

Caryl Phillips's Novels: A Reminder of a Forgotten Issue

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, colonization and the competition for power among the European races triggered the mass migration of many races in the world. However, it cannot be denied that the most affected race were the Blacks who were forced into slavery. The establishment of slavery is the biggest injustice of colonisation, where the Blacks were treated as commercial objects. Slavery turned into a lucrative business where it involved licensing and diplomatic controls between many European powers. Therefore, this phenomenon has borne many writings on human migrations and assimilation in their new homes. Most of these writings are the works of writers who themselves were affected by this movement across continents. Caryl Phillips is one of the writers who made this issue as a persistent theme in all his works. Phillips's works were never a mere narration on migrants and migrations. More than that, it is an attempt to retell an unfortunate incident in the chapters of the world history about the mass displacement of a particular race. Phillips, who was born in the Caribbean Islands and raised in England, often depicts the feelings of rootlessness and the nostalgia for a homeland in the characters in his novels. However, what seems like an affinity to lurk around a rich story material has a potent and hidden agenda. This paper will show that Phillips, a descendent of slaves, often harps on these long forgotten issues with a deliberate and definitive motive. A scrutinised study on his novels will show that it is indeed his wish to remind the world and the descendents of the Black slaves not to forget the past.

Keywords: Assimilation, history, migration, nostalgia, rootlessness

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INTRODUCTION

Edward Said, in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983), claims that writing is "the complex, and generally orderly, translation of many different forces into decipherable script, forces that all converge on the desire

to write, which is a choice made over the desire to speak, to dance or sculpt” (p. 129). This means that a literary piece is a medium that echoes the writer’s desires, views and messages to the world. Literary works, more often than not, is not merely an art work that was created to entertain. It is the voice of the author that articulates his social and political visions. Therefore, whenever a single theme dominates a writer’s work, the work is most likely influenced by certain related episodes or experiences during the writer’s younger days. As for Caryl Phillips, who is a postmodernist writer with multi-cultural background and wide travelling experiences, it has been easy for him to channel all his experiences into his writings. Phillips was born in St. Paul’s small village in St. Kitts, one of the Leeward Islands in the Eastern Caribbean. His parents moved to England when he was only twelve weeks old. He grew up in Leeds, Yorkshire in northern England. He schooled in Leeds until 1974 and then he continued in Birmingham until 1976. He went to Queen’s College, Oxford, from 1976 to 1979. He became the first student to go to Oxford in his King’s Norton Boys School’s 85 year old history. Phillips at first wanted to study Physiology, but he ended up graduating with Honours in 1979, with a degree in English literature and language. He was also a good athlete and seriously considered going into professional sports but his parents refused to allow him to adventure into it. They did not want him to be known as an ordinary Black who is only capable in sports and entertainment. Ever since his graduation, he

has been making his living through writing. Throughout the 1980s, he was living in both England and St. Kitts. In the 1990s, he started teaching in the United States. He has since been shuttling between London and Amherst, New York and Caribbean. He has been travelling on visiting professorship and reading tour throughout the world.

According to Said, in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983), “a desire - to write - that is ceaseless, varied, and highly unnatural and abstract, since ‘to write’ is a function never exhausted by the completion of a piece of writing” (p. 131). Phillips is a living proof to this statement. To date, Caryl Phillips has written nine novels, four non-fictions, two anthologies, four stage shows, radio plays and many more. The five novels that will be discussed in this paper were written in the time span of twenty years. His debut novel, *The Final Passage* was written in 1985, while the latest novel chosen for this research, *Dancing in the Dark* was written in 2005. The other three novels are *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1992), and *Crossing the River* (1993). In these twenty years, a single theme that dominates his novels is the enslavement of the Blacks in Caribbean islands, the Americas and Europe. Phillips has constantly harped on the same issue for the past twenty years. His sincerity and seriousness in depicting the plight of his race cannot be questioned because without sincerity it is impossible for a person to dwell so persistently on the same subject for the past twenty four years. Phillips, as the first Black generation in Britain, has had a vast experience, growing

up as the children of immigrants. Phillips quotes the following about his multifaceted identity in *The Guardian*, Saturday 11 December 2004:

I belong not only to the British tradition, I am also a writer of African origin and, for people of the African diaspora, "home" is a word that is often burdened with a complicated historical and geographical weight. This being the case, travel has been important for it has provided African diasporan people with a means of clarifying their own unique position in the world.

The experiences of displacement and assimilation with the dominant culture were faced not only by Phillips but also by all the Blacks who were involved in slavery and the mass movement of the Blacks from the African continent to the Americas, Caribbean Islands, and Europe. Phillips's parents left the island of St. Kitts in the hope of having a better life in the mother country, England. A few weeks after his parents arrived in England in 1958, the Notting Hill riots erupted and Phillips puts it as "into this climate of proprietorial paranoia that my parents had migrated" (Phillips, *A New World Order*, 2001, p. 244). Phillips's travel experiences proved highly productive in terms of creativity and had contributed immensely to his writings which were often based on historical and cultural aspects. Phillips's novels often have historical senses

which take the readers on time travel. T.S. Eliot defines historical sense as "a sense of the timeless, as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and not of the temporal together" (1963, p. 23). This definition that corresponds to the two definitions of time is present in all the five novels. Derek Walcott in his article, "The Muse of History", argues that obsession with history is not without dangers. Walcott further claims that it can lead to a creative impasse for it can produce "a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendents of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendents of masters. Because this literature serves historical truth, it yellows into polemic or evaporates in pathos" (1976, p. 112). As for Phillips who belongs to the former group, history has given him a firm grip over his theme of slavery. He recognizes the truth in history and has taken it upon himself with the conviction that "it is dangerous to forget history", and to relive it through his writings.

RECORDING HISTORY

Phillips's writing involves the elements of the past and the present. T.S. Eliot, in his essay titled "Tradition and the Individual Talent", states that "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (1963, p. 23). Eliot sees writing as an organic process and emphasizes the interaction between the past and the present. Phillips's novels too carry the reflection of history. His novels often have the settings of the triangle slave trade route which is from West Africa,

Europe, Caribbean and the Americas. In an interview with Stephen Moss, Phillips stated the following:

All writers are territorial. They're like dogs marking their territory. The great task of being a writer is to discover what your territory is, and you do revisit similar themes in different ways. I think I'm very lucky to have found a patch of earth which resonates very powerfully with me because of my own personal life history, but also seems to resonate powerfully with the nature of the country.

(Moss, 2009)

The excerpt shows that Phillips's writings are closely connected to his own history and episodes that took place in his life. Gene Edward Veith, in *Post Modern Times* (2003), claims that postmodernist writers bring the marginal to the centre "by rewriting history in favour of those have been excluded from power, i.e., women, homosexuals, blacks, Native Americans and those victims of oppression." As a postmodernist writer, Phillips too gives a lot importance to history in his novels. Phillips in an interview with Carol Margaret Davison states the following about his writing on history:

I think a writer really has a responsibility to at least acknowledge that he produced by very specific social circumstances.

We weren't, any of us – male, female, black, white, whatever – immaculate conceptions dropped out of nowhere without history. One shouldn't feel a guilt for one's history and one shouldn't feel ashamed of one's history, one should just take responsibility for it.

This is evident in Phillips's motive to record the history of the displaced people. Since Phillips has had the experience of both conditions, he employs them in his writing. In his debut novel, *The Final Passage* (1985), Phillips uses the title as the direct reference to the "Middle Passage" which marks the Atlantic Ocean. *The Final Passage* is an allusion to the middle passage of the slave trade. It is significant to the crossing of slaves from Africa to the New World plantations in the Caribbean. The main characters of this novel are Leila Franks who is a Mulatto and her husband Michael Preston, a very irresponsible man. This story is set in Baytown, St. Patrick, in the Caribbean. When Leila's mother leaves for England, Leila and Michael decide to follow suit. The ill-fated journey of Leila and Michael represents the experience of the "Windrush generation" where the first post-war West Indians arrived in England on the ship called SS Empire Windrush. In *Higher Ground* (1986), Phillips explores the life of Blacks in the African diasporic. In the first part, he shows the involvement of the Blacks in the slave trade and how the Blacks themselves helped to capture their fellow men through a nameless African

narrator. The second part is about Rudolph Leroy Williams, a member of the Black Panther movement. Phillips highlights the prejudiced treatment of the Black prisoners in jail. It is significant to note that 'Rudy' was the name of one of Malcolm X's gang members when he was a burglar. Here, Phillips is trying to make a connection with the life of the real Rudy through this character (Malcolm X, 1968, p. 231). The final part is the glimpses of the Nazi era where the character, Irina recollects her memories at the concentration camp where he exposes the cruelty of Nazi regime. While in *Cambridge* (1992), Phillips gives two different accounts of an incident that took place during slavery. The story is narrated in different genres as well, a diary of a slave owner's daughter named Emily Cartwright, the confession of a slave (Olumide) and finally is the report from a local newspaper. The entries in the diary will give a different perception on the slaves but the truth will be revealed through Olumide's confession in the end. Olumide is a learned slave who is moved from one continent to another. He is moved from his motherland, Africa, as a slave and is sent to America. From America he is sold to an Englishman and is taken to England. After completing his studies in Christianity in England, Olumide is set free by his master and he travels to Africa as a missionary. Unfortunately, during the voyage he becomes a victim of some slave traders and is put back into slavery where they sell him to a plantation in the Caribbean islands. Like the character Olumide, Phillips, a West Indian brought to Britain at a very young

age is a man twice removed from history and place. His ancestors were slaves who were brought to the West Indies by force. His long past ended abruptly at the moment his ancestors were torn from their West African homes (Smethurst, 2002, p. 10). Phillips captures this moment of desperate separation from motherland through the character of Olumide, who catches the last glimpse of Africa from the slave ship that was taking him to the Americas. Olumide states the following:

We fellow captives fixed our watery eyes upon the land in a state of mortal grief. Whether the affection for one's country is real or imagined, it is not an exaggeration to proclaim that at this moment instinct of nature suffused our being with overwhelming love for our land and family, whom we did not expect to see again. Our history was truly broken.

(Phillips, Cambridge, 1992, p. 137)

The above excerpt is truly a recording of history that gives the readers a glimpse of how every slave grabbed from Africa would have felt knowing that they will never return. According to Paul Sharrad in his article titled "Speaking the Unspeakable: London, Cambridge, and the Caribbean", Phillips's "ironic approach serves to make present the absences of history and to allow the unspeakable truths of slavery to become compellingly eloquent" (Sharrad, 1994, p. 203). Phillips is obviously trying to prove

the real situation during the slavery era when whatever said by the White master was considered to be the truth. As a matter of fact, slavery and the justification for that heinous action have been always biased. Phillips also attempts to record the history through the characters in *Crossing the River* (1993). The story spans through 250 years of slavery, with an African father's melancholic voice crying over selling his children. The first part is in the form of letters written by an ex-slave to his former owner, who failed to keep his promise. Nash Williams, a freed slave travels as a missionary to Liberia. He faces a lot of difficulties as his former master did not send the promised supply of goods and money to spread Christianity. Through this character, Phillips exposes the readers to the new nation of Liberia where the freed slaves were dumped. The other historical fact that Phillips uses here is the ship named "Mayflower of Liberia" which sailed in February 1826 from New York City to Sierra Leone with eighty-six freed slaves on board. The next part of the novel is James Hamilton's logbook, which is a journal from a real slave trader named John Newton titled *Journal of a Slave Trader* to show the records of sale of three children by an African father whose crops failed. He also used the journal of a slave ship, *Duke of York*, to set a basis for his story (Eckstein, 2001, p. 36). Through the letters written by Hamilton to his wife, Phillips exposes to the readers that Hamilton is an individual subjected to the forces of the historical period and power configuration. Hamilton is unable to reconcile his mission

as a slave trader and his Christian values. Phillips even reconstructs the Dodge City in the third chapter titled "West", where the runaway slave's lover Chester is murdered in the streets of Dodge by "three brave men with pistols smoking" (Phillips, *Crossing the River*, p. 85). Phillips is very descriptive of this town as how it was in the nineteenth century and metaphorically transposes slavery there because the blacks who live there at present have to struggle with the memory of slavery as they remain slaves to the reality of fragmented lives and disrupted communities (McInnis, 2005, p. 2). At the end of the nineteenth century, the story of Travis is told in the form of a diary through a white character, Joyce. She represents the souls of the fragmented people before and during the World War Two period. In *Dancing in the Dark* (2005), he writes the novel to commemorate the first black entertainer, Bert Williams where Harlem is used as the setting. By employing various methods to narrate the story, Phillips brings the readers to relive and experience the life of entertainers in Harlem. In Act 1 (1873-1903), the story is narrated by an omniscient voice but he has also used dialogues that are conventional with plays and poems. The second section of the story is titled Act 2 (1903-1911). It has an omniscient voice but at the same time, he incorporates a lot of newspaper reports about Bert Williams and George Walker. In the final act which covers the years from 1911 to 1922, the story is told in a narrative form and also by using newspaper clippings. This novel is a biography of a comedian Bert Williams

whom Phillips wants the world to remember him for his contributions to the world of entertainment. The readers have to follow the news clippings closely to learn the Whites' opinion regarding these two black performers.

Phillips records history by deconstructing history as all the novels have historical facts and events which had been deconstructed to put the different local narratives into context, giving history a fundamental role. The author has put in a lot of historical facts to reveal his message. Phillips often deconstructs history through the characters in his novels. This makes the novels more realistic in their settings and plots. This method enables Phillips to convey his message to the readers more effectively and successfully.

REPRESENTING THE SILENCED VOICES

Phillips's writing is also a representation of the Blacks' silenced voices. Early Black narratives, like poems by Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784), a slave who learnt to read and write with her master's consent did not have the liberty to voice out the sufferings of her fellow Blacks openly and Phillips took the liberty to speak on behalf of the silenced people. The experiences of Phillips's parents as West Indian migrants living in the pre-dominantly white city of Leeds paved way for Phillips to speak for the marginalized people. Possessing British passports did not give them the priority of a British citizen as their skin colour hindered everything. Salman Rushdie has pointed out

the following in his essay titled, "Minority Literatures in a Multi-cultural Society" in *Displaced Persons*:

Being black in a predominantly white society has imposed upon many writers a kind of public responsibility, a kind of public project, which may be described as "giving voice".

(Rushdie, 1988, p. 37)

Even after slavery was abolished, the Blacks were never free of racial prejudice. Phillips believes that it is his personal responsibility to represent the silenced or the marginalized voices through his writings. This is supported by Gayathri Spivak's view that the silencing of the muted native subject, usually in the form of the 'subaltern' woman, has testified to the fact that "there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak" (Spivak, 1985, p. 122). Besides that, Ashcroft too claims that the silencing of the subaltern woman actually extends to the whole of the colonial world, and to the silencing and muting of all natives, male or female (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989, p. 178). So, Phillips's writings indirectly act as giving voice to the silenced people. In short, Phillips's writings are the unheard voices of the enslaved Blacks. Homi Bhabha, in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", claims that the subalterns' voices can be recovered in the narratives by symptomatic readings. He further states that the very technique that broadcasts the

dominance of the colonial discourse actually exposes its weaknesses that ultimately destroy itself from within. He restates the following:

It is as if the very emergence of the 'colonial' is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitations or prohibitions within the authoritative discourse itself. The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 8)

He further claims that the subaltern people can speak and a native voice can be recovered. Therefore, Phillips revokes the silenced voices by narrating his stories using entries in the diaries, journals, advertisements and letters of the characters which eventually leads to the writing of a novel which defies the Aristotle's traditional linear narrative. This is evident in all the five novels where he does not allow his characters to speak.

According to Kreilkamp in his article titled "Caryl Phillips: The trauma of 'Broken History'", exile has been the personal condition Phillips, who in the words of commentator, "could qualify as one of his own characters" (Kreilkamp, 1997, p. 44). Phillips's approach in the novels is an attempt to come to terms with his own experiences. Phillips remaps people's mental images of the areas and to save

outsiders from the position of marginality. Phillips states the following about his experiences as a Black in *The Guardian*, Saturday 11 December 2004:

Like any black child in Britain who grew up in the 60s and 70s, it had long been clear to me that the full complexity of who I am - my plural self, if you like - was never going to be nourished in a country that seemed to revel in its ability to reduce identity to easily repeatable clichés. The first time one is called a "nigger" or told to "go back to where you come from", one's identity is traduced and a great violence is done to one's sense of self.

(Phillips, 2004)

According to Paul Smethurst in his article titled "Postmodern Blackness and Unbelonging", the history of black involvement in European culture is explicit, but Phillips interleaves history and fiction and uses postmodern narrative form to engage with issues of racism in his major novels. He further states the following:

The major theme in his novels is exile, marginalization, oppression and exploitation of black people, but increasingly, race and racism are explored through theories of non-essentialism in race, ethnicity and gender. The presence of such theories, and the novelistic form

and style through which they are explored, is the hallmark of Phillips's writing.

(Smethurst, 2002, p. 7)

Therefore, the main motive of Phillips's writing is to represent the silenced voices. The novels are written in polyphonic voices where a host of voices will be jostling for attention in all the five texts. The novels are written using many points of view with the White's points of view overshadowing the Black's point of view. Phillips wants to show that the Blacks are the enslaved race that has no voice of their own to fight for their rights. According to Paul Smethurst, it is the hallmark of Phillips's fiction to use multiple narrators who are usually more than one gender and more than one race or ethnicity, each of whom seems to connect across different times and spaces (Smethurst, 2002, p. 9).

In the *Higher Ground*, Phillips uses three juxtaposed segments, with each of them concentrating on individuals who suffer due to displacement and dealing with a transitional moment in their lives. Phillips acts as the voice of the silenced prisoners of the Black Panther movement in the 1960s. He does this by exposing the harsh treatment in prison which culminates the Black prisoners to insanity. He also becomes the voice of fellow Africans who helped to capture their own people for the sake of money and their dilemma being loathed by their own fellow Blacks. In *Cambridge*, Phillips relates the story by

using multiple voices to deliver the evils of slavery. Phillips voices out the feelings of a slave owner's daughter, Emily Cartwright, who records all the events in a diary. The recordings in the diary gives a one sided story to the readers where the Blacks are portrayed very negatively. Towards the end of the novel, Phillips furnishes the readers with the confession of Olumide. However, a local newspaper fabricates a different story, where Olumide is described as a barbarous slave. Here, Phillips takes the role of an informer to reveal the truth and show how sometimes learned slaves like Olumide have been forced into slavery by the Whites just because of his colour. In *Crossing the River*, the idea of "multi-tongued chorus" heard across two hundred and fifty years of history, and across the boundaries of race and gender, pulls together the various narrative strands into a single story of survival and communicable empathy. Phillips speaks not from one side, but from both sides of the river; one side representing freedom and the other is slavery. Phillips represents the voice of an African father who laments selling his three children and the ordeal of a runaway slave named Martha who is never free to voice her opinion. In the final part, Phillips speaks of the dilemma faced by a white woman who has an illegitimate Mulatto child. In an interview with Carol Margaret Davison for the *Ariel Journal*, Phillips himself admits that *Crossing the River* is a novel which is fragmentary in form and structure and polyphonic in its voices (2001, p. 94). Meanwhile, *Dancing in the Dark* has various voices, as well as letters, newspaper

articles and journals. The readers have to follow the news clippings closely to learn the Whites' opinion regarding these two black performers, Bert Williams and George Walker. This style of writing shows that the Blacks had no voice of their own or were silenced by the racial prejudice.

I believe the reason why Phillips prefers speaking in multiple voices in his novels is to give voice thus bringing to life the silenced group. This fate of silence often befalls the minority race in a certain country. As for Phillips, who grew up in England, feels that the Black people in Britain are unrepresented in the novels:

*White British writers have continued to write about Britain without seeing any black faces, and the responsibility to represent a multiracial Britain has continued to fall on the shoulders of non-white writers. The plays and novels of the vast majority of Britain's literary labourers are devoid of black faces and, until very recently, the same has been true of film and television. One notable exception is Alan Hollinghurst's novel, *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988), which examines the complex relationship between race, class and sexuality across two generations. But even here, while one is grateful to see black characters represented, we are encouraged to view most of them through the prism of sexuality.*

(Davison, 2001, p. 95)

According to Phillips, the Black characters are often viewed negatively. They are never given the chance to give their points of view. This is why Phillips has taken it as his duty to give voice to the silenced and marginalized characters.

REMINDER OF THE FORGOTTEN ISSUE

Karl Marx wrote "the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." By reading these novels which were written by a descendent of slaves, one will understand how the Blacks were never free from racial prejudice despite slavery being abolished in the late 19th century. Phillips wants to remind the world and the descendents of the Blacks of the evils of slavery through his novels. He does this through the depiction of acts and misery of the characters in his novels. Martin Luther King, Jr., during his confinement in Birmingham city jail in 1963, answered the following to a group of clergymen who wrote and asked him to slow and moderate his movement accusing him of acting "unwise and untimely" in Birmingham, Alabama. He replied that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice". He further reinstated that "they need nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood." Phillips too does not want the world to forget what had happened to the Blacks. He still feels that justice has not been done to the Blacks scattered all over the world due to slavery. Indeed, it is puzzling to see a contemporary writer like Caryl

Phillips harping on a four hundred year old issue. When civil right's activist, Martin Luther King Jr. fought for equal rights of the Blacks in America, he emphasized that "freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed" (King, 1967). By highlighting the past plight of the enslaved people subtly, Phillips is demanding for the rights of the Blacks which were denied by the colonisers.

He uses repetitions in his writing to expose the atrocities committed against the Blacks in the Americas and Caribbean. The themes in Phillips's plays and novels often overlap. Phillips's plays can be considered as the blueprint to his novels. His first play, *Strange Fruit* and the first novel, *The Final Passage*, has similar story lines that centre on a one-parent Caribbean family living in one of England's inner-city areas. Both depict the life of Caribbean migrant women who face the ruthlessness of the White English world, symbolised in both cases by snow that starts to fall as the two heroines reach the lowest point of their migratory experience. Leila, the Mulatto who makes a journey to England with her husband, Michael and son returns as a failure to her nameless island. She could not survive as a migrant in London. Similar themes also haunt the novel, *Higher Ground*, as this novel too focuses on Black characters who are involved in slavery and their descendents. *Cambridge* and the play, *The Shelter*, focus on one Black man and a White woman. Importance is given only to these two characters. *Crossing the River* and the play *The Prince of Africa* are historical

pieces that handle the triangular trade and the experience of the African diaspora. Both writings expose the slave trade and the traumatic journey of the slaves. *The Shelter* and *Crossing the River* span several centuries and deal with multiple story lines. *Dancing in the Dark* also talks about a West Indian migrant to America and his survival in the entertainment field. The repetition of themes like displacement, longingness for a homeland, oppression and similar character roles in the novels are reminders to the readers not to forget the past.

Since Caryl Phillips belongs to the younger generation of the Black-British authors who have the history of Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas and Europe as their past, his writings linger around the immeasurable individual sufferings and pain endured by his people. Phillips himself has said the said the following:

It is the same story rewritten in many ways. I feel it is my duty to tell the story and I can't stop telling it. As long as I feel I have something to say I have the obligation of saying it and I will keep on writing. When I have said it all, I hope I will be the first to admit it and just quit.

(Phillips, 1997)

The statement above shows that Phillips has taken it as his responsibility to remind people of their past, especially the descendents of slaves. Therefore, he feels that constant repetition of themes will keep

reminding the people the ordeals that their ancestors went through.

Besides using the overlapping themes in his literary works, Phillips also uses the setting of his novels to rekindle the memory of the Blacks. The settings always involve a time span which moves the setting of the novel from one era to the other. This change of time and space in the settings of the novels takes the readers back and forth of the slavery era. Ironically, *The Final Passage* is opened with the first part titled, "The End", where the main character, Leila burns all her belongings that remind her of her five months stay in London. It has the setting of a sugar cane plantation which is obviously a reminder of slavery and the disparity that the slaves faced. Michael and his friend Bradeth often spent their time in a bar called "Day to Dawn". The second part of the novel is titled "Home", followed by "England", "The Passage" and "Winter". All the sub-titles are insignificant to time and space. He juggles the readers from the present to the past using flash backs. In *Higher Ground*, Phillips again tells the story in three parts. The setting of "Heartland" is in Africa where readers are exposed to the slave trade and the conditions of the slave in the slave dungeons. "The Cargo Rap" is set in the prison which is told through letters written between January 1967 and August 1968 by a Black convict and finally "The Higher Ground" is narrated through an insane Jewish character. *Cambridge* is set in the 19th century and it centres around two characters, Emily and Cambridge. The first part is set in the Caribbean while the second part takes the readers from Africa

to England and back to Africa and finally ends in the Caribbean. There are also various settings involved in *Crossing the River* where 'The Pagan Coast' is set in Liberia. However, in the beginning and the ending of the novel, Phillips exposes the readers to the lamentations of a father who sold his children into slavery because his crops failed. The section 'Crossing the River' is set in the Atlantic where Phillips dedicates to the millions of Africans who crossed the Atlantic aboard the slave ships. The setting which focuses on the river banks and crossing of rivers shows the situation of the Blacks who were once free on their African banks and once crossed, they became slaves. This is to remind the readers of the ordeals of the Africans who crossed the Atlantic Ocean. *Dancing in the Dark* too is told in Acts 1 to 3 which has specific time span. Act 1 is from 1873-1903 where Phillips narrates the story using dialogues as such that is written in plays and poems while the second act covers the time span from 1903 to 1911. Bert Williams and George Walker are depicted through newspaper reports. The final act in the novel which covers the years from 1911-1922, Phillips narrates the story through newspaper clippings. This novel acts as a biography of comedian Bert Williams and George Walker, whom Phillips wants the world to remember their enormous contributions to the world of entertainment. The settings and the titles used in the novels certainly will rekindle the reader's memory on the issue of slavery. Phillips has successfully used this style of writing as a tool to remind the forgotten issue.

CONCLUSION

Unlike other contemporary writers, Phillips gives very much importance to his own identity and the displaced Blacks. He is not willing to forget the tragedy that befall his race four hundred years ago as the memories keep haunting the Blacks until today. The mass kidnappings and enslavement of the Africans was without any doubt a wicked criminal enterprise in the recorded human history. From the 1500s to the 1800s, twelve million Black slaves were brought against their will to the Western zone. During the voyage, about 2 million slaves died and their bodies were thrown into the Atlantic. This episode is comparable, if not worse than the Nazi holocaust, during the World War 2, whereby six million Jews were massacred by Adolf Hitler. The Jews did not hide their sufferings by hiding the holocaust like the issue of slavery. The Jews, with the help of Britain and America, were able to expose this crime against humanity. The oppressors were brought to the tribunals across the world and reparation for resettlement was given to the descendants of those who suffered. But, that is not the case of the Blacks. Unlike the Jews, the Blacks did not find sympathy from the White West. The Blacks, who were displaced from their motherland in the name of slavery and the opening of New World, were paid no compensation. The descendants had to live with the harsh memories of their forefathers as an inferior race. Forgetting slavery, for this writer is erasing history, which is legitimizing injustice done to humanity. So, it is not difficult to understand the

reason why writers like Caryl Phillips keeps “harping” on the issue which for some is nothing more than one of the dark episodes in the long and tangled history of mankind. It may be the case for an outsider who views it with the eye of a researcher but it is not so for those who were born out of it. It is not a scheduled accident or an isolated incident that happened to a community but it is a mass holocaust that befalls a race which the Europeans regarded as inferior. For Phillips, slavery is not merely a concept or a process. It is a thorny knot that was tied in their soul and passed from generation to generation. The Blacks could have forgiven those who implicated the untold agony on their soul – but they refuse to forget. They remember and try to keep remembering the plight and misery for it is the painful memory that gives them their identity as a race, and Caryl Phillips is not an exception.

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