

A Postanthropocentric Reading of Racial Hybridity in Contemporary British Ethnic Fiction and Caryl Phillips' Reflections on Cross-Racial Solidarity

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Abstract This article illustrates how the postcolonial postanthropocentric perspective is employed to analyze the conflictive relationship between the “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces, suggested by Mikhail Bakhtin, on the representations of racial and cultural hybridity in contemporary Britain. Concepts such as deterritorialization, liminal space and the violence of colonial desire are used to the postanthropocentric reading of contemporary British ethnic novels. Through a comparative analysis of novels by V. S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith and Caryl Phillips' novels, this article argues that the rhetoric and practice of dichotomy in social life and literary works inevitably leads to the reinforcement of ideologies of colonialism, racism and patriarchal sexism, and the rhetoric and practice of solidarity and empathy create positive visions of cross racial community.

Keywords postanthropocentric reading; hybridity; cross racial solidarity; contemporary British ethnic fiction; Caryl Phillips

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Introduction

Contemporary British ethnic novels are mainly written by immigrants (or their

descendants) who came from former British colonies. Their novels reflect the deterritorialization of cultural heritage in a global age. Deleuze and Guattari think that deterritorialization is a way of challenging dominant cultural discourses and opening up a space to express the concerns and experiences of a marginalized community. In “What Is a Minor Literature?” Deleuze and Guattari argue that “A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 16).

Contemporary British ethnic fiction is minor literature characterized by “deterritorialization,” political and “collective value.” Contemporary British ethnic novelists such as Sam Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith and Caryl Phillips have collectively enunciated their desire of expressing “another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (Deleuze and Guattari 17). They are unanimously in a tug of war between two mutually antagonistic forces working on a nation’s language. Mikhail Bakhtin define these forces as “centripetal” and “centrifugal.” The “centripetal” force of a nation’s official language “attempts to enforce a unified and authorized way of speaking, for example, ‘Received Pronunciation’ or ‘BBC English’” (Bentley 78). Contemporary British ethnic novels represent the oppositional or “centrifugal” force that challenges the official way of speaking with “unlicensed” language.

Contemporary British ethnic fiction celebrates and problematizes the racial and cultural hybridity which is considered by the white British as something containable because Eurocentrism or European humanism still characterizes British ideology despite the truth that multiculturalism and cultural hybridity have already been interwoven with ordinary British life. “European humanism has historically excluded others from ‘legitimate participation’ in the political. These others range from non-males, non-whites, and non-Europeans to nonhumans, who are all in one way or another thought of as the deficient and subjacent Others of Man, lacking in subjectivity and reduceable to passive objects of knowledge, systemic exploitation, and resource extraction” (Moslund 4). When colored immigrants are considered as non-whites, non-Europeans and nonhumans there will be no emotional empathy toward them. Contemporary British ethnic fiction reveals and challenges this unempathetic British cross racial and cultural situation.

Reading contemporary British ethnic fictions, readers can still feel the strong influence of the Eurocentrism of the dominant anthropocene narrative, even though “the cultural dynamic of deterritorialization has decoupled previous links between

space, stability and reproduction; it has situated the notion of community in multiple locations; it has split loyalties and fractured the practices that secure understanding and knowledge within the family and social unit” (Papastergiadis 117). Emphasizing colored immigrants’ human nature and the necessity of cross racial solidarity, contemporary British ethnic novelists have demonstrated their strong intention to revolutionize the problematic anthropocene narrative of British racial and cultural hybridity.

Racial Hybridity in Liminal Space and Its Postanthropocentric Representations

Edward Said argues that western superiority over the colonized and western economic and cultural hegemony that once existed in the colonial period still exist in the postcolonial age. Said affirms that there is always a division between the (white) colonizer and the (colored) colonized and in postcolonial age the division becomes the one that is between the first world and the third world (Said 206-207). Bhabha deviates from Said’s opinion of racial division by suggesting the displacement of the binary logic of Black/White, Self/Other and the development of racial and cultural hybridity in liminal space.

Drawing from Renee Green’s conversation with Donna Harkavy, Bhabha argues that the liminal space is “the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white” and “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 5). Celebrating racial and cultural hybridity in liminal space, Bhabha is also aware of the difficulty in authorizing “cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (3). According to Bhabha, racial and cultural hybridity is not only a truth, a trend in history but also an on-going negotiation.

Sten Pultz Moslund argues that “Posthuman thinking theorizes not the empowerment (or attainment) of human subjectivity but its relative dissolution, not the history of interhuman power struggles but a decentralization of human history altogether” (Moslund 3). According to Moslund, racial hybridity does not solve racism because it does not endow the colored immigrants with subjectivity and dignity. In the novels written by Sam Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith racial hybridity evacuates or dissolves subjectivity. Thus, racial hybridity becomes a constantly contested posthuman issue in contemporary British ethnic fiction.

Within the liminal space of racial hybridity racialized people are “deprived of their subjectivity, of being exiled from humanity as exploitable ‘objects among

other objects' and 'judged to belong to nature rather than to history'" (qtd. in Moslund 3). Identifying "the [sado-masochistic] violence of colonial desire" (Young 108), Robert Young contends that "Theory of race were thus also covert theories of desire" (Young 9) and hybridity is a key term managing and explaining the ambivalent colonial attraction to and repulsion from racial Others.

In *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Sam Selvon's creolized voice "transports the calypsonian 'ballads' of his errant island 'boy' to the diamond pavements of Caribbean London" (Nasta vi). Sam Selvon illustrates that racial hybridity and Caribbean immigrants' "nigrification" of London are postcolonial fantasies. As the names of the characters such as Moses and Galahad whose real name is Henry Oliver suggest, black Caribbean male immigrants have their ambitions to brave the new world of London. Sam Selvon draws a picture of Caribbean male immigrants' bleak and oxymoronic London life. Their pilgrimage and knightly pursuit turn out to be in vain. In *Exodus* Moses is the spiritual leader for Jewish diaspora. In *The Lonely Londoners* Moses is the "liaison officer" and "a welfare officer" for Caribbean diasporas in London. In *The Legend of King Arthur*, Galahad is the noble knight in King Arthur's court sitting in the Siege Perilous and embarks on the journey searching for the holy grail. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Henry Oliver nicknamed by Moses as Sir Galahad embodies Caribbean immigrants' collective search for the holy grail, the sense of belonging in London. Sadly, Henry Oliver has to give up his moral goodness in order to make a living and is forever on an ambiguous journey.

According to Sam Selvon, racial hybridity in London is postanthropocentric, i.e., materialistic and physical but never emotional and spiritual. *The Lonely Londoners* has a carnivalistic beginning, climax but a hellish ending, "As if a forlorn shadow of doom fall on all the spades in the country" (Selvon 139). At the end of the novel, the third person narrator's reflections summarize the living situation of Caribbean black male immigrants "...lord Galahad say when the sweetness of summer get in him he say he would never leave the old Brit'n as long as he live and Moses sigh a long sigh like a man who live life and see nothing at all in it and who frighten as the years go by wondering what it is all about" (Selvon 101-102).

Contrary to Selvon's disillusionment of racial hybridity, BBC television documentary series entitled "Windrush" celebrated Caribbean immigration and Caribbean immigrants' integration into British society in 1998. Responding to BBC special program, Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips published a book named *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (1998). They tell an optimistic story of change against all odds, in the course of which people and

customs with roots in former colonies have become integral parts of a reconstituted, postcolonial British society, a society in which compounds like “Caribbean British” or “Black British” are no longer considered oxymoronic. The Empire Windrush, Mike and Trevor Phillips suggest, is an apt symbol to mark the beginning of this gradual and ultimately unstoppable process of ethnic and cultural pluralization (Frank 290).

BBC special program and the book by Mike and Trevor Phillips stand for the “centripetal” force of a nation’s official language. They aim to create a rosy picture of British racial hybridity and multiculturalism by exaggerating the effectiveness of immigrants’ social integration. As Selvon has stated, in order to make a living Caribbean boys have to “live up to the films and stories they [the English white] hear about black people living primitive in the jungles of the world...” (Selvon 100) and satisfy the fetish of British colonial ideology. In *The Lonely Londoners* there are two modes of temporal narrative structure, one is seasonal (summer and winter) and the other one is of the division between day and night. Summer night is the time for Caribbean boys to fulfill their wish of racial hybridity by having sex with British white women in London parks. Winter is their season of starvation due to unemployment. During summer Caribbean boys work as cheap laborers in factories in the daytime and they are sexual preys at night. They want to be integrated into British society but turn out to be the embodiment of white English women’s sexual fantasy.

Zadie Smith’s millennium novel *White Teeth* (2000) continues to challenge the propagandized idea of British racial and cultural hybridity. According to Zadie Smith, racism in Britain has changed its strategy from stereotyping to “genetic control.” Both strategies are postanthropocentric due to their dehumanizing nature. In *White Teeth* British Jewish genetic scientist Marcus assimilate human tumor to cultural tumor and affirms that “You eliminate the random, you rule the world” (Smith 341). According to Marcus “the random” not only refers to the biological oncogene but also metaphorically refers to alien cultural elements. The elimination of “the random,” the cultural oncogene, means British cultural purification or “Englishifying” the cultural DNA of the colored immigrants. Marcus’s future mouse project emerges from “neo-fascist tabloid fantasies-mindless human clones, genetic policing of sexual and racial characteristics mutated diseases, etc” (Smith 419). Ironically the master-mind behind Marcus’s project used to be a Nazi doctor who conducted gruesome and horrific medical experiments on prisoners. Smith has depicted a satirical picture in which Jewish scientist and former Nazi doctor cooperate to carry out genetic experiments. Marcus’s genetic experiments and his

wife Joyce's cross-pollination practice in horticulture can be regarded as metaphors for the containment of racial and cultural hybridity.

In *The Lonely Londoners* and *White Teeth* labor, sex and tumor are racialized, objectified and postanthropocentrically represented in liminal spaces such as factories, summer night parks and Marcus's gene laboratory. In *White Teeth*, Samad, the middle-aged Bangladeshi immigrant, is the "racial and cultural tumor" that Marcus, the spokesman and practitioner of eugenics politics, intends to get rid of. According to Nikos Papastergiadis, Samad is one of the members of migrant communities who came to prominence "within the cultural and political circles of the dominant society" they "began to argue in favor of new models of representing the process of cultural interaction, and to demonstrate the negative consequences of insisting upon the denial of the emergent forms of cultural identity" (Papastergiadis 3). In *White Teeth*, the negative consequence is Samad's son Millat's terrorist action, the failed assassination of the former Nazi doctor. In *White Teeth* the liminal space for racial hybridity is nothing but "a space for Britain, Britishness, space of Britain, British industrial space cultural space" (Smith 518). Zadie Smith has examined the botanical and biological parameters of racial and cultural hybridity and manifested that the universality of colonial ideology and colonial desire have taken postanthropocentric forms in 21st century Britain.

In Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), the liminal space is the Eva Kay's house where Karim's father conducts meditation and yoga class for affluent Londoners. During the class Karim's father instructs his audience with a kaleidoscopic mixture of "Yin and Yang, cosmic consciousness, Chinese philosophy, and the following of the Way" (Kureishi 27). Karim's father is an Indian Muslim immigrant. Indian Muslim, Chinese and English racial and cultural elements coexist in his class. Karim's father as the Buddha of Suburbia and his English followers are not really dedicated to the dissemination and learning of Oriental culture because the class is nothing but a part of the "Oriental Fever." In the liminal space, as the result of the racial and cultural hybridity Karim's father together with his cultural performances become saleable commodities.

The liminal space of racial hybridity in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Live* (2001) is "Notting Hill, neutral territory" (Naipaul 72), where the "new and exotic" colored immigrants meet "English people—both high and low, with a taste for social adventure [...] in dimly lit furnished flats in certain socially mixed squares [...]" (72). The bohemian world of Soho can be regarded as the enlarged version of the summer night parks in *The Lonely Londoners*. The colored immigrants only enjoy their nocturnal life in which they become faceless objects of oriental fantasy and people

without identity.

Racial hybridity in the above mentioned contemporary British ethnic novels is a process of objectification, commodification and loaded with sexual, biological and cultural assumptions and prejudices. They are what Étienne Balibar calls “anthropological universals,” which are themselves a form of the “superstition” from which the Enlightenment sought to break free (Wolfe xiv). Marcus’s future mouse project aims for human evolution through the mastery of both human nature and culture, as Balibar notes, “the paradoxical figure of an evolution which has to extract humanity properly so-called (that is, culture, the technological nature—including the mastery of human nature: eugenics) from animality, but to do so by means which characterized animality (the ‘survival of the fittest’) or, in other words, by an ‘animal’ competition between the different degrees of humanity” (Balibar 56). Racial hybridity in the above mentioned British ethnic novels displays a humanism that leans on colonial desire and imperial politics. As a result, cross racial relationship in the form of hybridity is always characterized by the humanity/animality dichotomy, the humanity of the British white versus the animality of the colored immigrants.

“Marking Whiteness” for Cross-Racial Solidarity

While Sam Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith have paid much attention to the unfulfilled ineffective racial and cultural hybridity in post-war Britain, Caryl Phillips emphasizes the importance of cross racial solidarity. In his novels the dehumanized subalterns, both white English women and discriminated blacks, are united together to make a living and to possess their human dignity. In another word, cross racial solidarity consolidate subalterns’ humanity. Caryl Phillips wrote a letter to me emphasizing that “without cross-racial solidarity there is no chance to overcome the racism that exists. In fact, the racism that threatens to undermine society as a whole. Especially British and American society.”

Juliet Hooker argues that solidarity is necessary to address racial injustice, but racial injustice prevents the development of solidarity between Black and White Americans (Hooker 5). According to Hooker “It is precisely the views of the majority who do not see themselves as having benefited from White supremacy that must change if the political will to achieve racial justice is to be developed” (114). Greta Fowler Snyder comments that “‘Marking’ is a social process whereby certain groups are made more visible than others, often in negative ways” (Snyder 311) and “marking whiteness” is an effective way to develop cross racial solidarity and achieve racial justice. Snyder contends that “By making the racial polity visible, and

by making contemporary Whiteness's place in the racial polity undeniable, marking Whiteness may shift the White lifeworld—including understandings of self and community—in ways that enable cross racial solidarity" (299).

Compared with Snyder's notion of "marking whiteness" which mainly aims at white racism, Caryl Phillips' marking of whiteness includes not only the description and criticism of white supremacy, average whites' practice of power and their complicity in racial oppression but also patriarchy and sexism in white societies associated with racism and colonialism. Making people conscious of their Whiteness is a step toward cross-racial solidarity. Phillips intends to encourage the typical whites especially white males to see themselves not only as raced, but also as oppressors in hierarchical racial and gender polities that distort relationships.

The critical point of cross racial solidarity is a situation within which the humanity/animality dichotomy or the racial boundary between the white "self" and the colored "other" vanishes due to practical reasons. Racial crossing takes place of the principle of "survival of the fittest," or on the other hand, racial crossing is the result of abiding by the principle because in certain cases only racial crossing can guarantee the collective survival of people from different ethnic backgrounds. Damon Ieremia Salesa argues that British Empire "were filled with black and yellow 'perils', all kinds of fears and controversies, as well as a kaleidoscope of fixations, books, studies and discussions that were driven by one or another kind of racial crossing" (Salesa 1). According to Salesa, cross racial narrative is often characterized by the description of racial exoticism and the fear of miscegenation.

In *Cambridge* (1991), *A Distant Shore* (2003) and *The Lost Child* (2015), Caryl Phillips' cross racial narratives focus on the problems of racial exoticism and the fear of miscegenation. But as far as the portrayal of major characters are concerned, Phillips' concern is mainly on the necessity of the development of cross racial solidarity under contexts of racial exoticism and the fear of miscegenation. In Phillips' upper mentioned novels British white women's anti-patriarchal struggle goes hand in hand with black males' anti-colonial resistance. In the struggle and the resistance against patriarchy and colonialism, white English women and the African blacks (black males in most cases) are in alliance with each other to develop cross racial solidarity.

Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis regard "racisms as modes of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation that present specific and different characters in different social and historical contexts. Extreme examples are those of extermination, segregation and slavery" (Anthias 2). In Caryl Phillips' novels white English women subjugated to patriarchal sexism can be identified as the

colonized and racialized “other,” as Edward Said contends “‘the colonized’ has since expanded considerably to include women, subjugated and oppressed classes, national minorities, and even marginalized or incorporated academic subspecialties” (Said 207).

According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the colonized women, black women to be specific, are in a combined course of anti-patriarchal struggles and anti-colonial resistance. One crucial point in Spivak’s feminist theoretical framework is her exploration of the links between (neo-) racism-capitalism/colonialism and patriarchy that combined together contribute to women’s marginalisation. Women as the subaltern are under a double shadow of colonialism and patriarchy (Spivak 287). In Phillips’ novels, white English woman characters are directly or indirectly involved in the course of British colonization. They resemble the colonized black women who are forced into voicelessness and dehumanized by patriarchy, colonialism or racism. The liminal space, or contact zone for the development of cross racial solidarity is either in British colonial plantation, or in an English city. The dehumanizing forces of patriarchy, colonialism and racism draw white English females and the African blacks together. They are on an equal footing. Material needs and mutual sympathy facilitate the development of their cross racial solidarity.

In *Cambridge*, the word “Father” with the first letter capitalized has three meanings full of patriarchal and colonial implications. “Father” is Emily Cartwright’s biological father who is an English absentee landlord of a plantation in West Indies. “Father” also refers to the colonial England and the English priests in West Indies plantations. “Father” in the novel is not a human but a synonym of British colonial institution in West Indies.

Father’s arrangement for Emily’s future is “The rude mechanics of horse-trading” (Phillips 4). Emily, a white English woman at the age of thirty, has to marry Thomas Lockwood a fifty-year-old widower with three children after her return from the inspection journey to her father’s West Indian estate. Emily’s father has lost a large amount of money to Thomas Lockwood in gambling. Emily’s arranged marriage to Thomas Lockwood is the way in which her father pays his gambling debts. Emily thus becomes an expendable commodity, deserted and sold into “slavery” by her father. Pramod K. Nayar argues that when humans are speciesist and treat non-human life forms as expendable, then some species of humans are also — as history shows in the form of genocides, racism and slavery— excluded from the category of the human to be then expendable (Nayar 14).

According to Nayar, there is an “intrinsic link between a speciesist humanism

and discriminatory practices such as racism or sexism” (14). *Cambridge* is full of descriptions of speciesist humanism. As a victim of colonialism and patriarchal sexism carried out by her father and her white English lover Mr. Brown, Emily sympathizes with Cambridge who is the victim of racism and slavery. After the stillbirth of her baby with Mr. Brown, Emily is deserted by Mr. Brown and decides to live with her black servant Stella in the West Indies. Going native is Emily’s way of developing cross racial solidarity in a hostile environment and her only hope to survive. Cambridge’s consideration of Emily’s personal safety and Emily’s sympathy toward Cambridge lay a foundation for the development of their cross racial solidarity which is finally materialized in Emily’s union with Stella after Cambridge is persecuted to death by Mr. Brown.

In *A Distant Shore* Dorothy, the white English female protagonist, a retired music teacher moves to the new development of Stoneleigh in a village named Weston to recover from a bad thirty-year marriage, an affair gone sour and depression due to the untimely death of her young sister. Dorothy is constantly under the supervision and discipline of English men, her father, her husband, her school master, her new colleague and even her psychiatrist. Maltreated, used and deserted by English men, Dorothy is in urgent need of companionship. Solomon, a black African male refugee, who has escaped from Sierra Leone civil war and works as a watchman in Stoneleigh is the only person who offers solace to Dorothy. Solomon and Dorothy gradually develop a cross-racial solidarity in Stoneleigh to be temporarily free from English patriarchal oppression and racial violence. Solomon is discriminated and killed by a group of white British young men. The death of Solomon leads to the subsequent “madness” of Dorothy. Diagnosed without scientific reason or proof by Williams, the psychiatrist, as a schizophrenic Dorothy is hospitalized.

Based on the story of Manisha, a homeless mentally-ill woman who met with an untimely end in a mental hospital, Kimberly Lacroix and Sabah Siddiqui questions “the scientific-medical paradigm, the state legal system, and society that allows a vulnerable woman to vanish without a trace” (Lacroix 68). They argue that cultures of violence exist in apparently benevolent institutions and the complicit relationship between science and the law in violence takes place in the name of helping the helpless (68). Resembling Manisha, Dorothy is also a victim of benevolent institutions such as school, psychiatric clinic and mental hospital. In *A Distant Shore*, Caryl Phillips makes further efforts to reveal the patriarchal and sexist nature of these “benevolent institutions.”

Solomon and Dorothy’s emotional engagement is the precondition for the

development of their cross racial solidarity, even though there are huge racial and age discrepancies between Solomon, a black African refugee in his thirties and Dorothy, a white English woman at the age of 55. Solomon is Dorothy's loyal listener and volunteered driver who accompanies Dorothy to her psychiatrist regularly. In Dorothy's eyes Solomon is "a proper gentleman. In fact, one of the first gentlemen that I'd ever met, with his smart driving gloves" (Phillips, *Distant* 64). Solomon's death has a devastating effect on Dorothy. Dorothy reflects "Without Solomon, Weston suddenly seems like a strange and empty village, and it feels as though a whole lifetime has passed since the day that Solomon came calling" (55). Solomon's death has worsened Dorothy's depression that could have been relieved by Solomon's constant and contented company.

According to Dorothy, Solomon is full of human dignity while the native English are lazy and animalistic. Meanwhile, Solomon views Dorothy as his soul mate in England. Caryl Phillips vividly describes Dorothy's emotional engagement with Solomon: "His every movement would appear to be an attempt to erase a past that he no longer wishes to be reminded of. She looks at him and she understands" (268). Unfortunately, Solomon does not have the opportunity to tell Dorothy his tragic life experience in Sierra Leone due to his murder. Dorothy and Solomon have told their personal stories not to each other but to the readers. Readers have observed their urge for mutual comfort which could have been achieved if Solomon were still alive. Reading thus becomes a testimony for the budding but unfulfilled cross racial solidarity between Dorothy and Solomon.

In *The Lost Child* by juxtaposing the tragic experiences of the black Congo woman who is depicted as the mother of Heathcliff, the dark-skinned protagonist in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and the white Oxford University female graduate Monica Johnson, Caryl Phillips has marked whiteness from the perspectives of colonialism, racism, patriarchal sexism simultaneously. The black Congo woman's maltreatment by English slave ship captain and Mr. Earnshaw and Monica Johnson's maltreatment by her father and her white English boyfriend are narrated side by side. As far as their tragic fates are concerned there is no difference between the black Congo woman who is deserted and dies on Liverpool street in late 18th century and Monica Johnson who is deserted, sent into mental hospital and dies in mid-twentieth-century England.

For Caryl Phillips, "marking whiteness" is multifunctional and transhistorical. Phillips has highlighted the boomerang effect of British colonialism and slave trade in contemporary English society. In his novels, there are multiple sites of racial and gender oppression and the victims of the inhumane and degrading treatments carried

out by the white males include not only African blacks but also white English females. Phillips has constructed a fictional world in which colonialism, racism and patriarchal sexism are in a symbiotic and interactive relationship. In his novels, hostile living situations enable black subalterns, either as black slaves or as black migrants and white subalterns, often depicted as marginalized white English females go over the racial border and establish a collaborative relationship in which racial difference and racism give way to multiracial experience with cross racial solidarity as its basis.

Cross Racial Empathy between Jews and African Black Diasporas

In “African Modes of Self-Writing,” Achille Mbembe has summarized the black problems caused by “historical degradation: slavery, colonization, and apartheid” (Mbembe 241). Mbembe argues that as a result of the historical degradation the blacks are plunged “not only into humiliation, debasement, and nameless suffering but also into a zone of nonbeing and social death characterized by the denial of dignity, heavy psychic damage, and the torment of exile” (241-242). Mbembe suggests that “the model of Jewish reflection on the phenomena of suffering, contingency, and finitude” (242) can be borrowed to address the problems of black African diasporas.

In *The Nature of Blood*, Phillips adopts Mbembe’s strategy by collaging histories and stories of Jewish persecution with his story of Othello to weave “connections between the experiences of loss suffered by Jews and Blacks at the hands of Janus-like persecutors” (Guignery 124). *The Nature of Blood* reveals Phillips’ reflections on cross racial empathy and alliance between white Jews and black African diasporas.

Empathy signifies a strong element of co-feeling, identification, or what the psychologist C. Daniel Batson calls “perspective-taking”—imaginatively experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and situation of another. Batson prefers empathy (“perspective-taking”) over sympathy, which he fears “has become tinged with a paternalistic, moralistic cast” (Batson 87). Opposite to Batson’s positive definition of empathy, Kimberly Chabot Davis has pointed out that “Cultural critics often argue that crying over the plight of disempowered people does little to challenge the status quo, since the emotional catharsis afforded by literature and film all too often results in political inertia and complacency” (Davis 6). As Davis has mentioned empathetic feeling and humanizing emotions have been denied their efficacy as tools in the fight for social justice. Elizabeth V. Spelman voices that sympathy and compassion are regularly equated with condescending form of pity, a “selfish and

cruel wallowing in the misfortunes of others” (Spelman 65).

Being the offspring of Windrush generation and as a descendant of black African diasporas Caryl Phillips has no racial, cultural or political advantages over Jews and other black African diasporas. Lacking condescending effect, Phillips’ narrative empathy shows more emotional and moral engagement with the racially discriminated and persecuted, such as white Jews and black African diasporas.

On one hand Phillips shows his empathy for both white Jews and the “successful” African diaspora Othello, on the other hand he warns the white Israeli Jews not to forget Jewish holocaust and not to turn themselves into racists by discriminating black African Jews in their newly established country. The racial discrimination and persecution of black African Jews carried out by white Jews in Israel is a form of new racism, a moral crime similar to the anti-Semitic crimes in history. Mutual empathy between the Jews and the blacks is the precondition for the elimination of racial discrimination and persecution and the key to develop cross racial solidarity.

Caryl Phillips weaves the stories from *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1947), the history of the blood libel trial in Venice in 1480 and his prequel to William Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1622) to construct three seemingly irrelevant narratives, the narrative of Eva Stern, a Jewish girl whose prototype is Anne Frank, the narrative of Othello and the narrative of Eva Stern’s uncle Stephen Stern. The third person narrative of the history of the blood libel is embedded within the two first person narratives of Eva Stern and Stephen Stern. Othello’s encounter with an old Jewish man at the Venetian Jewish ghetto and Stephen Stern’s encounter with a black African girl on the Israeli street introduce readers to the idea that the fate of Jews and the fate of the blacks are intertwined.

Besides the upper mentioned narratives there is a covert narrative in which Phillips links *Merchant of Venice* (1600) and *Othello* together. In *The Nature of Blood*, the narrative of 1480 blood libel trial and the description of Othello’s encounter with Venetian Jews implicitly refer to William Shakespeare’s reflections on racial discrimination and persecution in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*.

In *The Merchant of Venice* Portia’s mentioning of one drop of Christian blood is the turning point of the trial. Caryl Phillips infers that Shylock’s fear of “one drop of Christian blood” in *The Merchant of Venice* comes from the shared Venetian knowledge of the 1480 blood libel trial. Shylock certainly knows the consequences of the blood libel trial and that is the reason for his silence and complete surrender in the Venetian court.

In *The Nature of Blood*, Caryl Phillips attributes Othello’s tragedy to his

failure in associating the fate of Venetian Jews with his own fate. Othello does not even identify his fate with the fate of Venetian African black gondoliers who share similar experiences with him. The black gondoliers are the African diasporas in Renaissance Venice. Kate Lowe argues that “There are probably hundreds of notarial records mentioning or relating to black slaves in Venice [...]. Venice could also be an African’s second, third, or fourth destination of forced diaspora” (Lowe 419-420). In *The Nature of Blood* Othello reflects upon his personal history of diaspora but he prefers to forget his humiliating slave experience and enjoy his high social status as a Venetian general.

Othello suffers misidentification syndrome characterized by overemphasizing his present identity as a Venetian general and erasing his identity as an African black diaspora as he meditates: “I, a man born of royal blood, a mighty warrior, yet a man who, at one time, could view himself only as a poor slave, had been summoned to serve this state; to lead the Venetian army; to stand at the very centre of the empire” (Phillips, *Nature* 107). In *The European Tribe* (2000) Caryl Phillips defines Othello as the insupportable loss-leader created by Venice, “the most famous of all the black European success. But the pressure placed upon him rendered his life a tragedy” (Phillips, *European* 46). The pressure mentioned by Phillips is not only the Turkish military pressure on Cyprus that Othello has to deal with but also his identity-related pressure.

Othello sympathizes with Venetian Jews who live in poverty stricken ghetto and expresses his surprise at the harsh reality of Jewish life: “My exploration had unnerved me somewhat, for it was well known that the Jews were fortunate in their wealth. Why they should choose to live in this manner defeated my understanding” (Phillips, *Nature* 130). Ghetto refers not only to the enclosed living space of the Venetian Jews but also to the open space of the city of Venice in which Jews and blacks including Othello himself are under the supervision and containment of white Venetian Christians.

Even though Othello realizes that he is supervised as his monologue shows “Upon my arrival in fair Venice, a retired merchant—a man somewhat advanced in years, but with considerable experience of trading in different parts of the world—was appointed by the doge and his senators to watch over me” (107), he prefers to wear a “white mask” in order to be integrated with the white Venetian Christians and win the hand of Desdemona.

Racial threats such as Shylock’s revenge on Antonio and Othello’s marriage to Desdemona which is the source of Venetian fear of miscegenation will certainly be dealt with by white Venetian Christians. Othello’s military value to Venice is the

precondition for the interracial marriage between Othello and Desdemona. Othello's military value vanishes after his occupation of Cyprus. As a result of which, Othello and Desdemona are severely punished.

In Phillips' fictional world of *The Nature of Blood* Othello's story takes place after the blood libel trial in 1480 and the story of *The Merchant of Venice*. Othello should have learned from the Jewish persecution history and paid attention to his African countrymen sold into slavery in Venice. Phillips has revealed the reasons for Othello's misidentification syndrome which explains Othello's paranoid schizophrenia and his murder of Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

It is the Islamic-Christian conflicts that bind the fate of Venetian Jews and the fate of Othello together and Venice is the place where Jews and blacks suffer similar if not the same racial persecutions. In *The Nature of Blood* the conflicts include the first Turkish war from 1463 to 1479 and the fourth Ottoman–Venetian war between 1570 and 1573. The first Turkish war is the background of the 1480 blood libel trial and the fourth Ottoman–Venetian war is the background of the story of Shylock and Othello. Jewish persecution and the vicissitude of Othello's life are the result of the political economic crisis caused by the wars. Under the context of Islamic-Christian conflicts Jews were executed in 1480 blood libel trial, Shylock and Othello have been sacrificed for the political economic interests of the Venetian empire.

In most part of *The Nature of Blood* Caryl Phillips has demonstrated the importance and necessity of cross racial empathy and alliance between white Jews and African blacks in Venice but in the last section of the novel Phillips diverts readers' attention from Jewish persecutions in 15th and 16th century Venice, the Jewish Holocaust during the second world war and the racial persecution of Othello to the discrimination of black African Jews in the newly established Israeli state.

As one of the founders of Israeli state Stephen Stern witnesses not only Jewish persecution and diaspora in Nazi Germany and Cyprus refugee camp but also racial discrimination against black African Jews who are rescued by Israeli soldiers from Ethiopia. Stephen Stern's first person narration reveals the oxymoronic nature of white Israeli Jews, i.e. the once persecuted people in history become modern day persecutors.

Portraying the character of Malka, a black Ethiopian Jew who has been forced to emigrate to Israel, Caryl Phillips challenges the official report of Operation Solomon, the officially eulogized Beta Israel's salvation and Ethiopian Jews' exodus to Israel in 1991. Stephen Spector wrote the news story entitled "Operation Solomon The Daring Rescue of the Ethiopian Jews" and expanded it into a book with the same title.

In *Operation Solomon: The Daring Rescue of the Ethiopian Jews* (2005), Stephen Spector argues that Ethiopian black Jews' diaspora to Israel is to answer the call of God as he writes "an Ethiopian qes (Jewish priest) named Adane told me that his people had left for Israel for a simple and compelling reason: God had told them to. Hearing God's call, they quite suddenly had abandoned their villages and their homes, leaving their crops unharvested" (Spector xiii).

In *The Nature of Blood* Malka does not mention the God's call documented by Stephen Spector. According to Malka's first person narration, Ethiopian black Jews are attracted by lights in the desert, herded together and transported to Israel. It is a forced diaspora organized by Israeli government. Black African Jews have been uprooted from their families, religious and cultural traditions. Young black African Jews represented by Malka, her sister and brother are told to believe the religious significance of the journey. The forced diaspora is described by white Israelis as "going home" and "We (the African black Jews) thanked God for returning us to Zion" (Phillips, *Nature* 201).

Malka asks a question on arrival at Israeli airport "My sister and I wondered, in this new land, would our babies be born white?" (201) It is a question about racial discrimination. Within the context of the black Ethiopian Jews' diaspora Malka reflects "Gently plucked me from one century, helped me to cross two more, and then placed me in this time. Here. Now. But why? What are you trying to prove?" (208) Malka's life experience in Israel proves that white Jews' racial discrimination against black African Jews does exist. Black African Jews are confronted with problems such as lack of job, poor living situation, segregation, linguistic, religious and cultural barriers. According to Malka's description they are transported to Israel to be singers and dancers for a folklore group for tourists, nurses and soldiers but many African black Jewish women become prostitutes due to lack of jobs.

The night club encounter between Eva Stern's uncle Stephen Stern who is at the age of 75 and Malka who is at the age of 25 is transhistorical, cross-age and cross racial. The description of the intimate relationship between Stephen Stern and Malka serves as a palimpsest upon which Stephen Stern's memory of Nazi holocaust and Jewish persecution in 1940s are weaved with the harsh reality of racial discrimination against black African Jews such as Malka. Malka's case reveals a paradoxical truth i.e. the once persecuted white Jews change into persecutors of black African Jews in Israel, the Zion for Jews and the forced migration of black African Jews to Israel resembles the black slave trade to a certain degree.

In *The Nature of Blood* Othello sympathizes with Venetian Jews but Stephen Stern does not sympathize with Malka and the poverty stricken black African Jews.

Malka's interior monologue about the forced diasporan experience of her people and Stephen Stern's nostalgic recalling of his family, especially his two nieces are in a parallel relationship. Maybe at the age of 75 lonely and bereaved of family members Stephen Stern has suffered and witnessed so many tragedies and disasters. As a result he has lost the capability of empathy. *The Nature of Blood* ends with Malka's return to the black African Jewish ghetto in Israel and Stephen Stern's reminiscence of his nieces playing in their family garden before Jewish holocaust took place in Germany. Caryl Phillips presents readers layers of a palimpsest of Jewish persecution and its unempathetic repetition in Israel.

Phillips has demonstrated the interaction mode of the tripartite relations among himself, his white Jewish and black African characters. In his omnipotent narration Phillips has expressed his empathy to both races, the white Jews and the black African diasporas. But as Phillips has narrated in *The Nature of Blood* there is no effective empathetic communication between the white Jews and the black African diasporas including the black African Jews. According to Phillips cross racial empathy is the precondition for the development of cross racial solidarity. The interactions between the white Jews and the black African Jews depicted in *The Nature of Blood* provide a thought provoking context for readers to ponder upon the necessity of cross racial solidarity and the efficacy of empathetic feeling and humanizing emotions as tools in the fight for social justice.

Drawing on research in Leeds and Bradford, Deborah Phillips, Cathy Davis and Peter Ratcliffe argues that "ethnic segregation is at the centre of debates about 'race' and 'difference', integration and citizenship in multicultural Britain" (Phillips, Davis and Ratcliffe 217). According to their argument, ethnic segregation is one of the reasons for terrorist attacks in Britain. "The London bombings in July 2005 coupled with the head of the Commission for Racial Equality's (Phillips T 2005) assertion that Britain seems to be 'sleepwalking' its way towards American-style ghettos; all have prompted a racialized political discourse on urban segregation through which minority ethnic clustering, but not white clustering, has been constructed as problematic and a hindrance to 'community cohesion'" (Phillips, Davis and Ratcliffe 217).

In *Color Me English* (2011) Caryl Phillips also mentions the London suicide bombing on 7 July 2005. He considers it as a consequence of racial discrimination and segregation in the UK. The description of racial persecution of his thirteen-year-old classmate, Ali who is a colored immigrant from Pakistan conducted by white British boys in Leeds juxtapose with Phillips' reflections on London suicide bombing. Phillips argues that British racism, especially British anti Muslim hostility

has driven four young British men to “reach out and embrace an alternative place by seizing upon an extreme form of Islamic political identity and demonstrating its potency with tragic consequences” (Phillips, *Color* 13).

In *The Pleasure of Exile* (1960) George Lamming describes his dilemmatic attitude toward migration to Britain. Lamming confesses that he suffers the pains of leaving and the sense of shame about the betrayal of roots, he also expresses his yearning for migration, racial and cultural hybridization in the belly of the beast. Lamming’s anti-colonial desire for migration, racial and cultural hybridity is in sharp contrast with the postanthropocentric reality of British multiculturalism. In contemporary British ethnic novels racial and cultural hybridity takes place in dehumanizing liminal spaces where colored immigrants and their descendants are treated in a sub-human or a non-human fashion.

In Caryl Phillips’ novels “whiteness” has been marked to reveal and criticize the ideology of colonialism and patriarchal sexism held by British white males. In Phillips’ novels cross racial solidarity among subalterns, the white British females and the black males, is an undeniable and unavoidable social reality the negation and the sanction of which leads to tragedies. Phillips’ call for cross racial solidarity is not restricted to the relationship between the British white and the African black. Rewriting history and classic literature works, Phillips links the fate of Jews and the fate of black African diasporas, including the black African Jews together to warn against moral fatigue, the occurrence of new racism and the recurrence of the history of racial persecution to call for cross racial empathy and the establishment of cross racial affective communities.

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