

## Where is Palestine in Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*?

Ahlam Masri and Tahrir Hamdi  
Arab Open University, Jordan

**Abstract:** *This article examines the theoretical/critical and literary silence on Palestine as represented by Caryl Phillips's novel, The Nature of Blood. It is argued that the silence on Palestine is simultaneously political, historical, geographical and imaginative. In his novel, Phillips provides a framework of Jewish suffering and persecution in an anti-Semitic Europe which culminates in the Holocaust in order to justify the establishment of a Jewish homeland. The criticism Phillips directs at Israel has to do with Israel's racism against black Jews. Phillips, who is ironically identified as a postcolonial writer, ignores the fact that Israel is also a colonial entity, which was established based on the belief that Israel would be an ethnically pure homeland for the Jewish people. Phillips's inability or unwillingness to understand this basic given leads to his intentional erasure of a whole people, the Palestinians and their cause, a criticism that can also be leveled against trauma and postcolonial studies.*

**Keywords:** Caryl Phillips, Palestine, postcolonial, silence, trauma, Zionism

In their introduction to *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman put forward two contradictory postcolonial realities: the first is that “the era of formal colonial control is over, apart from aberrations such as the Falklands/Malvinas” (3-4). The second reality confirms that postcolonial theory as an academic discipline could not have been possible, or even thinkable, without Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978: 5). The following question is inevitable and inescapable: if it is uncontested that Said inhabits such a significant (and even fundamental) position within the articulation of postcolonial thought, then how could his Palestine (both as political entity and national identity), which forms the backbone of his postcolonial thinking, be so contentious and even unrecognized as a colonized space in postcolonial discourse? In other words, in what sense does postcolonial thinking appreciate Said without appreciating his cause?

The answer to the above question has been posed explicitly by Williams (who did not mention Palestine in the above example) and Anna Ball in their poignant article “Where is Palestine?”: “In moments of despondency—or, for others no doubt, mere realism—it can be tempting to answer the question “Where is Palestine?” with “Nowhere”: nowhere geographically, nowhere politically, nowhere theoretically, nowhere postcolonially (127). This statement is, to a great extent, true with the addition of the phrase ‘nowhere historically’ to make the statement more comprehensive. Yet, it is important to understand how Palestine has come to be “nowhere.” The story of Palestine has been unilaterally narrated

from the perspective of Zionism so that Israeli existence and Palestinian non-existence in historical Palestine became ipso facto justified. More importantly, the political authority of the narrator has sustained the textual authority of its narrative; it is mainly because of Israel's qualitative existence on the world political map that its narrative on Palestine has been sustained, circulated, and communicated as a dominant discourse not only in Israel but also in the pro-Israeli West, especially, the United States of America, where the Palestinian narrative, as Said argues in an important essay, has not been given the permission to be narrated (1984). Simultaneously, it is because of Palestine's qualitative lack of existence on the world political map that any attempt to provide a counter-narrative on Palestine has been rejected, minimized, and contested.

Zionism has been committed to keeping Palestine outside geography, outside politics, outside history, and consequently "outside discussion" (Said 1979: xli). This very last notion could be read as the main reason for Palestine's non-existence within the articulation of post-colonial thought, which would only mean its prior existence in history as a colonized nation, and thus conceived as a direct defiance to dominant Israeli political discourse (William and Ball 2014: 128). Although Palestine has been explicitly communicated as a post-colonial discourse through a sheer variety of outstanding Palestinian voices that are both theoretical and imaginative (of which Said and Mahmoud Darwish are prompt examples respectively), it has not been addressed appropriately as a colonized space within the context of postcolonial criticism. It is ironic that postcolonialism is indebted for its existence to the Palestinian American cultural theorist, Edward Said. Postcolonialism, a literary school supposedly established to pursue moral authority and expose cruel colonial practices, has offered little attention to Palestine. Thus, it is indeed odd how a postcolonial writer, such as Caryl Phillips, whose novel is concerned with the marginalization and silencing of Israel's black Jews, can at the same time conveniently silence the narrative of Palestine and Palestinians. Phillips is well known for his novels which are concerned with the African diaspora in Britain, the Caribbean and the United States of America, especially "with reference to the displacement and hybridity of the diasporic subject" (Silku 2009: 163) as exhibited in his two novels *The Final Passage* (1985) and *A Distant Shore* (2003).

Phillips's "postcolonial" novel *The Nature of Blood* (1997) has been widely critically praised and appreciated for several but considerably interrelated reasons. One reason is for its literary cosmopolitanism. According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, cosmopolitanism is a cultural phenomenon which attempts to validate, respect, and understand communal cultural differences and individual autonomy (2005: 268). The main purpose of cosmopolitanism, according to Appiah, is to make the whole world a "shared hometown" (ibid: 217) in which both human dignity and cultural differences are treated with empathy and sensitivity in order to finally realize co-existence and co-habitation of these different cultures (Kumar: 229). Cosmopolitanism could function effectively through the historical juxtaposition of the diverse cultural experiences of different cultural minorities at the terrains of race, ethnicity, gender, and class (the four of which are the common

threads running through the terminology of cultural differences) by means of inter-narrativity (ibid). The technique of inter-narrativity, which Phillips uses in his novel, attempts to juxtapose and intertwine the different cultural experiences and identities within a structure of narrative representation. In this sense, *The Nature of Blood* provides imaginative, historical, and cultural contact zones between Jews and blacks, mainly through juxtaposing the traumatic histories of these others through ages of oppression, subjugation, violence and injustice, caused by anti-Semitism and slavery, and this resulted in the forced migration of both groups as presented in Phillips's novel.

The two main strategies required to achieve cosmopolitanism are cultural empathy and inter-narrativity (ibid). However, cultural empathy attempts to understand and appreciate these diverse cultural experiences within a structure of identification. With cultural empathy and by means of inter-narrativity, *The Nature of Blood* provides a historical continuity between two different victims from two different worlds, connected not in time or space but in experience, in what Michael Rothberg calls, "multidirectional memory" (Scharfman 2010: 92). It provides a historical continuity between the Jewish experience of the fifteenth century Portbuffole and the twentieth century Holocaust, which are European instigated Jewish persecutions caused by anti-Semitism. It also provides a historical continuity between the migratory experience of the sixteenth century black Titan (the Othello-like figure) and the twentieth century black Malka that are mainly caused by slavery. All these experiences have been narrated by the Kittitian-British writer Phillips who, as a cosmopolitan writer (who happens to be black), could not only speak for the traumatic experience of his race, but could also construct an empathetic identification with a different ethnicity and, remarkably, a different gender and speak for the traumatic experience of the Jewess Eva. In this regard, Benedicte Ledent has commended Phillips for challenging "the current literary tribalism, pervasive in this age of identity politics, that would mark off black experience as the domain of blacks, restrict the telling of women's lives to other women, and leave the Holocaust to the Jews" (qtd in Craps 2008 : 191).

Furthermore, both the novel and its novelist have been appreciated as products and producers of postcolonial realities (Scharfman 2010: 94). Phillips was born in 1958 in St. Kitts in the West Indies. He grew up in Leeds in Britain, divided between his Carribean origins and his British upbringing (Clingman 2004: 142). As a black British citizen, Phillips, along with his parents and his community, experienced racism, alienation and above all an insecure identity, which he decided to document as a writer (Kreikamp 1997 : 45). Nevertheless, as a writer, Phillips has also decided to construct an intimate relationship between the black experience and the Jewish experience for three main reasons: the first reason has a familial dimension since on his maternal side, Phillips has a black Jewish grandfather (Clingman 2004: 143). The second reason has an ideational dimension; in a book of essays entitled *The European Tribe*, Phillips quotes Frantz Fanon who in 1952 repeated the words of his philosophy professor: "Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking

about you" (Fanon qtd in Phillips 1987: 45). The third reason has a historical dimension. In this respect, Phillips wrote that the traumatic experiences of his race/people "were not on the curriculum and certainly not on the television screen. As a result I vicariously channeled a part of my hurt and frustration through the Jewish experience" (Phillips qtd in Craps: 191). Thus, the black experience in Europe has been given no public attention or reference, but the Jewish experience, especially the events of the Holocaust, have, and this is why Phillips has decided to project much of his own history through Jewish history.

Consequently, Phillips places the narrative of his protagonists (Eva, Titan, and Servadio who are the Jews of Portobuffole) in a much larger context of European racism in an attempt to construct multiple identities scarred by the "traumatogenic effects" (Gonel 2011: 220) of othering by the European self across centuries of dispossession, uprooting, fear, chaos, diaspora, disease, persecution and death. This very last notion entails a brief discussion of trauma and Diaspora Studies within the context of cultural studies, centrally related to the question of identity, which lies at the heart of the previously mentioned cosmopolitanism and postcolonialism. Trauma studies is a cultural phenomenon which emerged in the 1990s and takes real-world issues such as history, politics, and ethics as focal points of study (Craps and Buelens: 1). Interestingly, there have been some critical appeals to consider postcolonial studies as a post-traumatic cultural formation (ibid). The term 'trauma' is self-illustrative and includes humiliation, oppression, subjugation and suffering as focal thematic concerns. The main reason for any traumatic experience is explained by Charles Taylor in his article "The Politics of Recognition." In this regard, Taylor believes that there is an unbreakable bond between recognition and identity formation essentially because it is either recognition or misrecognition of others which is responsible for "a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being" (25). The importance of Diaspora Studies lies in its fundamental role in identity-formation and reformation since "the notion of home goes beyond being a place to inhabit but becomes a metaphor for self-identification, rootedness, belonging, and connection to one's past, present and future (Gonel 2011: 228). Thus, Diaspora Studies takes notions of home, homelessness, belonging and returning home as focal thematic concerns. Cathy Caruth, an important scholar in trauma studies, emphasizes history and its leading role in understanding and investigating the traumatic experience of not only a certain group in history, but also of diverse groups in an attempt to construct cross-cultural bridges between these traumatic experiences (10-11). Caruth further insists that trauma can only be meaningful when communicated both historically and culturally amongst the survivors of diverse traumatic experiences (ibid: 11).

*The Nature of Blood* provides a literary model in which almost all the characters both talk and listen to each other implicitly, but also empathetically, about a common crisis of identity-misrecognition (generally with a prior diasporic and traumatic experience) and simultaneously call for a retelling of their stories to ultimately achieve their identity-reformation/ reconstruction.

In his own attempt to reconcile form with content, Phillips experiments with new stylistic devices which harmonize with the general disrupted, discontinuous and pessimistic atmosphere of the novel. For example, the novel provides a variety of historical and cultural settings along with diverse modes of narrative (Clingman 2004: 146). The novel opens by alluding to the story of Stephan Stern, mainly told in the third-person narrative. Stern abandoned his former life in Europe in the 1930s to go to Palestine to help establish the state of Israel. The novel also ends in the Israel of the 1990s, telling the story of old Stephan's encounter with Malka, a young black Jewess, telling her migratory experience, along with her family, from Ethiopia to Israel. The novel also tells, largely in the first-person narrative, the story of Eva Stern who has witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath in the concentration camps. Another first-person narrative retells the story of the Othello-like figure Titan who migrated to Venice in the sixteenth century to lead a war against the Turks and fell in love with Desdemona, the white Venetian lady. Finally, the novel provides a third-person narrative, detailing the persecution of the Jewish community in Portobuffole, a district near Venice, and the execution of three members of this community after being accused of killing an innocent Christian boy, Sebastian, in an attempt to fulfill the rituals of their Passover in the fifteenth century. To achieve inter-narrativity, all these narratives appear in gapped paragraphs with no chronological or sequential order (Calbi 2004: 146). Structurally speaking, the novel has no chapter headings, titles, or even numbers. Rather, chapters are intertwined and intermixed, mirroring the experience of their protagonists.

With regard to dialogues and monologues, it is interesting to note that as Thomas Jay Lynn points out, in postcolonialism, dialogue is presented as the language of non-violence, intellectual progress, and as a means of productive cross-culturalism and consequently constructive identity-formation. Monologue, on the other hand, is presented as the language of violence, psychological regress/suicide/death and as a means of destructive identity formation (65). This notion is practically true when applied to both Eva and Titan whose monologue is firstly brought about by the absence of common language. Consequently, monologue or a lack of dialogue has validated their sense of alienation and self-misrecognition and has particularly brought about Eva's suicide.

Since the novel is about traumatic and diasporic experiences, it would then fulfill the thematic requirements of these two cultural perspectives which have been previously mentioned, such as home, return, belonging, dehumanization, oppression, subjugation, chaos and fear. Phillips has been able to break out of the barriers of identity politics and to revise and recontextualize the common cultural experiences of disparate peoples, times and spaces within his own search for personal identity. His attempt to provide his fictional perspective with a transnational identity (Clingman 2004: 162) has enabled him to emerge as a universalist within the context of postcolonial studies. Thus within the scope of postcolonialism, trauma and Diaspora Studies, this novel can be said to have a profound ethical dimension and should thus be read accordingly. However, a different ethical reading of the novel would unveil an *ethical crisis*, stemming

from Phillips's textual disengagement with Palestine and Palestinians as partners in the postcolonial, traumatic, and diasporic experiences which the novel dramatizes. In fact, the screaming silences in Phillips's novel easily lend themselves to Said's practice of contrapuntal reading, which according to Said "must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded" (1993: 66-67).

Here, Stuart Hall's (Phillips's fellow Caribbean-British thinker) ideas can be used to deconstruct Phillips's imaginings. Phillips bases his novel on the idea of the cosmopolitanism involved in bringing together the suffering of two different peoples—European blacks and Jews through the technique of inter-narrativity. Although Phillips does criticize Israel for its fanatic persistence on the concept of a pure Jewish race and their return home to the exclusion of black Jews, he is unable to extend his criticism from Israel's stark racism to Israel's brutal colonization of Palestine. Phillips ironically justifies and adopts the authenticity of the "return" home of the Jews to "Israel." However, by adopting this narrative, Phillips paradoxically subscribes to the view that identity is a pure essence (which he rejects in his criticisms of Israel's racism against black Jews), something stable and unchanging, rather than a process as Hall presents in his important essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." For Hall:

Diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, the imperialising, the hegemonising, form of 'ethnicity'. We have seen the fate of the people of Palestine at the hands of this backward-looking conception of diaspora and the complicity of the West with it [.....]. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (401-402).

The very idea of the founding of the state of Israel is based on the principle of a "pure" identity, a concept which runs counter to Phillip's literary cosmopolitanism. Thus, Phillips, who objects to Israel's treatment of black Jews inside Israel, but wholeheartedly accepts the premise of the state of Israel, misses the point entirely. Israel can only accommodate ethnically white Jews; by its very definition and creation, Israel is a racist state. Thus, Phillips's novel self-deconstructs by first accepting the premise of a *Jewish* state (which emphasizes the purity of a direct line of Jewish descent) and then rejecting racism against black Jews inside Israel. In fact, a careful ethical reading of the novel could only validate Phillips's conspicuous *non-narrative* of Palestine. If Phillips's novel is situated properly within the parameters of ethical criticism, then both the novel and its novelist should be criticized for the same reasons they have been previously praised.

One of the most important themes of the novel is the theme of home/homeland. In the novel, Phillips illustrates how, in the 1480s, the Jews of Portobuffole concluded a certain ceremony they kept for 5240 years since the

creation of their world by chanting “[t]his year, slaves; next year in the land of Israel, free” (Phillips 1997: 58). Later in the novel, particularly in the 1940s, after surviving the Holocaust, the free Eva comments: “For Palestine [.....] [a]fter hundreds of years of trying to be with other, of trying to be other, we are now pouring in the direction of home” (ibid: 45). However, the explicit and superficial representation of the theme of homeland in the novel bears implicit and profound ideological aspects that are worth analyzing since these themes are directly linked to Phillips’s justification of the Zionist state.

One important ideological aspect which has been communicated in the representational character of homeland in the novel is religion. In a divine promise, Palestine has always been conceived in the Jewish psyche as the “Promised Land” for Jews worldwide. In this sense, Israel’s appropriation of Palestine has gained moral, religious, and salvational dimensions. It has been conceived as a fulfillment of God’s promise to His “Chosen People” and as a redemptive mission. However, unlike the nature of any redemptive missions, which would mainly include the natives of the redeemed territory in its redemptive project, the establishment of Israel was informed by Jewish ethno-religious supremacy (which could only be read as racism) that has served to convert the theme of homeland into an exclusivist project, which is committed to keeping Palestinians, as non-Jews, outside any conception of the “Jewish state,” and outside any conception of Israel (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2001: 119).

As a matter of fact, the ideological dimension of religion has a more profound qualitative character in the sense that it has been employed to idealize the concept of home in order to rationalize the concept of colony. This means that Zionism has employed religion so that the appropriation of Palestine would be conceived as a redemptive enterprise, not a colonial project. In an absurd twist of Zionist logic, Jews are “proven” to be the original owners of Palestine, coming home after a long, coercive stay abroad, while Palestinians are represented as foreigners who have colonized Palestine for centuries and should thus surrender Palestine to its original owners. Following this narrative, post-1948 Israel becomes, both spatially and temporally, a postcolonial entity (Massad 2006: 19). Accordingly, Palestine and Palestinians have no historical, geographical or even cultural existence. This is precisely the narrative to which Phillips subscribes.

This notion has been suggested by Stephan in the novel who answers Moshe’s question about the Israeli army by stating: “Yes there is an army, and it is organized and well disciplined. It will be extremely important once we have a free country” (Phillips 1997: 7) and later by Eva who elaborates on her Uncle Stephan’s mission along with his army to the readers: “He had journeyed to the British colony of Palestine, for he wanted to defend the new Jewish settlements against attacks from the Arabs and to prepare the land for large-scale settlement by Jews” (ibid: 73). In both notions, Israel is represented as a colonized land pursuing liberation but the question is from whom? Although Palestine is referred to as a British colony in Eva’s words, it is not colonized by the British but rather by the Arabs. This notion might be given more importance if we know that Stephan’s surname Stern could allude to Avraham Stern, the leader of the Stern

Gang, a Zionist terrorist organization which was founded in 1940 ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)). Unlike the Irgun organization which supported the British in their fight against the Nazis, Stern supported the German Nazi regime in return for the support of Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment of Israel. Stern was finally killed by British authorities in 1942 (*ibid*). Nevertheless, Eva's recurrent visions of the British in general and Gerry in particular as 'liberators' are meant to falsify any identification between Stephan and Avraham. If we are to apply the equation that the 'enemy of a friend is an enemy, and an enemy of an enemy is a friend' as the arbiter here, and if we are to place the British, Jews and Arabs in a colonizer/colonized binary opposition, then both the British and Jews/Israelis should emerge, according to the above description, as colonizers since history has never recorded such an intimate and benevolent relationship between colonizer and colonized.

Given his interest in colonialism and the fact that he has been appreciated as both product and producer of postcolonial literature, how are we expected to understand Phillips's misconception of such a common colonial denomination between Britain and Israel? How are we to understand Phillips's inattention to the atrocious colonial practices that have accompanied the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 by Stephan-like Hagannah soldiers, to which the Deir Yassin massacre is a case in point? How can the postcolonial Phillips ignore the fact that the so-called "free" state of Israel has been established upon the dispossession of about 780,000 Palestinians (Said 1979: 14) and the total destruction and depopulation of about 536 Palestinian towns and villages? (Esber 2013). Furthermore, given Phillips's interest in cosmopolitanism, humanist universalism and above all racial traumatic experiences (as has been previously illustrated), how can the reader understand Phillips's one-sided criticism of Israel's failure to reconcile with multiple diasporic identities, (Scharfman 2010: 107), which is highlighted in its racist treatment of the black Jewish immigrant Malka, who along with her family and Ethiopian community, has been racially mistreated and forced to live in ghetto-like housing in Israel. Disappointed by her homeland, Malka makes her nervous statement: "I ask is this a home" (Phillips: 207). Israel has disappointed not only Malka but also Phillips, who stated that his writing of the novel was motivated by reading the news that for fear of disease, Israel discarded the blood that was donated by black Jews (Clingman 2004: 165). Again, how can the reader understand Phillips's sensitivity to Israel's racist treatment of black Jews in Israel without extending his critical sensitivity to Palestinians who have been subjected to extreme racial persecutions by Israeli rule in Palestine since its establishment?

Another important ideological theme which is directly linked to Phillips's justification of the establishment of Israel is the Holocaust, which was caused by centuries of anti-Semitic violence, oppression and dehumanization in Europe. In Europe, Jews experienced several forms of 'othering'; they were characterized as backward, feminine, dirty, cunning, lazy and weak. Moreover, they were socially excluded in ghettos and denied certain areas of activity, such as war and agriculture (Massad 2006: 27). This anti-Jewish sentiment which caused the

agonizing estrangement of Jews in Europe was conceptualized mainly in the nineteenth century by Zionist ideology as anti-Semitism (ibid: 166). Phillips's detailed narration of the historical injustice suffered by the Jews in Europe is not to be understood in terms of a simple retelling of a traumatic experience. In fact, this suffering is used by Phillips (as Zionists before him have already done) to justify the establishment of the state of Israel. Phillips's cultural empathy with Jews is suggested in the story of the black Titan (Othello-like figure) who upon entering the ghetto seeking the help of the Jewish scribe to translate a letter for him from Desdemona describes the streets as "recklessly narrow and ill-arranged" (Phillips: 129), then wonders: "Why they should choose to live in this manner defeated my understanding. Surely there was some other land or some other people among whom they might dwell in more tolerable conditions?" (ibid: 131). Both black Titan and the Jewish scribe are able to recognize one another through each one's form of othering as being designed and practiced by their mutual European oppressor (Clingman 2004: 156). Yet, Phillips's sensitivity to anti-Semitism is further detailed in the story of the fifteenth century-Portobuffole Jews who are characterized in the following manner:

They looked different, the average one being between thirty-five and fifty years of age, pale and heavy under the eyes, with a long untidy beard [...] Those who glimpsed the Jewish men praying claimed that they covered their whole bodies, including their heads, with a large shawl that made them appear both animal-like and foolish. These Jews arrived as foreigners and foreigners they remained (Phillips: 51) [and as] "merchants of tears and drinkers of human blood" (ibid: 56).

Phillips painstakingly describes the anti-Semitic European environment of the fifteenth century with an aim of tying this to the events of the Holocaust in the twentieth century and of course later to the justification for the establishment of a Jewish only state where Jews can supposedly live in peace and liberty.

Another reference in the novel explains how they lived within "boundary walls" (ibid: 49) and how they "were unable to practice in either the arts or trades, no matter how skilled" (ibid: 53). Anti-Semitic violence has been detailed in the story of the three Jews (Servadio, Moses, and Giacobbe) who were accused of killing an innocent Christian boy (Sebastian) upon celebrating their Passover and were executed afterwards. Phillips's empathy with Jewish experience is clear when he refers to Servadio's defense speech in court: "We respected your traditions, we made charitable contributions towards your institutions. Yet now you people pluck my beard [...] I know not what you are talking about. My wife is suffering, my family is drowning in tears. Why?" (Phillips: 181) and finally in respecting Servadio's courage and steadfastness at facing his death and thus converting him into a hero/martyr (Kumar 2012: 232). Phillips provides a historical continuity of anti-Semitic violence against the Jews of Portobuffole and Eva Stern five centuries later by means of inter-narrativity. The first lines of the story of the Portobuffole Jews state that: "In Germany they frequently murdered the Jews" (Phillips: 51). This notion is preceded by: "Such is the way of the Germans with their Jews" (ibid). By means of historical inter-narrativity, Eva's

narrative about the horrors of the twentieth century Holocaust would seem expected, validated, historically endorsed and most importantly reliable.

The perceptive reader of Phillips's novel cannot help but notice the novelist's minute description of Jewish suffering in Europe and Jewish redemption in Israel with a complete silence on the original inhabitants of the land, the Palestinians. For example, Eva's story has borrowed much from Anne Frank's diaries and the testimonies of other Holocaust survivors (Kumar 2012: 231). In a fragmentary way, Eva tells some of her most horrifying experiences of oppression, dehumanization, and death in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. Her horrifying experience in facing the Nazi regime's death and horror, especially the fact that she has survived death by burning the bodies of her Jewish community (i.e. killing them) has destabilized her psychological faculty: "These past years have hurt me in mind and body" (Phillips 1997: 29). Thus, the distinction between her dreams, hallucinations and even lies on the one hand and reality on the other becomes highly demanding. Nevertheless, Stephen Clingman argues that the quality of Eva's narrative is determined by and associated with the quality of her extremely violent experience. Therefore, understanding Eva's world should precede any judgment on the reliability or unreliability of her narrative (152). References to anti-Semitic violence which preceded the Holocaust are many, such as:

There was humiliation. There was the daily anxiety of being easy prey for groups of men, who ran throughout the streets yelling slogans. There was the torment of their cruel laughter. There was the fear of being betrayed by a gesture, a slip of the tongue, or an accent [...] there was humiliation. Forbidden to ride on a trolley-car. Forbidden to sit in a park. Permitted to breathe. Permitted to cry (Phillips: 85).

And:

Assaults in the street were becoming increasingly frequent, and even decently dressed people were being waylaid by uniformed brutes and ordered to scoop up dog filth with their bare hands, or lick clean the windows of a nearby shop, or simply hand over their money and valuables (ibid: 90).

Then comes Eva's detailed account of the Holocaust, the chimneys, the process of gassing and the resulting wealth of corpses:

Once everybody is inside, the heavy doors are slammed shut [...] They open trap doors, then shake the contents of the cans (which are marked Zyklon B- for use against vermin) [...] After only three minutes, every single inhabitant in the chamber is dead and nobody has been known to survive the ordeal [...] Once the cremation chamber has been brought to a good red heat (approximately 800 C), the corpses are introduced. They burn rapidly (ibid: 176).

Eva introduces the reader to the quality of life, which characterized the concentration camps during the Holocaust:

Camp life. The scream that deafens with its terror, the terror of deafening silence [...] Forever hungry, no longer amazed at how quickly the body deteriorates, intrigued by the temporary peace with the skeletal, the unbearable pain of hunger, promising the shrinking body warm food, all night thinking of food [.....] And always the violence of memory. Camp life (ibid: 32-33).

This violence of memory marks Eva's traumatic life which she finds herself obliged to witness and document (Scharfman 2010: 103) for the sake of not only herself but also her family and the entire Jewish community: "But somebody must remain alive to tell all of this" (Phillips: 179). Thus, when she is summoned for a filming by the documentary crew, Eva strips herself naked for them because she believes that her skeletal body would tell much about her violated humanity: "A hungry body is an affront to human dignity" (Phillips: 169). However, if Eva could survive the Holocaust, she could not survive the new world it has left behind (Clingman 2004: 152). Having no Gerry, who has abandoned her and married another woman, and thus no chance for a new beginning, Eva eventually breaks down and commits suicide, or seems to. Jeffery Alexander explains that cultural trauma, as a concept, has a collective character. It implies atrocious collective practices against members and is meant to scar their lives and psyches by the unforgettable memory of atrocious practices and to alter their identities fundamentally and irrevocably (1).

Keeping Alexander's analysis in mind, it is difficult to deny that Eva has encapsulated the collective traumatic memory of her Jewish community. However, it is worth noting how collective Jewish identity was altered fundamentally and irrevocably. The opening pages of the novel show one of the Jewish refugee camps in Cyprus referred to as the camps of the displaced and dispossessed. These camps are established, and controlled by the British authorities who are also responsible for organizing and supervising Jewish immigration to Palestine. The camps of the displaced and dispossessed are comprised of Eva-like young Holocaust survivors and Moshe-like young anti-Semitism survivors all of whom are referred to as "the orphaned and the unattached" (Phillips: 4). Phillips's narrative confirms that whereas these orphaned and unattached leave European shores as refugees, they arrive in Palestine as armed soldiers: "The majority of the 'orphaned and unattached' were now Hagannah trainees, secretly preparing themselves for a life of military service in the underground army that they would join once they reached Palestine" (ibid: 5). It is historically recorded that about a third of the Hagannah fighters were primarily Holocaust survivors (Massad 2006: 131). Therefore, if we are to understand cultural trauma as essentially a transformative project as Phillips also suggests in his novel, then both anti-Semitism and the Holocaust have enabled this transformation, which has redefined and reformulated Jewish collective identity from outcasts and refugees in Europe into landowners/settlers and soldiers in Palestine. In this way, Jewish cultural trauma has not only offered European Jews with a new identity but also a new homeland that is historically justified and sympathetically identified with in Palestine.

However, not only has Jewish cultural trauma (anti-Semitism and Holocaust) been historically employed to justify, assert and reinforce Jewish claims to Palestine, it has also been ideologically employed to justify Israeli violence against Palestinians (Massad 2006: 131). Indeed, the establishment of the state of Israel has replicated and redirected almost the same conditions, if not worse, of displacement, dispossession, refugee camps, persecution and violence toward Palestinians in Palestine and has thus transformed Palestinians, according to Said's perception, into "the victims of the victims" (Said 1979: 21). This notion of violence seems to have been suggested (and justified) indirectly, as Ana Miller argues, in the opening narrative of the novel. Phillips's authorial ambivalence towards the militarism of the newly-established Israeli society is expressed through Stephan who expresses an implicit opposition to Israeli militarism (Miller 2014: 516), which would implicate not only him but also the Moshe-like young soldiers in violence: "Moshe, the army is not everything. Hagannah is not everything. A wife and child, now that is something" (Phillips: 8) and "I have tried for two months to help those from the old world enter the new. The young with revenge in their hearts. Enough killing" (ibid: 11). However, it is not enough to problematize such a military institution as the Hagannah, leaving unaddressed its practical implications which made it problematic in the first place (Miller 2014: 516).

In her article "The Silence of Palestinians in Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*," Miller rightly argues that both Phillips and postcolonial criticism should be criticized for not raising the question of Palestine directly, as a colonial entity and as one of the traumatic histories they address (509). Miller has correctly attributed this negligence to mainstream American and Western complicity with Israel at the terrains of politics, culture, and academia (ibid: 510) and to a prominent ideological framework which constructs anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism (ibid: 513). However, Miller argues that Phillips's opening narrative discourse has evoked both the dispossession and displacement of Palestinians albeit indirectly through Phillips's employment of irony, tension and ambivalence (ibid). Miller concludes that Phillips's employment of such structural strategies has produced an unreliable narrative by unreliable characters who are implicated in their violent systems. It has also produced conformity that, even if unenthusiastic, would create complicity with the dominant social structures which are finally meant to normalize violence against Palestinians (ibid: 519). Although we accept Miller's argument concerning her conception of Palestinians as a significant silence (ibid: 511), we disagree with Miller's discussion of Phillips's supposed indirect involvement with Palestine and Palestinians. In contrast to Miller's argument concerning Phillips's indirect treatment of Palestine, we believe that Phillips does not deal with Palestine indirectly through his ambivalence and gaps/silences. Rather, Phillips deals with Palestine *directly* by erasing it historically, geographically, politically, culturally and most importantly imaginatively in order to justify the narrative he is telling, which ironically contradicts with his literary cosmopolitanism.

In *The Question of Palestine* (1979), Said states that in rewriting Jewish history, both gentile and Zionist versions have communicated a common vision of an uninhabited Holy Land (66). This ideological notion of an empty homeland is suggested on the opening pages of *The Nature of Blood* when Stephan Stern makes every effort to describe “Palestine/Israel” to the young Moshe:

The new kindling snapped, and the flames rose higher and illuminated the boy’s face. He spoke quietly. ‘Tell me, what will be the name of the country?’ ‘Our country,’ I said. ‘The country will belong to you.’ The boy looked down at the sand, then scratched a short nervous line with his big toe. ‘Tell me, what will be the name of our country?’ I paused for a moment, in the hope that he might relax. And then I whispered, as though confessing something to him. ‘Israel. Our country will be called Israel’....Our troubled land. Palestine. Israel. The boy whispered the new word to himself, weighing it carefully on his tongue, rolling it from one side of his mouth to the other, until he was happy with its presence (3).

Phillips is intentionally repeating the word “our” on the first page of the novel to ingrain in the reader’s mind the idea that Israel *belongs* to the Jews who have been persecuted in Europe and are now dispossessed refugees in Cyprus. It is as if Palestine is an uninhabited, virgin land as far as Phillips is concerned. However, this land is troubled not because it is really uninhabited but mainly because the humanity of its inhabitants, as Said has argued, has been systematically denied by an established Orientalist discourse (Said 1979: 66). This Orientalist discourse is evident particularly when Stephan’s brother, who in answering back to Stephan’s attempt to convince him to go to Palestine states: “To this primitive British colony of Palestine?”(Phillips 1997: 10).The inhabitants of Palestine have been denied their very existence, humanity and identity, and thus they are never referred to as Palestinians, but rather as Arabs: “Uncle Stephan had given up on his medical studies, discarded a wife and daughter, and gone off to fight for what? Why create another home among these Arab people? His wife was right to refuse to uproot her life and expose her child to these barbarians” (ibid: 75). Apparently, Phillips has taken no notice of the fact that the Palestine of the 1930s (the same historical period of Stephan’s mission in Palestine) consisted of more than 500 villages and nine principal towns all of which were built by more than one million Palestinians most of whom worked in different areas which included agricultural, professional, and intellectual activities and most of whom believed Palestine to be their homeland (Said 1979: 12). However, if Palestinians hardly exist in Phillips’s perception of the newly established Israel, they are, surprisingly, totally subtracted from Phillips’s perception of contemporary Israel on the closing pages of the novel (Miller 2014: 517) in total accordance with the Western-Zionist attitude to Palestine as an empty land. In this sense, Phillips’s narrative is essentially a politically authorized Zionist narrative that has first laid claims to pre-Israel Jewish experience and *moralized* the establishment of Israel accordingly by emphasizing the themes of religion, anti-Semitism, Holocaust and homeland/“Promised Land.” Phillips does not acknowledge the original inhabitants of the

land, which we believe to be intentional because he is following this pre-ordained, official narrative of Israel.

It is indeed strange that Phillips, as a postcolonial writer, refuses to recognize Palestine as a colonized land; thus, Phillips's refusal to give any space to the Palestinian narrative is a direct and intentional slighting of a whole people, the Palestinians, who are effectively erased from Phillips's Jewish only narrative. It is quite interesting to note how Phillips often repeats a sentence that can be understood to mean that Palestine's (which according to Phillips's narrative shall soon be renamed "Israel") fruit trees are waiting to be plucked by their true owners: "'And in Israel the fruit is on the trees. You may take the fruit straight from the branch'" (2). Again, this sentence reinforces the idea of belonging; it is as if these fruit trees have no owners, and Jews can finally return to their "Promised Land" and pluck the fruit off their trees, which we suppose have been waiting for them for thousands of years. Not only does Phillips fail to establish an inter-narrativity between the black and Palestinian experiences, but he intentionally erases a whole people from existence.

Clingman poignantly questions: "where does one draw the line regarding whose stories may be told, which voices may or may not be inhabited?" (ibid 148) and "what are the implications of voicing in fiction? Are there indeed racial or other intrinsic limits to any such presumption?" (ibid: 149). Although we agree with Clingman and subscribe to the general idea of juxtaposing different traumatic experiences in literary representations, and believe that his above questions are quite telling and illuminating, we would ask: Could these same questions address the issue of Palestine as a colonized land and whose people have experienced unspeakable trauma? Can postcolonial and trauma writers deal with Palestinians as victims of unspeakable horrors? Unfortunately, the answer to these questions has too often been in the negative. In fact, it is not only Phillips, but also the disciplines of trauma and postcolonial studies that can be criticized for ignoring and marginalizing non-Western traumatic histories of which Palestine is a compelling example, and for thus perpetuating Eurocentric views which are meant to widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world.

The questions posed above could be intensified by the fact that Phillips's postcolonial interests are informed by his own black traumatic history. Obviously, the politics of representation which have prohibited the circulation of black traumatic history are the same politics of representation which have permitted the circulation of Jewish traumatic history and thus (in an attempt to answer Clingman's above questions) are responsible for drawing the line regarding whose stories may be told and which voices could be heard or even spoken for. In this sense, Palestinian traumatic history has suffered the same politics of misrepresentation which Phillips has been totally aware of and thus an accomplice in. Therefore, both Phillips and schools of supposedly ethical criticism (trauma studies and postcolonialism) are to be blamed for silencing Palestine and Palestinians and consequently for perpetuating their suffering and miseries.

Ahlam Masri

Department English Language and Literature  
Arab Open University  
Jordan  
ahlam.almasri78@yahoo.com

TahrirHamdi  
Department English Language and Literature  
Arab Open University  
Jordan  
tahrirhamdi@yahoo.com

## References

- Ashcroft, Bill and Pal Ahluwalia.** (2001). *Edward Said: Routledge Critical Thinkers, Essential Guides for Literary Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C, Ron Eyeran, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka.** (2004). *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, New York: University of California Press.
- Appiah, Anthony.** (2005). *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Appiah, Anthony.** (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. London: Penguin Books.
- Calbi, Maurizio.** (2004). 'The ghost of strangers': Hospitality, identity and temporality in Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*'. *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 6 (2): 38-54.
- Caruth, Cathy.** (1995). *Trauma: Exploration in Memory*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Clingman, Stephen.** (2004). 'Forms of history and identity in *The Nature of Blood*'. *Salmagundi*, 143: 141-166.
- Craps, Stef.** (2008). 'Linking legacies of loss: Traumatic histories and cross-cultural empathy In Caryl Phillips's *Higher Ground* and *The Nature of Blood*'. *Studies in The Novel*, 40 (1/2): 191-202.
- Craps, Stef, and Gert Buelens.** (2008). 'Introduction: Postcolonial trauma novels'. *Studies in The Novel*, 40 (1/2):1-12.
- Esber, Rosemarie.** (2013). When Israel compensated Germans for land in Palestine. *ElectronicIntifada*.<http://www.electronicintifada.net/content/when-israel-compensated-germans-land-palestine/12512/> (Retrieved on 5 January, 2016).
- Gonel, Tuba.** (2011). 'Traumatic memory, diaspora and Caryl Phillips: *The Nature of Blood, Higher Ground* and *Crossing The River*'. *International Journal for Arts and Sciences*, 4 (1): 219-230.

- Hall, Stuart.** (1994). 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora'. In Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, 392-403. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Kumar, Narendra.** (2012). 'Cosmopolitanism, Inter-narrativity and Cultural Empathy: Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*'. *Rupkatha Journal On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, IV (2): 228-235.
- Kreikamp, Ivan.** (1997). 'Caryl Phillips: The trauma of 'broken history''. *Publishers Weekly*, 4 (28): 44.
- Lynn, Thomas Jay.** (2010). 'An adequate revolution: Achebe writing Africa anew'. In M. Keith Booker (ed.), *Critical Insight: Things Fall Apart*, 53-68. Ipswich, Massachusetts: Salem Press.
- Massad, Joseph.** (2006). *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians*. London: Routledge.
- Miller, Ana.** (2014). 'The silence of Palestinians in Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50 (5): 509-521.
- Phillips, Caryl.** (1987). *The European Tribe*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.
- Phillips, Caryl.** 1997 (1998). *The Nature of Blood*. New York: First Vintage International Edition.
- Said, Edward.** 1978 (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.
- Said, Edward.** 1979 (1992). *The Question of Palestine*. London: Vintage Books Edition.
- Said, Edward.** (1984). 'Permission to narrate'. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13 (3): 27-48.
- Said Edward.** 1993 (1994). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: First Vintage Books Edition.
- Scharfman, Ronnie.** (2010). 'Reciprocal haunting: Imagining slavery and the shoah in Caryl Phillips and Andre and Simone Schwarz-Bart'. *Yale French Studies*, 118/119: 91-110.
- Silku, RezzanKocaoner.** (2009). 'Postcolonial routes and diasporic identities: Belonging and displacement in Caryl Phillips's *The Final Passage* and *A Distant Shore*'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 45 (2): 163-170.
- Taylor, Charles.** (1994). *Multiculturalism*. New Jersey: Princeton UP.
- The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica.** (2009). 'Stern Gang'. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.  
<http://www.britannica.com/avraham-stern-zionist-leader/> (Retrieved on 15 April 2016).
- Williams, Patrick and Anna Ball.** (2014). 'Where is Palestine'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50 (2): 127-133.
- Williams, Patrick and Laura Chrisman.** (1994). (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.