

Chapter IV

*Cross–Cultural Spaces: Encounters, Movements
and
Liminal Formation of Postcolonial Identity in Caryl
Phillips’s Fiction*

Jose Varunny M. “Contours of Psychological (Dis)orientation: A Postcolonial Reading of Caryl Phillips’s Fiction” . Research Centre, Department of English, St. Thomas’ College, Thrissur – 680 001
March 2014 .

Chapter IV

Cross–Cultural Encounters, Movements and Liminal Spaces: Formation of Postcolonial Identity in Caryl Phillips’s Fiction

Displacement of individuals from their geographical territories under various colonial conditions necessarily creates a number of related problems. One of such problems that the field of postcolonial studies engages is with the questions of formation of cultural identity of those who are displaced and dislocated. The present chapter examines how such movements and dispersals transcending the borders of nation, ethnicity, religion and language become crucial in constituting one’s cultural identity. Roger Bromley observes that migration is a quintessential experience of displacement and deterritorialisation, which causes the formation of diasporic communities and the development of diasporic identities (7–8). Although European colonialism is held responsible for the major dispersals and diaspora of various communities in the history, the whole issue of migrations and transnational movements cannot be described solely within such a format. As Gayatri C. Spivak says, transnational diaspora are the results of Eurocentric migration, labour export and the seeking of political asylum, while pre–transnational diaspora occurred as a result of religious oppression, of slavery and indenturing, trade and conquest (“Diasporas Old and New” 87). What transpires in all these travels and cross–border movements is the susceptibility of the individuals to constant identity transformations. One of the significant aspects of Caryl Phillips’s novels is his preoccupation with the formation of identity of those individuals under such movements, travels, migrations. In his interview with

Jill Morrison, Phillips claims that he is “more concerned with ‘identity’ than with ‘race’”, and maintains that race is just “a component” of identity like “religion, gender, nationality, [and] class” (1). The present chapter analyses how the above transnational and pre-transnational movements, through constant cross-cultural, cross-border engagements, bring upon new transformations and reconfigurations of postcolonial cultural identity.

Homi Bhabha emphasises the fundamental transformative power of displacement, diaspora, and relocation of cultural identity (*Location of Culture* 247), while Stuart Hall conceives it as rooted in continuous ‘play’ of history on the individual’s life, focusing on what “we really are”; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’ (225). From Bhabha’s and Hall’s propositions, it follows that instead of conceiving identity as an already finished product, it should be perceived as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process under the transformative power of historical forces. Paul Gilroy shares a similar view of the formation of cultural identity of blacks, when he emphasises on the formation of black identity as constituted by the ongoing process of ‘travel’ and ‘exchange’ across the Atlantic. While all the above arguments stress on the formation of cultural identity as the product of ‘displacements,’ ‘dispersals,’ ‘migrations,’ ‘movements’ and ‘travels,’ the locus of identity formation is required to be designated. Bhabha’s concepts of ‘Third Space’ ‘In-between Space’ or ‘Liminal Space,’ Edward Said’s concept of ‘Overlapping Territories,’ Gilroy’s concept of ‘black Atlantic’– all refer to the interstitial spaces, where cultures collide and where new cultural identities are produced and negotiated. The present chapter primarily focuses on this aspect of displacement, cross-border

movements, cross-cultural engagements and a productive third space where the cultural identity of the postcolonial subject is constituted.

Phillips's first novel *The Final Passage* (1985) reveals how historical black diaspora and migrant experiences become part of constituting one's cultural identity with its cultural conflicts and cross-cultural potentials. The transatlantic slave trade brought millions of Africans to the Caribbean islands, thereby shaping its culture and history enormously. One of the crucial effects of slavery in the Caribbean islands is that after having crossed the Atlantic, the African cultures arrived at the Caribbean islands, survived there and finally managed to adapt creatively itself in its soil. Thus people who were transported to the Caribbean islands from various ethnic backgrounds and cultures of Africa found new possibilities of hybridised cultures and identities. In the case of Leila, life in such rich and varied cultural conditions of the Caribbean islands bears these aspects of a long history of diverse African cultural heritages. It is fundamentally about this sense of cultural identity that Stuart Hall speaks in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." He views "'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves,' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (223). One notices that Leila's awareness of such cultural identity is deeply ingrained in her. As the ship departs the island, Leila takes a look at her island and sees "...the African breadfruit trees tower[ing], sunburnt in the daylight, charcoal-black at night, proud of their history. They were brought here to feed the slaves. They were still feeding them. They would not feed Calvin She looked past his head and back towards the island of their birth.... But she was leaving all

this behind” (*FP* 18–19). The breadfruit trees, that become emblems of African identity and history of slavery, remind her of her position in the long tradition of her ancestors, and her inseparable link between them. This collective consciousness which is rooted in transatlantic slavery renders the Caribbean a ‘unique’ identity.

However, one notices not only an early African presence, but also long histories of European colonialism in the soil of Caribbean that have been some of the vital forces in re-modifying its already hybridised cultural life. From mid-fifteenth century, Spain and Portugal had already started their interaction with the Caribbean islands (Falola xvii). The plantations that European colonisers possessed in the Caribbean islands imparted a different cultural milieu to it. Though Caribbean islands in 1950s belonged to British Empire, it also reveals a simultaneous cultural presence of America. The village has changed in its Caribbean social practices and customs. “No longer was it the familiar crowded chaos, it was more like a mid-American town similar to those in the old western films they had sent down from America once every month, or every two months, that young and old queued for hours to see” (*FP* 96). Stuart Hall examines how one’s cultural identity is formed under such colonial experience. According to him, cultural identity is

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.... The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation....

They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other'. (220)

Stuart Hall emphasises on the transformative capacity of colonial power on one's cultural identity. Leila's cultural identity in her island has been one that is formed in terms of constant encounters and occupations by European colonial powers. Therefore, she cannot experience a cultural homogeneity and cultural singularity in relation to her island and its cultural traits. For Leila, cultural identity becomes an ongoing process, "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" as Stuart Hall observes (225). But by the intended journey to Britain she expects to go beyond such varied cultural thresholds of her island, where her identity has been constituted in terms of 'African' – 'Caribbean' – 'British–Caribbean' and 'Mulatto.'

Leila's whole life is constructed at the confrontational spaces of her small island that is devastated by colonialism. What Leila undergoes in the island is a process of "creolization, metissage, mestizaje, and hybridity" (*Black Atlantic 2*), a process of cultural intermixing and cultural exchange. The term, 'creolization' has usually been applied to 'new world' societies particularly the Caribbean and South America, and more loosely to those postcolonial societies, whose present ethnically or racially mixed populations are a product of European colonization (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 58). Leila's 'Mulatto' identity, a 'half white/European' and 'half black/Caribbean,' is also at the heart of her uncertain positions in her Caribbean island. Her life is centred on what she considers herself to be a 'mulatto' girl. The term 'mulatto' originates from the Spanish word for 'young mule' and it refers to the progeny of a European and a

Negro (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 147). Colonial presence in her country transforms her identity from a black to a mulatto in which she finds no significant space either in whiteness or in blackness. Born to a black mother and an unknown European father, Leila suffers humiliation of not being a progeny of a (black) father. The thoughts of her absent father “embarrassed her” (*FP* 65) very often. As a mulatto girl, her existence is, thus, defined by a clear departure from the Caribbean ‘blackness’ and a European ‘whiteness,’ and thereby she endures the public disgrace of being called both ‘mulatto’ and ‘white girl.’ “‘Mulatto girl’, ‘Mulatto girl’ was what her friends at school used to sing at her, and Leila used to run away and hide” (*FP* 65). Her practice of running away and hiding from her friends who call her ‘mulatto’ signifies the profundity of her psychological distress.

If the schoolchildren call Leila ‘mulatto girl,’ what Michael’s grandmother calls her is “white girl” (*FP* 45). A categorical distinction is made regarding her identification, and this alienates her from the rest of her community. Ann Phoenix and Charlie Owen observe that although people with one black and one white parent have historically been categorised as black, they have simultaneously and contradictorily, been identified as separate from both black and white people. The terms commonly used to describe people of mixed parentage, and sexual union among the black and the white people, tend to pathologise those who cannot easily be fitted into the taken-for-granted racialised binary opposition (74). Leila’s ambivalence and predicament exemplify the inevitable consequence of a cross-cultural engagement between the European and the Caribbean cultures. Essentially, as a ‘mulatto’ girl, Leila is in an ‘in-between’ position to which she

has been helplessly trapped and therefore, her identity emerges between ‘black’ and ‘white’ body distinctions. She falls in a liminal position in which she belongs neither to the white nor to the black. Victor Turner defines ‘liminal’ as representing “the mid–point of transition of a status–sequence between two positions” (237). In fact, Leila suffers double exclusion; one from a white body/culture and other, from her ‘own’ black community.

Leila’s journey across the Atlantic becomes another moment of defining her identity. *SS Winston Churchill*, the ship on which Leila travels to Britain becomes an image of ship similar to one that Paul Gilroy speaks in his *Black Atlantic*. For Gilroy, the formation of black identity is associated with the travels and journeys across the spaces of Atlantic, where Europe, Caribbean, Africa and America become essentially connected and given metaphorical link by the Atlantic Ocean. In Gilroy’s perception, the image of sailing ship in the Middle Passage becomes a ‘locus’ where new identity is constituted or reconstituted. He says,

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise.... The image of the ship — a living, micro–cultural, micro–political system in motion — is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons ... Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs. (4)

As Leila's transatlantic journey is emblematic of the Middle Passage of her African ancestors, the ship aboard which she travels unites her cultural experiences with a shared history and identity of African blacks, and she inevitably finds solidarity with the 'black Atlantic' that Gilroy claims. Benedicte Ledent has noted, "Just as the sufferings of Middle Passage form the humus of Caribbean identity, so the quick sands of twentieth century exilic condition have surprisingly become the foundation on which to build a new sensibility" (*Caryl Phillips: Contemporary World Writers* 25). The ship *SS Winston Churchill*, in this case, becomes a negotiating space that transfers Leila and her cultures, while simultaneously allowing her to reformulate and redefine her identity. Her travel aboard the ship also becomes a cultural re-enactment, and part of reminding her position within the larger framework of African diaspora. James P. Hannan in his doctoral thesis argues that Phillips shifts "the idea of home away from a purported motherland to an unrooted oceanic space, [suggesting that]...home can be thought of as process and mobility rather than stasis and location" (104).

In Britain, Leila is required considering new definitions of identity formation. Her attempts to belong to Britain under the banner of 'colonials from the British colonies' get her into further complex identity crisis. Coming to Britain, what she expects to do there is to redefine her already constrained boundaries of multiple identities. But, having lived in Britain for some time she finds herself transfixed between the haunted memories of a colonial past of her Caribbean island and a deadening present of Britain's attitude towards the colonials. Her immense faith in Britain as 'Mother country' is shaken as she finds "...everything ... bleak" (*FP* 142) in relation to a sustained life in its spaces.

However, men aboard the ship shares their pride in their inclusion into the ‘imagined community of imperial Britain’ and their unique identity as ‘British’ when they declare, “... we all have the same flag, the same empire” (*FP* 142). Against this overestimated notion of Britain’s multicultural national character, Leila notices around her in Britain an attitude of ethnocentrism and racial exclusiveness. The sign boards in Britain’s walls announce this peculiar attitude, “‘No coloureds,’ ‘No Vacancies,’ ‘No children’” (*FP* 155) “‘No vacancies for coloureds.’ ‘No Blacks.’ ‘No coloureds’” (*FP* 156). This racialised perspective of Britain problematises her belonging in its spaces, while Leila sarcastically feels “grateful for their honesty” (*FP* 156). Essentially, the complexities confronted by Leila in relation to her inability to imagine Britain as her ‘Mother country’ indicates the incapability of West Indian culture and its national identity as the ‘other’ in asserting “a new life [...] over there” (*FP* 103). Stuart Murray’s observation in this regard is significant, “The Caribbean communities in the United Kingdom show how the false consciousness of colonialism ... is challenged when the differing cultures inhabit the same nation space” (10). It is the same view that Nick Rennison gives, “In the poverty–stricken backwater of their small West Indian village, Britain—always presented to them as a nurturing ‘Mother Country’—offers hope of a new and better life. When they do emigrate, they discover that image and reality are very different and that a new sense of cultural belonging is not easy to attain” (109).

The cultural model presented by Britain implicitly define the colonised subject of the Caribbean islands as the ‘other’; and subsequently, a ‘national identity’ in Britain essentially requires Leila to extricate herself from such identity

formats, while paradoxically Britain considers its colonies as part of its Empire. John McLeod observes that "... in the 1950s and 1960s, Caribbeans were within, but not a part of, London's economic and social fabric... [and were] subjected to a series of attitudes which frequently objectified and demonized them, often in terms of race" (*Postcolonial London 2*). For Leila in Britain, the limits of nationality are marked in terms of racial prioritisation, one among the many other aspects. She recognises that only by crossing these boundary lines of race and ethnicity can she secure new spaces of belonging within Britain. In order to attain a 'British' identity, she believes she requires belonging to an 'impossible' white or English identity politics. But a disoriented Leila even fails to answer 'Calvin's question,' "Why is Santa Claus white?" (*FP* 202). Fundamentally, Leila finds herself disillusioned by everything in England, because they all remind her of her 'difference' and marginalisation. Eva Ulrike Pirker notes, "The question of Santa Claus's skin colour ultimately links up with the question of Leila's own neither-black-nor-white skin colour, which in turn reflects her dilemma of belonging neither here nor there" (272). The life experiences of Leila in Britain demystify the notions of diversity and pluralistic character of British society by unraveling the contradictions and paradoxes involved in the process of identity formation.

Emerging from the husk of her 'neither white nor black identity,' and from the memories of a colonial past of her Caribbean islands, the struggle that Leila makes with the past and present identities in Britain's racialised spaces provides her an inescapable psychological disorientation. Sarah Lawson Welsh mentions in connection with the new frameworks of identity for the immigrants in Britain that they underwent 'new experiences of Britishness' that subverted the dominant

understanding of ‘nation’ (45). The story ends with a disillusioned Leila planning to return to her own Caribbean island since Britain “no longer held for her the attraction of her mother and new challenges” (*FP* 203). Essentially, Leila is positioned in a predicament in which she never finds an exclusive participation and inclusion in any of the places she tries to belong. James P. Hannan observes,

Phillips’s novel *The Final Passage* focuses directly on the impossibility of belonging to either of two potentially local places – an island in the Caribbean and London. Joined by oceanic passages, these two places become sites not only of a diaspora out of Africa to New World, but also of a continuing process of mobility that takes on a global scale in the development of mobile labour, capital, information and products. (107)

Leila’s identity is never fully constituted as an African, a Mulatto, a Caribbean and a British, but rather it emerges at the liminal spaces of her constant travels and journeys. In Victor Turner’s observation, liminal spaces are not a place where the subject is caught and statically held, from which never to emerge. It represents a threshold which contains within itself the concept of passage, the movement from one status to another (231). Leila’s life explicates these exilic journeys and constant movements, and the consequent struggles in defining and evaluating her unstable and fluid cultural identities, which essentially connect her with the tradition of black diasporic experiences.

Caryl Phillips’s second novel *A State of Independence* discusses the challenges in negotiating cultural identity for the postcolonial migrant who has

returned from the metropolitan centre to the homeland. Bertram Francis's is a passage similarly experienced by those exiles and migrants who find straddled between their own cultural backgrounds and those of the locales they migrate to. Unable to constitute an authentic identity of 'West Indian' or 'English,' the protagonist Bertram falls into the category of "English–West Indian" as his former friend Jackson calls him (*SI* 136). Oscillating between these double senses of identities Bertram finds himself in a perpetual state of disorientation and disconnectedness. After receiving a coveted scholarship Bertram goes to England, a 'contact zone' and a liminal space, where all the migrants without distinction attempt to negotiate their place and formulate their identity in terms of race, gender, class or nationhood. Despite twenty years of life in England, Bertram could not become one with its cultural milieu. He moves through uncertainties and ambiguities, and attempts desperately to negotiate and articulate his identity out of a sense of his rootlessness. His disorientation and inability to fix himself in England make him a stranger and outsider there, but at the same time, the 'homeland' evokes a primary loss for him and it remains as a world of memory and nostalgia. Roger Bromley argues that it is crucial that the migrant should be able to find space to construct an identity that can accommodate what he or she once was and is now supposed to be: an identity that is somewhere in-between (66). The troubled memories and a photograph with him become, as in the case of Irene in *Higher Ground*, a "valuable 'scrap' which [one] can use when stitching together new ways of thinking about [one's] identity and [one's] place in the world" (McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* 215). However, in Bertram's case, since the photograph brings him back the unwanted memories, he destroys it.

Thus, his life in England becomes one with divided commitments, in which he can place neither here nor there. As John McLeod emphasises Bertram's life as a migrant is problematised by his inability to "indulge in sentiments of belonging to either place" (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 214).

'English–West Indian,' an ambivalent identity format of Bertram, suggests his existence at the interface between two radically different sites and cultures, their interpenetration and overlapping. It is within these boundaries that tension arises in an attempt to construct a stable identity. Bertram's present position necessitates him to look for a stability and fixity, which eludes forever. Robert J. C. Young's observation is significant in this regard. He notes, "Fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change" (*Colonial Desire* 3). What Bertram looks forward to have is this stability in his own country at a moment when he finds his life caught between the contradictions of a migrant, but unfortunately, it continuously eludes him. But moving through the interstices of these tensed spaces and psychological vexations, Bertram pushes hard the next twenty years living a life at this 'borderland' in England.

The Westernised, English-educated Caribbean is the personification of the hybridised postcolonial subject. In spite of Bertram's return to homeland, he stands unable to carve out an identity rooted in his Caribbean homeland due to his English identity attached to him by his own people. From the early moments of his return to his homeland, Bertram feels this cultural ambiguity. The advertisement at the Airport "Independence: Forward Ever – *Backward Never*" (*SI* 12; emphasis added), metaphorically represents the message for Bertram. The island becomes a disjointed space rather than a negotiating space for his identity construction. Even

his position as a Westernised–black, with its mentality is articulated in what he ‘sees’ about his island. He does not find a substantial change around him in the island, which he has been accustomed with in the Western world. He looks at his island through the eyes of Westernised, modern values and standards. On his return from England, he “found himself *overwhelmed and disturbed* by the bare brown legs, tired black limbs, rusty minds, the bright kinetic reds of the village signaling birth, the pale weary greens, the approach of death. For a moment he could not admit to himself that he was home” (*SI* 18–19; emphasis added). His observation underpins the problematic relations existing between the ‘impoverished’ island and his ‘improvised’ self. The emigration officer’s question, “How long you planning on staying here?” (*SI* 12), and his mother’s attitude of rejection towards him disguised in the question, “And when you planning on taking off again?” (*SI* 49) leaves him groping for fulfillment in the act of identity construction. He feels desperate when his attempts to convince his friend Jackson of his legal and moral right to live in the island fail. Jackson transports him to an awareness of his ‘in-between’ position of ‘English – West Indian,’ where he finds himself inescapably trapped in. Jackson says, “You English West Indians should just come back here to retire and sit in the sun. Don’t waste your time trying to get into the fabric of the society for you are made of the wrong material for the modern Caribbean you all do think too fast and too crazy, like we should welcome you back as lost brothers ... ” (*SI* 136). Finding himself in a dilemma, he says, “I don't yet feel at home back here either” (*SI* 152).

Despite the prevalence of discourses of nationalism, ethnicity or race that might serve as models of ‘belonging,’ and enable people of a homogenous group

to live together, identity construction for the migrants essentially depends on a diasporic consciousness. According to McLeod, such models

no longer seem suited to a world where the experience and legacy of migration are altering the ways in which individuals think of their relation to place, and how they might 'lay claim' to lands that are difficult to think of in terms of 'home' or 'belonging'. Instead, new models of identity are emerging which depend upon reconsidering the perilous 'in-between' position.... (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 214)

Finally, Bertram remains torn apart by the impracticality of bridging the gap and patching up the tatters between 'English' and 'Caribbean' identities. This impossibility to inhabit, to 'stand rooted' at one or other position, is what informs his sense of ambivalence and disorientation, and makes his condition 'exilic' at home. Elena Machado Saez notes, "Faced with the image of a perpetual migrant, Bertram is confronted with potentially dismal future: the never-ending journey of the homeless" (33). According to John McLeod, these models of identities that are fluid, contingent, multiple and shifting can be compared to Bhabha's 'border lives', where the concepts of overlapping, hybridity, routed identity, and shifting subjectivity become enthusiastically promoted as the new 'art of the present' (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 225). Thus, the recurrent passages and exiles of Bertram illustrate how on the fluid and unstable terrains the postcolonial identities are constructed. While his postcolonial identity lives at the borders where the West Indian and English cultures overlap, it also reveals its fluctuating and shifting tendencies.

Phillips's novel *Cambridge* discusses the life of its eponymous character, who is an African transported to England via the Carolinas, converted to Christianity and liberated from slavery, captured again on his missionary voyage to Africa and sold as a slave to a Caribbean island. Cambridge's transnational journeys blur the boundaries of any stable conception of identity and disrupt the fixed notions of his nationhood and culture. As Paul Gilroy argues, "A sense of identity-making as a process has been enforced by the enduring memories of coerced crossing experiences like slavery and migration" ("Route Work" 20). In England, Cambridge becomes a "black-Englishman" (*CA* 147) and with this double inscription of identity, his position falls 'neither here nor there' situation and a new configuration of identity emerges at the borders or at the overlapping spaces of two cultural spaces of Africa and England. Ultimately, for Cambridge, the structures and the strictures of nation and cultural identity are overcome by the journeys that he makes in a system of transatlantic slavery, and these journeys typify the movements of people of African descent from Africa to Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas as explicated in the concept of 'Black Atlantic' by Gilroy. According to Gilroy, what characterises the black Atlantic is transcending "the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" (*Black Atlantic* 19). Cambridge's identities in Africa, England and the West Indies inform about the results of an ongoing process of travel and exchange across the Atlantic. His new identity in England transcends his African cultural identity and conflates with his new English identity. This transition is evident in his 'comfort' of accepting the English language, Christian idealism and marrying the white woman Anna in England.

Cambridge persistently confronts identity transformation as his names keep changing during his transnational journeys. Although Europeans force Olumide (Cambridge's original name) to shed of his labels of identity, his reluctance to accept the English name 'Thomas' was evident. Initially, he "... chose to ignore the title Thomas and [waited] on Olumide" (CA 140); but he was informed that "Little would be spared ... [and] Olumide became Thomas" (CA 141). Thus he carries "the featherish burden" (CA 141) of English cultural norm with him in England until it is again transformed to David Henderson, an appellation stuck to him by his spiritual guide Mrs. Spencer in England. In the Caribbean island, as a slave, his name again undergoes a transformation as the plantation manager Wilson "... made it known that [his] title was to be Cambridge" (CA 157). But for Emily, Cambridge represents "the impressive black Hercules" (CA 58) or "the negro Hercules" (CA 62), assigning him a mythical stature. At the end he remains as a 'murderer' of the white man in the West Indian island. Olumide's identity remains fragmented and hyphenated throughout his diasporic journeys, while it oscillates between Olumide – Thomas – Henderson – Cambridge – Hercules, unable to choose anyone of them, for all of them have been stuck upon him by others.

Cambridge's attainment of freedom and education in England renders him the imaginary position of an 'English man.' However, this new identity remains partial, because Cambridge feels the presence of an African consciousness dogging him. "Truly I was now an English man, albeit a little smudgy of complexion! Africa spoke to me only of a history I had cast aside" (CA 147). Cambridge's dilemma is that he cannot fully participate in the cultural space of

England as “[his] uncivilized African demeanour” (CA 144) envelops him. He pictures himself as a “black Christian” (CA 161) and a “virtual Englishman” (CA 156) who possesses a “superior English mind” (CA 155) and who marries “a sturdy Englishwoman by the name Anna” (CA 141). While participating in the experience of Englishness, he also remains incapable of giving up his Africanness and that makes his predicament more categorical. Elizabeth Kowaleski –Wallace’s observation is true in the case of Cambridge; to her, people like Cambridge are “hybrid creation whose identity lies somewhere in between his African roots and Christianized Western identity” (89). He lives on the borderlines or ‘liminal’ spaces, where neither his African identity is denied nor his Englishness is fully actualised. Homi Bhabha defines these borders as ‘beyond’:

The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past [...] we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond.’ (*Location of Culture* 1)

For Bhabha, the border is a space where notions of past and present, inside and outside, cease to exist as binary opposites, but rather they combine and participate. Cambridge precariously finds himself trapped in this hybridised identity and thereby experiences the psychological vexation and disorientation in his inability to overcome this impasse. This psychic vexation is amplified in his cry, “Truly I was now an English man, albeit a little smudgy of complexion! Africa spoke to me only of a history I had cast aside” (CA 147).

However, a rupture of this imaginary ‘black–Englishness’ takes place and he enters another identity format because of his deportation to the Caribbean island as a slave. What bothers Cambridge most in the Caribbean island is the threat of a removal of this Englishness rather than finding himself again in his ‘Africanness.’ “That I, a virtual Englishman was to be treated as base African cargo, caused me such hurtful pain as I was barely able to endure. To lose my dear, fair England, and now liberty in such rapid succession!” (CA 156). The initial reaction to this removal is a symptom of withdrawal to himself, in which situation he feels he is to act “a strange figure, quiet and reserved” (CA 158). In the plantation colony, he remains again to be transformed into an African slave, with all the burdens and sufferings associated with such a condition and he also remains shed of his identity as ‘black–Englishman’ converging into an ‘Afro – English – Caribbean.’ Cambridge undergoes this transition by living a triple life, outwardly performing the duties of a slave in the Caribbean island, in the core as an African, but remaining steadfast to his English ways in private.

The identity formation of Nash Williams in *Crossing the River* is a reversion of his acquired multiple identities/his ‘borderland’ identities on his diasporic survival and belonging. It becomes a moment of ‘re–routing’ for Nash to his ancestral cultural identity, though not to his own land. Yogita Goyal in her doctoral thesis argues,

Nash [is] an instance of a mimic man, a sign of decolonizing hybridity or postcolonial double inscription. This portrayal is obviously similar to Gilroy’s notion of the unique positioning of blacks in modernity, simultaneously inside and outside, or haunted

by a Du Boisian ‘double consciousness.’ (*Diasporic Nationalisms* 224–225)

As an African freed–slave, born to slave parents in America, and due to his education in English and Christianity in America, he becomes an African–American and his identity remains unsettled in hyphenation. This hyphenated identity is the product of his parent’s transnational and transcultural journeys as black slaves to America. However, in spite of his proficiency in English language and conversion to Christianity, he is staved off from fully incorporating into an American ‘citizen’ owing to his racial and ethnic marginality.

Nash’s attempts of acculturation into the American cultural spaces turn out to be only partial. What Nash is capable of doing is moving beyond a racially essentialist ways of thinking that constructs homogeneous, pure and singular black culture. Therefore, his identity becomes fluid and ever–changing. As it is in the case of Cambridge, the position of Nash also is in the ‘in–between’ spaces of ‘African’ and ‘American.’ According to Homi Bhabha,

These “in–between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. It is the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference.... (*Location of Culture* 1–2)

Nash’s assimilation into American cultural life is a ‘crossing,’ significantly made as against the usual practice, in which the slaves are prohibited from such

improvements in education and cultural participation. This is evident in his letter to his former master: “I praise His holy name that I was fortunate enough to be born in a Christian country, amongst Christian parents and friends.... Had I been permitted simply to run about, I would today be dwelling in the same *robes of ignorance* which drape the shoulders of *my fellow blacks*” (CR 21; emphasis added). This invitation to participate in the cultural life of the West has actually been important for Nash in constructing his cultural identity from his marginality. What saves him from the destiny of his fellow African slaves is his assimilatory process into American cultural life.

However, the central action of the story happens in Liberia, where Nash discards his Americanism and embraces African culture due to his disillusionment. Nash Williams suffers the predicament of one who abundantly indulged once in American cultural life but one who suffers at present the discomfort and uneasiness in carrying it. What transpires in Nash’s case is his repatriation to the African soil, but not to his country, and his retrieving the troubled ancestral roots that enable him to shed of his attachments and affiliations of other cultural contexts. Caryl Phillips attempts to highlight here the dilemma of the diasporic African who returns to his ancestral soil. Although this change does not come easily, it is a transformation that takes place gradually in the individuals who have undergone multiple levels of displacements and identity transformations.

As a black diasporic subject who is sent to Africa, the life of Nash becomes under constraints due to his existence at the borderlands of two cultures. His feeling, at the beginning in the Liberian colony, is a mixture of strange perspectives and commitments. He counts himself one among the ‘whites’ as he is

a returnee from America. He says, "... they call us all *white man* ..." (CR 32; emphasis added). In addition to that, elsewhere he contrasts the 'whites' sharply with the 'blacks.' He says, "I chanced to go into Monrovia in order that I might visit with old friends, both *white and black*" (CR 40; emphasis added). 'Whites,' here, as mentioned by Nash are the westernised Negroes who have been repatriated to Liberia. Not only does Nash initially hold himself as a 'white', but he also sees himself through the prism of a 'master – slave' paradigm. He poses himself as a master in the fashion of a coloniser in the Liberian colony, while the natives are perceived as colonised. His hypocrisy is self-evident in his words: "I often ask them how it is they cannot read and write like the white man (they call us all white man)... Sadly, not all *masters* will converse in such manners ..." (CR 32; emphasis original). But at certain times, he also contradictorily finds himself as an unfortunate. He says, "... unchristian in their behavior and vulgar in their demeanor, whose only visible occupation seemed to be to prey upon *poor unfortunate creatures* such as *myself*" (CR 26; emphasis added). His positions, therefore, are contrived with numerous contradictions and paradoxes.

Nash, for the first time is confounded to see himself in the African soil freed of racial barriers and ethnic structures that had once surrounded him in America. His predicament is that he feels attracted towards African culture, but is simultaneously unable to shed of Americanism due to its allurements. This 'borderland living' is further explicated in his admiration for Africa and America simultaneously. His attraction comes as he realises that there is enough possibility for freedom, equality and justice in Liberia which had been under constraints in America. He says,

A colored person can enjoy his liberty in this place, for there exists no prejudice of color and every man is free and equal.... Liberia, the beautiful land of my forefathers, is place where persons of color may enjoy their freedom. It is the home for our race.... Its laws are founded upon justice and equality... Liberia is the star in the east for the free colored man. It is truly our only home. (CR 18)

In spite of his glorification of Africa, he also holds Africa in contempt. For him, the Africans around the Saint Paul's River in Liberia are 'heathens'/'blacks' who need to be educated and liberated from their 'darkness.' He says, "Indeed, the natives are *a much-maligned* people in this *dark* and *benighted* country" (CR 31; emphasis added) and he holds the African country as "land of darkness" (CR 25).

Initially, one finds it difficult to locate Nash exactly on a specific platform with his commitments and his inclinations as he is in postcolonial condition of 'neither here nor there.' Therefore, one is to assume that the positions of Nash are filled with inconsistencies and slippages. McLeod argues, "Borders are important thresholds, full of contradictions and ambivalence. They both separate and join different places. They are intermediate locations where one contemplates moving beyond a barrier" (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 217). Nash's simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards both Africa and America take him to the point of 'beyond.' This hybridised identity of Nash that emerges from the intertwining of both the African and the American cultural aspects significantly challenges any possibility for providing an essentialist version of cultural identity. According to Bhabha, all these new modes of cultural systems are constructed in the in-between spaces or the 'Third Space of enunciation.' As he says, "For me the importance of

hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (“Third Space” 211). Although Nash ‘comfortably’ remains altered at the end in the West of African Liberia, his return to Africa cannot be called a return to his original soil. Though he is in Liberia, it never becomes his original ‘homeland,’ but he shares the destiny of African people in migrating from place to place. Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi in his doctoral thesis observes that the story of Nash explicates that for the “hyphenated Africans, a journey to West Africa is not a return in any form – the continent is simply another theatre of migration and Africans are not relatives of hyphenated Africans” (131). However, being in African continent what he looks forward to do is to go back to original African cultural traditions of his ancestors. Stuart Hall, in his essay, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” conceives of cultural identity in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (223). By divesting himself of American culture, Nash attempts to participate in the lost traditions and shared histories of Africa. Accordingly, the new cultural identity that he adopts reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural practices that provide him with the feeling of ‘one people,’ ‘one culture’ and ‘one history’ in his African land. This mode of collective cultural identity, beneath the constant fluctuations and transformations, acquired through diasporic journeys is what Nash seems attempting to discover.

A Distant Shore exemplifies a different mode of diaspora and transnational mobility experienced by the African descendants in the

contemporary period. The transnational mobility of Solomon/Gabriel, an African, falls in the refugee and asylum seeking modality of diaspora that seeks to find asylum and refuge in the multicultural England of the contemporary times. As Rezzan Kocaoner Silku notes, “*A Distant Shore* discusses the concept of identity on a more global level from the ‘new world order’ perspective of the 21st century” (166). The new world order perspective that Silku discusses is akin to that of Phillips’s own “new world vision.” In *A New World Order*, Phillips suggests a

new world vision ... for the age in which we live. An age in which migrations across boundaries are an increasingly familiar part of our individual lives as national borders collapse and are redrawn. An age ... in which illegal movements from one country to another become increasingly desperate as economies fail and wars continue to rage. (132)

Solomon’s transnational journey in *A Distant Shore* from his African country to the multicultural England stems from the ongoing civil war in his country and the conflicts related to the emergence of neocolonial nation–state and associated complexities. His story focuses on the issues of identity formation for the strangers and asylum seekers in transnational spaces of multicultural England. To Phillips, *A Distant Shore* is both “a novel about the challenged identity of two individuals, [and ...] also a novel about English – or national – identity” (Morrison 135). The evolution and structuring of Solomon’s cultural identity takes place on the overlapping territories of his Africanness and Englishness. England is introduced in the novel as a pluralistic society in which the question of identity construction receives paramount importance. Solomon’s transnational journey to England and

the succeeding events in England compel him to constitute his identity as unstable and fluid. The new cultural milieu into which he has made his migration produces in him a specific diasporic consciousness. On his 'exile' from the racist south to north of England, Solomon seeks to transform himself into a 'new person' by changing his name from Gabriel to Solomon.

His journey from his war torn country to England marks the beginning of an erasure of traumatising memories and colonialist cultural past. His life becomes one similar to the waters through the medium by which he travels to England by clinging to the belly of a ship. From a symbolic level, the ship, as in the case of Leila in *The Final Passage*, becomes a vehicle of cross-culturality that enables his crossing the borders, separating and joining the lands. For Paul Gilroy, the image of ship "immediately focus[es] attention on the middle passage" (*Black Atlantic* 4). For Solomon, therefore, the 'passage' by clinging to the ship's belly enables him re-imagine the 'Middle Passage' of his African ancestors with whom he shares common historical and cultural experiences. As against his ancestors' practice, his diaspora is willingly taken up in order to escape the revenge of the government army. Solomon's transnational passages and the subsequent formation of self demonstrate how the past is conflated with the present in his life, while such a journey is anticipated to make a break with the past. Now in England, he receives new identity – Gabriel/Solomon and African/British. Essentially, it is at the cross-cultural territories that his new hybridised, hyphenated self is formulated. However, even after securing the necessary documents that validates his citizenship in England, his belonging to England is problematised in the light of racism and ethnocentrism. Much of the difficulties faced by Solomon in

England in search of asylum and refuge seem to suggest the fact that the hostility and resentment of Britain towards the refugees originates from the anxiety which constant migrations and influxes produce. This incessant turbulence of migrations to Britain's national frontiers is amply illustrated by what the English lady Dorothy worries about at the opening of the novel. "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 doesn't feel right" (*DS* 3).

Despite the agent's exciting promises at the transit camp about new prospects in England, the life in England for Solomon appears to be unhinged on the boundary lines between intimacy and hostility. The Iraqi cellmate anticipates this concern: "The light in England is weak. It depresses me. They have taken the sun out of the sky" (*DS* 71). His sense of ambivalence at both being in an idealised England but amidst a group of 'reckless' black people in England, which symbolically represents his own African culture, is articulated very clearly by the narrator: "This is not the England that he thought he was travelling to, and these shipwrecked people are not the people that he imagined he would discover. Under this sad roof, life is stripped of ambition and it is broken" (*DS* 155).

The life of Solomon in Weston spins around a friendship between Dorothy. The black – negro – stranger – Solomon's friendship with the white – English lady –lonely – Dorothy, provides an example of producing identity within a multicultural world order that Phillips envisions. For Phillips, this communion and community of both the white and the black, appreciating and approving each other, is "the perfect model for the age in which we live" (*A New World Order* 132). The friendship that Dorothy and Solomon weaves transcends the

stereotypical identity construction of both the whites and the blacks in England, for if previously the whites constructed their self by de-constructing the 'other'/blacks, in the case of Dorothy, her friendship with Solomon goes beyond the ways European discourses constructed their identity. Essentially, they build their identities by reciprocally supporting and encouraging. As Benedicte Ledent observes,

... the two do not get the chance to make their budding friendship blossom, but live side by side, wary of invading the other's life. If both are finally defeated by a world obsessed with appearances, Dorothy mentally and Solomon physically, they nonetheless survive in the reader's mind as human being ("Caryl Phillips: A Master of Ambiguity" 11)

Solomon's ability to undermine and blur the lines of demarcation that once seemed clearly drawn between the whites and blacks enables him to discover a new world order of hybrid positions. Though such a friendship is principally developed between Dorothy and Solomon, Solomon's identity formation is perceived and constructed, as an 'outsider,' 'foreigner,' by the white society. Under such conditions one's identity is formulated on the principles of nationalist discourses and concepts. Homi Bhabha analyses this aspect of cultural identity emerging "within conditions of political antagonism and inequity" ("Culture's in-Between" 58). Dorothy's contemplation on the attitude of her father towards the people from erstwhile British colonies testifies how in an antagonistic society of England, Solomon struggles to weave a genuine identity. The comment made by Dorothy's father is not an isolated case, but rather people in an ethnocentric

society, like in England, holds this as generalised view. She remembers that to her father, "...coloureds [was] a challenge to our English identity.... For him, being English was more important than being British, and being English meant no coloureds" (*DS* 37). This ethnocentric attitude of the English towards the migrants on its national and cultural spaces creates immense problems in imagining a space for belonging and formulating their identity. As John McLeod observes, "Discourses of power which seek to legitimate certain forms of identity and marginalize others by imposing a logic of binary oppositions remain operable and challenge new forms of identity from emerging" (*Beginning Postcolonialism* 225). While it is very hard for Solomon to affirm a sense of identity in a society that is obsessed with 'Englishness,' he seeks to reinvent his identity without observing the constraints imposed by racial discourses and practices. Finally, Solomon's death transpires at the backdrop of this unwillingness to provide a space that accommodates and acknowledges the asylum seeker and refugee. At the end, he becomes a victim in the hands of some village hooligans, for whom Solomon is more of British, which is unacceptable, than English, which he could never become.

While Phillips deals with the formation of identity of the blacks, he also finds a similar predicament in the case of modern-day Jews. Through the examples of a German Jew Eva and an Ethiopian black Jew Malka in *The Nature of Blood*, Phillips takes up this issue for discussion. According to Stephen Clingman, Eva is a "profoundly abandoned woman for whom *navigation* is both imperative and impossible" (*Grammar of Identity* 80; emphasis added). As Jews were singled out for persecution and extermination during the Holocaust days in

the Second World War, Eva is forced to make her multiple cross-border movements that connect her to the historical diaspora of her ancestors over the ages. The narrative moves back and forth through the maze of an emotional texture in order to reach a more 'settled' and 'satisfying' place. Eva confronts the difficulties of exile and the emotional consequences of fleeing a locale that which is known. The rhizomatic diasporic journeys of Eva are characterised by the permanent losses and separations, which affect her in forming a cultural identity. As a Jew, she is uprooted from her German ghetto and from her family only to be scattered and dispersed forever. This sense of eternal scattering and diaspora forces her to dream of having a comfortable life with Gerry in London; and she even dreams of London as a last resort for her. Therefore, she "wants London to be a different place. A happier, brighter place" (*NB* 189). But when she realises the impossibility of having London a happier place for her, she goes insane and psychologically unhinged.

The construction of a unique and solid identity is viewed to be essentially related to one's sense of belonging within a national border or a country of one's own. Abraham Rosman and others observe that nation suggests a shared cultural identity that may derive from common ideas about origins, history, family, and religion, as well as language use (332). But for Eva as a Jew, the nation and the national borders are no more relevant because of the diasporic journeys imposed upon her. As Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin observe in *Powers of Diaspora* (2002), "Diaspora offers an alternative 'ground' to that of the territorial state for the intricate and always contentious linkage between cultural identity and political organization" (10). Having been denied a political unit/a nation of their own, Eva

and her people never could claim a space of their own. After having been pushed into constant diaspora, as Boyarin notes above, her diasporic conditions are the ‘grounds’ on which she constitutes her identity. Her constant journeys and diasporic experiences, like in Germany – Nazi concentration camp – British internment camp in Cyprus – England – mental sanatorium, all inevitably give her a distressing awareness of not having a land or space of one’s own. The paradoxical situation of Eva’s life is exemplified by her right to belonging to the ancestral land of Israel, which is rooted in Jewish cultural tradition, but at the same time, the persistent diasporic journeys that she and her people make challenge and contradict these concepts of belongingness and rootedness. This paradoxical power of diaspora is expressed by Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin: “On the one hand, everything that defines us is compounded of all the questions of our ancestors. On the other hand, everything is permanently at risk. Thus contingency and genealogy are the two central components of diasporic consciousness” (4).

Eva’s mother expresses the futility of the Jewish attempts to formulate a unique cultural identity based on a permanent notion of a nation and its national borders. “Eva, where in the world is the United States? Where is Russia, even? One day you are neighbours, the next day they spit on you. We are stupid for being proud to be what we are not ...” (*NB* 93). If Moshe, one of the detainees along with Eva Stern in the liberated camp in Cyprus, receives a hint about his destination after the dissolution of the rescue camp, Eva has not yet been informed with anything of that kind. The endless journeys and the trauma associated with this search for a space to belong, prevent her from imagining a return to her ancestral homeland, Palestine. Palestine/Israel remains to be a concept of ‘home’

still unachievable for Eva and her people. Israel/Palestine was a single land until 29 November 1947, prior to its partition into an Arab state and a Jewish state by a Resolution 181 adopted by the General Assembly of United Nations (Baum n.pag.). When in the makeshift dormitory in Cyprus, the other women make “nervous plans” (*NB* 44) for their return to Palestine, Eva considers the pointlessness of such a plan.

They are making nervous plans. For Palestine ... Apparently, we have wandered long enough. We have worked and struggled too long on the lands of other peoples. The journey that we are making across the bones of Europe is a story that will be told in future years by many prophets. After hundreds of years of trying to be with others, of trying to be others, we are now pouring in the direction of home. I am not included in their plan.... (*NB* 44 – 45)

Eva, in the last lines indirectly refers to the attempts of some of the Jewish defence forces like Haganah to which her uncle Stephen Stern in the novel belongs in view of forming a new Jewish state of Israel. However, her expectations are marred by a pessimism borne out of constant travels and unending journeys, and also due to the trauma that she undergoes in Nazi extermination camps.

Though Eva’s ties to her past are severed by the Holocaust and the impracticality of a return, her relationship with her old home and societal life are sustained through her memories. The metaphorical demise and loss of her previous life is highlighted through the burying of “... some precious family objects beneath a large oak tree” (*NB* 92). But memories become an important tool with

which she tries to dig out her cultural past. Like Bertram in *A State of Independence* and Irene in *Higher Ground* who with the help of memories and the photograph simultaneously flee away and fly to their past, in England for Eva, it is only through the help of her 'haunting' memories of the Holocaust and of her family she is able to relate to her past. Memories and Photograph that Eva possesses becomes valuable "scrap" (McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* 215) as mentioned earlier in the case of Bertram. Caryl Phillips, in an interview reiterates the significance of memory in the construction of one's identity. To the point as to how memory is related to identity formation he explains, "... if you don't know where you've come from you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are then you have no idea where you are going. So, you have to know where you come from, you have to understand how you arrived where you are" (Eckstein 40).

Eva, in fact, is situated at the two contrary positions; she resists and crosses the boundaries simultaneously. In order to evolve a new life of her own, Eva adheres to the strategy of "boundary maintenance mechanism" (Rosman 337), through which she tries to separate herself from the dominant society. She contemplates: "last night, in the pub, I finally abandoned words" (*NB* 196). Her sense of non-belonging and her reluctance to participate in a new cultural milieu are exemplified in holding her tongue back from conversing with the passenger next to her on the train to London. She imagines, "My foreign voice will only jump out and assault her" (*NB* 188). Through a particular act of restraint, she is choosing to be careful not to cross the boundaries. But at the same time, later on, she also decides to cross the European cultural boundaries by desiring to be

married to Gerry, an English soldier at whose invitation she travels to England from her liberated camp. Her efforts are to cross the European bloodlines and attain an English identity that would save her temporarily, which also would enable her to transcend the present constraints of her social exclusion. But when she finds Gerry with his new family in London, all her plans for a relationship with him go frustrated. In moments such as these, she feels, she belongs neither to Germany nor to Palestine nor to England, and her life lies between her conditions of uprootedness and unbelonging. Therefore, for Eva, the negotiation of cultural identity takes place around the overlapping territories, the in-between spaces of varied national frontiers, multiple cultural backgrounds, continuous shifts and diasporic journeys.

Caryl Phillips identifies the historical dispersions of the Africans in the system of transatlantic slavery between Africa, Americas and Europe, while he recognises a parallel diasporic movement by the Jews across the cultural spaces of Europe, the Middle East and Africa. In *The Nature of Blood* he examines how such movements and diasporic journeys of the Ethiopian Jews have destabilised their notions of cultural identity in a newly created Israel – their long cherished ancestral homeland. Mitchell Bard observes that historically, Israel's effort to bring the Ethiopian Jewish community to its homeland has been instigated by Rabbi Kook who warned of the extinction of the Ethiopian Jews in 1921 and which rescued some thousands of Ethiopian Jews (xii). Under such rescue project, Malka and her community in *The Nature of Blood* are transplanted from Ethiopia into the newly founded Israel. There in Israel, as a black Jew, Malka experiences a

deep sense of alienation and also a distressing psychic inability to define her 'home.'

Though born in an African racial group, her participation in the Jewish faith compels her to take upon long journeys to newly founded Israel, where she is doubtful about her inclusion in the society owing to her 'blackness.' The Ethiopian Jews were generally referred to as 'Falashas' by their neighbors in Israel. 'Falashas' is a pejorative term meaning "strangers" or "immigrants" that was nevertheless widely used for outsiders as well (Bard 2). Malka and her community feel segregated and marginalised from the mainstream of the white Jewish community. "She lived with her parents and younger sister at the edge of the city in one of the developments into which her people had been placed" (NB 202). This exclusionary attitude of the white Jews against the black Jews dissolves the idealisation of her 'homeland.' Her agonised question, "You do not want us here, do you?" (NB 209) indicates how they are unaccepted and cast outside their rightful place. Andrew Armstrong notes,

'European' Jewish hegemony in contemporary Palestine, in its need to construct a pure Jewish space, repeats the neurosis adopted by societies embracing the tenets of dangerous nationalisms.... This vision excludes the Falashas from modernity and the process of modernization. They are good for ethnic decoration, to sing and dance for the tourists coming to Israel, but never to be considered for serious citizenship. Malka and the other Falashas are not pure enough to be considered as *real* Jews; they are constituted as unsanctified – strangers in the Promised Land. (130)

Out of these painful experiences, Malka is trying to spin out a new cultural identity. She deeply experiences the long distance that she has travelled from her geographical, psychological and cultural territories. This sense of detachment and disconnectedness that she undergoes is articulated by juxtaposing the white Jews in a contrastive position. "... then *you* herded *us* on to buses" (NB 199), "... as *we* learnt the language and *your* ways... (NB 207) and also "*you* say *you* rescued *me*..." (NB 208; all emphasis added). This 'You' and 'I' binaries illustrate the difficulty that Malka confronts in defining a unique and all-embracing identity in her 'new homeland.' Malka's dreams of her 'homeland' reflect her great expectations built upon at the backdrop of distressing experiences of years of wandering as a people without a history and a land: "We, the people of the House of Israel, we were going home. No more wandering. No longer landless. No more tilling of soil that did not belong to us" (NB 201). According to Malka, this much-celebrated rescue of the Ethiopian Jews has not served its purpose and she is suspicious of the racial politics being played out behind this rescue operation and subsequent rehabilitation projects. "You say you rescued me. Gently plucked me from one century, helped me to cross two more, and then placed me in this time. Here. Now. But why? What are you trying to prove?" (NB 208).

Eva's Uncle Stephan Stern, whose Zionist convictions force him to leave his family behind in Nazi Germany in order to join the guerrilla forces fighting in Palestine for the establishment of a Zionist homeland, recognises the problems involved in uprooting the Ethiopian Jews from their cultural environment. To him, the cause of their alienation and disorientation is "simply a problem of language and culture" (NB 207). The narrator in the novel also reflects, "She belonged to

another land. She might be happier there. Dragging these people from their primitive world into this one, and in such a fashion, was not a policy with which he had agreed. They belonged to another place.” (*NB* 210). The reductionist observation provided by the narrator typically demonstrates the attitude of the white supremacists of new Israel. But as Malka recognises the problem is not with the entire nation itself but with the racists who have faltered from the great ideals of achieving a ‘Promised Land.’ She says, “This holy land did not deceive us. The people did” (*NB* 207). By presenting both Malka and Stephan Stern, Phillips also attempts to bring together the two different generations of people of Israel, and thereby examines how they view the present conditions of emerging Israel as disenchanting. While Stephan Stern looks forward to become part of his burgeoning country, he is also equally disappointed to find the paradoxical situation of Israel as a ‘Promised Land.’ Benedicte Ledent observes that Stephan's ideal of togetherness, of a country he can share with other “displaced and dispossessed” people (*NB* 5), is spoilt by the cultural and racial consolidation of the new Jewish state which fails to integrate people like Malka and her family (“Fictional and Cultural Labyrinth” 188). Stephan’s disillusionment at the inability of the new country to grow to the expectations of its founders is similar to the disappointment of Malka, whose dreams of a new homeland are thwarted by the unexpected racist mentalities.

Malka’s and her parent’s problems are their inability to survive and make a sense of belonging in the ‘imagined community’ of Israel. She remembers how systematically they were rid of an African cultural identity. Malka observes: “Everywhere, we were told the same thing. First we will teach you the language,

then when you leave the absorption centre you will be able to study at the university.... And then, as we learnt the language and your ways, our parents felt as though they were losing us” (*NB* 207). Malka contemplates on how her parents were traumatised and absorbed in a fear of being excluded owing to their particular identity as Africans. She says, “After the absorption centre they were frightened of white walls and white coats. They simply watch television. My mother is tattooed on her face, her hands and her neck. She finds it difficult to leave the apartment” (*NB* 207). Being in one’s homeland but being unable to participate in its life renders the tragedy of Malka’s parents. For Malka, her African cultural identity and present Israel’s ‘white exclusiveness’ create an ambiguous position, where she neither finds inclusion nor a way out to her African culture. Therefore, unable to negotiate a genuine relationship with Israel, her everyday life slides to more complexities.

For the Jews in general, having gone through constant displacements and diaspora across diverse spaces and times, the concept of a homogenous and pure Jewish cultural identity is redefined in terms of ‘hybridity.’ Virinder S. Kalra, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk observe that the diasporic subjects are carriers of a consciousness that provides an awareness of difference, which is a basic aspect of self-identity for diasporic subjects (30). But the founders of new Israel seem to underestimate the hitherto reality of this cultural hybridity and difference of Jewish cultures. Surviving between a deceptive notion of homogeneity and a deep reality of cultural hybridity and difference renders Malka and her community constant psychological trauma and disorientation. Wendy Zierler notes that the sense of estrangement of Malka as an Ethiopian immigrant points to a sense of

disillusionment with the realities of life in the Jewish homeland (61). Thus, for Malka, the formation of the cultural identity relies upon residing between two worlds, two cultures – the first one from which she is totally uprooted but that which still haunts her, and the second one that excludes her due to her past affinities.

Caryl Phillips examines how displacements and subsequent migrations, travels, exiles and diaspora of the blacks and the Jews have destabilised the notions of their unique experiences of nation, race, culture and identity. He also analyses how such acts of undermining one's identity structures render the postcolonial subject new platforms for identity formation. Phillips's perspectives on defining one's identity go in concurrence with that of Paul Gilroy's observations. Yogita Goyal notes,

Phillips's narratives of diaspora are remarkably similar in orientation to the theories of Paul Gilroy. Both writers share a suspicion of nationalist paradigms of identity, believing instead in non-racial, hybrid routes of diaspora. They also reject any form of racial exceptionalism, positioning blacks and whites as co-participants in the history of diaspora. ("Theorizing Africa" 7)

Fundamentally, in postcolonial studies, conceptualisation of identity informs the idea of a 'process,' transcending one's national, cultural and racial histories and cultures, rather than an 'actualised' entity. In this sense, identity is not a fixed category of the postcolonial self, but rather, a formative practice wherein new

configurations of hybrid and pluralistic identities emerge, and new venues and spaces become the catalyst for such modes of identity formation.

While there are proposals and suggestions from various quarters for a better world vision, the displaced and dislocated migrants and asylum seekers very often fail to survive the complex cultural and racial discriminations in the locations of their destination–points. These complex positions of marked differences in the host countries often complicate and problematise any sense of ‘belonging’ for the displaced people. The centrality of racial and ethnic prioritisation in Europe and America, to where most of the migrants gather, often becomes great barriers in participating and achieving solidarity and cohesion. Caryl Phillips views race and ethnicity to be major determinant factors in the history of America and Europe that deny participation and belonging for the migrant, asylum seeker and the refugee. The next chapter of the thesis engages in examining how a ‘new world order’ envisioned by Caryl Phillips becomes constrained and challenged under intense racial and cultural assumptions in the imperial centres.