

**Memory against Forgetting:
Voices of Africa in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River***

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Heba makram kamel sharobeem

The struggle of man against power ...is
the struggle of memory against
forgetting.

Salman Rushdie

Introduction

CarylPhillips (1958) is one of the most renowned modern British writers, a novelist, a playwright and an essayist, who is also known as the “Black Atlantic” writer since the majority of his works deal with African slavery and diaspora in different parts of the world and the subsequent themes of immigration, displacement and dislocation, himself a person with “nomadic inclination” who “has made his temporary home in many parts of the world...” (Ward) In the introduction to his book *New World Order* (2001), he repeats the following sentences when he first visits Sub Saharan Africa, New York and St. Kitts, the place of his birth: “I recognise the place, I feel at home here, but I don't belong. I am of, and not of, this place” (1, 2, 3). He later adds that “he has had to understand the Africa of his ancestry, the Caribbean of his birth, the Britain of his upbringing, and the United States where he now resides. He has learnt to accept his transgressive nature” (*World Order*, 7). Interestingly, the four places he mentions are strongly associated with transatlantic slavery. Hence he refuses to be labeled in any way, especially as a black writer. In the preface to his play *The Shelter* (1983), he remarks: “In Africa I was not black. In Africa I was a writer. In Europe I am black. In Europe I am a black writer. If the missionaries wish to play the game along these lines then I do not wish to be an honorary white” (12).

His *Crossing the River*, which came out in 1993 and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, echoes and embodies Salman Rushdie's above mentioned remark concerning memory as a tool of resistance and survival. The novel, which, to quote Phillips, “is fragmentary in form and structure [and] polyphonic in its voices” (Davison 22) consists of four short independent works woven together by the common theme of slavery and diaspora and by three African characters, Nash, Martha and Travis. They do not interact with one another; yet, each of their stories reflects the hardships and struggle of Africans displaced by international slave trade. Their sections are also framed by a brief lyrical prologue and epilogue in which we hear a

fatherlamenting and regretting at the beginning the selling of his children, but celebrating at the end their resilience and survival despite their pain and losses: “My children, their voices hurt but determined, they will survive the hardships of the far bank” (CR142).¹The novel’s four narratives reveal Phillips’s experimentation with time and place; for they are displaced in time, spanning about 250 years, from the mid-1700s to 1963. Within this time frame, Phillips, as is the case in many of his novels, “substitutes the traditionally linear narrative with fragmented tales that shuttle in time and space and whose disruptions aptly evoke the lives of his displaced, usually dislocated, characters” (Ledent 3).

Hence, the action proceeds back and forth, lending a timeless ambiance to the work, making the memory of slavery a repository for linking the past to the present and the many generations of the African diaspora, one to the other, as well as creating an impression of a vicious and endless circle of their suffering everywhere. Besides, the action takes place in America (Virginia, Kansas, Dodge, and Denver), Africa (Sierra Leone and Liberia) as well as England, three settings that represent the triangle of transatlantic slavery. The three tales, together with the prologue and epilogue and the slave ship captain's journal form the novel’s “many-tongued chorus of common memory” (CR142). Hence Phillips’s book relies “on a more or less straightforward juxtaposition of isolated, often lyrical, voices which are separated from each other by gender, race, class and often time, yet share a common experience of pain and an almost instinctive urge to hope against all odds” (Ledent 3).

Objective of the paper and theoretical background

This paper will examine how Phillipsevokes and keeps the memory of the trauma of slavery and the suffering of the Africans alive through the characters’ life stories presented by the novel’s multi-vocal chorus. By doing so, the memory evoked fits in the definition of memory given by Johanna Lindbladh as “a narrative construction” and by Thomas Wägenbaur as a *storage* on the one hand and a *story* on the other hand: “The major achievement of memory is not to remember what has actually happened, but a constant distinction between recollection and forgetting” (6 & 9). Remembering versus forgetting, especially regarding history, is no better elaborated than in the great French philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s landmark book *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), which questions the fact that history seems to “overly remember” certain events that “occupy the forefront of the collective consciousness” at the expense of other events that “stand distantly behind;” he remarks: “I continue to be troubled by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting

elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory—and of forgetting” (xv). Therefore “Ricoeur situates his philosophy of history in-between the mastery of memory and the force of forgetting” as evident from the three key words of the book’s title (Wiercinski 106).

By resorting to “the Greek Heritage,” the title of one of the book’s sections, Ricoeur traces the meaning and connotation of the word memory, its association with imagination and the aporia and enigma related to this association. He notes: “Memories, [are] by turns found and sought... To remember is to have a memory or to set off in search of a memory” (4). However, recalling or representing the memory of the past takes place “in the mode of becoming-an-image;” we commonly speak of “an image of the past” or use the expression “memory-image,” which can be “either quasi visual or auditory” (Ricoeur 5). Referring to Spinoza, Ricoeur elaborates more on this relation: “This sort of short-circuit between memory and imagination is placed under the sign of the association of ideas: if these two affections are tied by contiguity, to evoke one—to imagine it—is to evoke the other—to remember it. Memory, reduced to recall, thus operates in the wake of the imagination” (5).

He then proceeds in his discussion of the aporia of imagination and memory by referring to Socratic philosophy, which offers us two different; yet complementary “*topoi*” or versions on this subject, one Platonic, the other Aristotelian. The first, also voiced by Protagoras, speaks of “the present representation of an absent thing” or “the presence of the absent in the eristic of the (present) non-knowledge of (past) knowledge;” while, the latter, focuses on “the representation of a thing formerly perceived, acquired, or learned” (Ricoeur 7, 8). In both versions, an image is created whose lasting effect on the memory is best described in Socrates’ interesting “metaphor of the block of wax,” which, we may regard “as a gift of Memory [*Mnemosyne*], the mother of the Muses” (Ricoeur 9). The block is hypothetically in our souls, and differs from one person to the other according to its size (it can be larger or smaller,) and the purity and consistency of the wax (having pure or dirtier wax, hard, soft, shaggy or “just the proper consistency”) (Ricoeur 9). What happens is that we make impressions upon this block of whatever we wish to remember, whether they are things we have seen or heard or thought of. We stamp our perceptions and thoughts on the wax, creating imprints similar to those made by signet rings: “Whatever is impressed upon the wax we remember and know so long as the image ... remains in the wax; whatever is obliterated or cannot be impressed, we forget and do not know;” for forgetting is “the effacement of

traces and ... a defect in the adjustment of the present image to the imprint left as if by a seal in wax”(Ricoeur 9, 8).Therefore, “the metaphor of the wax [best] conjoins the problematics of memory and forgetting”(Ricoeur 9).

This is what Phillips is doing through the novel’s different parts; for fear that the image imprinted in our block of wax regarding the Africans’ trauma has become with time blurry or is obliterated and effaced, he clarifies it and creates the visual and auditory “memory-image” Ricoeur discusses by highlighting the themes of abandonment, displacement, disillusionment and abuse. To “preserve in memory” this painful past that still looms in the present, he historicises his characters’ stories by presenting in every tale historical events or institutions that left their landmarks on the history of African Americans in particular. Besides, he also creates a pattern that reflects the different kinds of pain and forms of slavery they have undergone over the centuries and the way through which they defy their displacement and losses. Going back to their roots, clinging to their memory, remembering and keeping the memory of those who have been lost and attempting to find and regain what they lost are some of the tools that help them do so. Indeed, the mere fact of writing their life stories is a defiant act by Phillips himself, fulfilling what Paul Ricoeur calls “un devoir de mémoire” or “the duty to remember [which] consists essentially in a duty not to forget,” (30) and doing what Edward Said had always called for, to tell the story over and over again so that we/ humanity would never forget the atrocities committed against Africa and her children. Thus her voice and theirs will resonate and continue to be heard.

African Complicity

Interestingly Phillips wrote an eleven- minute- radio play entitled *Crossing the River* in 1984 or 1985 as he mentions in an interview, but it was “just voices,” he remarks, “a strange and haunting piece, which I’m not sure many people understood” (Jaggi 25). Hence when he later started to think about the novel, he decided to develop the play’s theme, which was about “the guilt of a father who has sold his children,” and to clarify its structure, which “was fragmented, yet held together by the father’s guilt (Jaggi 25). In fact, the novel poses from the beginning the issue of the complicity of the Africans in transatlantic slavery, in addition to the role of the white man; thus reminding us of the various agents in the history of slavery. Between the fifteenth and nineteenth century an estimated number of 9 -15 million Africans were taken to the Americas across the Atlantic, known as the Middle Passage. Hence Phillips does not only highlight the suffering and traumatic experiences of the Africans, but also the

role played by their own people in this tragedy. He “keep[s] vibrant across time and space the question of African agency and the resultant psychological havoc emerging out of it. It unsettles the minds of the Africans, inevitably questions the moral obligation for the trauma enforced upon millions of Africans” (Varunny 27). This is due to his interest in and “commitment to the reworking of history,” to re-reading and retrieving it which makes this novel, like many of his works such as *Higher Ground* (1986), “a digging deep into the labyrinths of history, a corrective exercise and revision of history” (Varunny24).²For, when asked about the writer’s responsibility, he made it clear:

You become aware of the possibility of being somebody who can identify a history and perhaps do something about redressing the imbalance of some of the ills and falsehoods that have been perpetrated by others about your history. We weren’t, any of us- male, female, black, white, whatever- immaculate conceptions dropped out of nowhere without a 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. (Davison 24)

Different historical studies reveal howslavery had already existed in Africa prior to the Europeans' involvement in this trade; for slaves formed part of the property of the African leaders and elites and later brought them a huge amount of income. From the fifteenth century onward, African communities were diverse in their social, political and economic structures, and it was common for kingsas well as village and tribe chiefs to enslave their opponents or those who did not belong to their clans. Hence, “Slavery was widespread and indigenous in African society, as was, naturally enough, a commerce in slaves. Europeans simply tapped this existing market, and Africans responded to the increased demand over the centuries by providing more slaves” (Thornton 73). Therefore “Africans were active participants in the Atlantic world both in African trade with Europe (including slave trade) or as slaves in the New World”(Thornton 6-7).Some historians go as far as claiming that 90% of the Africans who were transported to the Americas were kidnapped by African kings and leaders and sold to European traders; therefore without the collaboration of the African elites in this business, it would not have been possible for it to thrive, or at least it would not have occurred on such a wide scale (Varunny 25).

The Prologue

It is a polyphonic presentation of the voices of both the Africans and the whites. It starts with a father bemoaning his horrible deed and bringing“the whole gamut of African complicity” in

the following lines: “A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children. I *remember*. I led them (two boys and a girl) along weary paths, until we reached the place where the mud flats are populated with crabs and gulls” (Varunny 27 &CR1, italics mine). This is immediately followed by the voice of the white man, Captain Hamilton the captain of a slave ship: “*Returned across the bar with the yawl.... Bought 2 strong boys-man and a proud girl*” (CR10). The first paragraph of the novel’s prologue is actually made up of this chorus, a few sentences by the guilty African father followed by a few ones by the sea captain written in italics. It ends with two sentences, one that reflects a sense of business satisfaction on part of the captain versus a seemingly endless feeling of guilt and shame by the father: “*I believe my trade for this voyage has reached its conclusion*. And soon after the chorus of a common memory began to haunt me”(CR10). One feels that the repetition of memory indifferent forms, as a noun and a verb, remember, is meant to keep this terrible tragedy committed by both blacks and whites far from oblivion.

The second and last paragraph is solely said by the father who, I believe, can also be Mother Africa or any African involved in transatlantic slavery; hence the father and his three children can be seen as archetypes for Africa and its people. Having exchanged his children’s “warm flesh” for “cold goods,” he notes that he blames no one but himself for his misery (CR1). The paragraph begins with: “For two hundred and fifty years I have listened to the many-tongued chorus. And occasionally, among the sundry restless voices, I have discovered those of my own children. My Nash. My Martha. My Travis. Their lives fractured” (CR10). This sets the time frame of the novel, which spans the period of 250 years, and refers to the life stories of these three characters or rather their descendants who were doomed to the same miserable life, which suggests the endless slavery and injustice the Africans have been suffering from ever since. For the rest of the paragraph, the father tries to explain or justify his deed; however he is “consumed with guilt” evident in the repetition of the first three short sentences which start the prologue and end it: “A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children” (CR10). Still, in the middle of his lamentation, there is a tone of hope; for the children, though “Broken off like limbs from a tree... [will not be] lost, for you carry within your bodies the seeds of new trees. Sinking your hopeful roots into difficult soil” (CR10). After this strong beginning, Phillips sets sail with his readers *across the river*, or the Atlantic, tracing the journey of the three named African characters or their descendants.

The Novel’s Four Narratives

“The Pagan Coast” is the first of the novel’s four sections; its central characters are an ex-slave Nash - the first of the “2 strong boys-man” sold in the prologue - and his former master and father figure, Edward Williams. Having received, “a rigorous program of Christian education, and being of sound moral character” Nash is sent to the Pagan Coast or rather Liberia under the auspices of the American Colonization Society (CR12).Historically, the Society’s inaugural voyage took place on 31 January 1820,but Nash’s was in 1834. From the moment he set foot in Liberia, he would let nothing deflect him from spreading the word of God, even if he has to endanger his life. His early letters,bristlingwith strong faith, reveal that he has established a renowned mission school and managed to convert fifty of the natives to Christianity, anotable success that made him an inspiration to both priests and educators (CR12). However, afterseven years, he suddenly sends a note to his former master expressing his desire to hear no more from him, a decision that puzzles Edward who sends one of his ex-salves to check on Nash. Learning that no one is able to locate him, Edward travels to Liberia where he discovers the horrid truth of Nash’s abandonment of his Christian Faith in exchange for the African religion, tradition and life-style, marrying simultaneously three women, refusing a Christian burial and having his body burned according to the pagans’ custom. Hence, this story shows the diametrical change that befell Nash: from a true Christian, who deeply internalised his former master’s faith and ideas to a person who renounced these beliefs and broke away from all ties to his former life in America.

“West” introduces the story of the second African character, “my Martha,” as called by the remorse stricken father, anddepicts“a proud girl”as described by Captain Hamilton in the prologue.At the beginning of this shortest part of the novel,she is an old woman who has been abandoned by her travel companions for slowing down the progress of their trip to California.Then through the stream of consciousness technique and her interior monologues, the reader journeys with her through her life while curling on the Main Street in Denver or lying in a small cabin taken to and owned by a benevolent white woman, and where she spends the few remaining hours of her life. Recollecting her whole life, she “peered back east, beyond Kansas, back beyond her motherhood, her teen years, her arrival in Virginia, to a smooth white beach where a trembling girl waited with two boys and a man. Standing off, a ship” (CR42). This takes us back to the prologue and the two boys and the girl sold by the father. She is not definitely that girl, as her tale takes place at least a century after the prologue, in the late 1800s, spanning the few years before and after the American Civil War (1861-1865); but bearing the name Martha unites her story to that of her ancestor.

Following the death of her master, twenty-five years ago, she, the rest of the slaves and his Virginia plantation were inherited by his ruthless nephew who sold them in an auction. Consequently, Martha is estranged from her husband, Lucas, and young daughter Eliza Mae. She is first bought by the Hoffmans who try to make her convert to Christianity, but fail; for unlike Nash, she could not find consolation in religion. But when they plan to go west, they decide to sell her back across the Missouri River, which brings to mind the river, or rather the Atlantic that her predecessors crossed to reach America and begin their doomed life of slavery. She escapes and arrives in Dodge, lives there for ten years with Chester, the man she loves, and creates a business of her own. However, he is killed by three white men, and she has to leave for Leavenworth. Finally, meeting a coloured pioneer heading west, she joins the trip by working her fare out, cooking, washing clothes, and nursing the sick. She was hoping that there she would meet her long lost daughter, but she dies on the road and ironically receives a Christian burial and name contrary to her wish.

Phillips interrupts the narratives of the three African children in the third section, entitled "Crossing the River" and written by the slave ship Captain who purchased them. In the acknowledgements of his novel, Phillips makes clear that he has resorted to many sources to write this book, but, he adds, "I ... would like to express my particular obligation to John Newton's eighteenth-century *Journal of a Slave Trader*, which furnished me with invaluable research material for Part III". Written in diary and epistolary forms, this section is a truncated journal "of a voyage intended (by God's permission) in the *Duke of York*... from Liverpool to the Windward Coast of Africa, etc., commenced the 24th August 1752" (CR54). We have many entries starting from that date until Friday 21st May 1753 when the ship sailed back from Africa after having been "slaved". In-between these entries we read two letters written by Captain Hamilton to his wife in England. Before the journal entries, we have a list of the Officers and Seamen working on board of the ship, some of whom were discharged, others deceased and the rest managed to survive the voyage.

Having the setting of this part mostly on the ship is significant because, to use Paul Ricoeur's words, it helps replace our "(present) non-knowledge" with "(past) knowledge," and makes the absent and distant past present. Besides, according to Paul Gilroy:

...ships were the living means by which the points within that Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places

that they connected. Accordingly they need to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade. They were something more-a means to conduct political dissent and possibly a distinct mode of cultural production. Ships also refer us back to the middle passage, to the half remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation. (16-17)

Hamilton's short section takes us to the past (timewise, it is supposed to be the first part of the novel) and introduces the voice of a white man involved in transatlantic slavery. Most of the entries speak of the weather and sea conditions, places they passed by or stopped at, death of a sea captain, as well as problems on board the ship such as two intended mutinies by the slaves or the misconduct of some crew members and their subsequent punishment. This part ends with the ship leaving the coast of Africa and taking the novel's three sold children to the unknown, to a world and life of suffering. Hence no wonder we hear the Africans' grief in the captain's last entry: "At dawn brought the ill-humoured slaves upon deck.... They huddle together, and sing their melancholy lamentations. We have lost sight of Africa..." (CR69) Their sad voices add to the chorus of common memory and to the father's lamentation in the prologue.

Having sailed with the readers in the mind of Captain Hamilton, Caryl Phillips resumes his journey with the second of the 2 *strong boys-man* sold in the prologue, Travis. However, contrary to our expectations, he gives us, in this last and longest section of the novel, the story of Joyce, a white English woman, and her relationship with Travis in her voice. They meet when he comes, as a GI officer during the Second World War, to "Somewhere in England," the title of this part, which refers to her village, which though unnamed, seems to be in Yorkshire. They fall in love while she is married to Len Kiston, who was then in prison for trading in the Black Market. Obtaining divorce and knowing that she is pregnant, they are married on New Year Eve in 1945. But Travis, killed a few months later in Italy, never sees their baby boy, Greer, whom Joyce is advised to give up for adoption: "You'll be better off, love, with somebody else looking after him. And so we, my son and I. My son who hadn't asked me to turn him over to the lady with the blue coat and maroon scarf. My GI baby. No father, no mother, no Uncle Sam. It must go into the care of the County Council as an orphan...." (CR139, 136) The section ends with a mother-son reunion after eighteen years of separation. Like the father in the prologue who has longed to tell his children, "I am your father. I love you," Joyce whose son, now a young man and about to

leave her after a brief visit, “wanted to hug him. I wanted him to know that I did have feelings for him. Both then and now. He was my son. Our son” (CR10, 136).

Thus Phillips cleverly relates the novel’s last part to the prologue, and succeeds in linking all the seemingly unrelated parts to each other. Notable in each one is his experimentation with time and narratology. For example, the first section is written in an omniscient voice as well as an epistolary form allowing the reader to hear mainly the voice of Nash through his letters to Edward, whose voice is heard through an unreceived letter which he wrote to his former bondsman. Unlike the second and fourth sections of the novel, this one somehow respects clock time. Martha’s tale is narrated through the stream of consciousness technique, and her monologues flit backward and forward in time. Captain Hamilton’s part is written in diary and epistolary forms. But whereas his entries respect clock time, Joyce’s, written in retrospect and short fragmented sentences, disrupt it. For example, the first thirteen entries oscillate between the years 1942 and 1939, starting in the former which marks the arrival of Travis and the Yanks at her village. The earliest date of “Somewhere in England” is 1936 when Joyce is eighteen and the latest date and last entry is 1963 when Greer, also eighteen, comes to see his mother for the first time. These different methods of narration contribute to forming the novel’s “many-tongued chorus of common memory,” and to creating a vivid visual and auditory “memory-image” of the characters’ suffering best exemplified through the novel’s various themes.

Abandonment, displacement and disillusionment

These themes, highlighted in the prologue through the unnamed African father, represent one of the elements tying up the novel’s three tales. In “The Pagan Coast” Nash is favoured by his master, but it is not an innocent liking; for the last pages of this part implicitly suggest a sexual relationship between the two. But Edward abandons his “intimate” and displaces him by sending him to Liberia unprepared for the harsh conditions he is about to face there. Edward himself is shocked at the poverty-stricken state Nash, the new settlers and the natives lived in: “Men, women and children appeared to be living alongside hog, goat and fowl as though family members, and Edward had never before witnessed such scenes of squalor...” (39) They also suffered from the terrible climate, from the African fever and malaria, which killed many including Nash himself. (CR13).

While living in these appalling conditions, Nash and the blacks, or the “unfortunate creatures” as described by Phillips, were abandoned and unsupported by Edward and the rest

of the whites (CR13). In each letter, Nash would ask for financial support or simple things such as clothes, tools or trade goods; yet, Edward never answered his letters, nor did he send him anything: “My pleas with you to aid me... have been ill-received, for you have made nothing available to ease my present circumstances” (CR26). The last straw was when he asked, like one of his fellow ex-slaves, for a permission and help to return to America, having been in Africa a long time; still he received no response. Gradually, the letters reveal his growing disappointment, blaming Edward for exploiting, cruelly abandoning and expelling him, his “past intimate,” though he followed his counsel. He even cries out writing: “Why have you forsaken me?” (CR37) bringing to mind Christ’s outcry on the Cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me”. Nash finally tells Edward that his faith in him is evidently broken, which leads to his loss of faith in God, shared by many new settlers. Hence, by the end of this part, we can feel the collective sense of disillusionment in the white man and his assumed civilization, as well as Nash’s personal disappointment in his father figure. Hence, they no longer see themselves as “pioneering in the welcoming bosom of their native land, with a clear blue sky for a roof and a fertile soil beneath their dusty feet” (CR13).

In “West,” Martha’s life is such a manifestation of the above mentioned themes that she cries out in the first paragraph of her narrative: “*Father, why hast thou forsaken me?*” the same remark addressed by Nash to Edward, and reminiscent of Christ’s cry on the Cross (CR41). Asked about this sentence as “a haunting, reiterated Biblical question” that brings forth the issue of paternalism and responsibility, Phillips replied:

It seems to me that the very nature of the relationship between the master and the slave, the colonizer and the colony, Britain and the Caribbean, is paternalistic. The whole question of relationships between black and white historically has tended to be paternalistic and perhaps enshrouded in some air of patronage at times, and so I’ve always been interested in those kind of power relations. It has such Biblical overtones as well because it is also a reference to religious themes. (Davison 22)

Martha is twice abandoned by her masters, and finally by her travel companions. Every act of abandonment is accompanied by bereavement, dispossession and displacement, forcing her to travel from one place to another in harsh circumstances and to work so hard that she sums up her life as: “Such misery in one life;” and when asked by the lady who found her on the street if she could stand up, she shakes her head and thinks: “No ma’am.... I doubt if I’ll ever be able to stand by myself again. But no matter. I done enough standing by myself to last

most folks three or four lifetimes” (CR48, 43). Her first serious loss was one of a life time when estranged from her family; she recalls the pain of the auction: “I fall to my knees and take Eliza Mae in my arms. I did not suckle this child at the breast, nor did I cradle her in my arms and shower her with what love I have, to see her taken away from me” (CR43). This traumatic experience remains with her all her life to the extent that a few hours before her death, “she burst in a quiet sigh. Eliza Mae,” (CR45) and her last dream before death is of her daughter, as a socially respected woman greeting her mother in her own house, with her schoolteacher husband and their three children dressed in their best Sunday clothes. Along her life journey, she also lost Chester, who was murdered before her eyes. Every time she loses a family, a lover or a friend, Martha is forced to leave behind all that she worked for and to move to another place. Therefore she ends up possessing nothing and feeling lonely.

The novel’s last section, too, reflects the above mentioned themes; and in Joyce we have a mother who, like the father in the prologue, is “ashamed” for having to give away her child who, she writes, “would never call me mother” (CR136). Learning Joyce’s story, we understand why the bemoaning father in the epilogue includes her among his three abandoned but somehow triumphant and surviving children, and why she and Travis were destined to love each other. We do not know much about Travis’ life prior to meeting Joyce, but hers and other characters’ in this section embody the novel’s themes of abandonment, segregation and disillusionment, as if Phillips means to present other forms of slavery inflicted on many people, including the whites. In this he brings to mind Chinua Achebe who remarks in an interview: “There are different forms of dispossession, many, many ways in which people are deprived or subjected to all kinds of victimization—it doesn't have to be colonization” (Bacon).

Joyce, whose father was killed in the First World War, is psychologically abandoned by her mother, herself a victim of the loss of her husband and later of her job. The mother-daughter relationship is cold; for they rarely talk to each other, and Joyce is made to feel guilty by the mother whenever she shows her any form of empathy. Thus she makes her withdraw to books, acquire, like Nash and Travis, a low self-image and finally accept marrying Len seven weeks after meeting him when she was only 21 years old. She is then displaced; for she leaves her town for the village where he lives. However, he, too, disappoints her in different ways, making her feel, not for the first time in her life, “the humiliation of being abandoned” (CR91). For prior to meeting him, Herbert, an actor who is married with two children,

seduces her when she is only eighteen and finally abandons her when she is pregnant with his child; so she undergoes an abortion. In Len's unnamed village, Joyce is alone since the people hardly speak to her; rather they speak about her. In the first entry, she has been living there for almost three years; yet like Travis who has just arrived, she remains a stranger: "Once the men [the soldiers] had vanished, eyes turned upon me. I was now the object of curiosity. The uninvited outsider. There was nobody with whom I might whisper. I stared back at their accusing eyes and then stepped back into the shop" (CR72). Her biggest loss was yet to come when, like Martha, she lost her family with Travis killed in the war and Greer taken away.

It is interesting how Phillips suggests through the novel the circularity and endlessness of abandonment and loss, and associates them with *the failure of the crop*, an image repeated in different ways in the novel's first two sections; thus acting as a leitmotif. First, we see it in the prologue forcing the father/ Africa to sell his/her children. By the end of "The Pagan Coast" we are reminded of it through the abandonment exercised by both master and slave whose crops failed one way or the other. Literally speaking, Nash's agricultural crop failed as mentioned in one of his letters, and so did his school, which was finally closed down. Metaphorically, this signifies the failure of the Colonization Society's *crops* and signals "a humiliating defeat" for their ideals (CR14). Similarly Edward ends up standing alone at Nash's house, abandoned by another of his ex-slaves and aware of "the hopelessness of his predicament" while the natives are wondering at his abased state; this again suggests nothing but the ultimate *failure of his crops* and dreams (CR40). It is the same in "West," with Martha who was abandoned by the Hoffmans when their crops failed or "were not selling".

This circularity of abandonment is most evident in Joyce's life story, which not only echoes her mother's, who warned her against marrying a soldier as he would never come back, but is also re-lived by her son. Like him, she was yet a baby when she lost her father, both fathers killed in World Wars, and then abandoned differently by their mothers. Like Greer, she has no memory of her father except a single photograph, which was ironically lost with the destruction of their house in an air raid. Similarly, her son has no memories of his father; as she had to destroy everything when she started a new life with a man named Allen: "I don't even have a picture of him [Travis]. I'm sorry, love. I destroyed everything. Letters, pictures, everything. When I met Alan. It seemed the right thing to do, but I was stupid" (CR136).

Nevertheless, despite the absence of any picture or document of Travis, Nash or Martha, their memory is made present and lingers on.

Survivors despite Abuse

The pain experienced by the characters due to the above mentioned themesis accentuated by the different forms of abuse they undergo. Nash is emotionally and, like other slaves, sexually abused by his seemingly naïve and well- intentioned master. However, he harms Nash who “supplanted” another ex- slave, Madison, in his master’s affections (CR29). As a boy, Edward had brought him from the fields to the house; their relationship was too much for his wife Amelia, driving her out of home and mind, and eventually making her commit suicide. This makes the reader question Edward’s real intentions of taking Nash’s African children back to America to offer them, what he calls, “a proper Christian life amongst civilized people” (CR39).

Edward also harmed Nash by making him blindly internalise his and the Colonization Society’s demeaning beliefs of the natives, included in the education he and his fellows received. Through his first letters, Phillips brings to our memory such teachings which made Nash consider himself lucky to have been taken from his parents by Edward who gave him a Christian upbringing; otherwise, he would have been “dwelling in the same robes of ignorance which drape the shoulders of ... [his] fellow blacks” (CR18). A statement that shows his adoption of the colonial binary opposition discourse, detected more than once, like when referring to Liberia as the land of darkness in contrast with America, “a land of milk and honey,” or describing the Africans as heathens and uncivilized, bringing to one’s mind the image and discourse associated with Africa in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (CR20). Hence Nash and his fellows internalise a sense of self-contempt, question their own worth, continue to address the white people in Liberia as *masters* and believe that Liberia is the only place where people of colour have the right to enjoy their freedom “and the same privileges as ... [their] white *brethren* in America” (CR33, 17, italics mine). Indeed, it is only there that Nash gained the respect denied him in America; he is addressed as “*Mr Williams* and not *Boy*” (CR23).

Nash’s letters also reveal the abuse suffered by the natives who are tormented, exploited and enslaved by the whites who break the law and trade with them through slave-dealers and through establishing slave factories in Liberia. We read of an American, who,

when in need of money, “*borrowed* two native boys,” after having deceived their fathers that he was going to teach them English, only to sell them to a slave factory in return for twelve dollars (CR23). Nash, too, speaks of others, who are vulgar and “unchristian” in their attitude and whose sole occupation is “to prey upon poor unfortunate creatures such as myself” (CR21). Even worse is the continuation of slave trade under the protection of the American flag, or “the unfurling of the Star Spangled Banner”. Phillips denounces this through Nash: “...this American protectionism is a disgrace to our dignity, and a stain on the name of our country” (CR27).

In addition to these striking examples of abuse, Phillips continues to question the intentions even of the supposedly benevolent whites like Edward who whole-heartedly internalise the *white man’s burden* towards the Africans, thinking of Liberia as a place with “heathen shores at the edge of civilization” (CR14). Like Marlowe, Conrad’s narrator of *Heart of Darkness* who ascribes the horrible degradation in Kurtz’s character to the devilish wilderness of Africa, Edward blames Liberia and its “barbarous climate” for changing Nash and encouraging him to turn against God. However, one feels that Caryl Phillips deconstructs such accusations which, according to Achebe, have for long shaped the collective consciousness of many readers regarding Africa and its natives. Hence, in his last letter, Nash or rather Phillips denies Liberia the guilt of corrupting people and expresses his and many slaves’ protest:

We, the colored man, have been oppressed long enough. We need to contend for our rights, stand our ground, and feel the love of liberty that can never be found in your America. Far from corrupting my soul, this Commonwealth of Liberia has provided me with the opportunity to open up my eyes and cast off the garb of ignorance which has encompassed me all too securely the whole course of my life. (CR36)

Ironically this statement contradicts Nash’s earlier gratitude to his master for saving him from a destiny of ignorance like Liberia’s natives.

However, despite all that Nash goes through and his death at the end, he is not defeated; for he struggles against the harsh circumstances he encounters, manages to survive against all odds and makes a life of his own by going back and clinging to his roots. He also overcomes his early low self-image. By the end of this section, Edward is alone outside Nash’s house, looking confused and making a fool of himself before the natives, an attitude that stands in stark contradiction to Nash’s final and confident words: “...having no means to return to

America, and being therefore bound to an African existence, I must suspend my faith and I therefore freely choose to live the life of the African” (CR36-7). Hence, the first narrative’s open end mainly suggests the failure of the white man and his losing the way in contrast with Nash who, whether we agree or disagree with what he did, was certain of his.

Similarly in “West,” and without graphic description of slave abuse or torture, Martha’s tale poignantly reminds us of the ugly face of this horrible trade. This is most notable in the auction scene, which presents an effective visual and auditory “memory-image” of this degrading process. While this woman and other slaves are standing on the auction block, we *see* the crowd attending this event: farmers coming from everywhere, “A fun-seeking crowd,” as well as traders; and we *hear* “The auctioneer crying to the heavens. A band strikes up. A troupe of minstrels begins to dance,” (CR44) which reveals the callousness of all present. Martha remembers how an overseer rides his horse towards her and whips her on the arm while she is standing with the rest of the Virginia property in the order in which they will be sold: “Slaves. Farm animals. Household furniture. Farm tools” (CR43). In the meantime, her daughter is “terrified,” cries or holds on to her while whispering or repeating one word only, “Moma,” as if it were the only word she possessed; and her husband is approached by a trader who “prods Lucas’s biceps with a stick. If a trader buys a man, it is down the river. To die” (CR43, 44). This whole scene is one of the strongest and most humiliating ones of this section and the whole novel, an effect created through the way imagination and memory co-work: by evoking one-our imagination- the other is evoked, remembrance; thus “memory operates in the wake of the imagination” (Ricoeur 5).

It is not surprising that throughout “West,” this scene lingers on in Martha’s memory who is haunted by “Voices from the past. Some she recognized. Some she did not. But, nevertheless, she listened” (CR45). Among these voices, we keep hearing that of young Eliza and the one word she uttered during the auction, “Moma”. Once more the words remember and memory are repeatedly used in Martha’s interior monologues: “She no longer possessed either a husband or a daughter, but her *memory* of their loss was clear. She *remembered* the disdainful posture of Master’s nephew, and the booming voice of the auctioneer. She *remembered* the southern ladies in their white cotton sun bonnets and long-sleeved dresses, and the poorer farmers who hoped to find a bargain....” (CR44 italics mine). Hence, she was adamant not to be sold or renamed again.

Besides, even in the Free states when the blacks own and run their business, they continue to suffer; when Chester has his own store, he remarks that some “folks” were not yet used to the idea of coloured people owning decent property. Hence they dream to go west not for the sake of gold, but because:

...they were just prospecting for a new life without having to pay no heed to the white man and his ways. Prospecting for a place where things were a little better than bad, and where you weren't always looking over your shoulder and wondering when somebody was going to do you wrong. Prospecting for a place where your name wasn't 'boy' or 'aunty', and where you could be a part of this country without feeling like you wasn't really a part. (CR42)

However, despite all the abusive circumstances encountered by Martha, we find ourselves before a fighter, a strong, courageous and proud woman who cherished her dearly earned freedom: “Never again would she stand on an auction block. (Never.) Never again would she be renamed. (Never.) Never again would she belong to anybody. (No sir, never)” (CR45). We have a woman who managed to be an agent more than once, a woman who “had a westward soul,” and was determined and dreaming until the last moment of her life to “become a part of the colored exodus that was heading west” symbolic of this section's title (CR52).

But the trauma of slavery is no more strongly evoked than in the novel's third section, especially that it is based on a real slave trader's diary. Hamilton refers to the purchased nameless slaves as “cargo” or “numbers,” bringing to mind the humiliating auction scene of the previous section. In one entry we read: “2 girl slaves, who have long been ill of a flux, died. Nos 117 and 127,” (CR65) a statement repeated more than once in the same emotional detachment, matter-of-fact way; since many slaves died on board the ship before sailing back to America. Hence once more the reader is shocked at the objectification with which Hamilton, Mr. Ellis, the slave dealer, and other sea captains deal with the Africans. They seem like murderers committing their crimes in cold blood. Stopping at Whiteman's Bay to view some slaves, Hamilton writes, “Was shown 10, but bought none. Lame, old, or blind” (CR58). Approaching Sierra Leone, we see many slave ships at the harbour, and learn of the commercial competition among them. We understand that the Africans were sold cheap at the beginning, but then as slave trading started to flourish, they became more expensive: “Sent Mr Foster in the yawl with goods for 5 slaves, that is to say close to 500 bars which in earlier

times might have purchased 20” (CR60). Meeting the captain of a ship, ironically named the *Virtue*, Hamilton learns from him that the price of slaves has run up to 125 bars and more. At one point, Hamilton is advised to linger in West Africa to get more and better “cargo,” 30 slaves of superior quality, for a cheaper price, 75 bars each. That evening, celebrating the deal, he orders the music to be played and strong liquors to be drunk. Besides, we see the slaves physically tortured and sexually abused, as in the case of a crew member who seduced “a woman slave big with child, lay[ing] with her in view of the whole quarter deck” (CR64). Yet, he was punished for that deed.

When contrasting these entries with Hamilton’s two love letters to his wife, one feels puzzled at the apparent duality of his character similar to Edward Williams’ and the Hoffmans’. The letters reveal a sensitive man, sincere in his love for his wife whom he misses and dreams of. One wonders how he and his likes never thought of the Africans’ feelings, having estranged them from their families for good; or how they dehumanized them to justify their trade. These questions and others impose themselves on the reader, especially when Hamilton more than once, like Edward Williams, admits that this business contradicts with his Christian Faith. Similarly, we learn that he prays at a slave- factory chapel, and we hear him speak of “God’s blessing,” thanking Him for saving his ship from damages or from insurrections planned by the slaves.

One way of justifying this dual attitude is given by Achebe who remarks in an interview following the publication of his *Home and Exile* that the literature produced by Europe during the last four or five hundred years stereotyped Africa and dehumanized its people to justify slavery and slave trade, whose cruelties troubled many Europeans and made them question this profitable business:

It was difficult to excuse and justify, and so the steps that were taken to justify it were rather extreme. You had people saying, for instance, that these people weren't really human, they're not like us. Or, that the slave trade was in fact a good thing for them, because the alternative to it was more brutal by far. And therefore, describing this fate that the Africans would have had back home became the motive for the literature that was created about Africa. (Bacon)

In the novel’s last section, we see how that same abuse and segregation remain even after the emancipation of the slaves and continue to exist in the twentieth century, as evident through the suffering of Travis and the “coloureds”. When he was once out with Joyce and late

for his return to the camp, they were both picked up by a military police's jeep; yet, after dropping Joyce off,

...they hadn't taken him back to the camp. ... they'd driven him down the road to a clearing and told him to get out of the jeep. And then they beat him with their sticks. He said they beat him so hard that he thought his kidneys were going to burst. I [Joyce] closed my mouth, which I now realized had been hanging open. When they took him back to the camp, they'd made a report that said that he'd been drunk and difficult. I was horrified when he told me this, but he seemed to take it as *a matter of course*. He told me that the army only liked to use *them* for cleaning and the like. (CR124, italics mine)

No wonder that when showing documentaries of the war in the cinema, "Coloureds" never appear on the screen, and later, a white soldier of higher rank bluntly tells Joyce: "A lot of these boys [Travis and other coloured soldiers] are not used to us treating them as equals" (CR136). Besides, when Travis takes a permission to marry her, he learns that he will not be allowed to take her back to the US, but would rather stay in England.

This section also reveals how abuse and segregation extend to include the whites, especially women. Joyce suffers at the hands of two men before finding briefly true love with Travis. The first one is Herbert, the actor, and the second is Len who exploits her, making her work most of the time in his shop and beats her more than once (CR 81). Similarly, Sandra, Joyce's only friend, is another victim of war and woman abuse. Desperate and living alone with her baby, Tommy, since her husband is away in the war, she is seduced by Terry, Len's friend, and ends up being pregnant. Knowing what happened, her husband is ironically "Back from the war to kill. His wife" (CR100) and Tommy is consequently taken away to an unknown destiny. That night, we see Terry at the pub drinking "like nothing was the matter;" (CR10) thus bringing to mind the cold-hearted audience at the slave auction scene in "West".

However, despite the abuse suffered by many characters in this section, they resist, fight back and manage to survive. Joyce stands up to Len when he beats her; and so does Travis when he knows of Len's release from prison and his attempt to harm her. Managing the shop on her own during the war years amid all hostile and challenging circumstances, Joyce reminds the reader of Martha, who too was handling a business and living among hypocrites. More importantly, Travis and Joyce find the long-awaited love and solace in each other and get married against all odds, enjoying, even briefly, fleeting happiness.

Historicising the characters' life stories

To keep the memory of the Africans' trauma far from oblivion, Phillips historicises the life stories of his characters by linking them to certain events or institutions. Carol Davison remarks: "In each instance, Phillips conjures up unchronicled up largely moments in black history...." (20) For example, he reminds us in the first part of the controversial ACS, also known as the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States. It was founded in 1816 with the aim of promoting the manumission and repatriation of the former slaves on the west coast of Africa, namely in the colony of Liberia. The Society thought that by doing so, they would achieve a two-folded aim: they would get rid of "a cause of increasing social stress" in America, and help civilise Africa through shipping off her descendants who had received Christian upbringing and education (CR12). However, Phillips makes us question these seemingly civilised and benevolent objectives; being a cover up for the whites' intolerance of the freedom of the blacks and of a possible co-existence with them in America. He also reveals their corruption and hypocrisy; their colonial club and its furniture stand in stark contrast with the dehumanizing living conditions of the natives and the new settlers. Besides, Nash tells Edward that they are never content with what they have and "seem determined to clasp what little there is to their own bosoms" (CR18). Edward himself admits at the end that the project is "after all, ill-judged" (CR32).

"West" brings to mind briefly the American Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation as well as the territorial expansion towards the West by the end of the 19th century and the "impressive bravery of the pioneers" who suffered hunger, dehydration and other route hardships (CR50). However, the War did not make a difference to Martha: "War came and war went and, almost unnoticed, the Union toppled. I was free now, but it was difficult to tell what difference being free was making to my life. I was just doing the same things like before...." (CR47)

As for Travis' and Joyce's tale, it is linked to the Second World War, which is indeed a brilliant choice by Phillips. Not only is war compared to slavery in the traumas they leave behind, but it is also war that brings Travis to Britain, the country on whose ships the three children in the prologue, his ancestors, were forced out of their native Africa. More interestingly war signals the coming of the ex-colonized (the Yanks, the Americans) to their ex-colonizers (the British) and the reversal of roles and relationships. The Americans have come to help bleeding England in the war; but the reaction of the English is: "We've been invaded by bloody Yanks. Nobody wants them.... Everybody expects trouble. People keep

talking about their Yank arrogance. Saying that they think that all they have to do is to blow their own trumpets and the walls of Germany will fall down” (CR75). However, many people are put to shame by their politeness, especially that of the coloured soldiers.

The epilogue

Phillips wraps his text through the voices of the Africans who have crossed the river, and to whom he dedicates his novel. The epilogue echoes the prologue, but asserts the survival of the children or rather their descendants despite all the abusive and heartbreaking conditions they have endured. “Survivors all. In their diasporan souls a dream like steel” (CR 235,6). If the father /Africa in the last sentences of the prologue has been waiting for 250 years for “the drum to pound across the water,” he/she in the first line of the epilogue “hear[s] a drum beating at the other side of the river” (CR1, 142). The voices of Nash, Martha, Travis and Joyce are echoed through their own words and thoughts, which we have previously read in their sections. Nash’s voice is presented through one of his letters to Edward in which he ironically writes, “*I am eternally grateful to you and my Creator*” for having been taken away from his parents (the father in the prologue) and receiving a Christian upbringing; Martha’s is heard through her unfulfilled dream of meeting her daughter; and Travis’ and Joyce’s in her recollection of their meeting on New Year Eve, 1945: “*Joyce. That was all he said. I couldn’t believe it. He’d come back to me. He really wanted me. That day, crying on the platform, safe in Travis’s arms*” (CR142). Failed dreams, but the dreamers are emblematic of Hemingway’s famous quote: “But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated”.

And the “chorus of common memory” swells from different parts on that other side: from London, Brooklyn, São Paulo, Santo Domingo, Charleston, the Caribbean, Stockholm, Paris, Trinidad, Rio, and others, which shows how the three children’s descendants were scattered across the globe, and also unites the blacks everywhere through their African origin, including Caryl Phillips, himself a native of the West Indies. And lest we should forget, he reminds us of what they went through at the hands of Captain Hamilton (and his likes) whose voice is also heard in the epilogue and written in italics as is the case in the prologue: “*Put 2 in irons and delicately in the thumbscrews to encourage them to a full confession of those principally involved. In the evening put 5 more in neck-yokes*” (CR235). But the suffering and enslavement of the Africans still go on in different forms; Phillips takes us to the present and we see “a helplessly addicted mother” in Brooklyn (whose story is reminiscent of Martha’s:

“They have stopped her benefit. She lives now without the comfort of religion, electricity, or money”), a barefoot child in SãoPaulo(who could be like the young abused Nash) and an “eleven-year-old-daughter ... preparing herself yet for another night of premature prostitution” in Rio (CR235-6).

And yet we hear voices of resistance, “I have listened. To reggae rhythms of rebellion and revolution dipping through the hills and valleys of the Caribbean,” and dreams of a better future: “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave- owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood” (CR237). The sentence echoes a remarkable African American whose spirit and achievements remain an everlasting symbol of hope and resilience, Martin Luther King and his famous “I have a dream” speech, and Langston Hughes’ poem, “I, Too Sing America”. The Africans’ “haunting” voices resonate and impose themselves everywhere through their revolutionary figures, such as Toussaint L’Ouverture, “hoping for: Freedom. Democracy,” and their culture, notably their music: “the saxophone player in Stockholm...Samba. Calypso. Jazz. Jazz. Sketches of Spain in Harlem. ...an African carnival in Trinidad” (CR142).

Celebrating the power of African culture, particularly its music- whether coming from the Caribbean, America or “hybridised by black Britain”- is important for what Paul Gilroy calls “black musical expression” and “expressive counterculture”. Gilroy comments on a popular song, which he sees as a “formal unity of diverse cultural elements” since it was “produced in England by the children of Caribbean settlers and then re-mixed in a (Jamaican) dub format in the United States by... an African-American. It included segments or samples of music taken from American and Jamaican records” (16). His remark applies to Phillips’s reference to Jazz in his epilogue and all the music that we hear in his text such as the lamentations of the black slaves on Hamilton’s ship when they could no longer see Africa, or when Joyce listens out of the church to the voices of Travis and his mates and their clapping of hands (CR 83).³ Gilroy sees the above mentioned song as “more than just a powerful symbol. It encapsulated the playful diasporic intimacy that has been a marked feature of transnational black Atlantic creativity. The record and its extraordinary popularity enacted the ties of affiliation and affect which articulated the discontinuous histories of black settlers in the new world” (16). This is the same and lasting effect created by Phillips’s text.

Conclusion

Going through Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* shows how he successfully manages to give Africa and its people proper voices that counterbalance the silence imposed on it/them and to amend its/ their horrid stereotypes in history records and many literary works; stereotypes which "gained currency long ago in the slave trade and poisoned, perhaps forever, the wellsprings of our common humanity" (Achebe 35). Paul Ricoeur remarked in an interview: "Historians work with documents, and a document is already a rupture with memory, since it is written and since the voices have already turned silent" (12). But Phillips manages to break that silence and to create a "memory in the singular [that] is ... an effectuation," a memory with an "affective character [through] ... the choice of words, metaphors, mode of narration" and other tools (Ricoeur 22 & Lindbladh 5). By giving voice to the voiceless, Phillips creates successfully what Ricoeur refers to as the present representation of absence, (7) similar to what Achebe calls for, the "process of 're-storying' peoples who had been knocked silent by the trauma of all kinds of dispossession," a process which he hopes will continue in the twenty-first century and will eventually result in a "balance of stories among the world's peoples" (79). Achebe's *Home and Exile* and similarly Phillips's novel are indeed "a rumination on the power stories have, to create a sense of dispossession or to confer strength depending on who is wielding the pen" (Bacon).

The novel's brilliant narratives reveal the voyage of African diaspora which cuts through time and space, which "is set in Africa, the Americas and England" and shows that even if "these three places have either forgotten or toned down the history of ... [this] peculiar institution," Phillips's fiction brings it to the fore and "tries to retrieve it in a more personal mode" (Ledent 6). He makes sure that the image imprinted in our "block of wax" remains strikingly clear by showing us that the three African characters' shared experience of oppression, racism and victimization are the stories of the children of visible and invisible slavery everywhere. Phillips does not present a graphic description of their abuse; for unlike other remarkable texts that deal with African slavery, like *Beloved* or *The Color Purple*, we do not have lynching or raping scenes. Still, in their voices, he appeals to our humanity and creates in us feelings of guilt by evoking the memory of their hardship over 250 years. Hence, the memory he creates fits in Johanna Lindbladh's definition of "individual and collective memory ... [as] enigmatic, fragmentated, intimately connected to our senses and feelings.... Memory is essentially emotional in character" (5). Interestingly, the words memory, remember and voices are repeatedly used in the text; "remember" appears 20 times.

Asked about his aim behind writing this novel, Phillips answered: “I wanted to make a connection between the African world which was left behind and the diasporan world which the people had entered once they crossed the water. I wanted to make an affirmative connection, not a connection based upon exploitation or suffering or misery, but a connection based upon a kind of survival. This is an unusually optimistic book for me” (Davison 21). Optimistic as Phillips may consider his text, I argue that its “many-tongued chorus of common memory” plays a harmonious music of pain and abuse that unfortunately continues to exist in our world in different ways, as evident from the epilogue and the continuous suffering of the blacks, as if Africa and its children are doomed to a painful fate. Stories as such are important for the human conscience to act as a reminder of a crime that should never be forgotten. Having recently visited the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, I was constantly reminded of Phillips’ novel and other similar texts. The Centre traces the painful story of transatlantic slavery and displays vivid and heart-breaking samples of places where the African Americans lived, were imprisoned or tortured. It also shows documentaries of the trips of fugitive or runaway slaves who, like Martha, wanted to safeguard their freedom by crossing a river that can guarantee it unlike the big one, the Atlantic, crossed by their ancestors to slavery. The Centre speaks of invisible slavery today, like human trafficking, and in a poster directly shows: “unfreedom, racism, illiteracy, genocide, hunger and tyranny” as forms of slavery. Isn’t this still happening in our world where every day human bodies of people of different ages, races and gender are washed off the shores of different rivers; people who were either pushed to escape genocides or totalitarian regimes or choose to cross the river seeking and dreaming of a better life since *their crops at home have failed?* In one of the signposts at the centre, a rhetorical question is placed asking the guests: “If not you, then who; if not now, then when? I feel that this is the same question articulated differently in *Crossing the River*.”

End Notes

¹ Whenever citing from *Crossing the River*, the initials CR will be used.

² Jose Varunny gives a thorough study of Africans’ complicity in slave trading and refers to different historical studies in this particular issue in his “African Complicity in Slavery and Psychological Vexation: A Study of Caryl Phillips’s Fiction”.

³ For a study of voices in Phillips’ *Crossing the River*, see Jee H. An’s “The Sounding(s) of Countermodernity in Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River*,” a paper given at a conference on Phillips in France, 2016.

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