

## *Chapter VI*

### *The Decolonising Consciousness of the Oppressed under Slavery 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 VI

### **The Decolonising Consciousness of the Oppressed under Slavery in Caryl Phillips's Fiction**

Frantz Fanon, at the end of his discussion in *Black skin, White Masks* argues, "It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world" (181). For the colonised, who are patterned according to the colonisers' ideals, redemption from the colonial subjection is possible only through creating a 'tension' or a 'struggle' to achieve freedom. This transformative tension or struggle of the colonised, the oppressed or the subaltern necessarily resists the colonial authority, its discourses and power sources. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe, "Decolonization is the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved" (*Key Concepts* 63). In delineating such decolonising consciousness, the slaves who undergo subjection, marginalisation and oppression explicate particular psychic orientation. The present chapter addresses the formation of decolonising consciousness in the slaves that provides them a means of liberation from their oppressive structures.

Contrary to a political or a national level resistance made against colonial structures, the novels of Phillips discuss a mode of 'cultural resistance' mobilised individually, and in much 'anticipated' form. In a sense, in its seminal form it

occurs before the actual execution of large scale political or national level resistance. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue, while discussing the resistance made at the cultural level in the settler colonial situations, “resistance at the level of cultural practice may occur before the political importance of such resistance is articulated or perceived” (*Key Concepts* 17). Essentially, there are two modes of anti-colonial struggles formulated by slaves in the novels of Caryl Phillips; first, their resistance is articulated by subverting dominant colonial discourses and ideologies used to subjugate the colonised in cultural spaces; and second, the resistance is created by constituting an opposition against colonisers’ concrete modes of representations. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin emphasise that the dominated or colonised culture can use the tools of the dominant discourse to resist its political or cultural control (*Key Concepts* 19). What transpires in the novels of Phillips is its simple form of resistance, in which it does not allow the colonised to passively submit to the repressive structures of European slavers. These modes of resistance at the cultural level and emancipatory struggles of the victims of oppression are viewed ultimately stemming from their redemptive and liberating consciousness. The most explicit form of resistance to colonial power-relations in slavery articulated in Caryl Phillips’s novels is found in “Heartland” in *Higher Ground*, in “Pagan Coast” and “West” sections in *Crossing the River* and in the novel *Cambridge*. According to John Ford, Phillips draws lessons from the perverse power relations of the slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and addresses a twenty-first century audience that is faced by unrestrained globalised power centres and localised vulnerability and resistance (2). In all the forms of resistance to colonialism, all the colonial victims in the

above novels express exemplary courage and fortitude to fight colonialism in its various forms.

The collaborator, Cambridge, Nash and Martha, are all slaves who remain uprooted and destabilised from their social and cultural environments. Under such transformation, they are taught to view their original culture as inferior to that of colonisers'. Thus, colonialism begins by placing the colonised and their culture in a hierarchical order, in which the coloniser positions himself at the top of the ladder while relegating the colonised to the lower positions. This hierarchical order is infused into the colonised through various discourses and stereotypes as a naturally ordained design of the universe; and through repetitions of the stereotypes the coloniser ultimately justifies the colonial domination. In *Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note that in the colonial locations, language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established (7). Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman note that before colonialism, there were many diverse cultural worlds, but after colonialism, cultures were ranked on a kind of 'great chain of being' according to European notions of culture and development, with Europe at the center (31). In Phillips's above mentioned novels, the protagonists remain displaced from various aspects of their life, such as those from their identity, psyche, land, history and culture, and the coloniser's language and religion play a vital role in creating such colonial situations of these protagonists. Ngugi Wa Thiong comments:

[The] biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against [colonised] is the cultural bomb. The effect of a

cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. (3)

In the colonial locations of the collaborator, Cambridge, Nash and Martha, the European cultural hegemony is established by installing the metropolitan language and religion as the norms thereby by dislodging and marginalising native's local languages and religions. David Richards notes in relation to Fanon's observation how colonialism necessarily creates psychological deprivation in the colonised:

[For] Fanon, colonialism does more than simply deprive the colonized of their independence. Colonialism and its handmaiden, racism, strike much more deeply into the social and individual psychology of the colonized.... The colonial condition prevents, therefore, the formation of workable forms of social and cultural life by creating psychological dependence on these substituted images of domination and inferiority. (10 –11)

Though each of the above mentioned protagonists in Phillips's novel has been instilled and transmuted with colonisers' language and religion, these cultural transformative apparatuses of the coloniser are 'borrowed' or 'appropriated' by the slaves through a 'willingness' and are utilised by them in an 'indistinguishable' manner to articulate anti-colonial resistance. In postcolonial studies, 'appropriation' is the process of capturing and remoulding the colonial language to

new usages with a view of challenging cultural hegemony of the colonial discourses (*Empire Writes Back* 37). As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe, "... anti-colonialist movements often expressed themselves in the appropriation and subversion of forms borrowed from the institutions of the coloniser and turned back on them" (*Key Concepts* 14). This appropriation involves the strategies of 'mimicry' and 'hybridity' that Homi K. Bhabha speaks about. In his elaboration of these concepts, Bhabha clearly attributes a resistant power to both the acts of mimicry and the hybridity, but this resistance is not to be seen as a tool of any explicit political intention on the part of the mimic. Under their colonial conditions, the colonised 'accept' the colonisers' cultural values and assumptions in language, and through colonial 'mimicry,' create them into the "blurred copy" of the coloniser that can be quite threatening" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 139). This 'blurred copy' is the result of colonial mimicry which according to Bhabha is neither 'slavish imitation' nor 'assimilation' into coloniser's culture. It is an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners and ideas of coloniser. This exaggeration means that mimicry is repetition with difference which is also a form of mockery, because it mocks and undermines the ongoing pretensions of colonialism and empire (Huddart 57).

In the case of collaborator in "Heartland" in *Higher Ground*, his cultural identity remains radically remoulded in the hands of white slavers, which he accepts in a disguised manner in spite of his sense of alienation owing to his painful separation from his own family, culture and community. Overtly, though, the collaborator holds the local rulers or kings accountable for constituting his present predicament, the European cultural ideologies that have shaped a

significant part of his subjectivity bring him to a greater awareness of its influences. He says: “Some years ago a king’s trader captured me and sold me to one of their factors. He, in turn, taught me the principles of their language and methods of trading” (*HG* 44). The knowledge of the colonisers’ language and their ways at the cost of his own cultural values are so profound that it accounts mainly for his downfall and his cultural uprootedness. In the novel, language as a cultural unit is one of the tools with which the colonisers exercise power over the psyche of the collaborator. He seems to be transformed under the weight and erosive power of the colonisers’ language, and it typically alienates him from his own cultural scenario and community. He tells the village girl at one moment, “I feel uncomfortable in conversing in our native tongue” (*HG* 33). His inability to be an ‘African’ arises from his overexposure to colonisers’ language and their association in the Fort. Though he remains primarily cut off from his native language, the acquisition of colonisers’ language has privileged him, in another way, to ‘trespass’ the cultural spaces of the colonisers.

The white slavers colonise the cultural territory of the collaborator by displacing and substituting his cultural codes with that of the colonisers,’ and thus, they create his subject position and compel him to work for them. Moreover, this seemingly less threatening job places the collaborator in a safe position, from which he sincerely does not seek for a return to his people. For him, paradoxically, new cultural transformation is not colonisation, but rather ‘liberation,’ a paradoxical liberation from the misfortunes of being a slave. Until a later stage, he remains comfortable within this ‘self-styled’ freedom. Curiously enough he resists colonial oppression in a way by being with the colonisers and enjoying their

cultural values. What he does here is consciously attempting to enter the 'territory' of the coloniser by assimilating their culture and living in the Fort. This 'subversive' strategy of colonial discourses obviously provides his decolonising consciousness with a different tool of resistance. Essentially, his resistance to his colonial subjugation to slavery becomes possible as long as he remains in their camp by interpreting and helping the slavers to shackle the slaves or by being part of colonisers' schemes. As long as he is capable of wielding control over the cultural traits of the coloniser he is safe in the Fort and instinctively finds some kind of comfort in this position. Despite carrying a guilty conscience, due to his particular role, what transpires at the early stages in the Fort is that he does not deliberately attempt to extricate himself from such position. Had he been experiencing 'true remorse' over his shameful collaboration with the slavers, he would have escaped the job and 'freed' himself of the 'burden,' which he obviously does at a later stage when the situation presses him to do so. But here at the moment, on the contrary, what he does is to carry the 'burden' while safely enjoying the benefits proffered to him through the colonial culture.

His willingness to accept the colonial cultural attributes makes him more English than African, and this new cultural transformation 'liberates' him from his Africanness and brings him 'closer' to the European. This 'almost similarity' of the collaborator with the coloniser explains the reason why he is terminated from his job as a collaborator at a moment when he prepares to question the European slavers, Mr. Lewis and Mr. Price on the issue of the village girl. Through this 'rebellious' act of the collaborator, the colonisers seem to understand the transformation of the collaborator into an 'insurgent.' The colonisers recognise

that it essentially poses a threat to their colonial authority due to his “*almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 89; emphasis original) stance to the colonisers. Therefore, subversion of colonial authority inherent in the process of mimicry, through which the collaborator appropriates the European cultural traits, fundamentally provides him with strength to combat colonial domination.

The cultural transformation of Cambridge begins when he is caught as a slave from his land of Guinea and brought to England where he works in the household of a retired English Captain in London. Cambridge, on his capture as a slave, finds himself displaced from his history and culture as the colonial language is employed strategically to avoid slave’s communication with each other aboard the ship. In England, however, he acquires the cultural attributes of English society by adopting English language, their dress code, customs and the religion. Moreover, he marries an English woman and lectures on anti-slavery across the country until the death of his wife. The freedom that he wins in England offers him certain privileges in the English society. He proclaims, “Truly I was now an Englishman” (CA 147). Vivian Nun Halloran notes that by remaining true to his idea of himself, Henderson(Cambridge) finds redemption from the mire of the dehumanising rhetoric of slavery despite the fact that no one outside his immediate circle of friends ever fully acknowledges his Englishness (“Race, Creole, and National Identities” 94). Cambridge typically becomes a ‘mimic man’ in England, and with new appellations like “black Christian” (CA161), “virtual Englishman” (CA 156) and “black-Englishman” (CA 147), he enters ‘an almost equal’ status of the Englishman. Gail Low opines, “Olumide’s accession to the status of free man,

his education and literacy should render him equal to any free-born Englishman” (125).

By being a “black-Englishman” he slowly sheds away his “*uncivilized African demeanour*” (CA 144) from his consciousness, *and thereupon embraces a “superior English mind”* (CA 155). This process of colonial mimicry allows him to formulate a “partial presence” (*Location of Culture* 114) as Homi K. Bhabha opines. For Bhabha, culture, as a colonial space of intervention can be transformed by the unpredictable and partial desire of this hybridity (*Location of Culture* 114–15). The newly defined hybridised cultural territories of Cambridge provide him with a capacity to inhabit the cultural and social spaces of the coloniser. It enables him to have only a ‘partial presence’ in European cultural scenario, because in spite of his acculturation, the racial category to which he belongs as an African cannot be removed from him. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace notes that Cambridge “is a hybrid creation whose identity lies somewhere in between his African roots and Christianized Western identity” (89). *This* hybridisation or colonial mimicry in Cambridge necessarily produces ‘anxiety’ and ‘ambivalence’ in the very center of colonial authority.

The colonial mimicry or hybridity poses a threat to the extent of unsettling the boundaries and relations of colonial authority between European slavers and African slave Cambridge. For Homi Bhabha, this “Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition” (*Location of Culture* 113). Bhabha’s argument is that cultural hybridity of the colonised

subverts colonial discourses and its dominant cultural authority. That is to say, there is a potent resistive power inherent in the process of hybridity that bears the capacity to undermine colonial power structures. Cambridge's 'almost near' condition to the European is a form of intimidation to colonial authority and it destabilises the difference that is 'carefully maintained' between coloniser and colonised, thereby posing a threat to the total cessation of colonialism itself. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, the threat inherent in mimicry comes not from an overt resistance but from the way in which it continually suggests an identity not quite like the coloniser, which is always potentially and strategically insurgent (*Key Concepts* 141).

Nash Williams gains access to the cultural life of America by being indoctrinated in the Christian education and acquiring English language like Cambridge. Finally he wears the white mask of American culture erasing his African culture. His identity is transformed into an 'African-American' as he is introduced to the American cultural life. His newly acquired cultural hybridity allows him to enjoy his master's benevolence in America. He finds himself 'liberated' from the colonial position of a slave and becomes a favourite of his master. Yogita Goyal in her article, "Theorizing Africa in Black Diaspora Studies" pictures Nash "as an instance of a mimic man, a sign of decolonising hybridity or postcolonial double inscription" (19). His elevation from the position of a 'slave' to one of a 'filial' relationship with his master, Edward Williams provides him with necessary protection and participation in the American cultural life. He, in one of his letters notes that he was brought up in his master's dwelling "as something more akin to son than servant" (*CR* 21). He also realises that the

cultural hybridity in which he involves has been a privilege granted to him by his master. He reflects, "... not all masters are so inclined to place the wisdom and good sense of the Bible at the disposal of their colored property" (CR 20). Thus, having been educated Nash finds himself freed of the "robes of ignorance which drape the shoulders of [his] fellow blacks" (CR 21).

Nash's unpredicted access to the language and religion of America enables him to ward off at least a part of crisis that surrounds his slave identity. Nevertheless, his inculcation in African-American identity becomes overwhelmingly disturbing for the Americans. This amply explains why Nash is repatriated to Liberia under the auspices of American Colonization Society in the pretext of establishing a colony and educating the African inhabitants there. In the case of Nash and other freed Negroes, the Americans feared that the free Negroes would revolt against slavery or would instigate revolts, and if they became successful, they might marry white women too. Therefore, the fear of the Americans in the case of Nash is, seemingly, owing to his 'partial presence' in America's cultural territories or his ability to reach almost the same level of any American. As Bhabha points out, the effect of making the 'same, but not quite' of the colonised is that "*double vision* which in disclosing ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (*Location of Culture* 88; emphasis original). While through the cultural processes of mimicry and hybridity Nash formulates an ambiguous presence in the cultural life of America, these postcolonial strategies also provide him with power to resist colonialism. While examining Bhabha's position, Robert C.J. Young argues that the hybridity of colonial discourse reverses the structures of domination in the colonial situation and it becomes an

active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power (*Colonial Desire* 21). This ambivalence of colonial discourse proposes that it provides with an immense capability to the colonised for resistance.

By entering the mainstream colonial discourses of coloniser, three slave figures, the collaborator, Cambridge and Nash Williams deconstruct the parameters of dominant discourses and ideologies. Through their instruction in colonisers' cultural traits, three of them are turned into mimic men who are “*almost the same, but not white*” (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 89). Though their ‘whiteness’ as the mark of “visibility of mimicry” (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 89) is not achieved, in cultural appropriation they become almost equal to the ‘*quite/white*.’ For Bhabha, this ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority is what enables the colonised to forge colonial resistance. Thus, in Bhabha’s conceptualisation, this process opens up fissures in the ostensibly impregnable mantle of colonial authority, and according to Matzke and Muhleisen it is our perception of these fissures that, retrospectively, makes the act of mimicry embody a form of resistance (103).

Alternatively, the ‘invisible’ struggle taking place against cultural colonialism by the above colonised people becomes part of a larger ‘overt’ struggle that the colonised make against the colonial oppression. An important question that rises here is to what extent this struggle is continued. In the above three illustrations, one finds that after a certain point of time, the intensity and power of resistance is terminated or closed down as they are shed of the privileges of colonisers’ culture. With regard to the collaborator, this subtle form of anti-hegemonic resistance to colonial culture comes to an end when he learns to ignore

colonial language, and when he is cast out of his duties and privileges of an interpreter and facilitator for the white slaver. Cambridge finds to his dismay that his hitherto freedom and benefits of being a 'black Englishman' come to a halt as he is recaptured as a slave and sold to West Indian sugar plantations. For Nash Williams, such a privilege as an 'African-American' comes to an end at a point when he becomes disillusioned with the American culture while being in the African country of Liberia. Although, in the cases of all the above three protagonists, while the inculcation in colonisers' culture has been one of conscious efforts, which is often sought after and enjoyed, the anti-colonial resistance that underlie this process is to be viewed as mostly unconscious and even unintentional; this is because, not all forms of resistance is premeditated. David Huddart while discussing Bhabha's concept of mimicry observes that not all forms of resistance are actively chosen or visibly oppositional: some resistance is subtle or indeed unconscious. For Bhabha, that it is resistance at all is more important than the degree to which it is an actively pursued strategy (Huddart 62). Therefore, in the cases of all the above three protagonists, what is more significant is not how conscious their anti-hegemonic resistance is, but how a resistive power is inherent in the colonial strategies of domination, and how it is maneuvered by the colonised to subvert colonial authority.

There are also moments of covert or conscious attempts of those above protagonists to challenge the white slavers. In the instance of the collaborator, it rises to the level of a brave and rebellious quality of action when he can no longer withstand the torturous and cruel exploitation of the girl whom he now desires to make his own. Obviously, his love for the girl is complicated in two ways; first, it

is mingled with his desire for the carnal pleasures and second, he is persuaded by his sympathetic attachment that he feels for her. As Renee T. Schatteman in her doctoral thesis argues, “In his first interactions with the girl, he attempts to use her as he has the slave women in the fort, but then his desire to rape her is replaced by an obsessive need to know what Price did to her” (*Caryl Phillips, J.M. Coetzee, and Michael Ondaatje* 45). Interestingly, the collaborator does not bother about his colonial subjugation earlier, as long as his position provides him safety and security in the Fort, but when he realises that colonial aggression prevents him from possessing what he considers ‘his own,’ for the moment, he begins reacting to his colonial masters, irrespective of his own safety and security. At this moment he consciously initiates forging anticolonial struggle. He risks his life, his career and above all his safety in the Fort in order to save the girl from the village, where she remains now excluded and isolated in her village for being molested by the White man. As Schatteman observes, “... the translator commits his first act of resistance when he secretly retrieves her again, saving her from the ostracism of her own community, and hides her in his quarters at the fort” (*Caryl Phillips, J.M. Coetzee, and Michael Ondaatje* 43). This act of ‘defiance’ has its consequences on him later on. Though he talks about the escape with the girl after hiding her in the Fort, the escape is never materialised. Finally, on having discovered his act of defiance, he and the girl are shackled for deportation across the Atlantic.

This transition takes him to a different level of freedom that he has been looking forward to. As Schatteman remarks, “In his relationship with the girl, however, the translator is able to *free* himself from his suspension in a meaningless present and to *recover* from the amnesia he has developed regarding

his pain and his guilt” (*Caryl Phillips, J.M. Coetzee, and Michael Ondaatje* 45; emphasis added). He tells the white slaver Lewis, the one who abuses the girl repeatedly in the Fort after her being rescued and hidden in the Fort by the collaborator: “Lewis, I do not think you should come back here again.” Lewis looks *puzzled*. He cannot believe that I might be *ordering* him to do something.... I can see the *panic* in his eyes” (*HG* 55; emphasis added). The ‘puzzle’ and the ‘panic’ in the eyes of Lewis indicate the moments of the disruption of colonial authority. The white slavers never would expect any intimidating reaction from the collaborator. As customary, the colonisers expect him to respond according to the cultural edification provided by the coloniser, but not to the point of interrogating them.

Essentially, this growth of the collaborator to their ‘level’ worries the colonisers. This bewilderment in the coloniser is what Bhabha calls the ‘ambivalence’ of the coloniser in the colonial situation. Therefore, it is essential to note that the colonial power itself contains the grains of its own disruption even while it attempts to exercise control over the colonised. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe, “There is a kind of built-in resistance in the construction of any dominant discourse and opposition is an almost inevitable effect of its construction of cultural difference” (*Empire Writes Back* 102). For Homi Bhabha, the colonial power is disrupted in its moments of colonial ambivalence opening up spaces for colonial encounter. David Huddart, while discussing Bhabha’s concepts examines that this ambivalence or anxiety is the space for counter-knowledge and strategies of resistance and contestation (55). The ambivalence that the white master Lewis in the Fort feels here is the result of a ‘fissure’ in the colonial ideology of

‘superior’ and ‘inferior,’ a split in the structural non–equivalence of coloniser and colonised, but it is a moment of resistance, a resistance to colonial authority. Bill Ashcroft in *Post–Colonial Transformation* argues that the idea that ‘counterforce’ is the best response to the colonialist myth of force and this has often implicated colonised groups and individuals in a strategy of resistance (21). What the collaborator achieves here is the disruption of this colonial authority by posing a challenge, though its consequences are anticipated and obvious for him.

But once the collaborator begins to experience the misfortunes of his people, he gains immense strength which hitherto had been subdued or repressed in him. Even at the shackles he becomes aware of the need to divest himself of colonial power, and therefore decides to disregard English language, the heavy psychological burden that he has been carrying until then. He says: “*I have decided to feign ignorance of their language. I erase all expression, save that of fear*” (HG 60; emphasis added). According to Hanz Okazaki, “The ‘in–between–ness’, of the narrator of *Heartland* is an unbearable condition, which he only manages to cast off, in the end, by repudiating his knowledge of the ‘Master’s’ language – thus enabling him to join in solidarity with the other captives, in their chant” (44). The collaborator’s hybridised identity, a privileged position, but a burden, is shed of only when he refuses to acknowledge the colonisers’ language. Though his physical damnation is anticipated across the far–off shores, he remains finally victorious by redeeming himself from the strictures of colonial ideologies. As Schatteman notes, “The fact that this character chooses to claim ignorance of the English language ... indicates that he has chosen hardship over complicity, suggesting that the cost of the latter can be greater than the cost of the first” (*Caryl*

*Phillips, J.M. Coetzee, and Michael Ondaatje* 46). The rebellious song that he initiates at the shackles marks his departure from colonial submission and his surging anti-colonial consciousness. He states:

Under my breath I begin to mutter. Other lips move independently, and without organization we swell into choir .... the same hitherto baffling rebellious music that now makes a common sense for we are all saying the same thing; we are all promising to one day return, irrespective of what might happen to us in whatever land or lands we eventually travel to; we are now promising ourselves that we will return to our people and reclaim the lives that are being snatched away from us. (*HG* 59–60)

The determination and indomitable resolve in their choral chanting to come back to their homeland on a later day is indicative of a new strength gained in resistance and rebellion formulated against the colonial power. Eventually, through this resistive strategy, what he gains is the retrieval of his identity that would not yield anymore to the colonial ideals. Ironically, he attains his ‘freedom’ when he is enslaved at the end.

Cambridge manifests similar kind of anti-colonial sentiments in his encounter with the coloniser Mr. Brown. The growth of Cambridge from his position as a submissive and dutiful slave to the level of attaining an active cultural participation, and at a later stage his act of questioning and confronting the coloniser are significant moments of psychological interest. While being in the West Indian sugar plantation, an explicit form of anti-colonial resistance of

Cambridge is manifested in his categorical ‘denial’ of the new position proffered to him by Brown. Cambridge recognises that after having grabbed the power, Brown’s intention is to reorganise his “status among the slaves to suit his own purpose” (CA 161). In order to achieve this end, Brown tries to manipulate Cambridge, and with that in view he extends to him the new title of ‘Head Driver.’ But, according to Cambridge, “Not wishing to be master to any, *I declined*, and so began the period of conflict between myself and this Mr. Brown” (CA 161; emphasis added). Here, one may perceive Cambridge’s own position being driven by two motives; first, his Christian education compels him not to hold mastership over another human being, and the second motive for denying Brown’s offer stems from his desire of not to be at the dictates of a “bullying brute of an overseer who seemed trapped within the imagined swaggering authority of his skin” (CA161). However, as against the colonial expectations of Negro subordination and conformity, Cambridge refuses to comply with Brown’s need. Brown from then exercises his power to retaliate this ‘defiance’ on Cambridge. Cambridge tells, “He could not accept my *disobedience*” (CA 161; emphasis original). Brown having felt humiliated at the hands of a slave settles the score sadistically with him by making Cambridge’s wife Christiania the object of his lust. Though Cambridge had not wedded Christiania in public, to Cambridge she “meant as much ... as any who might occupy that station” (CA 162). Not only does Brown make the already “unsound *wife* of Cambridge the object of his frothful desire...”, but “His *patience* extend[s] as far as allowing her to share his table” (CA 161–162; emphasis original). This resentful act of Brown disturbs the ‘marital’ relationship between Cambridge and his ‘wife.’ Glenda Rossana Carpio in her doctoral thesis

*Critical Memory in the Fictions of Slavery*, argues that at the end, Cambridge kills Brown not only because within the sexual economy of slavery Brown mocks Cambridge's efforts to perform the office of protector/husband, but also because he wants to replace Brown as Christiania's sexual master (38).

By resisting and refusing to conform to the colonial subjection, Cambridge like the collaborator begins a new mode of anti-colonial struggle against the coloniser Brown. Though the final catastrophic action is not a premeditated one, as evident from Cambridge's own narrative, it is deemed that a productive anti-hegemonic attitude had been animated already in his mind. However, what one finds here is the indomitable spirit that had been cultivated in him as a result of his indulgence in Christian faith and education. However, this Christian edification does not compel him to avenge the mistreatment meted out to him and his *wife*, but it requires him to resolve the issue in a Christian manner. His education in Christian ideals lends him new perspectives on 'liberation.' But what happens at the critical moment is that he slides away from the Biblical teachings and principles. The physical violence that is inflicted upon him, coupled with unscrupulous advances of Brown towards his wife, leads him to a point where he can no longer endure the oppression of the coloniser. 'Determined' to resolve the issue in a 'Christian' fashion, he decides to meet Brown "to instruct him to cease indulging [his] *wife's* behaviour, and to offer him the opportunity of cleansing his heathen conscience and confessing his role in her recent sad demise" (CA 163; emphasis original). However, Cambridge's initial attempts to explain the matters to Brown fails as the latter declines to listen to the slave out of a fear for the sturdy Negro slave. At this, Cambridge returns to his Negro village. But secluded in his

hut for many days for an alleged case of stealing food, and swept by the concern for his 'wife's' present misery, he determines to resist the unjust tyranny.

*I had resolved to no longer endure his abuse if applied in the only manner he seemed to understand, in other words, unjustly. I had decided that I would resist, without turning my mind to heroic mission, for my knowledge of the Bible instructed me that it is man's duty, with God's blessing, to outwit tyranny in whatever form it appears. (CA164; emphasis added)*

In his second attempt to redress the matters, Cambridge decides to meet Brown again. Cambridge considers this encounter with Brown as a "holy crusade" (CA 164). Although his excessive reliance on his Christian ideals, as Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi notes in his doctoral thesis, makes Cambridge, above all, a slave to the indoctrinations of Christianity (162), while his 'determination' transcends this submissiveness and passivity. Subsequently, his resolve is "I would visit him irrespective of his wrath, and talk to him as one man to another. Upon representing myself I would no longer be swayed from my purposes by either his clamouring voice or his raised fists. That he must cease his tormenting of my wife would be the main thrust of my message" (CA 165–166). Fanon in his celebrated work *Wretched of the Earth* observes a similar psychic character of the colonised before his actual political resistance or encounter is made with the coloniser.

For if, in fact, my life is worth as much as the settler's, his glance no longer shrivels me up nor freezes me, and his voice no longer turns me into stone. I am no longer on tenterhooks in his presence; in fact,

I don't give a damn for him. Not only does his presence no longer trouble me, but I am already preparing such efficient ambushes for him that soon there will be no way out but that of flight. (45)

One finds Cambridge gaining strength from his Christian education and becoming a Christian 'activist' rather than a passive ideologist. In fact, he truly seems to understand the liberating spirit of the teachings in the Holy Scripture that invokes to fight against injustice and oppression. Cambridge proposes to fight injustice by addressing its alleged source of evil in Brown and therefore, he wants to bring Brown to an awareness of his moral conscience. In so doing, Cambridge tries to relate Christian ideologies that he has mastered with respect to the social justice and human rights. The most significant aspect here is Cambridge's viewing the Christian ideologies and its teachings from the perspective of the oppressed. Consequently, he believes that since the truth is on his side, it would ultimately liberate him.

However, at the moments of his second confrontation with Brown, Cambridge forgets his Christian principles, and succumbs to violent outpouring of his emotions. When he approaches Brown determined to state his grievances but a fierce fight ensues. He reflects about it: "I had steeled myself to endure no further abuse.... He struck me once with his crop, and *I took it from him*, and in the resultant struggle the life left his body" (CA167; emphasis added). Though this is a version of the story provided by Cambridge himself in his narrative, in which he justifies his action, his resentment and humiliations in the West Indian plantation estate have forced him to go to the extreme forms of resistance. His anti-colonial struggle reaches to the point of exterminating the oppressor – the slave owner,

though not willingly. Apparently, this act of Cambridge goes in agreement with the ideas of Frantz Fanon. As David Richards argues, “Violence, for Fanon, was not only a political strategy to secure independence, it was a psychological necessity to liberate the minds of the colonized from the repressive effects of the empire” (13). Cambridge is a wounded person in multiple ways – culturally, socially, psychologically and physically. He gathers his resentments that were ‘psychologically locked up’ for many years within him for treating him as a slave; that is to say, his grudge towards the coloniser is unbridled at a decisive moment and it erupts from his psychological vexations, humiliations and wounds that he has been taking from the colonisers over the past. In *Frantz Fanon and Authentic Decolonization*, C. Rajan quotes Peter Geismer as having said, “Third world revolutions are the cathartic vengeance for decades of quieter colonial murders” (94). In Cambridge’s act of murdering Brown, one may find that it is a deed that serves the purpose of ‘catharsis.’ Fundamentally, it rinses out all the pent up resentful feelings of Cambridge against the coloniser. What Cambridge does here is that the dominance of imperial power is being challenged and combated by a new kind of revolutionary consciousness more akin to that of Fanon’s line of thought. Renate Zahar notes,

By relaying the pressure of the colonial system under which he suffers, the colonized man acts against his own interests, that is to say, in an alienated manner. But if popular resistance is politicized and organized in such a way as to lead to acts of violence against the true enemy – the coloniser – violence loses its criminal

character: it now becomes emancipatory and, hence, a potential instrument of disalienation. (56)

In the case of Cambridge, though the course of action has not been premeditated, essentially it has rescued him from what he had been suffering from. Phillips shows Cambridge at the end waiting for his death penalty as the consequence of his action in a white legal system.

Under the patronage of American Colonization Society, Nash Williams is repatriated to the burgeoning country of Liberia to establish a Christian mission and colony. In the new Liberian colony, Nash formulates anti-colonial struggle against his neo-colonial situation. His attempts to resist American cultural values and its assumptions emerge in terms of a resistance that opposes colonialism through visible oppositional strategies. Though he remains a liberated slave, an American cultural consciousness overrides his African cultural identity and confines him to a different image of a 'neo-slave' in the new cultural spaces of Liberia. Fundamentally, the two significant aspects that contribute to make his neo-slave position in Liberian colony are, first, his excessive and undue devotion and dependence on his former master Edward Williams; and second, his intense admiration for Western cultural values and profound commitment to establish them in Liberia. What is revealed here is Nash's peculiar psychic dynamics that still keeps him a colonised in a neo-slave position. As Vivian Nun Halloran observes in her doctoral thesis, "Nash Williams, the protagonist of "The Pagan Coast," ... steadfastly refuses to give up his old cultural identity as an American slave even after obtaining his freedom and returning to Africa" (146). Fundamentally, this continuity of Nash's colonial situation, which stems from his

basic psychological disposition, makes him a neo–slave. Ashis Nandy, in *Intimate Enemy*, discusses that colonialism is a psychological state rooted in earlier forms of social consciousness in both the colonisers and the colonised. It represents a certain cultural continuity and carries a certain cultural baggage (2). In the case of Nash, this continuity and connection with American cultural ideals is extended even to the territories of his African life. At each transformative stage in his life, he undergoes this cultural translation that finally contributes to his anticolonial struggle. John Ford observes,

Sold out of Africa by his metaphorical father, he acquires English and Christianity, is returned to Africa by his master to colonise an Africa he is alien to, only to find he must allow it to modify him in order to survive. At each stage there is a translation, literal and metaphorical, going on within Nash. The American speaks to the African about literacy and Christianity. The African speaks against America’s slave system and the American must learn a local African language. (6)

This cross–cultural identity in Nash basically renders him a sense of being torn between two inappropriate locations. But on coming to an awareness that his American cultural identity is to be modified for his continued existence in African soil, he decides to rid himself of the former colonial identity.

Nash Williams finds it comfortable also to be in a paternal–filial relationship, which provides him a sense of security that leads to his vulnerability. Pramod Nayar notes, “Colonialism ‘infantilizes’ the native, rendering him/her

helpless, vulnerable, and dependent on the white master” (40). In spite of having acquired his freedom and liberty in America, his paternal–filial relationship with his former master Edward Williams, constitutes him psychologically a ‘slave’; it is a dependent position, which he voluntarily accepts. Nash variously addresses Edward as ‘master,’ ‘father,’ ‘beloved benefactor’ and ‘intimate,’ while he refers to himself in his letters as “humble servant and affectionate son” (CR 28). His psychological dependence to Edward comes primarily through a realisation that his former master has been unduly considerate enough to teach him the predominant Western cultural values. He reflects:

I was fortunate enough to be born in a Christian country, amongst Christian parents and friends, and that you were kind enough to take me, a foolish child, from my parents and bring me up in your own dwelling as something more akin to son than servant. Truth and honesty is great capital, and you instilled such values in my person at an early age, for which I am eternally grateful to you and my Creator. 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)

Ashis Nandy while discussing the psychological coordinates of colonial operations argues that a system of colonisation is perpetuated by providing some incentives to the oppressed, which seeks to conceal oppression.

Obviously, a colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized, through socioeconomic and psychological rewards and

punishments, to accept new social norms and cognitive categories. But these outer incentives and dis-incentives are invariably noticed and challenged; they become the overt indicators of oppression and dominance. (3)

In the case of Nash, such incentives are provided through his education in Christian principles and instruction in English language.

Owing to his Westernised education, Nash places himself high above the natives in Liberia in all respects and views himself as one of the “white man” (*CR* 32). Not only does Nash hold himself as a ‘white,’ but he sees himself also 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. In spite of experiencing a new sense of Americanism and subsequent pleasure and power in it, there emerges an underlying sense of discontentment that requires him to modify his cultural consciousness. As Benedicte Ledent argues, “Men are indeed captives in ‘the prisonhouse of natural bias’ prisoners of the roles imposed upon them by the code of colonial behaviour” (“Overlapping Territories” 58).

As the days pass by, Nash Williams remains a postcolonial figure paradoxically located in the Liberian colony suspecting his allegiance to Americanism. This sense of disjunction between ‘native’ and ‘foreign’ in Liberia forces him to think of relinquishing what is foreign in order to formulate an oppositional strategy against colonial culture on his way for liberation. Nash recognises a new awareness surging up within him that conveys the

incompatibility of American cultural values for a life in African context. He says: “Far from corrupting my soul, this Commonwealth of Liberia has provided me with the *opportunity to open my eyes and cast off the garb of ignorance* which has encompassed me all too securely the whole course of my life” (CR 61 – 62; emphasis added). He gradually recognises the futility of conflating these two diverse cultures in African soil. According to him, “America is, according to my memory, a land of milk and honey, where people are not easily satisfied. [But] things that seemed to me then to hold so much value are now, in this new country, and in my new circumstances, without value” (CR 25).

Though Nash’s letters can be assumed to be a link between his Americanism and his African consciousness, these letters, in the later stages become vehicles of his anti-colonial consciousness. As Gail Low observes, “Nash’s letters to his former master ... serve to question some of the Eurocentric presumptions of Edward Williams’ world” (132 – 33). His letters of allegiance are stopped temporarily when he suspects a deceit in the purposes of his repatriation. Once he achieves a decolonising consciousness, he questions Edward: “Perhaps in this realm of the hereafter you might explain to me why you used me for your purposes and then expelled me to this Liberian paradise” (CR 62).

Nash takes, however, an extreme form of resistance by refusing to conform to the colonisers’ culture. He says, “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” (CR 61). His anti-hegemonic struggle begins by integrating himself more fully with what is African. He, by now, having fully relinquished American cultural life, embraces

polygamy, African religion, and learns African language. In one of his letters (written on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1842) he mentions about having “three wives (I have considered a fourth, but the expense is at present beyond me)” (CR 60). In this regard, he also anticipates the bewilderment of Edward. He writes to Edward, “... that my present family does not conform to what you might reasonably expect of me ...” (CR 60). For Nash ‘Christianity’ with its institutional practices represents a western ‘design’ and he chooses to abandon Christianity (but he still loves Christ as a man) with its principles.

The school is no more, and shall never again occupy a position of authority in any settlement of which I am a part. This missionary work, this process of persuasion, is futile amongst these people, for they never truly pray to the Christian God, they merely pray to their own gods in Christian guise, for the American God does not even resemble them in that most fundamental of features. The truth is, our religion, in its purest and least diluted form, can never take root in this country. Its young shoots will wither and die, leaving the sensible man with the conclusive evidence that he must reap what grows naturally. It has taken my dark mind many years to absorb this knowledge.... (CR 62)

He denounces the Western religion as he realises the futility of it for the African. In fact, it is not only the disinterestedness of the natives that makes him stop evangelising, but rather his own disillusionment in the ideology of Christian faith and its impracticability in the African life and culture.

Indications to severing his ties with colonial language are also obvious. Realising the practical necessity for learning the African language, he says, “I feel the necessity of being able to understand properly the words of the natives in whose land I reside” (CR 60). Previously, a strong supporter and educator of colonial language (English), Nash now remains well aware of its inappropriateness in his African existence and in his children’s lives as well. Therefore he teaches his children the African language. He informs through his letter to Edward, “In addition they receive, from their mothers, instruction in African language, as I do” (CR 60). Nash’s anti-colonial resistance enables him to extricate himself from a colonial mentality and being a ‘slave’ to a colonial system. His cultural identity interestingly passes through multiple phases from being an African, African-American (American) and finally an African. In the final stages, before his death, Nash is able to cast off the garb of a colonial vest and becomes an African, partially a ‘free’ man, with an underlying sense of disillusionment in Americanism at the deep most area of his heart. Fundamentally, Nash’s anti-colonial resistance has been one chosen voluntarily and it has been emphatic to the degree of total opposition to colonial ideologies.

Gayatri Spivak in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” states, “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (28). Martha, a slave woman in “West” in *Crossing the River*, is presented as a subaltern woman whose voices are silenced by the slave-masters, and therefore, she suffers even more excruciatingly than other characters in slavery. Her subalternity is constructed through systematic deprivation of her human value and voice in slavery. Sold at the

auction center as a slave, and separated from her husband and little child, she is forced to run away from slavery before she is sold out a second time. Here one recognises Martha as a subaltern who amazingly derives courage and strength to resist the colonial domination over her. Ania Loomba notes that subalterns are positioned simultaneously within several different discourses of power and of resistance (239). This recognition of simultaneous existence of both subalternity and resistance allows Martha to emerge free at the end.

Martha exhibits radical form of anticolonial resistance by fighting against colonial cultural values and finally running away from slavery to freedom. She is enslaved in the United States and suffers separation from her family at the auction center. Having been sold at the auction center in Virginia to Mr. Hoffman, she spends her life as a slave with Hoffman's family. As the fortunes of Hoffman's family decline they decide to move to another place. Though Hoffmans are pictured as "deeply religious people" (CR 79), they decide to sell her again to slavery. Martha remembers: "He paused. 'We are going to California, but we shall have to sell you back across the river in order that we can make this journey.' Martha's heart fell like a stone" (CR 80). Her silent but impulsive "No" (CR 80) to being sold out as a slave again reveals her courage borne out of her decision not to yield again to colonialism. Ashcroft observes in *Post-Colonial Transformation*,

... if we think of resistance as any form of defence by which an invader is 'kept out,' the subtle and sometimes even unspoken forms of social and cultural resistance have been much more common. It is these subtle and more widespread forms of resistance,

forms of saying ‘no,’ that are most interesting because they are most difficult for imperial powers to combat. (20)

For Martha, the news that her master would dispose her, must have come as a warm welcome, if not for her being re–sold to a new slave–master. She has lost her family and suffered the pains of abandonment, and therefore, further yielding to slavery means a lifelong negation of freedom and identity for her. Hence, the news of being sold out again compels Martha to run away from the Hoffman family. One would notice here that in a system of slavery, the slave master exercises power over the body of the slave and it constricts the physical existence of the slaves.

Martha’s resistance to power structures of colonial cultural values is seen earlier in the story. When the Hoffmans discover Martha distressed and dejected owing to her separation from her family, especially from her little daughter, they “took Martha with them to a four–day revival by the river, where a dedicated young circuit rider named Wilson attempted to cast light in on Martha’s dark soul. Satan be gone. The young evangelist preached with all his might...” (CR 79). It is significant to note here how Martha formulates an anti – hegemonic resistance against coloniser’s cultural values. The slave masters attempt to quell the psychological distress in Martha by trying to provide her with the colonisers’ cultural values. Categorically, it is this colonial obstinacy that Martha resists; and her decision not to comply with this makes her anti–colonial struggle more emphatic. The narrator continues to describe how Martha ‘defies’ coloniser’s religious system: “Martha could find no solace in religion, and was unable to sympathize with the sufferings of the son of God when set against her own private

misery.... Never again would the Hoffmans mention their God to Martha” (CR 79). Deliberately she avoids such a western religious cure for the malaise generated by colonial slavery on her. Obviously, this particular act of defiance provides her the needed strength to forge a new anti-colonial resistive consciousness in the forthcoming predicament.

Her running away from the Hoffmans is an act of ‘defiance’ and part of her anti-colonial struggle. Her decision not to fall again into the hands of slavers is apparent in her emphatic articulation of “Never” at various stages.

Eventually, Martha climbed to her feet and began to run. (Like the wind, girl.) *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.*)... And then, later, she saw dawn announcing its bold self, and a breathless Martha stopped to rest beneath a huge willow tree. (Don't nobody own me now.) She looked up, and through the thicket of branches she saw the morning star throbbing in the sky. As though recklessly attempting to preserve its life into the heart of a new day. (CR 80–81; emphasis added)

The expression, “The morning star throbs in the sky” metaphorically provides a clue to her birth into freedom and it comes through the “thicket of branches” of her struggle. Martha survives slavery and makes a new life for herself in Kansas. Finally, she intends to travel to American West, California where she would join the “colored folks” (CR 88) to build up a community. California, for Martha,

remains to be a symbol of freedom from slavery and the possibility to be reunited with her family, though her old age and ill-health prevent her from realising the goal. On her way to California with the 'colored pioneers,' being unable to cope with the tiresome journey, she is kindly placed in Denver, Colorado where she dies in freedom.

As the subjectivity of the colonised in Phillips's novels is constructed through dominant discourses and colonial representative models, it is imperative for the colonised or the oppressed to formulate some strategies of resistance in order to escape the effects of hegemonic controls. Peter Barry notes that "If the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one's own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued (193). Though the slaves succeed, to a great extent, in subverting and formulating oppositional strategies in their attempts of liberation, their absolute decolonisation remains unrealised. However, as their cases prove, a productive and dynamic engagement of resistance need not meet always with absolute liberation or decolonisation as in political scenario, but rather it offers possibilities for opening up venues for persistent decolonising consciousness. As Helen Tiffin observes, "Decolonization is process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them" (95). In Phillips's novels, all the slaves remarkably exhibit decolonising consciousness by persistently managing to resist colonialism through various means of subverting the dominant colonial discourses and resisting the representations of colonial power and authority. As long as colonialism continues to stay in the world through various forms, anti-colonial resistance should prevail as a continuous process.