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**BELONGING AND BROTHERHOOD IN THE ATLANTIC DIASPORA:
CROSSING THE RIVER AS A CASE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

This article concerns itself with exploring postmodern criteria of belonging to a liminal third space. It is thematically divided into two parts. The first historically surveys what it calls "the Existential Dilemma of Black Survival"; the attempts of the blacks to belong to the societies they live in and the reasons behind the estrangement they find. The second part features a substitute hybrid diasporic community in author Caryl Phillips' novel *Crossing the River*, where the Afro-descendants can comfortably belong. It studies the structure that reflects a movement across the borders not only of land but also of race and sex to ignore blood and history relations. The article details the web of relations prevailing diaspora to provide the warmth of brotherhood. Postcolonial and postmodern theories discuss how loneliness, survival and political and religious detachment create a transcultural identity.

Keywords: Diaspora, slavery, postcolonial, displacement, hybridity, liminal space, transcultural.

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As a system approving of trade slave, mercantilism, genocide, and ethnic cleansing, imperialism, even if not colonial or military, has generated millions of displaced people.¹ With the advent of imperial and colonial powers to the southern hemisphere of the earth, military terror and exile have benighted the lives of millions of Africans. By uprooting the Africans from their natural habitat, the African Continent, transplanting them into the Caribbean texture, and then offering

them low labor wages in the metropolis, Europe has created the Atlantic Diaspora. There are no exact numbers denoting Africans overseas; however, millions of African descendants reside now in the western part of the earth. Some of those are the offspring of mandatory deportation into the colonies of the Caribbean Islands and the New World while others were born in the West after their parents migrated in the wake of World War II.

Though the majority of the African descendants have chosen to integrate within the white societies they dwell in, so far, they have never been welcomed as equal but different human beings. The blacks living at the heart of the defeated Empire who have tried to acculturate themselves within the white culture of the metropolis have

¹Imperialism in this thesis follows Edward Said's definition of imperialism in his *Culture and Imperialism*. Said finds imperialism to be "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" (8). Imperialism usually brings colonialism, which is "the implementing of settlements on distant territory" (8).

been continuously excluded. A dilemma of survival marks the black presence and deprives it of the blessings of belonging. In his article "Our Strange Birth," the twentieth-century Black American writer, Richard Wright summarizes the abnormal history of black loss and expulsion:

We millions of black folk who live in this land were born into Western civilization of a weird and paradoxical birth. The lean, tall, blond men of England, Holland, and Denmark, the dark, short, nervous men of France, Spain, and Portugal, men whose blue and gray and brown eyes glinted with the light of the future, denied our human personalities, tore us from our native soil, weighted our legs with chains, stacked us like cord-wood in the foul holes of clipper ships, dragged us across thousands of miles of ocean, and hurled us into another land, strange and hostile, where for a second time we felt the slow, painful process of a new birth amid conditions harsh and raw. (Kearns 5-6)

After surviving the deaths of the middle passage, and the plantation slavery, African descendants have had to secure their lives and the future of their coming generations.

Politicized black movements succeeded in rallying the blacks and mobilizing them against the segregation governmental and secretive white authorities were engaged in to instill into the arena of social, political, and economic metropolitan life. Whether in slavery revolutions, black empowerment movements, or the Civil Rights Movement, the blacks sacrificed their blood on the altar of freedom and equality. Truly speaking, such upheavals and the like could bring them their constitutional rights and citizenship, yet they were incapable of obliging the white majority to accept the blacks into the common norms of the white culture. As a result, the black offspring is doubly denied belonging; Europeans once forced the Africans out of their Mother Land to faraway places separated from their continent by an unfathomable and a wide ocean to push them later on to the excluded corners of the host countries.

Belonging to a land is a human necessity whose lack causes a deficient emotional satisfaction. Belonging

is the need of human beings to belong to something larger than themselves, to be part of a community—of language, customs, tradition, and history—that gives a purpose to their striving as individuals. Belonging to a nation gives human beings a sense of being safe, of being understood, and of being free to create their futures as they see fit. These are deep and understandable longings. (qtd in Kohn, *Encarta Encyclopedia*)

Afro-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Black-Britons have achieved almost none of the afore-stated human prerequisites.

Several reasons are behind black exclusion with racism being the lead factor contributing to current disorientation. The construction of Western nationalism on the basis of entertaining Christianity as a religious dogma and whiteness as an ethnic marker is a reason. The failure of the blacks to be part of without being subsumed and the failure of the back-home expeditions are other ones.

Unfortunately, the arousal of European national consciousness at the end of the eighteenth century ignored completely imperial prejudice. The banners of equality, fraternity, and liberty as embraced by the French Revolution failed to speak on the part of those most affected by imperialism.

As a point of fact, the swell of nationalism in Europe witnessed "othering" other cultures as an integral part of building European nations.² The not-innocent triadic combination of politics, religion, and ethnicity kept the blacks out of the collective sentiments jointly held by the members of the majority group inhabiting the land. With the whites being the majority of the ethnically homogeneous national bulk, the European nation attached itself to the geographical territory over which it extended its body. Stipulating commonality of origin, history,

² "Othering" is a word coined by Gayatri Spivak to talk about an institutionalized process of denial on the part of the powerful cultures towards the imperialized ones. Check *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, Ashcroft et al. (171-173) for more information on "othering" and "others."

religion, and color to the admission into full membership and integration drew borders out which different groups with distinctive color and cultural customs settled. By establishing their own criteria of belonging on the premise of elevating ethnical difference rather than cultural interaction with other minorities on the land, the Europeans drew the destiny of millions of blacks as “others” who were better kept around the national homogeneous body. Exclusion has been since accompanied by Eurocentrism that has always been there to discriminate against the minorities, or those regarded as intruders.

Trying to find a place in a racist society, the blacks hopelessly adopted the patterns of Western culture and shied away from their own black ancestral legacies, but all was in vain. On the contrary, absorption of the metropolitan culture has helped only intensify the subordination of the blacks into dark ghettos suffering high rates of poverty, unemployment, and what followed later on: drug addiction and sexual violence. The African descendant, the American citizen, the British resident, and the Caribbean-by-birth author Caryl Phillips is deeply involved in examining cultural belonging out of his first-hand experience. He explains what his newly arrived parents did to integrate within the white majority and be accepted in the British society after they left the Caribbean for Britain in the post- World War II period:

Immigrants want to forget [their past] because they are so concerned with their kids becoming a part of the new World. They want them to become part of the new society, so they don't want them to remember where they came from. That's really what happened to me. My parents didn't talk about it, and it wasn't something that was taught at school. We weren't reminded that we were West Indians; we were reminded that we were black. (qtd. in Thomas 3)

The blacks have found hope in a mythical homeland they have been told they belong to. The children of diaspora, even when born in diaspora, indulge themselves in dreams about coming home, a home

in which all dreams come true and hardships have no place:

There was engendered in their souls a romantic yearning to return 'home' to a family and a place where they could be free from the stigma of race. They would be 'home' again, albeit in a strange and forbidden region where the language, climate and culture were now alien to them, but at least they would be 'home'. (Phillips, *Atlantic Sound* 113)

Such an ideology, the ideology of coming back home, was stirred and sponsored by some American institutions. Under theoretically benevolent frameworks, mass expulsion of the freed slaves took place at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the United States. The American Colonization Society, in full American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States, was established in 1816 by claimed-to-be-abolitionist Robert Finley. This institution claimed to re-root the African-Americans into their African homeland. It organized voyages of ships boarded by freed African-Americans to land them in Africa.

Subsequent waves of African returnees journeyed back "home" from diaspora in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to set foot on African shores with an image of Africa as an ideal heaven in mind. After passing through the cruel events of slave trade, colonial rule, and postcolonial experimentations, the Mother Continent has failed to satisfy the dreams of security and safety.

The returnees' fantasies were unfulfilled due to their inability to establish contact with the natives who in their return could never align themselves with the formers. Afro-Americans headed towards Africa while indeed they had no attachment to the Continent or to its people. In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips probes the issue of returning to Africa. He tells of the fantasy, the ignorance and the enthusiasm that blind the returnees from understanding the circumstances that have befallen their country for the last four centuries. With American civilization brands on, the returnees' are completely unaware of their identities being far from African. Wearing "Nike T-shirts, Kente scarves and belts, baggy jeans, backpacks" is an indication of

internalizing the fake superiority of American civilization and practicing it with the indigenous population (160). The African locals cannot welcome these superiorly-complex and culturally-brainwashed strangers:

They [African-Americans] come over, but they're not real. They don't speak the language, and the villagers laugh at them because they're trying to learn how to feel like an African. But they're not African, they're like me, African-American. A lot of their behaviour, consciously or subconsciously, is a criticism of the people they've settled amongst. (122)

Cruising the Atlantic Ocean helps the returnees seize not their homeland, the icon of perfection. It strengthens their sense of displacement and creates a cultural shock, though. These people are the People of the diaspora who expect the continent to solve whatever psychological problems they possess.

People of the diaspora who dress the part, have their hair done, buy beads, and fill their spiritual 'fuel tank' in preparation for the return journey to 'Babylon'. They have deep wounds that need to be healed, but if 'their' Africa fails them in any way, if 'their' Africa disappoints, then they will immediately accuse 'these Africans' of catering to the white man. The same white man that they work for in New York, or Toronto, or even Jamaica. Do they not understand? Africa cannot cure. Africa cannot make anybody feel whole. Africa is not a psychiatrist. (172-173)

"Whereas they [the old generations of diaspora] could sustain themselves with the dream of one day 'going home', we [the new diasporic generations] were already at home. We had nowhere else to go and we needed to tell British society this," says Phillips (*New Order* 242). This is in brief the plight of modern diasporic generations in white cultures stated by Phillips. By basing the argument on Phillips' 1993 novel *Crossing the River*, this article explores a contemporary approach to diaspora, homeland, and slavery depending on postcolonial and postmodern theories.

Crossing the River concerns itself with the story of African Diaspora in the parts of the globe around the Atlantic over the last two hundred and fifty years. The dispersion of the enslaved African population and their descendants is narrated in four separate episodes commenced by a prologue and followed by an epilogue.

The prologue introduces the African father whose voice laments the loss of his three children after he himself sells them to a European slave trader thereby marking the commencement of the African trauma. In the first episode, "The Pagan Coast," the readers meet Nash Williams, the freed ex-slave brought back to Africa under the auspices of the American Colonization Society in 1830. Martha Randolph's miserable life as a slave being repeatedly sold to different landowners, her escape, and her journey westward, are the events of the second episode, "West." The interracial marriage of Travis, the third child, his participation in World War II, and his tragic death in Italy, take place in the fourth episode, "Somewhere in England." The third episode is "Crossing the River" and it is narrated by a young white captain, Captain James Hamilton. As for the epilogue, it is to be discussed in the following excerpts in detail.

What fashions Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River* is a redeemed hope in a hybrid world felt in diaspora, which will hopefully end the existential dilemma of black survival. Backing this hope is a turning point in world formation where postcolonialism has imposed cultural hybridity as a norm together with geographic displacement. By alluding to cultural hybridity, we are referring to "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 118).

In *Crossing the River*, cultural hybrids are those people who carry African blood in their veins and are covered by an African skin, and at the same time they exist in the West and are obliged to interact with the common norms of Western culture. Taking into consideration Paul Gilroy's development of the concept of "black Atlantic" in his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, this novel's characters are the hybrids of two previously opposing cultures and of a

complete phase of historical human circulation. *Crossing the River* narrates the story of black diaspora and draws the features of a hybrid world that is actively engaged in collecting cultural patterns from the places that once witnessed footing of chained blacks on their lands.

The life of each character individually represents part of the history of black journey in time and place along with the sociological forces forming black existence. Commonality of African origin and slavery as an experience unify the three children as both the children of the same African father and the representatives of the estrangement crisis engulfing millions of African lives worldwide. Just like Nash, thousands of African slaves were disposed of and brought to Africa to build the new colonies of Liberia and Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century. His personal life stands for all of the lives of those slaves liberated in America and sent on-board the ship *Elizabeth* on "January 31st, 1820" or any other day leaving "New York for the west coast of Africa" (9). Similar to Martha were many runaway slaves who felt the pain of being forcefully separated from their beloved children and spouses at auctions. As a slave, a runaway, and a pioneer, Martha represents thousands of pioneers who went in the nineteenth century on a voyage for the promised land of California in search for liberty and humanity.³ Travis is part of the American troops recruited in England to fight the Nazi regime in World War II. By participating in World War II, Travis is one of thousands of the African descendants who arrived in Britain from the Caribbean Islands and other Commonwealth countries to join the armies of the Allied Powers in both World War I and World War II hoping for being granted a forbidden admission.

The episodic narrative mirrors the fragmentation of the blacks across the continents. Just like the blacks who do not have a particular home, the narrative has no center. It hovers over geographically different spaces. The third episode, "Crossing the River," is not arbitrarily subtitled with the same name of the novel. The episode is narrated

by the antagonist, Captain James Hamilton, a 26 year-old captain of a slave ship, "*Duke of York*." This single episode is a miniature of the entire novel in that it reproduces the motion felt through the novel. Hamilton's ship and crew roam the seas with their human cargo and do not rest in a certain place. The mobility of the ship is epitomic of the postmodern theorization of a diasporic hybrid culture. The intangibility of the structure of the novel maps the paradigm of a pluralistic diasporic community. It moves from Africa in the first episode to America in the second and then to Europe in the fourth to combine all in the epilogue.

Like Homi Bhabha's liminal space that "prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities," Phillips' diasporic community is a third place which is neither European or American nor African, but transnational (*Location* 5). This place is thus conditioned by blurring borders and boundaries and living out their sphere, in other words, it is conditioned by transnationality. The reference here to transnationality as defined by Gilroy: "[a] desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" (*Black Atlantic* 119).

At the end of the novel, the three heroes, Joyce, and the toiling and marginalized people are brought together into synchronous polyphony. A single page is a junction point for all these voices that nullify the official borders separating between them. By bringing numerous figures living in diverse geographies into a single page, which is the epilogue, Phillips crosses the boundaries and creates a trans-continental identity by which all the blacks and the marginalized are identified. This plural notion of identity is cultural hybridity where ethnic restrictions and narrow definitions do not exist.

This space can take place at the heart of the Western World, which includes shunning away from any black-essentialist discourse. This is manifested in the novel by the father's fear of his children's loss as "[t]here are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return" (1-2). Phillips necessitates the transformation of the British and American societies' from societies centered around color and ethnic prejudices that are the residuals of the

³ In the mid-nineteenth century, California was thought of as a promised land for slaves. They headed there because it was signaled a free place for blacks.

defeated Empire to societies that are "plural, non-tribal, in which citizens feel confident enough to communicate with each other, rather than co-exist as self-isolated islands."⁴

To guarantee the blacks "respectable" integration in the white societies, there should be an acknowledgment that cultures are merely *different* from each other. The hybrids, the inhabitants of the hybrid culture, function as a bridge between cultures to make them meet on equal basis.⁵ For instance, while in Africa, Nash shows us there are certain African cultural practices that are unfair, but still there are a lot of favorable ones. What matters is that Liberia and Africa are taking their part in the world and are developing to take their place in world's civilization. He proves to the world that Liberia is a civilized place: "Far from corrupting my soul, this Commonwealth of Liberia has provided me with the opportunity to open up my eyes and cast off the grab of ignorance which has encompassed me all too securely the whole course of my life" (61-62).

The fictional embodiment of this third space is the garden that Nash grows towards the end of "The Pagan Coast." This garden is a hybrid transplantation of American and African crops into the African soil: "The land is rich and produces the familiar American garden stuff, cabbage, peas, beans, onions, tomatoes, etc., as well as the native produce, which it does in abundance" (62). Eventually, he succeeds in getting the help of the African natives who "worked with glee" (23). The laborious work of the African natives, the fertility of the African land, together with Nash's American experience in growing the plants are recruited to increase the productivity of the African land. More importantly, Nash's dogma is a transcultural development of both Christianity and the native style of his African forefathers. Even when Nash discovers the falsehood of Christianity as an imperial facade, Nash still admires Jesus Christ as a person, and he remains true to the grand principles He

represents: "the man I love is Christ, and I love him as one might love an intimate" (62). Thus, we know that Nash will be adding to the sublime values of African arrangements the noble teachings of Jesus Christ.

The liminality of the characters helps them establish such a community. Therefore, border life is a focal point in *Crossing the River* not as a line of demarcation in as much as it is an extended space of meeting points and crossroads, where all the characters live. Nash is neither a full American nor is he a full African. Similarly, Martha dies after she runs away from her slave-owners but before she arrives into California, the promised land of freedom. The third son, Travis, is homeless on one's own land. By crossing the fixed definitions, the characters draw various arcs of intersection that enlarge the spatiality of the boundaries.

Like Benedict Anderson's nation, the novel's diasporic space is imagined, for it binds together people who have never heard of one another.⁶ However, the opposite of the nation-state, diaspora is not limited, nor is it territorialized. It is a place in which "[s]eparate places become effectively a single community 'through the continuous circulation of people'" (Clifford, "Diasporas" 303). Diaspora is a widespread space where "[d]ecentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin" (Clifford, "Diasporas" 306).⁷ Therefore, geographical attachment to a particular piece of land is replaced by a set of social

⁴ Phillips, Caryl. "American Tribalism."

⁵ In Bhabha's *Location of Culture*, the hybrid is granted a functional presence; " '[a]lways and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks.... The bridge gathers as a passage that crosses' "5 (qtd in Bhabha 7).

⁶ Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* theorizes the construction of modern European nations and defines the nation to be "an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." Anderson's nation is "imagined" but "limited," and its "community" is territorialized.

⁷ Anderson's nation is "imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). This "comradeship," Anderson argues, is built by post World War II revolutions that have grounded themselves "firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the prerevolutionary past" (2).

networks merging into one single body numerous histories of suffering.

In this hybrid world, a different sense of belonging roams among the inhabitants. The characters shy away from any known commonalities like those of history, religion, ethnicity, and thus land. Diasporic brotherhood replaces the "normal" societal relations in the pre-postcolonial world.

The inhabitants of the diasporic space are the silenced minorities and the marginalized groups to whom no one has ever listened. Nash, Martha, Travis, and Joyce have repressed stories whose time has come to see the light of the day. "I have an interest in voices that are not heard," says Phillips (Jaggi 119). The black missionary, the westward pioneer, the GI stationed in Italy, and the exiled Yorkshire woman are not usual voices; rather, out of tune with the rational discourse of the West.

When searching for Travis' voice, Phillips comments "I tried to find a voice for Travis. I travelled down south during the research, drove round Georgia and Alabama for days in search of Travis. I couldn't find him anywhere" (Jaggi 117). On choosing Martha, he says:

But it struck me that there wasn't really any first-person documentary material I could draw on for a black woman in the nineteenth century. There was plenty of stuff for black guys. But it just struck me that I'd never seen a film in which there was a black person on one of those wagons heading west, let alone a black woman. A lot of the photographs of frontier towns contain women who were obviously doing the cooking and the cleaning and the laundry and what have you in forts and towns all across the West. (Sharpe 160)

The corporation of the decentered subjects within the metropolitan dominant narrative of homogeneity subverts this homogeneity through the influential telling of counter stories. These voices orchestrate what Phillips calls the "chorus of the common memory" to expose another version of history. This resounds Bhabha's contention that

the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant

and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees. (*Location 5*)

"On the far bank of the river," "the losers" celebrate the affluent multiplicity of the "chorus of the common memory."⁸ Slavery is the common memory the author names the chorus after. By this, he develops slavery to be an open signifier expressive of all the dignified values the heroes of diaspora hold to while endeavoring to survive. Faith, love, hope, and suffering are common experiences and sentiments that have been there through the lives of "the chorus of the common memory." A considerable variety of unfamiliar voices appertaining white and black men and women combine from all the sides in diaspora across time and space to form the harmonious choral:

And then listen as the many-tongued chorus of the common memory begins again to swell, and insist that I acknowledge greetings from those who lever pints of ale in the pubs of London. Receive salutations from those who submit to (what the French call) neurotic inter-racial urges in the boulevards of Paris. (235)

Anonymous agonizing "voices hoping for: Freedom. Democracy" and "Mercy" join the choral with Joyce, Travis, Martha, and Nash (236). Accentuating this heterogeneity is the African father, who takes Joyce, the British woman as his own child together with Nash, Martha, and Travis. "My Nash. My Martha. My Travis. Joyce," says the father. The father equates Joyce with his children because she receives the same amount of humiliation they are prone to. Phillips says:

The clue to her [Joyce] is the same thing that binds the other three characters together: she doesn't have a father. What holds the novel together is that the father has lost these children. That's why at the end of the book the father says 'My Joyce' too, that's almost the last change I made to the book. [. . .] And it seemed to me emotionally correct

⁸ To Phillips, the "losers" are the blacks who are negatively presented by the Eurocentric discourse. This is quoted from Phillips' interview with Charles Rhyne.

that she should belong with the other three kids. (Jaggi 118)

The ubiquitous father expects that "on the far bank of the river, a drum continues to be beaten. A many-tongued chorus continues to swell. And I hope that amongst these survivors' voices I might occasionally hear those of my own children. My Nash. My Martha. My Travis. My daughter. Joyce" (237).

The hybridity of the "chorus of the common memory" enriches the diasporic space with new alliances which move *across* rather than between the hierarchies of the old world's races, genders, and countries. The cover of the novel is a pictorial manifestation of this hybridity; it is a fusion of three faces into one body.⁹ The faces of a white woman and two black men are synthesized together from the edges' sides.¹⁰ Their unison suggests there are many other symbols that might comfortably wed humans together. Phillips emphasizes that "suffering is suffering. I don't see how one suffering can be prettier, more aseptically acceptable than another type of suffering. Somebody who dies in a bottom of a slave ship is suffering in the same way as somebody who dies in Auschwitz" (Eckstein 36-37).

International displacement, and not African bloodline, connects Phillips' characters into the affinity of brotherhood. The characters who hold the names Nash, Travis, and Martha are not the protagonists whose stories fill in three of the four main narratives. The narrative says nothing about those sold by their African father in the prologue, set in the 1750s, but replaces them with other people from the 19th and 20th centuries, also brought into the New World on European slave ships.

Together these three children stood shivering with their guilty father waiting Captain James Hamilton to take them away into the unknown. All in all, survival is the unique code that establishes a common ground with the diasporic generations. They all have learnt the art of survival from the

events they have passed through. "But it seems to me that black people," Phillips says, "are beginning to gather around themselves the values of survival and resistance that have sustained them on two journeys across the Atlantic, and are now fighting for the right to be a part of the future of this continent" (*European Tribe* 126).

Phillips destabilizes the readers' expectations when he assigns Travis' voice to Joyce. Despite the diversity of the narrating voices and the points of view in the first and the second episodes, the prominent narrators of them are the children themselves, Nash and Martha. However, in the fourth episode, it is not Travis' voice that narrates the incidents but Joyce's. In spite of the fact that Joyce and Travis are ethnically and culturally different, they share several similarities to the extent that the writer is encouraged to grant the fictional part allocated to Travis to Joyce. In addition to that, the life pattern of Joyce looks to a large degree like the life pattern of Martha. All these characters are left alone to face aggressive social and political rejection, and above all religious abandonment. In a word, loneliness typifies their lives leaving them deserted by all.

Joyce, the white woman, is as treeless as Travis, the black man. We already know that Travis is betrayed by his own father and sold into slavery. We do not even encounter any of his relatives or friends in the fourth episode. Joyce recognizes her late father only in "a bronze plaque." She does not even know his name that is "scattered among the names of hundreds of others" (133). Any reference to close or distant relatives is absent. Joyce lives with her indifferent mother, who is always tough on her with complete absence of human communication. When Joyce mentions her mother, her sayings are far from respect and affection. For example, she is pretty sure her father, whom she has never met, would have not tolerated her mother for she is "[a]lways angry" (131).

Joyce's two failed love affairs are disappointing and leave her more desolate. Herbert, the amateur, leaves her suffering the misfortune of un-requested love when he lies about being married to another woman. The marriage to Len insults her due to his hostile behavior towards her and

⁹ There is more than one edition for this novel and they have different pictures on their title pages. The one the article refers to is the one cited in the list of references.

¹⁰ It seems the writer replaces Martha with Joyce, an indication as the argument shows that they share a certain kind of misery.

everyone around and his offensive language. Joyce believes together with Len, they will be a "team against the rest of the world. Man and wife. Him and me" (141). Indeed, they are not. Len is money-minded, alcoholic, and bad-tempered. He does not mind subjecting Joyce to his patriarchal authority by beating her up for getting some money. As for the amorous affairs of Travis, there are no indications about them but we read about the ostracization he faces when he dates Joyce. Joyce and Travis are attracted to one another to sense the security they cannot feel in any other communion.

Travis is brought to fight a war which is not his. The cause by itself means nothing emotional to him. He is motivated in the first place by promises given by the States to assimilate those blacks. Travis keeps silent about his participation in World War II but the readers are aware of the promises white Americans pledged to convince Afro-Americans about joining the fight. By recruiting black soldiers in the national army, American whites took advantage on black crisis to beat Hitler and the German troops in the battle. Travis is enlisted in the American army though he is not even considered a member of the American society.

For Joyce, the issue is more problematic since she is already a British citizen and a white Christian who is supposedly part of Western culture. Joyce does not seem to be in agreement with the national atmosphere in her town. Politically, she is out of tune with the British government and the British leaders. For her, Churchill is a "fat bastard" (164). She does not trust the official stories being said on the national radio: "If Churchill tells me one more time that this war is being fought for freedom and true principles of democracy I'll scream" (164). This distance is evident in the description she provides for her town: "entering our village is like coming into a tunnel. You can't see anything except small houses dotted on either side of the road" (151). The sentiments people usually show when talking about their hometowns are missing in Joyce's apathetic description.

Joyce shares Travis' subordination and loneliness and shares Martha's determination and religious disbelief. Neither Joyce nor Martha allies herself with religious authorities. Joyce is attracted

to Len in the first place because he is not a churchgoer: "this man who in all likelihood had seldom seen the inside of a church. Perhaps this was what I liked about him" and that "we were both wrong for a church" (130-131). Joyce looks for comfort in religion after her emotional breakdown in the first love experiment, with amateur Herbert. She accompanies her mother to the church and expects "He [Christ] might express some interest" in talking to her but "He didn't." Consequently, she "left the church" and even "Christ" (194).

In being cynical of religion as a source of condolence, Joyce is acting out what Martha has done before. "Martha's faithless heart" doubts the presence of God at all (89); "Perhaps there was a God. Perhaps not" (79). Martha finds "no solace in religion, and was unable to sympathize with the sufferings of the son of God when set against her own private misery" (79). Religion is no refuge for Martha, nor is it for Joyce. Under their poor conditions, Martha and Joyce are lonesome and are abandoned by God.

With everything around trying to take away their identities, Joyce and Martha strongly struggle to keep on their original names and selfhood. Joyce prefers adhering to her maiden name after marrying Len, and she refuses to be addressed as Mrs. Len. "My name isn't bloody Len anybody" says Joyce when she receives a letter that addresses her with "Mrs Len" (148). Martha demonstrates a resistant disposition to replace her name with any other one: "Never again would she be renamed" (80).

The position of Martha and Joyce at the bottom portion of society pushes them to defy the social conventions that jeopardize their existence. Joyce continuously criticizes Len in her first person narrative when he misbehaves. While one day going on a trip, Len loses track of the way, still, he refuses to follow the way Joyce suggests. As a result, he asks for being hosted in one of the houses they encounter on the way. Len foolishly gives the woman who keeps them in coupons in return for the sandwiches she offers them. At that night, and out of "embarrassment," Joyce refuses to have sex with him giving him the cold shoulder (198-199). After he is imprisoned for trading in the black market, Joyce enjoys separation and realizes she is better without

him: "That if he came back now, I'd stand up all night in the corner of the room before I'd ever condescend to join him in bed" (199).

After being repeatedly physically violated by her husband, Len, Joyce determines to leave him and start on her own anew: "I didn't want Len near me. Not now, not ever" (170- 171). She even forces him into a divorce: "He can't expect me to follow him around like some silly puppy. No, if he wants to go, then he can go. Good luck to him, I say. I'll have to write to him and tell him this, in a nice way, of course" (148).

Both heroines, Joyce and Martha, are victimized by the members of their societies; Joyce is a victim of patriarchal authority represented by Len, and Martha is a victim of imperialism and its evil consequences. Joyce's resolution reminds the readers of how firm Martha is. Martha refuses to be treated like a piece of property bequeathed from one slave master to another or sold at public auctions. She risks her life and escapes bondage: "(Never.) Never again would she belong to anybody. (No sir, never.) Martha looked over her shoulders as she ran. (Like the wind, girl)" (80).

On top of all, both women are motivated by familial loss and constant partings: they both lose their husbands and children. Martha's family is split forever when their owners sell her family members individually at a public auction: "She no longer possessed either a husband or a daughter" (78). Martha is left alone again after her second husband, Chester, is shot by the whites. Likewise, Joyce loses her husband, Travis, to war, and her only child by him to the Country Council. Joyce gives up her child to the lady of the blue coat after she is made penniless and has nothing to afford to her child: "Let's be sensible. You're going to have to start a new life on your own. And so we were sensible, my son and I. My son who hadn't asked me to turn him over to the lady with the blue coat and maroon scarf" (228).

The marriage of Travis and Joyce uncovers hidden interrelational possible patterns between races and sexes. White women differ not in their suffering from black men and women. Besides, the parallelism between Martha and Joyce

demonstrates that even twentieth-century white women suffer what enslaved women undergo.

Even the Indians are drawn parallel to the blacks.¹¹ This web of similarities and differences is meant "to build alliances above and beyond petty issues like language, religion, skin color, and to a lesser extent gender" (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 28).

That human feeling should help different races and genders meet on common grounds is what Phillips calls "communicable empathy" (Davison 94). Phillips' "communicable empathy" applies in his words to women and men, and we see that it applies also to races, the blacks and the Indians of this novel.

Both races are present in the United States, and both are persecuted. For some reason, it seems that the Indians have a notorious reputation among the blacks. When Martha resolves to escape, she tells the pioneers she is afraid of nothing, she is not even afraid of the Indians. This implies that Indians are sorted out as a terrifying source of danger for the blacks. However, Martha discovers her impression about the Indians is mistaken and that they are, just like herself and the rest of the black race, a victimized group in the United States. "We saw Indians, and I felt some sympathy with them, but the Indian bands kept their distance and watched, choosing not to make anything of their encounters with the dark white men" says Martha (91). It is clear the Indians look at the blacks just like the way the latter look at the former, for they consider them similar to the white man, and hence they fear them. This tension is solved by reciprocal feelings about the commonality of harassment both races suffer at the hands of the whites. Waiting to pass peacefully, the pioneers wait and then:

The chief halted, as did the wagon train, and he dismounted. By means of facial expressions and gestures, he made it known that we could pass in peace. I watched as our leader rewarded him with sugar and tobacco, and he in return was rewarded with grunts of approval. (91)

¹¹ The Indians were also victimized by the whites who systematically sabotaged the aboriginal population of the Americas and accumulated their skulls in search for gold and land. They were mercilessly terminated and brutally subjugated.

It is this intertwining of unexpected elements that subverts the older world's concept of belonging. The characters obtain a hybrid identity whose power casts doubts on the prejudiced and imperial grand narratives of a coercively engraved dominant culture. In the above passages, we have seen how the transnational web woven by the structure, the writer and the characters renounces the dreams of founding membership on essentialism- commonality of history, color, and religion- and replaces it with a third culture, one that is flexibly transcultural. The subjects that join the cross-bordered hybrid world of the third space are themselves constructions of creolized patterns of the property of more than one place. The characters do now belong somewhere and they are no longer lonely but among a very large family.

The fictional world of *Crossing the River* is almost inseparable from the culture that has drawn the presence of the existential situations in the Atlantic world. The cultural practices hidden between the fictional lines are made visible in this research by quoting some theoreticians in order to link the fictional characters and their flesh-and-blood counterparts. The article has attempted to chronicle the mass dispersion of the descendants of the enslaved Africans and the Commonwealth migrating arrivals in the Atlantic world since it started mainly with the transatlantic slave trade after the discovery of the New World. It surveyed a history of failures to contrive a suitable political agenda to find the blacks a place to belong to whether attempted by some "philanthropist" whites or the blacks themselves. Mr. Phillips is a writer resolved to explore the seeds of ostracizing the blacks not only out of land but also out of humanity. While the first part of this article has problematized the non-human situations the blacks live in in the West, the second has established a space of faith the black Atlantic figures can belong to without being stripped of their unique identity. Personally speaking, *Crossing the River* transcends being a fictional work of art; it is a record of shining successes and scornful failures where human beings were once victimized by "human" ideas and have been breathlessly attempting to fashion their own

destinies. Caryl Phillips' novel is a rewriting of history; it is the emergence of a new culture.

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