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CHAPTER TEN

Borderland Strangers in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*

Josiane Ranguin

Born on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, raised in Yorkshire and now living in New York, Caryl Phillips considers the issues of nationality, belonging and identity of central importance: "Britain remains a country for whom a sense of continuity with an imagined past continues to be a major determinant of national identity" (Phillips 2002, 296). Phillips goes on to recognize that this "failure of national imagination," the inability to acknowledge the presence of non-European influences within the British culture and psyche, generated literary answers from authors who "experiment with discontinuities of time, and revel in the disruption of conventional narrative order" to become "disrupters of national continuity" (Phillips 2001, 292). Stephen Clingman, in his essay "'England has changed': Questions of National Form in *A Distant Shore*" perceptively attests to Phillips's masterly control of formal disruption:

There are spaces and times within the space and time of the national, in which versions of migrancy and internal exile co-exist but do not fully align, in which nation and narration are far from cohesive, horizontally unified, or identical. The sheer complexity of the novel's variations on this formal embodiment are hard to capture without a moment-by-moment sequencing of its account [...]. (51)

A Distant Shore (2004) focuses on two characters: Gabriel, an African refugee who chooses Solomon as a second name when he starts a new life in the north of England, and Dorothy, a retired music teacher who feels estranged in her own country, and progressively develops a psychotic behavior after a series of traumatic events. Both characters, the British national and the asylum seeker, share the same feeling of disconnection with their environment, but their friendship is cut short by the racist assassination of Solomon. Disruption of space and time is the narrative echo of their fractured lives. The first chapter focuses on Dorothy's arrival to Stoneleigh, a 'new development'(1), her en-

counter with Solomon and their relationship until his death. The second chapter narrates Gabriel's odyssey from an African country torn by civil war to England, while the third chapter concentrates on Dorothy's life after her divorce, her unhappy affairs with married men, her retirement, and her arrival in Stoneleigh for a new beginning. In the fourth chapter, Solomon describes his arrival in Stoneleigh, his reaction to the hate mail he receives, and his progressive interest in Dorothy. The final chapter finds Dorothy embattled in the secluded space of a psychiatric hospital, her silence being her only weapon against her feeling of isolation and homelessness. Out of the five chapters, only the second and third are not first person narratives, which underlines that this narrative mode seems to be restricted in the novel to the exploration from within of the feeling of foreignness, and the monitoring of the minute fluctuations of behavior or feelings of Dorothy and Solomon, both strangers in their new environment, and both ultimately reduced to silence, through death or psychosis.

The intention behind *A Distant Shore* is then to examine the way various characters, be they British nationals, or economic and political refugees immigrating to Britain, envision national identity. Immigrants are allured by idealized images of England, while Britons are depicted as facing a new image of Britain they are finding difficult to apprehend. The irony is that, in what appears as a time clash, the outdated beliefs about British identity that have been nurtured by asylum seekers are returned in prime condition to the mother country. Phillips compares the immigrants to pilgrims, using Benedict Anderson's image, since the members of the former empire are travelling from the periphery to the centre of power: "one by one they have made their way through the gap in the hedge and into the muddy field, and like a band of pilgrims they are strung out, one behind the other, with Gabriel at their head" (122).

The ideals of Britishness are brought back to a country whose social construct of national identity has shifted and appears, when confronted to its former image, all the more in mutation or under attack. A British character, Dorothy, analyzes identity as having no real link to nationality, since she feels estranged in her own country. "This is not my home" (312), she admits, while undocumented immigrants like Bright, who stows away with Gabriel to cross the British channel, espouse their adopted country with eagerness and determination. The sense of belonging is shown as a fragile feeling that is created and nurtured by the individual himself, but can be destroyed by a hostile environment. National identity as monolithic is then exposed as a fallacy since all the characters evoked in the text come to express their own idiosyncratic vision of identity.

As we follow Dorothy and Solomon in their haphazard quest of love, Phillips establishes a cartography of migration that I will explore, starting from his taxonomy or, to borrow from Walkowitz, a "collation" (539) of the lives of several migrants from the world over, to then explore the village as an allegory of the nation, home as microcosm of the nation, and finally conclude on the final frontier of identity, the human body.

Identity Politics in Strange Territories

In a discussion of identity politics in *A Distant Shore*, Phillips stresses that "race" is only one among the many traits that may come to define identity:

I'm more concerned with "identity" than with "race." The latter is just one component in the former, along with religion, gender, nationality, class, etc. This is obviously a novel about the challenged identity of two individuals, but it's also a novel about English - or national - identity. (Turner 2007, 1)

The disruption inscribed in Phillips's work is echoed in his own claim as a migrant writer. Displacement and migration inform both his life and work as though displacement and writing across borders were a way to escape pigeon-holing in any national literature, shifting perspectives offering new vistas. In "Border Crossings," Phillips expressed his feelings about the United States:

I have never really felt myself to be at home in the United States. [...] But the United States does not punish me, or laugh at me, or belittle me for being who I am. I have been able to cross the Atlantic and enter into the society, and my sense of displacement is, in the context of my parents' experience, deeply designer in character. (218)

Movements, fluidity, reinvention of oneself as part of a strategy of representation, become the strategy itself. This is a political stance, as Stuart Hall points out:

How things are represented and the "machineries" and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive* and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenario of representation - subjectivity, identity, politics - a formative, not only an expressive place in the constitution of social and political life. (91)

Phillips consciously takes this disruption of national continuity further by working not only on the conditions of production but also on the conditions of reception of his work. Walkowitz understands this production as "comparison literature" which is "an emerging genre of world literature for which global



comparison is a formal as well as a thematic preoccupation” and which is “asking us to understand comparison as the work of scholars, to be sure, but also as the work of books that analyze - as Phillips’s do - the transnational contexts of their own production, circulation, and study.” (536)

“A forced or eager flight into strange territory” is, in Toni Morrison’s terms, the common lot of the world refugees. What is underlined in the sentence is the migrants’ perception of the European environment as foreign and what is communicated is a vision of the search for asylum as a process of colonization in reverse, members of the former Empire exploring mother countries as foreign territories. Yet, fleeing poverty or abuses of human rights, asylum seekers do not emerge unscarred from a “deeply felt and painful experience” (Phillips 2006, 219) and *A Distant Shore*, where no migrant wishes to or can return home, charts world migration to include Africa, Asia, as well as Ireland and more surprisingly Scotland. The refugees choose England for its language, and the promise of a decent treatment:

What draws the immigrants to England? Language (since Solomon is an English speaking West African). The second thing is the sense of historical fair-play of Britain. The idea that somehow, Britain is country of decency and good manners, civility, and that one will be able to participate because this notion of kind, of paternal benevolence that Britain gives out towards colonial, or former colonial subjects, I think lives on. (Phillips 2004, radio interview)

The illegal crossing of boundaries when there is no turning back is a traumatic experience engaging body and soul. The narration of Gabriel’s flight from his country ravaged by civil war allows Phillips to give a vivid account of the harrowing process of exile. Gabriel, the only boy in the family, has no other choice than leaving, since his father and his family died in order to protect his life as he was hunted down for having allowed the massacre of villagers by the bloodthirsty soldiers he was supposed to lead. In order to survive and leave, he kills his friend, a shopkeeper, and steals his money to pay for being smuggled out of the country by his uncle.

In the past few days his uncle has aged many years and Gabriel feels as though he too has added considerably to his thirty years. Despite his uncle’s assurances, Gabriel knows that in many ways their journey is only now beginning. And only the strongest among them will survive. (119)

Migration is an endurance test that encourages the survival of the fittest. Premature aging signals that migration, as a traumatic experience, is deeply disruptive, as though global displacement were another type of world scale

holocaust. The same stigmata are described on concentration camp inmates in *The Nature of Blood*, another novel by Phillips: "Young bodies rusted like old taps" (168). The Chinese man who shows them how to cross the Channel is clearly marked out as a man who will not survive: "The Chinese man told me that for those with no money the only way to England is the boats. If we do not try, then we are defeated" (134). He "appears to be suffering badly with a cold" (133) and "begins to cough loudly into his chapped hands" (133). Unable to cling on to a metal chain on the side of the ship crossing the Channel, he dies swallowed by the sea, another casualty of the global flight from the dangers of political oppression or utter destitution. Various migrants such as these draw a map of the world within the British space: thus, as Clingman perceptively observes, "*A Distant Shore* shows transnational faultlines within national space" (94).

In the course of the novel, Phillips charts a map of immigration within Britain with asylum seekers coming from Africa, Asia and Europe. Gabriel, who belongs to an unnamed minority ethnic group in a West-African country comes to realize that to start a new life, he will have to erase his past. Even though the welcome in England is somewhat strained, he keeps hope alive:

Gabriel knows that if he is going to live again, then he will have to learn to banish all thoughts of his past existence. There can be no sentiment. Hurling blindly down this highway, he knows that with every gasp of the acrid air beneath the heavy tarpaulin, life is taking him beyond this nightmare and to a new place and a new beginning (94).

A foray in a bar elicits a comment which reveals that migrants are now enacting an exploration of the Old World, a discovery in reverse. They have the drive and energy of modern-day explorers. Gabriel remarks: "This is not the England he thought he was travelling to and these shipwrecked people are not the people he thought he would discover. Under this sad roof, life is stripped of ambition and it is broken" (176). All the same, to migrate is to grow, as he tells his unfortunate companion about to die in the detention centre they have been sent to: "Said, you must continue to allow hope to grow" (80). This new beginning is literally stated: "I am a one-year old man who walks with heavy steps. I am a man burdened with hidden history" (300). The poignant image reflects the conflation of past trauma and new expectations within the same subject and suggests the extensive internal readjustment at work when experiencing displacement.

Falsely accused of rape, Gabriel is befriended by the Andersons after his release from the detention center and becomes caretaker-cum-watchman in a new development in the north of England. But to his dismay, Solomon keeps receiv-

ing hate mails: "This is England. What kind of place did I come to?" (40). The only answer Dorothy can give is: "It's where I'm from" (41), as though she were unable to criticize her home country or question its mores. She then realizes that race might be an aggravating factor. "I haven't given it much thought, and perhaps this is my failing, but Solomon is the only colored person in the village. In the town, there are plenty of dark faces, but in this village he is alone" (45).

Unfortunately, Solomon does not have the keys to properly fight what is ahead of him "At home it was relatively simple to distinguish a man of a different tribe or region, but among these people I was lost" (273). Not knowing the local cultural code causes him to overlook his initial fear of England: "but my lack of knowledge of the ways of the English caused me to be fearful" (273). He stays in the village, instead of fleeing it like the Epsteins who left because the mother, a doctor, was both a woman and Jewish. Dubbing "hate mail" "communication" (292), the repetition of his absence of fear shows both courage and blindness to the forces of hatred at work in the village: "I am not afraid of this communication, but it is difficult for me to know what to do. To discard the offending article would probably be the wise decision, but I wish to keep it although I am not sure why. Perhaps to show that I am not afraid" (293). Racism is a rampant disease made apparent when dog mess is shoveled into his letter-box: "These people are unwell, for decent people do not conduct themselves in this way. Writing to me with their filth is one thing but this is savage" (300). Through the shift of perspective occasioned by this outrageous act, the modern-day explorer discovers the savagery in the heart of Europe.

Still, Solomon, being the son of a chief, an elder, "a man who decided disputes and punished crimes" (282), sees his new job as a watchman invested with a meaning it does not have in this new surrounding as can be understood from these reflections: "I am familiar with this village, and this area, but now it is to be my home. I am to be the night-watchman, and my job will be to watch over these people" (280). He fails to realize that his status of watchman is not synonymous with power and universal respect: "but when I travel at night with a torch it is a different matter, for I imagine that I command respect. I am official" (295). Survival means adaptation to new living conditions, but the word "imagine" underlines Solomon's delusion. Services rendered to the community no longer entail gratitude or respect. His status as a foreigner remains his prominent feature in the eyes of the skinheads who eventually ambush him, and his function of guardian of the community is subsumed by his status of black African refugee.

This comes as a reminder that skin color acts as a portable boundary, a signifier allowing for all manners of trespassing the black person's personal space,

and entitling one, if so minded, to consider that nothing black is off-limits. Such warnings appeared in *The European Tribe* (1987) when, as a homodiegetic narrator, Phillips evoked Othello, the Shakespearian character:

His attempts to secure himself worked, but only as long as there was a war and he was needed. Othello relaxed, like the black man in the middle-class suburb who is suddenly surprised to see racist graffiti daubed on the side of his house. He thought he had escaped all that, but he never could. (51)

Forgetting about one's origins becomes a flaw revealing the character's blindness to an ingrained and deep seated racism. Phillips returns to this idea in *The Nature of Blood* (1997): "Brother, you are weak. A figment of a Venetian imagination. While you still have time, jump from your bed and fly away home. Peel your rusty body from hers and go home. No good can come from your foreign adventure" (183). The undercurrent of Solomon's adventure seems to be utmost pessimism since the possibility for black persons to be allowed to forget the tension about race seems remote.

Far from being aware of the potential toxicity of his environment, Solomon appears then as a "black Uncle Tom" (Phillips 1997, 181) collaborating with the system. His lack of knowledge of the social structure of his new world will cost him his life because his trust in an idealized England is stronger than the realities he faces. When Solomon, attacked by right-wing youngsters, realizes that his life is at stake, he is pushed to the limits by despair and rage and his valiant fight before he dies may be seen as a way for Phillips to establish a continuity between the experience of slavery and the experience of being a refugee. His death reads like the restaging of the African slaves' return to their homeland through death: Gabriel, a fallen angel, had "Hawk" as a war name, and his last words, 'talking about how he was a bird that could fly' (54), evoke the final lines of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, where death and myth join: "it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the arms of his brother. For he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it" (341). By using this image of the bird in flight, Phillips artfully manages to conflate through Solomon's death the traumatic experiences that genocide, slavery, forced migration and racism are, showing the toxicity of a world that seeks to negate the personal boundaries of the black individual.

Gabriel meets Bright while they are both facing the Channel and seeking to enter England. Bright was a political prisoner in Africa and has become an illegal alien in England. He is pursuing the dream of an ideal England, utterly rejecting his native country:

But I am an Englishman. Only the white man respects us, for we do not respect ourselves. If you cut my heart open you will

find it stamped with the word "England". [...] I speak the language, therefore I am going to England to claim my house and my stipend. (134)

He refuses to admit that equating the mastery of a given language and national membership is a fallacy. If it is true that language has a "capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*" (Anderson 133), it does so in circumstances dictated by politics alone and, in Bright's case, we can feel that his claim to a British passport on these grounds is quite flimsy. Englishness as a last refuge, the last opportunity to find a home is an obsession but also the very ground on which Bright wants to build a new identity in a self-designed space he is determined to call home. "I am an Englishman now. I am English and nobody will stop me from going home. Not you, not these people, nobody" (134).

Salman Rushdie sees migrants as metaphors of a former self, as "people who had been translated, who had, so to speak, entered the condition of metaphor" (Rushdie, quoted in Clingman 12). Said, an Iraqi teacher, has been forced out of his country for talking to "some English people" (77). His dearest wish is to be 'translated' in England into a political refugee:

I am no longer a teacher. I am here to begin my life again and I have the appetite to do this so they can help me, yes? I told them I have a case to present, but they do not listen to me. I tell them: please, do not send me back to my country. Not there. (79)

He shares with Bright the belief in the English language as a key to nationality and still believes in the currency of the traditional image of the Englishman as a gentleman. His belief in democracy and English decency verges on idolatry, as shown by the following question: "Is it true that in England you can smell freedom in the air? That it is a different air?" (79). But it is becoming increasingly difficult to be a Muslim refugee, particularly after the 2001 terrorist attacks: "Everybody wants to keep out the Muslim but in England, freedom is everything. [...] British people are good. I have friends who tell me the truth. I do not hate Americans, but they are not gentlemen" (78).

Said is subsequently left to die in a retention centre in the UK, abused by warders and inmates alike. Phillips shows how migration is not only unwelcome but criminalized: "England is not my country. I have done nothing. I am not a criminal man" (79). Understatement is used to show that what the inmates experience in the retention centre verges on mental torture: "Is this true? You left this man in a cell with a dead man?" (117). We are not told that Gabriel experiences a nervous breakdown after witnessing Said die without medical attention, but only presented with the warder's comments after Gabriel's fit :

“Well, sonny, what’s with all the shouting? You losing it up here?’ The day warder taps the side of his head” (82) or when Gabriel is administered a tranquilizing shot: “This should hold the bugger in place” (ibid.). Refugees are shown as the ultimate destitute, leaderless guerrillas who have to fight to protect the boundaries of their only capital: their sanity and body’s integrity.

Another Asian character is introduced through Dorothy, the second main protagonist of the novel, since she has an affair with a migrant from the Indian subcontinent. Mahmood is a Punjabi newsagent, married at twelve, who has left India to escape cultural traditions he no longer adheres to. His dream of further education and success have run aground, but he is unable to stomach “the disrespectful confusion of running a restaurant” (202), that is to say blatant racism and uncivilities:

The sight of fat-bellied Englishmen and their slatterns rolling into the Khyber Pass after the pubs had closed, calling him Ranjit or Baboo or Swamp Boy, and using poppadoms as Frisbees, and demanding lager, and vomiting in his sinks, and threatening him with his own knives and their beery breath, and bellowing for mini-cabs and food that they were too drunk to see had already arrived on the table in front of them, was causing Mahmood to turn prematurely grey. (202)

He then moves with his wife to “a small English town with decent schools and among people who still had some manners” (203), only to be greeted by “the hospitable gloating of those who lived in this town” (203). Prejudice, racism and outright rejection of the foreigner are seen as prevalent and at odds with the benevolent image of England cherished by refugees.

Beyond the color bar, Mike’s story is there to remind us of the wars between Ireland and England and of the fact that colonization and exile do not only concern non-European countries. In *The European Tribe*, Phillips “had the temerity to consider Europe as tribal” (xi). Using the example of ETA, the IRA or Yugoslavia, Phillips describes Europe as a continent still plagued by tribal warfare triggered by nationalism. Therefore, Mike can be considered as a soldier from tribal Europe who has laid down his arms: “We could talk about Mike’s experiences growing in Ireland and how his father begged him not to fight against the English and how he first came to England on the Holyhead ferry” (295). He is also “the good Samaritan” who rescues Gabriel on a highway and shows proof of benevolence. He nevertheless appears prejudiced when Indians are concerned, as he sees them as economic refugees, as “scroungers” (291). Phillips avoids Manichean characterization and points to the difficulty of welcome even on the part of people who have had a first-hand experience of discrimination.

Mike introduces Solomon to Mr. and Mrs. Anderson who offer him shelter in their "blessed home" (292). While many indications in the text point to the Andersons as modern-day Scottish abolitionists, Scotland is not depicted as part of the United Kingdom since the space of reference is no longer the British Isles, but the world: "They were both retiring to Scotland which was the part of the world where Mum had originated" (296). Ireland, England and Scotland are placed on the same level, as nations in their own rights, as though Phillips were drawing a modified world map. The homogeneity of the nation is overtly challenged and finally denied.

The English Village as Allegory of the Nation

Very early on in the novel, England is presented as being a mutating country, where it is increasingly difficult for characters such as Dorothy Jones and her father to identify fellow citizens and refer to an imagined community, Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation being "an imagined political community" (Anderson 6). Indeed, the first section of the opening chapter of the novel, a first person narrative told through the voice of Dorothy, begins and ends with "England has changed" (3, 60). The sentences are not repeated to underline permanence in Dorothy's outlook on the changing character of England, but to bracket Dorothy's evolution. The first three sentences of the novel stress the anxiety linked to identity and identification. "England has changed. These days it's difficult to tell who's from around here and who's not. Who belongs and who's a stranger. It's disturbing. It does not feel right" (3). In *A New World Order* (2001), Phillips had already stressed the unease of feeling "of and not of a place" as a black British citizen: "I am seven years old in the north of England; too late to be coloured, but too young to be British. I recognise the place, I feel at home here, but I don't belong. I am of, and not of, this place" (4).

Thus, this novel about identity and belonging, describing a world where "coloureds" still exist, astutely starts with the uneasiness of a native English citizen who is seen as a newcomer in her own country: "We are the newcomers, or posh so-and-sos, as I heard a vulgar woman in the post office call us" (5). The faultline here is not race, but class. The uneasiness generated by displacement is echoed by the defense mechanisms of the established Weston residents, which is here a consequence of sheer change, although Dorothy lucidly remarks that a new development in a village can in no way alter its past:

After all, our houses are set on the edge of Weston, a village that is hardly going to give up its name and identity because some developer has seen a way to make a quick buck by throw-

ing up some semi-detached bungalows, slapping a carriage lamp in the front of them and calling them "Stoneleigh." (3)

The refusal to open boundaries even to fellow nationals translates itself into annoyance: "He was annoyed, and he wanted me to know that once upon a time there had been a move to change the name of Weston to Market Weston, but it never caught on" (3). Another defense mechanism shown at work here relies on history and myth: 'once upon a time' is a hint to the historicity of the town and its permanence through time. Moreover, any attempt to put into question the pre-eminence of Weston is considered as an offence: "He told me that he had been instructed by head office to scratch out the name 'Stoneleigh' if it appeared on any envelopes. Should the residents turn out to be persistent offenders, he was to remind them that they lived in Weston" (3). Such mechanisms on the level of a town aim at re-establishing priority and order based on history and class. Offenders are the ones who fail to get their priorities right, who fail to fit in. Benedicte Ledent thus stresses that Stoneleigh is an allegory of England, class barriers acting as social frontiers, explaining that "[t]he topography of Weston demands to be read figuratively, as if Stoneleigh stood for England as a whole, or even for the world in miniature" and arguing that [t]he hill on which the new development is built conveys the social superiority (real or imagined) of its new inhabitants" (157).

In his exploration of the mechanisms of integration, Phillips shows British nationals experiencing rejection and mild hostility as newcomers. Yet, experience does not generate empathy and Dorothy, who is the object of rejection in Weston, is blind to the plight of vagrants. The vagrant is thought to know neither limits nor boundaries, and the absence of the minimal border, that of home, triggers a negative response. Dorothy qualifies her unease at her own prejudiced attitude as embarrassment: "I am almost embarrassed to admit it, but these days, whenever I go into town it's the homeless people who annoy me the most, and the frightening thing is they seem to be everywhere" (12). In this sentence, Phillips has Dorothy express three terms in which racist feelings are usually expressed: embarrassment about the avowal of prejudice, annoyance, and fear. Moreover, in Dorothy's view, transgressions are made worse when gendered:

"What you looking at?" says one of them. It's a woman, which somehow makes it worse. She sounds and looks like a gypsy, with her black hair, and her black eyes, and her grimy black hands. Sheila and I have always been scared of gypsies and Mum had told us to run away if any of them ever spoke to us. They are nasty, and they like to take away people's children, everybody knows that much. (65)

Dorothy describes the rejection of the other as atavistic: "*always* been afraid" while it is shown to be socially acquired: "*Mum* had told us" (65, emphasis added). Migration as the lifestyle of nomadic nationals elicits the same rejection, compounded here with a sexist and racist slant, with no embarrassment this time since this rejection is culturally shared by "everybody." Still, Dorothy has come a long way in the span of three months: "England has changed" is uttered a second time after having referred twice to Solomon as a friend: "and I thought of my friend lying face down in the water like a dead fish" (59) and "Maybe I should visit the small stone church and say some kind of prayer for my friend?" (60) Contrary to the first utterance, the change is not seen from the vantage point of a nationalist bemoaning the altered state of her country, but as a person whose vision of the world is larger: "For the first time, I want to leave England. To see Spain or Italy, England has changed" (60).

Dorothy's first-hand witnessing of rejection makes her and the reader more aware of the difficulties experienced by others who see the anxiety of displacement compounded with racial, social, or sexual prejudice. Yet, border crossing is not limited to foreigners since the very definition of the nation seems to be put into question by nationals themselves. For his part, Dorothy's father clearly states that his nation is not the United Kingdom but England:

He believed that the Welsh were full of sentimental stupidity, that the Scots were helplessly mean and mopish, and they should stick to their own side of the Hadrian's Wall, and that the Irish were violent, Catholic drunks. For him, being English was more important than being British and being English meant no coloureds. (42)

If Britishness refers to the United Kingdom and the British Empire, Mr. Jones shows that he refuses the very idea of it. The prejudice he displays concerning the constituent countries of the United Kingdom that came to be part of the Union as far back as 1218 for Wales, 1706 for Scotland, and 1800 for Ireland, tends to underline the fact that tribal knee-jerk reactions are to be accounted for even in a country that is a major European power. There is dramatic irony in the allusion to Hadrian's Wall, since England came to existence well after the invasion by the Roman Empire, which was an immigration of a kind. As for "coloureds" they are "a challenge to our English identity" (42). Dorothy's father imagined community is then English, white and working-class, as he resents his daughter marrying a middle-class man.

The Body as the Ultimate Frontier of Identity

After presenting a collation of migrant lives, Phillips collates the lives of several women, another part of the submerged population: Denise, a neglected child victim of her father's and boyfriend's violence, Carla, the horrified friend of Solomon's murderers, Sheila, Dorothy's sister, who was abused by her father, and Dorothy herself who is nevertheless "concerned to make sure that the dominant narrative is male" (203). They are all part of a taxonomy of women whose body, as a frontier of identity, is a battleground. Coming from fractured or dysfunctional homes, they are in search of refuge as they share a sense of alienation from a man's world. They remain nevertheless the characters that are most empathetic to the plight of migrants who, like them, are denied the right to exert their free-will. Denise, who courageously resists the call to press charges against Gabriel for alleged rape declares: "Then Barry, he started with his fists when I didn't do what he wanted. They are sick, all of them. Just sick" (187). Katherine who works for an immigration law firm and helps refugees is an independent character who is shown to be able to exert her free will and act positively in favor of the homeless. She is nevertheless shown to have to wage a battle at home as her partner disagrees with her fight: "Gabriel, I'm sorry I can't do more for you than this, but as you can see I've got things to sort out at home" (182).

Freedom and physical integrity is not a given in their lives, and this is translated by Dorothy through the images used when recalling her affair with Mahmood: she felt like "a fish trapped" in her bed (210) and also "as an object speared" (199). Dorothy refuses to accept a role of sexual object and become submerged by "the familiar entanglement of female feelings of guilt and vulnerability" (Phillips 2009, 7). She becomes a fighter of a kind on the boundaries between sexes when she awkwardly tries to get even with her lovers, but her attempt at redress is translated as being mere harassment. There seems to be no safe haven for women in an environment where they are still trapped into pre-determined behavioral patterns, and which has also become "a more brutal England in terms of violence":

and so to her way of thinking it didn't seem to matter much where you were these days, for people seemed to feel that they could pretty much do whatever they liked to you. There had even be a story in the local paper about a woman who was badly beaten up by a gang of kids in the park across the way when she tried to stop the young hooligans from mugging her six-year old daughter for her bike. (195)

Dorothy's answer to the guilt feeling she has for having failed both her sister and Solomon, her feeling of loss after her parents' death and a series of humiliating love-affairs is to retreat into silence after her collapse: "My heart remains a desert, but I tried. I had a feeling that Solomon understood me. This is not my home, and until they accept this, then I will be as purposeful silent as a bird in flight" (312). The bird imagery is another link with Solomon. It points to her exile status and her desire to escape her stifling environment. Dorothy has chosen to inhabit a fractured space: "So our village is divided into two." (4), and this division of space reflects her fractured soul. A "secondary" victim (Luckhurst 1) of the incest committed on her sister, she laments her failure to come to her help. Her sense of self-esteem has been further diminished by her husband's casual desertion, her new role as the mistress of a married immigrant: "She does not say, I used to be the fancy woman for the Asian man in the corner shop, but he dropped me" (223), and the difficulty to ignore the social prohibitions inherited from her parents. After the strain of her sister's death from cancer, her dismissal after having been accused of harassment, and the end of her affair with Mahmood, the final blow is Solomon's death which provokes the uncovering of an internalized racial taboo. In a psychotic crisis, she hears her dead mother confirm the impossibility of a meaningful relationship with a black person:

She goes on, but she's so upset that she can hardly get the words out. Didn't I understand what people would say about me if I were to be seen with a coloured, and particularly one as dark as this Solomon? She had not brought me up to be that type of girl. (64)

Dorothy finds sanctuary, and home, within her own psychic boundaries. Toni Morrison has remarked that "we may suddenly realize that the most obvious and fundamental location of home *is* the human body, the final frontier of identity." Morrison further asserts the fundamental role of memory as a location of home, which throws a new light on Dorothy's behavior in *A Distant Shore*: "Foreign is the designation of the curious, the not us, the rupture between self and society. Home is where the memory of the self dwells, whether those memories pawn or shrivel, determines who we are, and determines what we may become." In a defiant gesture, Dorothy decides to shut herself off from the rest of the world, being thus comforted in the thought that she is safely off-limits.

The borderline personality disorders Dorothy suffers from enable Phillips to situate within the psyche and the body the unease, disquiet and anguish the crossing of barriers provoke. As Roger Luckhurst suggests, "Trauma is a piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange

communication" (3). Far from being the "settled female body" (Machado Saez 39) with which Solomon is unable to connect, Dorothy is a deeply unsettled woman whose quaint idea of England does not match its reality, and whose aspiration to openness and generosity clash with reactionary attitudes transmitted to her by her family or evinced by fellow villagers. While her quasi-Austenian respect for manners is seen as antiquated, blatant prejudices have free reign.

Listening to a publican talking about a Jewish family in a pub where she is having a drink, Dorothy discovers that children's names remain a criterion of eligibility to belonging: "Nobody cares much in the town, but around here they don't blend in. I mean, Rachel and Jacob. They weren't even trying" (9). Identity and nationhood become concepts that are increasingly defined individually in a constant negotiation between personal history and day to day circumstances.

In the nursing home, Dorothy realizes that it is through bonding with others that the feeling of belonging can be nurtured. Home is where you feel understood. That is why waiting for "gather[ing] some strength before going back to the world" (312), she decides to shut herself within her own body, the ultimate frontier, offering to the world the performance of a refusal to belong in a world where she is both homeless and alone. The only contact zone becomes the mask she will wear every day, as if in a dumb show. "Sometimes before dawn, as light begins to bleed slowly through the night sky, I will ease myself out of this bed and proceed to put on my day face" (312). Dorothy refuses to go on operating, collaborating with and negotiating the different faultlines of an increasingly fractured world. She openly denounces communication as a fallacy, offering a mask to the world: "And then, in the morning, just like in the real world, I put on my day face" (305). She becomes unmoored, a single unit isolated within her own psychological boundaries, trying her best to survive and keep death at bay: "They just shuffle around looking miserable, as though death has tried to talk to them in the night. Well, it also tries with me sometimes, but you're not forced to listen. There's nothing that says that you have to pay attention" (305). Clingman names this experience of utter isolation "disjunctive simultaneity of the national":

In such an account, we are light years away from Benedict Anderson's notion of national temporality - everyone experiencing everything at the same time. Rather, separately and together, Dorothy and Gabriel's lives suggest parallel universes within the nation, operating within different fields of time and space. Here we see the cavernous and disjunctive simultaneity of the national - times within times, narratives within narra-

tives – precisely because of migrant and exilic experience, whether in (in Dorothy's case) domestic or (in Gabriel's) across formal borders. (96)

In this novel, national, social, and personal borders are questioned and challenged. The fight for freedom and self-assertion turns out to be a deadly fight in unfriendly territory. Should we fail to acknowledge and celebrate the fact that in Toni Morrison's words "The world is every foreigner's home" and stubbornly refuse to listen to "the choral accompaniment of voices" (266) that constitute an integrated nation, we are headed for a world crisscrossed by a myriad of lines, where individuals isolated within their personal boundaries will be aggregated in fictions of communities, a world Phillips envisioned in 2000:

The New World. A twenty-first century world. A world in which it is impossible to resist the claims of the migrant, the asylum seeker, or the refugee. I watch them. The old static order in which one people speaks down to another, lesser, people is dead. The colonial, or postcolonial, model has collapsed. In its place we have a new world order in which there will soon be one global conversation with limited participation open to all, and full participation available to none. In this new world order, nobody will fully feel at home. (5)

Yet, a decade later, the world is still busy resisting the claims of all manners of exiles and most election returns in African countries tend to confirm the strength of the postcolonial model that still survives even if altered. According to one's location on the globe and position in society, access to global conversation remains either a myth or a spurious luxury. For better or for worse, the global unity and uniformity envisioned once by Phillips is far from achieved, yet the quest for home, one of Phillips's recurring motifs, is a global concern, now that environmental refugees have added their numbers to the flood of immigrants and political refugees throughout the world. *A Distant Shore's* overall pessimism only allows us to place our hope in individual resilience.

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