mercilessly mowed down by his “friend” Gabriel in dire need of money to flee the country. In fact, overall corruption, violence for achieving one’s particular aims and the perpetuating of the status quo, residues from years of colonialism, trigger the diaspora and the illusion of a better life in the former colonizing country.

The aim of the rebel army, made up of young men, does not meet the demands of a revolution where things will be planned for a better democratic government, more benefits for the people, more employment and a sharing of wealth. The leader says:

We are fighting for a purpose. Our aim is to liberate our land from these unscrupulous men who hate us. They outnumber us two or three to one, but they are mosquitoes. They suck our blood, but you will be trained so that you can squash them (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 125).

Through the above and other passages in which the rebel ethnically minority army is described Phillips (2003) seems to show that lack of true planning, unprepared skirmishes, bloodthirstiness, effeminate leaders, sexually-minded and cannabis-moved soldiers make unviable a true revolution in which community-building will result. Beneath the rhetoric there is the objectification of the people and the old colonial hierarchization by the rebel group which will repeat what the colonizers did in the past. As the British mowed down all opposing forces in the one time colony, the rebel army, relinquishing all moral demands, kills innocent women and children, or rather, its own people, sometimes even those of its own

ethnic group or community. Further, Phillips seems also to denounce that the true aim is not the common good of the nation in the transitional post-independence period, but the exclusive selfish demands of an ethnic group that falsely equates itself with the entire nation.

When Gabriel deserts his post in the wake of a massacre undertaken by his squadron and led by his lieutenant Patrick, he does not take this decision out of pure ethic stance, but from rather selfish motivations.

Now I had little choice but to make my way back to the capital and warn my family. Everybody knew that these were my men, and it was clear that the government troops would blame me for this massacre and take revenge on my mother and father and two sisters. This was the shameful manner in which we conducted our war. [...] Long before the last bullets ceased flying, I had begun the long walk north towards the capital. To reach my mother and father and two sisters, this was now the full extent of my ambition (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 132-133).

Although the move turns up to be useless (his family had already been rounded up in their own house and, hidden in a cupboard, he witnessed the murder of all), Gabriel becomes aware, perhaps due to his maturing age, that an ethical position in war is impossible, that baser factors other than power are involved when the gate is open for violence, that the rebel authorities' real motives are precisely the same as those of the group they are trying to oust out.

Chaos, violence, selfishness and political pretexts mentioned above, coupled to the narrator's insistence on the youth of the soldiers, seem to indicate the analogous mirror phase suggested by Lacan (1977). Lacan constructed the "image stage" so that a full understanding of the formation of the "I" may be possible. The child recognizes its image in a mirror and an ideal-I, a fictive conception, founded on unstable grounds, is created which situates the agency of the ego before its social determination. Although situated at the beginning of the ego's development, it is a misapprehension since the image is a substitute image of the self and not the self itself. Colonialism, as a patriarchal, Other-centered, objectifying great narrative, manages to reproduce in certain sections of the fledging nation an image of itself. Due to privilege, ethnic superiority or force of arms certain sections of recent independent nations see themselves reflected in the mirror of

colonialism and appropriate themselves of power, corruption, spurious aims according to the colonial model they have experienced. The mirror upheld to the young nation produces a false and immature image of what a post-Independence community has to be, especially its hierarchized and exclusion attributes. The novel's episodes leading towards the exclusion social context, civil war and Gabriel's transnational diaspora may be explained by the disastrous imitation of the roles played by the colonial power in its heyday. The image is unstable and will never produce any community-building imperative for the young nation.

Further, since power as envisaged by Foucault (1975) and later by Said (1983) shows that 'truth' and what is 'true' depend on who controls discourse, it is reasonable to believe that the colonizer's domination of discourses has trapped the colonized subject inside the colonizer's 'truth'. Gabriel's father, a member of the small rich ethnic group dominating finance in the young nation, gives his own version of the current events. This is the 'truth' inculcated in Gabriel who, without the least questioning, problematization and verification, obeys. Even in a post-Independence situation, it boils down to the patriarchal voice embodying a surrogate colonial power, held to be 'true' and executed. This fact is corroborated by the rebel leader's speech on the truck. "We looked at this man and nodded" (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 125). The same stereotypes of power, persuasion and intimidation which had been used by the 'colonizers' are now employed by the surrogate section to make themselves obeyed by the feeble colonized peoples. Power is exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life to constrain all the people who are the first to undergo a violent displacement and diaspora. Thus, *A Distant Shore* reveals that the civil war between the more numerous tribes backed by government soldiers and the smaller, albeit money/trade-controlling ethnic group, is the true cause of diaspora since both factions try to perpetuate colonial attitudes in ideology and discourse. No feeling of belonging to a national community is revealed; the only feeling of belonging is to reproduce the privileges of the ethnic group for its own exclusive and selfish ends.

Through the "illiteracy of the imagination" (HARRIS, 1989, p. 18) ex-colonized cultures close on themselves, deny the other and experience the colonizer's legacy of hierarchization. Bhabha (1998) renames this fact as "the inversion dream" by which the colonized occupy the place of the colonizer in their construction of identity. However, it is easy for a community to dethrone an oppressor and it is equally easy for these dethroners to become the oppressors (HARRIS, 1989, p. 25).

4 'MIDDLE PASSAGE'

The 30-year-old Gabriel's "middle passage" from the African country to England is a replication, *mutatis mutandis*, of that of millions of slaves from the western coast of Africa to the New World during more than three hundred years. Similarities abound: the cramming, the indifferent and rude middlemen, thirst and hunger, dirty surroundings and resting places, the insecurity of the journey, the various modes of transport, all precarious, dangerous and risky, possible death, the constant possibility of being cheated. Since Gabriel's diaspora (northward and not westward) lies in a transnational context, differences exist. It is "willingly" done to escape revenge from the government army and not suffer the fate that befell his family, there is hope for settling in a better place, respect for the refugee is expected, a job may be had and one may start anew in a host country. In Phillips's novel hundreds are experiencing the diaspora for one reason or another. It seems that the most common reasons are political (like Gabriel, fleeing a war-worn country), cultural (like the beautiful Amma, raped and impeded to remain in the family) or social redress (like Bright who considers England as his home since he has been colonized by the British and speaks their language) motives. Actually, each one or together constitute ethnoscape, one of the global cultural flows described by Appadurai (2003), or rather, the panoramic irregularly-shaped environment of displaced and moving persons not from one place to another in the same country but worldwide.

The imagined community in which Gabriel lived has been shattered. The members of his tribe imagined a hierarchized community after the last British soldiers quitted their shores. The unnamed African country was imagined as a simulacrum divided into powerful finance/trade-manipulating tribes and powerless people ruled by a puppet government. The war and the massacres disrupted this imagined local community but its citizens, who cannot afford to let their imagination at rest, projected another imagined country, on a larger scale, to where they thought they belonged: the erstwhile metropolis. Perhaps this is the reason why Blight, Gabriel and Amma were heading 'home', or more exactly, to a reversed imagined community, expected to find refuge in her bosom.

I am an Englishman. Only the white man respects us,
for we do not respect ourselves. If you cut my heart
open you will find it stamped with the word 'England'.

I speak the language, therefore I am going to England to claim my house and my stipend. [...] I want to forget Africa and those people. I am an English man now. I am English and nobody will stop me from going home [...] Nobody (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 119).

The imagined post-Independence community was no more and a future imagined other, a Utopia, loomed overhead: it would be a country which respected the non-European, free from wars and barbarian deeds, a haven. The deterritorialization of Gabriel and the other refugees produces another identity. Actually a change of identity occurs and Blight may say “I am an Englishman now” and Gabriel, the fierce looking “Major Hawk”, may become the genteel Solomon, watchman of the innocuous Stoneleigh district. “One of the first gentlemen that I’d ever met” (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 56) is Dorothy’s remark with reference to his neatness, well-measured words and dignity.

5 “HOME”

The huge effort (physical sufferings in travel and enormous sums of money) that diasporic people expend to find a place from where to start life meets with counter-identity forces that actually baffle their expectations and sometimes defeat them. On Gabriel’s arrival in England he is confronted with a sexually-biased charge, imprisonment, a case of sheer lack of care by a policeman with regard to the fate of another non-European unjustly-held prisoner, a reticent lawyer, a feeling of insignificance and loneliness, threat letters, almost insurmountable difficulties in getting the right documents for permanence in the country and in getting a job, and finally, torture and death. Although Gabriel and his community reflect common historical experiences and cultural codes, the same history and ancestry, points of difference arise in England which, due to the diaspora, reveal what Solomon has become. Solomon’s identity has been formed by the diaspora in both a negative and a positive process. The negative process disrupts the imagined community produced by the imminence of the diaspora. His *anagnorisis* occurs in the words of his Iraqi cellmate: “The light in England is weak. It depresses me. They have taken the sun out of the sky” (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 71). During his trajectory from the south to the north of England he perceives that he is nobody, the English are either impatient “[the lawyer] Stuart Lewis does not look up at him. The man continues to shuffle through

a pile of papers in front of him [...] Stuart Lewis stands and begins to push the papers into the briefcase”, (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 143-144) or hate the outsider and especially the African ex-colonial “The man next to me will not speak with me. [...] But the man continues to stare resentfully out of the window and he refuses to meet my eyes. [...] He offers no thanks”, (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 264-265). Surely English people are biased, as Dorothy testifies when ruminating on her father’s and the teachers’ stance against the “hated coloured [subjects]” and the “cheeky little niggers”. This deeply-ingrained bias disrupts the notion of “home” and the “mother-country” envisioned by the refugee. Facing the racist hooligans, Solomon’s stream-of-consciousness runs:

I have noticed how they look upon my person, and I know they have anger towards me. They are blocking my way and laughing. In order to pass by I will have to walk within inches of the water, but this is dangerous and I do not trust them. [...] They decide to offer abuse in my direction. I turn and begin to retrace my steps, for I know that should I stand my ground, or attempt to sway this spiteful rabble with entreaties, my efforts will prove useless. But they follow me, and spit at my back, and they laugh (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 250-251).

However, the construction of a diasporic identity contests and subverts the imagined world and constructs a positive identity. Gabriel sheds his “murderous” identity and turns into the genteel Solomon. Whereas the razor-blades and hate letters he receives and the dog-mess placed in the letter box do not make him feel significantly angry, the quiet job as a watchman and as a voluntary driver demonstrates the result of a process that built up his diasporic identity: an honest, respectful and caring citizen, or rather, a contrast to other people’s hostile attitudes.

Actually, the new diasporic identity of the African Solomon challenges and subverts the native “civilized” Englishman and his actions. Solomon’s care for his cell-mate in London subverts the selfish and no-caring attitude of the policeman; Solomon’s respect for the ‘wild’ English girl Denise subverts the bias of the policemen who charged him with sexual assault; Solomon’s laughter becomes an antidote to racist attitudes; Solomon’s respectful meetings with Dorothy are a challenge to the former teacher’s messy marriage and her two disastrous flirting episodes; his sensibility to Mike’s

death is a contrast to the village hooligans responsible for his own murder; his gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, his benefactors, disrupts the ingratitude of the old man whom he drives to the hospital in his own car free of charge. The colonial experience which colonized people, including Solomon, had to undergo and by which it was normalized to see itself as other has been disrupted by a different diasporic identity. That inner subjective conformation to the colonial norm has been broken in Solomon. Although the past continues to speak to Solomon and may be constructed through memories, narrative and myth, as it actually does in his reveries, a break has occurred.

If Solomon's cultural identity in England is a continuity with the past, it is also a rupture from the past. After a short time Solomon obtains the necessary legal papers and becomes a British citizen. Does he belong to England? Is England his home? Even as a future hyphenated Englishman he must, sooner or later, come to terms with his ethnic presence. However, this presence has changed. The African country he has quitted is not the same and cannot be recovered as a pre-war or pre-colonization representation. There is no return. He is "trapped" in the European presence which boils down to exclusion, imposition and expropriation. Although Solomon states "I am a man who has survived, and I would rather die like a free man than suffer my blood to be drawn like a slave's" (PHILLIPS, 2003, p. 251), he is aware that the colonial power has become a constitutive factor in his experience. This panoptic awareness has been described by Fanon.

The movements, the attitudes, the glances of the Other fixed me there in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self (FANON, 1986, p. 109).

In *A Distant Shore* this dominant presence, represented by policemen, barman, hooligans, villagers, elderly people, albeit strong and deep, seems to have been surmounted by Solomon's diasporic identity who has acquired a new sense to deal with the past and the present. The imaginary community, the "home", however, cannot be fulfilled. Solomon was nipped in the bud. His tentative reach for recognition as a self, for equality, for relief from loneliness has been defeated in precisely the country of freedom and democracy.

6 IS THERE A LIGHT AHEAD?

The post-colonial novel in English of the late 20th century and of the first decade of the 21st century is fraught with the great diasporic problems that are continuously surfacing in the wake of globalization and transnationalism. The current displacement of peoples is a record not merely in sheer numbers but in its variety of causes, sufferings and transculturation. The Euro/US-centric vision and the European/non-European binary scheme are still victimizing peoples. It seems that, as foregrounded by Gilroy (1993) and Bhabha (1998), the colonial and the diasporic subjects with their syncretic dynamism that appropriates, carnivalizes and destabilizes the codes of the dominant culture, is one of the solutions for true globalization and Other-Other relationship.

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