

Diasporic Representations in *The Final Passage*

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Abstract

Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* is an endeavor to tribute to all of those who tried outward voyage and their bewildered attempt to find a home in a country whose rooming houses post sign announcing "No vacancies for coloureds". This paper is modest attempt to highlights the projection of *The Final Passage*, the protagonist (Leila) of the novel covets better life in mother country. She and her family migrate from their impoverished island to the uncertain opportunities of England. However, whilst searching for better future her life becomes weary and drowsy. In the end, Leila had regrets about the change. Her story of migration, displacement proves that the search of better opportunities is thwarted. The present paper is an attempt to analyze diasporic representations in Phillips' *The Final Passage*.

KEYWORDS: diaspora, migration, nostalgia, alienation, lack of acceptance, racism, return to homeland.

Introduction:

Caryl Phillips (1958) is an 'alpha-class' postcolonial black British novelist, was born in a rum shop in St. Paul's British colony and small village of St. Kitts, the Eastern Caribbean Island. He is one of the major diasporic writers of the Caribbean wave who agitates about damp and holocaust history of blacks. He has written speculative novels about diaspora and ethnic identity crises in homeland and host land. He has presented his vision of the assimilation and hybridity, problems of migratory people, concealed historical episodes and transnationalism through his writing. He has written nine pensive novels: *The Final Passage* (1985), *A State of Independence* (1986), *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993), *The Nature of Blood* (1997), *A Distant Shore* (2003), *Dancing in the Dark* (2005) and *In the Falling Snow* (2009).

Debut Novel: Migration and Displacement

The Final Passage is debut novel of Caryl Phillips, Leila, a nineteen year 'mulatto girl' from an unspecified island in the Caribbean. The story of Leila deals with outward voyage to mother country where she tries to search her identity and better future but her dream of better life shattered and she resolves to remigration to the homeland. The novel is organized in five parts and series of flashbacks. The beginning of the story is unusual feature of writing; it means the end of story right at the beginning. The novel opens with 'The End', as Leila and her son Calvin are preparing for their migration to mother country better economy. Leila is a young girl lived with her ailing mother. Leila's boyfriend Michael is womanizer and irresponsible lover and father. His main interest is drink and sex. He does odd jobs delivery with his friend Bradeth, but most time of the day, they enjoy the life in local beer bar. Leila and Michael love with each other. They are going to be marrying but before marriage Leila become pregnant and give birth to an illegitimate child of Michael who was not interested and happy about the idea of marriage.

Leila finds her marriage seems to be almost futile and based on distrust. She decides to leave to England for searching a better life. Leila finds life on the small island increasing unbearable and hopeless. At first Michael was not interested in leaving island and friends, he says:

Leaving this place going make me feel old it's like...leaving the safety of your family to go live with strangers (*The Final Passage* 11).

But at last, paradoxically Michael also decides to emigrate with Leila for better economy and employment. Leila feels 'sorry for those satisfied enough to stay'. The last ship of midnight moves from the Caribbean island to England which connotes migratory experience of blacks. Leila and Michael represents to 50's mass migration to England. In the 1950's people migrates in masses, the huge ship is packed with emigrants most of them are lured away from their homeland by the projection of a better economy. Here, Phillips stresses his personal history of migration with his family to Leeds, England. The reason of first migration as Phillips tells to Yelin:

Mainly because of economic reasons, there was, I suspect, an idea of going to where their friends and family were. They are quite adventurous, foolhard, or courageous (Schatteman 42).

According to Zig Henry, "...the West Indies clearly existed preconditions for migration, since the islands were characterized by high population densities, high levels of unemployment, low gross domestic product per capita and low rates of economic growth" (*The New Commonwealth Migrants*, 1945-62). At the opening of the novel Phillips tackles the issue of migration and displacement which represent diaspora.

Sense of Alienation

Leila, Michael and infant Calvin reaches at England but the first look of England is very shocking for Leila, as she notices the condition of migrant and coloured people is disastrous and unpleasant. She notices that coloured people did not 'drive big cars or wear suits or carry brief cases'. Leila suddenly comes to know a dolorous reality of blacks in mother country. Her eyesight catches a lettering which clearly sounds in her that she has to work very hard in this country. A poster on a wall:

IF YOU WANT A NIGGER NEIGHBOUR VOTE LABOUR.

This eccentric reality leads a sense of alienation in her mind. Leila noticed the condition of black people which clearly marks towards 'lack of acceptance' by host country. The sense of rejection and feeling of alienation is very dominant characteristics of Caribbean people which represent diaspora. Leila shocked when her mother who comes for better treatment on her illness seems futile. Her mother realizes the dark side of England as she tells to Leila, 'London is not (her) home' (*FP* 124).

Racism and Discrimination

Leila surprises and disappointed with the unexpected condition of living and employment. Phillips lights on the problems of housing and employment in the fifties and sixties. The problems of housing and jobs revealed the historical episodes of racism. Leila and Michael, like most other West Indians faces renting discrimination. This is more evident by discriminatory housing practices that prevent the black family from renting. The sign board likes

No colored's, No Vacancies, No Children, No blacks (*FP*155).

The signs are clearly focuses on 'racism', the vexing question of racism is literally at centre of Caryl Phillips' novel which is important perspective of diaspora. In the end of 20th century problem of discrimination, migration and employment has become tricky in the social context of England. Especially the working class and poor class of

immigrants live contentedly. It all paved way to housing and employment problems in contemporary England. Phillips tackles this historical issue brilliantly. As Michael trudges for job in, he is stimulated by ignorant and nescient questions:

Have you ever been to prison or to a courtroom in front of judge?

How many wives, one or two (*FP* 166)?

This short extract shows that Michael is abused by white people on the term of race and colour. The coloured people were offered only odd jobs, as Michael was hired to work in a 'paper clip' factory and was told to 'put up the COLOURED QUOTA FULL' sign (*FP* 167). Michael was so frustrate as he gets interior job. On the contrary Leila also disappointed as her family gets bad housing for live. This lack of acceptance, racism and vulnerable life are trait of diaspora.

Identity Crises and Return to Home

However, Leila and Michael will not be able to start their new life in England. On emotionally sense to Leila, the 'mother country' proves devastating and family breaking place. She realizes that her relationship with Michael is very miserable and he will not be a part of her future life.

The character of *The Final Passage* equally possesses a hybrid identity. On the one hand, Leila and Michael is now accept mother country as 'home'. On the other they are rejected by the while culture on the bias of race. We could thus say that they failed in living a double life, and they cannot wipe out their original identity. At last Leila has decided to return to home to the island, she rememorizes the content life on homeland and miss her friends. The nostalgic memory of homeland leads her back to home. Admittedly at the end of novel Leila receives a Christmas card 'from nobody' (*FP* 205). The anonymous card indicates her meaningless stay at England. Lastly she fired all the things and objects of England. According to some critics 'fire' is a form of ritual purification and it announces the start of a new era.

Moreover, *The Final Passage* is also the title of the novel suggests 'displacement and migration' of characters which clearly marks diaspora. The title of the novel explores the phrase 'middle passage'. It indirectly connected with the days of slavery. The 'first passage' is a ship of black immigrant towards Africa from England. Then the dreadful 'middle passage' to the American and Caribbean plantations during which voyage many died and were thrown overboard, and the 'final passage' is the story of Caribbean migration for better future and opportunities.

Conclusion

To conclude, the search for better life leads to ambiguous and futile world. Phillips' novel *The Final Passage* is a mixture of historical and mythical episodes, where characters migrate, disperse from origin land and they find themselves unfit in mother country. In this diasporic episode many Caribbean people are not only uprooted but now remain rootless. The epigraph of the novel extracted from a poem by T S Eliot, '*Little Gidding*', confers Caribbean diaspora:

A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England (*FP*3).

Undoubtedly, the present novel lights on the issues of emigration, displacement, alienation, lack of acceptance by mother country and return to home. The novelist touches all the above mentioned issues of blacks which represent diaspora.

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