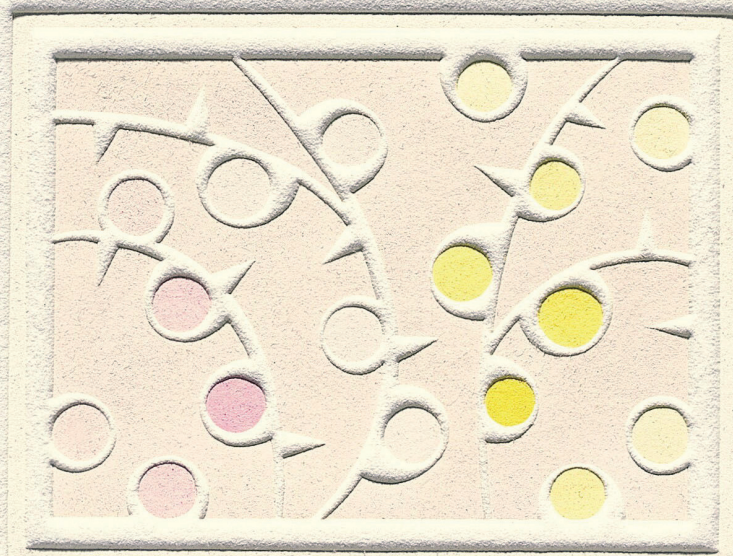


METAPHORS OF DIASPORA: ENGLISH
LITERATURE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

FERNANDO GALVÁN

English
Language
Overseas
Perspectives and
Enquiries



Editors: SMILJANA KOMAR and UROŠ MOZETIČ

**AS YOU WRITE IT: ISSUES IN LITERATURE,
LANGUAGE, AND TRANSLATION IN THE
CONTEXT OF EUROPE IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

Slovensko društvo za angleške študije
Slovene Association for the Study of English

Oddelek za anglistiko in amerikanistiko, Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani
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Metaphors of Diaspora: English Literature at the Turn of the Century

Summary

The purpose of this essay is to make a literary reading of the postcolonial diasporas in Britain, especially in connection with the metaphors used by diasporic writers in the UK in their search for their own identity and belonging. As diaspora is a metaphorical term in the sense we are using it now, three different metaphorical constructions of diaspora will be explored: a) the metaphor of the imaginary homelands created by immigrant writers; b) the metaphor of the Black Atlantic as a sort of space shared by those who are part of the diaspora and what this entails in history and literature; and c) the metaphor of the journey as an intrinsic element of diaspora itself.

Key words: diaspora, metaphor, imaginary homeland, Black Atlantic, journey

Metafore diaspore: angleška književnost na prelomu stoletja

Povzetek

Namen pričujočega prispevka je literarna predstavitev poskolonialnih diaspor v Veliki Britaniji, posebej v povezavi z metaforami, ki jih uporabljajo avtorji v Združenem kraljestvu v iskanju svoje identitete in pripadnosti. Glede na to da na tem mestu uporabljamo izraz *diaspora* v metaforičnem smislu, bomo raziskali tri različne metaforične zgradbe diaspore: a) metaforo izmišljene domovine, kakor jo ustvarjajo priseljeni pisatelji; b) metaforo Črnega Atlantika kot neke vrste prostora, ki si ga delijo pripadniki diaspore, ter njen pomen za zgodovino in književnost; in c) metaforo potovanja kot neločljive prvine same diaspore

Ključne besede: diaspora, metafora, namišljena domovina, Črni Atlantic, potovanje

Metaphors of Diaspora: English Literature at the Turn of the Century¹

1. Introduction: Diaspora and Postcolonialism

Diaspora and *hybridity* are both metaphorical terms in the usual terminology we employ in literary criticism today. The first is an agricultural metaphor associated with the idea of dispersion, of sowing or scattering seeds (from the Greek *diá* ‘through’, and the verb *spérein* ‘to sow’, ‘to scatter’). Moreover, its initial metaphorical ascription to the dispersion of a particular people, the Jews, after the Babylonian captivity, and then later, with the Jewish people being forced to leave Palestine, has been extended to other peoples and communities. Thus the classical, Jewish *diaspora* has carried over its meaning, extending it to other similar dispersions: we now view the African diaspora, the Asian diaspora, the Indian diaspora, and others, as equivalent to (similar to or like) the Jewish diaspora. Analogously, hybridity, originally connected to the horticultural – if not agricultural – and zoological worlds, has also acquired metaphorical values related to diaspora and postcolonialism. Its original meaning of combination or union of different species, races or varieties has been extended in association with diaspora to the coming together of different peoples, cultures, religions and worldviews. Thus we have come to talk about the hyphenated identities so characteristic of the United States (*African-American*, *Cuban-American*, *Italian-American*, etc.), and gradually becoming also common in the UK (*Black-British*, *Brit-Asians*, *Indian-British*, etc.). We could even picture the usual scene of a peasant or farmer sowing the land, dispersing seeds at random, these seeds falling in different places and producing hybrid fruits. In this way, and now referring of course to people and not to seeds, we may talk about current British society as a hybrid society, the product of diverse diasporas.

But my concern now is exclusively with the literary readings of the postcolonial diaspora (or rather, diasporas) made in Britain in recent years. The phenomenon of postcoloniality is not strictly a recent one because the independence of many British colonies started immediately after the Second World War. That sparked off the dispersion of populations from different areas of the world, and many colonised subjects – mainly (but not only) those who had collaborated with the colonial administration – left their countries for the metropolis in a process which, in the British case, took place between the late 1940s and the 1970s. However, reflection and theorising over this issue was not widespread until the last two decades of the twentieth century, when the movement for “reshaping British identity” coincided with an ideological, political and social debate on this question. Commenting on this at the end of the 1990s, Jürgen Schläeger mentioned the September 1997 Labour campaign issue “Reshaping British National Identity – Rebranding Britain” and the project headed by Homi Bhabha and the British Council Cultural Studies Department called the “Re-inventing Britain Project”. For Schläeger, all these governmental efforts had “all the elements of a great theatrical

¹ This paper was written as part of a Research Project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, code HUM2007-63028. Acknowledgements are also due to Dr Jonathan P.A. Sell for his reading and suggestions on a first draft of this manuscript.

spectacle – of a dramatised pageantry on a grand scale and Britain is, after all, the country and culture which produced the greatest dramatist of all times” (Schlaeger 1999, 57–8). But certainly, apart from any political motivation and/or manipulation of the issue (something that Schlaeger is keen on emphasizing), it is undeniable that the presence of immigrants in Britain has drastically changed the identity of its society and has produced a distinctly new style in its literature. My purpose in this paper is to delve into some of the manifestations of that situation, by focusing on the effects of postcolonial diaspora in the process of current writing in the UK.

The journal *Wasafiri* (Spring 1999, issue no. 29) echoed the British Council Project with the publication of Bhabha’s “Manifesto” and the transcription of a dialogue with Bhabha himself, Susheila Nasta and Rasheed Araeen in the BBC Radio 3 programme ‘Night Waves’. Bhabha referred there to the topic of hybridity by addressing the fact that today there are about 100 million people in the world that live as migrants in countries and cultures other than their own. As he says, these people are living in a sort of “in-between state, where they are not fully accepted as nationals” (Bhabha 1999, 40). He explains that even if they are accepted in legal terms, as they are indeed in some places, what really happens is that they are regarded by others as “a group apart”, “not fully integrated”. What is most interesting, however, is what he says after that description:

these people are not always talking about their own victimage or their own declaration, they are also producing very positive images. They are actually producing creatively a whole range of cultural and social acts, meaningful acts. (40)

This means that the main interest of studying the diverse diasporas in contemporary Britain is not restricted to their expressions of victimage, but rather to their capacity to be creative and productive. Susheila Nasta, also participating in that dialogue, emphasized this feature in particular relation to the “in-betweenness” that characterizes diaspora – the fact that immigrants are living in two worlds, sharing two cultures, even if they are in conflict one with another. These are some of her words:

The position of the migrant and immigrant I would add is enabling in this way for it allows a doubling of perspective, a view of the inside from the outside –though in reality the two perspectives are always linked. But this vantage point has both the precision of distance and intimacy and is essentially an ambidextrous one. (42)

My purpose in this paper is to explore just three aspects of the metaphorical constructions inspired by the postcolonial diaspora in contemporary Britain. I will specifically discuss: a) the metaphor of the imaginary homelands created by the diasporic or hybrid writers; b) the metaphor of the Black Atlantic as a sort of space shared by those who are part of a diaspora; and c) the metaphor of the journey as an intrinsic element of diaspora itself. I am fully aware that other metaphorical constructions have developed, and need further exploration (metaphors of blood, of colour, of the island, etc.). But I cannot deal with all of them in this paper, and so I will concentrate on the three mentioned aspects.

2. The metaphor of the imaginary homelands

It was Salman Rushdie who in 1982 wrote a beautiful essay entitled “Imaginary Homelands”. This piece starts with the contemplation of an old photograph of the house in Bombay where he was born. It evokes the past as something lost. Recalling the famous opening of L.P. Hartley’s novel *The Go-Between*, that reads “The past is a foreign country – they do things differently there”, he inverts the idea when he looks at that old photograph: “it reminds me that it’s my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time” (Rushdie 1991, 9). That repeated word, *lost*, evokes Proust and his lost time, but our writer does not have the same experience as the French novelist. Rushdie explains how he wrote *Midnight’s Children* in an effort to reclaim and to rebuild the city where he was born, a city that had disappeared from his factual reality, the reality he was living in North London, where he was writing his book. The experience of leaving Bombay for Pakistan (a country he never names but refers to simply as “the unmentionable country across the border”, 9) and his later trip to the former metropolis are obviously references to that diaspora or dispersion undergone by immigrants who feel compelled to leave their countries. The main problem of that diaspora, he says, in relation to the search for that lost time, is the impossibility of retrieving it as it actually was. He tells us that when he wrote *Midnight’s Children* he could not grasp the actual city and the past, so that he was fighting with his memory in order to recover that reality, but to no avail: “what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: ‘my’ India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions” (10).

He sees himself, in this respect, as one who writes from outside India trying to reflect that lost world and in doing so he is dealing with “broken mirrors” (11), never with the complete and actual reality. This image of the “broken mirrors” is very interesting not only for its suggestion of a substitution (a mirror only projects images, which work as a replacement for the real thing) but also because of its fragmentary condition. Diasporic migrants are necessarily fragmented, as they have been dispersed and torn away from their country and fellow citizens. So, like memory, which is faulty and partial and may thus lead into distortions and falsifications of history, the diasporic writer is faced with the challenge of remembering and rewriting the past left behind. Yes, rewriting the past, although it may sound a bit awkward, as if we were talking of politicians who pretend to make the world in their own image (such as in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). But writers also do that, need to do that, in order to counterbalance the lies told by politicians. Rushdie writes: “Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians’ version of truth” (14). What the Indian writer in the diaspora to Britain does, then, is to “create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (10). Fragmentation, which initially might be seen as a weakness, thus turns into strength, allowing the writer to imagine his past, giving him more freedom to create and to recover the lost time, the lost home. It could even be said that writers like Rushdie, experiencing this sort of diaspora in Britain, feel empowered by precisely the tradition of immigration and diasporas of the past. He puts it very clearly when he reclaims for his own art and writing the traditions that Britain has incorporated throughout its history:

Let me suggest that Indian writers in England have access to a second tradition, quite apart from their own racial history. It is the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group. We can quite legitimately claim as our ancestors the Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews; the past to which we belong is an English past, the history of immigrant Britain. Swift, Conrad, Marx are as much our literary forebears as Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy. (20)

The reference to the Jews cannot escape our attention in this context. Rushdie is also alluding to the classical diaspora, and clearly claiming that the Indian, or South Asian, diaspora in Britain bears a strong similarity to that of the Jews.

Other diasporic or immigrant writers have followed suit. We cannot forget, in connection with the subcontinent, writers like Hanif Kureishi, Vikram Seth, Amit Chaudhuri, Romesh Gunsekera, just to mention some of those who live or have lived in Britain and who have already made a name for themselves in the United Kingdom and abroad (see Nasta 2002). But of course the Asian diaspora goes beyond Britain, and others like Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Tharoor, and Michael Ondaatje are part of the South Asian diaspora in the United States and Canada.

It is interesting, however, to note that Rushdie's allusion to his literary forebears in the Indian and British traditions alike is echoed by another contemporary writer belonging to a different diaspora, the Caribbean one. It is Caryl Phillips, born on the island of St Kitts, who in 1997 published an anthology entitled *Extravagant Strangers. A Literature of Belonging*. This is a collection of texts and fragments ranging from 18th-century African writers like Olaudah Equiano to contemporary poets and novelists from diverse parts of the world like Linton Kwesi Johnson, Romesh Gunsekera, Kazuo Ishiguro, David Dabydeen or Ben Okri, but also including such well-known white authors as William Thackeray, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Wyndham Lewis, or George Orwell, all of them born outside Britain and all of whom contributed their imagination, their "imaginary homelands", to English or British literature. Phillips's idea in compiling this anthology was simply to prove that Britain has always been a country of immigrants, where different diasporas have coalesced in shaping its peculiar identity, an identity that cannot be considered homogeneous at all. Reading these texts we certainly become aware of the diversity implicated in the definition of *British*. In Phillips's words,

readers will come to accept that as soon as one defines oneself as "British" one is participating in a centuries-old tradition or cultural exchange, of ethnic and linguistic plurality, as one might expect from a proud nation that could once boast she ruled most of the known world. The evidence collected here confirms that one of the fortuitous by-products of this heterogeneous history has been a vigorous and dynamic literature. (Phillips 1997, xii)

So, this is the power that writers belonging to the diaspora wield. Their creations of "imaginary homelands" are multiple: Rushdie's singular *Midnight's Children* (1981) comes immediately to mind, but so too do Romesh Gunsekera's *Reef* (1994) in connection with Sri Lanka, Abdulrazak

Gurnah's *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Paradise* (1994), *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001) or *Desertion* (2005) about Zanzibar, as well as recreations of their parents' homelands by younger novelists such as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) or Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* (2002), or other constructions of "lost time", like the recreation of the "Windrush Generation" of Caribbean immigrants in the late 1940s and 1950s, as presented in Andrea Levy's popular novel *Small Island* (2004).

3. The metaphor of the "Black Atlantic"

The second metaphorical issue I wish to explore is that of the Atlantic as "black". The great ocean that separates, and connects, three continents: Africa, Europe and America, was thus regarded by critic Paul Gilroy in his 1993 book *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Gilroy's aim is perhaps best understood through the subtitle with its key terms "double consciousness", another name for what Bhabha and others have termed "in-betweenness". The first sentence of the book is very clear in this respect: "Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness", and a bit later he declares with further precision:

The contemporary black English, like the Anglo-Africans of earlier generations and perhaps, like all blacks in the West, stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations. (Gilroy 1993, 1)

The physical Atlantic Ocean is seen then as a metaphorical channel or space where the process of exchanges or mutations between Africa and the West take place. The slave trade is indeed the origin of this concept of *Black Atlantic*, but the concept itself is not merely equivalent or synonymous to the slave population and the slave trade in their passage from Africa to Europe and America. Gilroy talks about these movements of black people through the Atlantic, which, he says, cannot be seen exclusively as commodities, but also as "engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship", which is a way to re-examine "the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory" (16). This is not a minor subject, but perhaps more relevant to my point here is the emphasis put on the interaction between the black population and the white culture in the metropolis. In this sense *Black Atlantic* is a conceptual tool that permits us to study, as Ania Loomba has written, "the extent to which African-American, British and Caribbean diasporic cultures mould each other *as well as the metropolitan cultures with which they interacted*" (Loomba 1998, 175). This is precisely the centre of our interest: the effect that the slave trade and its subsequent diaspora had on the metropolitan culture, on British identity. Stuart Hall has taken this notion of the *Black Atlantic* as an instrument of analysis a step further and talked about "cultural *diasporization*" (Hall 1996, 446–7; quoted by Loomba 1998, 176). As can be seen, diaspora is now presented as a cultural process affecting not only the direct subjects of diaspora (Africans in this particular reference to the slave trade), but also the metropolitan subjects that interact with them. Its dispersing quality makes diaspora a sort of metaphorical "infectious disease", which extends across the wide social texture of the UK.

It is very interesting to reflect on what a Caribbean-born British writer like Caryl Phillips has written on this respect. In his book of essays *A New World Order* (2001) he comments on his experience of alienation when visiting Africa. As a black, wishing to get back to his origins, he visits the Dark continent and encounters a reality that is not his own:

Africa faces a unique set of problems as it tries to orientate itself through the postcolonial nightmare of corrupt leaders, and beyond the resounding clash of the new world entering as its people are still trying to pick over the remnants of the old world which was destroyed by European incursion. [...] What Africa needs is critical self-analysis, and intellectually rigorous minds and impassioned voices to dissect the past and suggest a future. And it possesses such minds and voices. What Africa does not need is a continual flow of disaffected African-Americans, wounded by race, acting out their fantasies of belonging and alienation with a presumed authenticity which is understood by the figment of the pigment. (Phillips 2001, 93)

A similar experience is had when he visits the Caribbean and particularly the island where he was born before his parents immigrated to Britain in the 1950s. He does not feel part of it at all. What is happening, as I have written elsewhere (Galván 2004), is that a cultural transformation is now taking place in Britain, and thus an emerging hybrid culture is occupying the space of what used to be different categories of people, each in their own neat pigeon-hole: white Europeans, black Africans, Indians, Caribbeans, etc. This new culture is the result of that dispersion of diverse diasporas, or *diaspora-ization*, as Stuart Hall has called it, in another development of the original agricultural metaphor. In Phillips's words,

After thirteen years of compulsive itinerancy, I know my Atlantic 'home' to be triangular in shape with Britain at one apex, the west coast of Africa at another, and the new world of North America (including the Caribbean) forming the third point of the triangle. (Phillips 2001, 305)

Of course that "Atlantic 'home'" he mentions is not a real place; it is not precisely located here or there; it is the "Black Atlantic", another imaginary homeland constituted by many other things apart from a lot of salty water ("I have chosen to create for myself an imaginary 'home' to live alongside the one that I am incapable of fully trusting. My increasingly precious, imaginary, Atlantic world", says Phillips 2001, 308). He has been writing for many years about this condition of feeling diasporic, and parallel to the experience of the Jewish diaspora, he has dealt extensively with one of the most traumatic aspects of it: the Holocaust. From documentary books like *The European Tribe* (1987; 2nd edition 1992) or *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) to novels such as *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993) or *The Nature of Blood* (1997), Phillips has been retelling over and over again the "other" Holocaust suffered by the black diaspora and fictionalising the common identity shared by Jews and Black Africans in their respective diasporas: Othello is thus one of the best epitomes of that experience, as Phillips has narrated it in *The European Tribe* and *The Nature of Blood*. This feeling is conveyed in strong terms in the pages of that first travel book:

I was brought up in a Europe that still shudders with guilt at mention of the Holocaust. Hundreds of books have been published, many films made, television programmes produced, thousands of articles written. The Nazi persecution of the Jews is taught at school, debated in colleges, and is a part of a European education. As a child, in what seemed to me a hostile country, the Jews were the only minority group discussed with reference to exploitation and racialism, and for that reason, I naturally identified with them. At that time, I was staunchly indignant about everything from the Holocaust to the Soviet persecution of Jewry. The bloody excesses of colonialism, the pillage and rape of modern Africa, the transportation of 11 million black people to the Americas, and their subsequent bondage were not on the curriculum, and certainly not on the television screen. As a result I vicariously channelled a part of my hurt and frustration through the Jewish experience. (Phillips 1992, 53–4)

So diaspora also means, in literary terms, and thus metaphorically, the reshuffling and reshaping of metropolitan language and literary and cultural myths: Othello, a black man, is like a Jew, and as such he is treated in *The Nature of Blood*, next to the Nazi concentration camps and the worst and cruellest manifestations of human beings. Curiously enough perhaps, the association between Jewish and black characters seems to be relatively common in postcolonial literature (which is possibly another effect or consequence of the colonial experience and the teaching of the Bible to natives). I will simply recall now the name of “Moses” in two very different novels: Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing*, back in 1950, where the African servant who kills Mary Turner has this name; and Sam Selvon’s sequence about Moses Aloetta, starting with *The Lonely Londoners* (1956).

I have been quoting from Caryl Phillips, but there are others who, living and writing in Britain, are now, at the turn of the twenty-first century, principally concerned with the diasporic experience of the *Black Atlantic* particularly in relation to metropolitan hybridisation or “diaspora-ization”. One of the most fruitful, inspiring and recent studies on this is John McLeod’s book *Postcolonial London. Rewriting the Metropolis* (2004), which focuses on the literary and imaginary constructions of London by writers belonging to different diasporas from the 1950s to our days. Contemporary authors such as Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Linton Kwesi Johnson, David Dabydeen, Fred D’Aguiar and Bernardine Evaristo feature prominently in this volume, but other recent publications also bear witness to the fertility of these British constructions of postcolonial diaspora, such as books published by Sukhdev Sandhu (2004) or James Procter (2003), whose span extends beyond London and addresses the issue of the construction of space (physical, mental, metaphorical) by members of diasporas. Procter focuses not only on those immigrants that arrived in Britain and tried to find their place there, but also on the new generation, those “born-and-bred” Black Britons who prefer to tackle their everyday reality rather than the past or lost worlds left behind by their parents. All this, in short, is evidence of the influential role played by this metaphorical view of diaspora.

4. The metaphor of the journey

Finally, let me address the third metaphorical issue connected with diaspora: the journey. This is of course an issue closely related to physical diaspora itself, but I wish to tackle it from the point of

view of writing and writers. In short, what is the role of travelling for diasporic writers? Firstly the connection with the African diasporic writers is self-evident: Caryl Phillips has drawn our attention to writers who have had to travel to other places in order to make sense of their own lives. These are individuals who are associated with foreign places, where they could settle and escape from the oppressive atmosphere of their original lands, people such as Langston Hughes in Moscow, W.E.B. Du Bois in Berlin, Ida B. Wells or Phillis Wheatley in London, Claude McKay in Marseilles, or James Baldwin in Paris. According to Phillips, “the ability to leave and see oneself through another prism – hopefully one that is less racially clouded – has long been a part of the legacy of being a writer of African origin in the West” (Phillips 2006, 4). This is also linked to Paul Gilroy’s description of his metaphorical *Black Atlantic*, as he sets out to discuss “the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering” (Gilroy 1993, 3).

Naturally, journey is not an exclusive property of the African diaspora; many contemporary Caribbean writers in Britain have also produced travel books or novels imbued with journeys. Apart from those written by Caryl Phillips which I have already mentioned, let us recall some of the classics: C.L.R. James, Jean Rhys, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, or Samuel Selvon. Members of the British literary tradition itself, on the other hand, have not been alien to these “necessary journeys”, as Phillips calls them, in order to “affirm their sense of their own place in the global scheme of things” (Phillips 2006, 3). Writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson or George Orwell, among many others, have felt that need to change countries and try to find themselves. In “Necessary Journeys”, Phillips develops his own justification for travelling, which he links to his diasporic condition. He explains that the only way for him to become a true writer was to escape from Britain and travel first across Europe, and then throughout the world. Otherwise he feels he would have become a prisoner of the image that Britain had of him, that is, a cliché of what it meant to be a black writer in the UK. Phillips does not want to be considered “a black writer” as a category or type; he does not want to be called by the media to give his opinion about racial issues, “a predicament that can quickly reduce a writer to the position of being little more than a social commentator” (Phillips 2006, 4). If he had not gone abroad, if he had not escaped that social and media pressure, he would not have developed his own self, as this was reduced in Britain to images (again the recourse to mirrors that project only “images”, fragmented pieces, of reality) which, he adds, “were laughably restrictive, generally insulting, and palpably false” (5).

The “necessary journeys” are also grounded on his own interior journey of development. Let me quote a descriptive paragraph about himself, because what he says here is generally applicable to many other writers of his generation and origin, in their fighting for an adequate definition of their identity:

I was born in the Caribbean and journeyed to Britain in the late fifties as an infant. This migration has had an incalculable effect upon who I am. That I grew up in Yorkshire, in the north of England as a working-class boy, has also had a deep-seated effect upon me. That I went first to grammar school, then to a comprehensive school, and from there to a prestigious older university, this has all fed who I am. The evidence of these

migrations over water and across land, through nations, class and geography had, twenty years ago, already bequeathed to me an exceedingly multifarious sense of self. Add to this the ingredient of race, in an institutionally racist society, and it becomes clear that I was dealing with a personal identity that resisted easy classification. (5)

As can easily be appreciated, the writer is not talking merely about the physical journey of moving with his parents from the island of St Kitts to Leeds, where he was brought up, but he includes as part of his journeys his metaphorical migration from working-class Yorkshire through grammar and comprehensive schools to the prestige of Oxford University. These are migrations in space of course, as they entail different geographies in the UK, but they are also, and perhaps more importantly, journeys across class and nation. In this sense, and in coincidence with Phillips, other diasporic writers have explored the metaphor of the journey (physical and interior journeys) in their novels. Not surprisingly, of course, some of these writers (Abdulrazak Gurnah, Zadie Smith, Hari Kunzru, Fred D'Aguiar, David Dabydeen, etc.) I have already mentioned in connection with the metaphor of the imaginary homelands and the *Black Atlantic*, and I say not surprisingly because the metaphor of journey is closely linked to the imaginary homelands and the lost spaces and times, as well as to the middle passage and the “in-betweenness”, hybridity or double consciousness implied by Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*.

5. Conclusion

As a way to draw this argument to a close, I will quote a few words from a paper published by Abdulrazak Gurnah in 2004 that reveal this utter identification with other postcolonial writers of the diaspora. He explains that he came to writing as a necessity to recover his past, his “lost life” in Zanzibar, as he is living in Britain and feels estranged in a foreign country, with “the sense of a life left behind, of people casually and thoughtlessly abandoned”. It is that separation which makes him write and empowers his imagination. The words he uses are particularly interesting as they combine the metaphor of the journey with that of recollection and imagination:

Travelling away from home provides distance and perspective, and a degree of amplitude and liberation. It intensifies recollection, which is the writer's hinterland. Distance allows the writer uncluttered communion with this inner self, and the result is a freer play of the imagination. (Gurnah 2004, 59)

Gurnah's experience is not far from Rushdie's or from Phillips's in this respect. All these writers are living and enacting the metaphors of the diaspora and, by so doing, they certainly extend and empower the cultural and aesthetic values of immigration, hybridity and diaspora-ization.

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