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Outcast Brothers: An Analysis of Black-Jewish Analogies through Historical, Intellectual and Literary Interventions

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Ai miei nonni Piera e Silvio

List of Illustrations

INTRODUCTION

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

("Amazing Grace")

When I visited the Writers' Museum in Edinburgh in summer 2017, I saw a sentence carved on the paving of the little courtyard – Makars' Court – in front of it: *Go back far enough and all humankind are cousins*. It is an aphorism written by Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999), a Scottish novelist and poet; this short sentence seems perfect to summarize the purpose of this work. At a first glance, one may think that blacks[1] and Jews have nothing in common, except for their similar experiences of diaspora; they seem too distant and too different from each other to share any analogy whatsoever. Nevertheless, if we go deep enough in history, essays and literature, we could discover a whole new world. Therefore, with a close look on them, we could realize that they are more similar than we have ever thought; indeed, blacks and Jews could be seen as cousins, or as Frantz Fanon would say – in his *Black Skin, White Masks* – as brothers in misery.

First of all, it is well known that blacks and Jews have shared a history of suffering and dispersion: both went through dreadful events, such as diaspora, slavery, racism, extreme violence and deprivation of human rights. Nevertheless, it is not always easy and instinctive to compare these – apparently – different histories. Indeed, one may argue that the racial hatred and the suffering experienced by the Jewish population in Nazi Germany and in the camps during the Holocaust are something unique and, therefore, what they endured cannot be compared to any other ordeal of human history.

[1] In the context of this thesis, a distinction shall be made. I have chosen to use the label "Africans" to deal with all those people – originally coming from Africa – involved in the slave trade. Instead, the term "blacks" is employed to encompass people of African descent in the diaspora.

On the other hand, it can be undoubtedly said that the "barbarous trade"[2] that was the slave trade and the experiences of slavery that African men, women and children underwent in the Americas were a form of evil without equals in history.

In relation to this kind of comparison between different experiences, which may sometimes seem too forced or even too disrespectful towards the tribulations of a single population, Paul Gilroy said, "why does it remain so difficult for so many people to accept the knotted intersection of histories produced by this fusion of horizons?".[3] As a matter of fact, trying to establish and analyse the possible parallelisms existing between blacks and Jews could be quite dangerous as each part might perceive this approach as an attempt to lessen and downgrade their own personal experiences.

Nevertheless, French writer Albert Memmi said that "oppressed people resemble each other";[4] as a consequence, if we try to perceive blacks and Jews as cousins or as brothers, it does not feel so unnatural to try and see what they – two of the most oppressed people ever in the history of mankind – share with each other. Indeed, in order to broaden our consciousness and our reasonings, as modern and enlightened people, we should always try to see the possible comparisons and analogies – obviously, only in a dimension where it sounds appropriate and sensible – between different events and people. In addition, as Michael Rothberg explains in his essay *Multidirectional Memory*, we should not limit or stop the enormous power of our memory and see every single historical event as something unique and isolated. History repeats itself and comparing different events and people's experiences can be useful to understand the similarities and differences between them, so that our memory can truly develop and become multidirectional.

Therefore, in my thesis, I would like to analyse how black and Jewish experiences can be compared, following three different paths: history, intellectual interventions and (mainly contemporary) literary works. As a consequence, in order to set up a clearer

[2] This is how Prince Albert (Tom Hughes) described the black slave trade in the sixth episode ("The Queen's Husband") of the TV series called *Victoria*. Main cast: Jenna Coleman, Tom Hughes, Alex Jennings, Rufus Sewell. United Kingdom, ITV, 2016.

[3] P. Gilroy. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge (USA, Massachusetts), The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 78.

[4] A. Memmi. *Dominated Man: Notes towards a Portrait*. Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, p. 16. Also to be found in Bryan Cheyette. *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2013, p. 48.

analysis, my idea is to divide this work into two separate parts. The first section is completely focused on some theories concerning the diaspora, historical events and works written by some scholars, who examined the analogies between blacks and Jews; then, the second part of this dissertation will be mainly centred on the analysis of some novels by the Kittian-British novelist Caryl Phillips (born 13 March 1958 in St. Kitts).

In the contemporary literary dimension, this author probably represents the most appropriate representative to deal with this analogy. As a matter of fact, in many of his novels, Caryl Phillips often shows examples of parallel histories lived by black and Jewish characters; by reading them, even though they are always set in different geographical locations and historical periods, the readers may notice several common themes and experiences. In addition, Caryl Phillips is to be considered the most suitable novelist even on a personal and biographical point of view. Indeed, he was born in St. Kitts – an island in the West Indies located in the Caribbean Sea – to parents of African descent; as a consequence, he can trace his own roots back to some African country and back to the African Diaspora following the slave trade. Furthermore, he personally took part in another diasporic movement as well, since he moved to England with his family when he was only four months old. Finally, one of his grandparents was Jewish; thus, thanks to this close bond, Caryl Phillips is probably capable of showing a direct sensitivity and awareness towards the Jewish Diaspora.

The first chapter of the first part, which I entitled "Scattered People", is devoted to the most evident contact point between Africans and Jews: the diaspora. My reference texts are the essays *Global Diasporas* by Robin Cohen and *Cartographies of Diaspora* by Avtar Brah, and some articles, mainly written by William Safran and Khachig Tölölyan. Thanks to these contributions, I would like to deal with the concept of diaspora in general terms and see how it developed in time; then, an important part of the chapter is employed to describe the two examples of diaspora which I am interested in. In addition, since the Jewish diaspora historically covered a huge span of time and it was a little more difficult to gather precise pieces of information about it, I thought it was better to have a historical support and I chose *A History of the Jews* by the English historian and journalist Paul Johnson. Finally, not only were these two populations united by a history of dispersion; since they have also shared the wish to go back to the

lands of their forefathers, I think it is also important to devote the last paragraph of the chapter to the idea of the dream (or achievement) of returning to homelands.

In the second chapter, called "Parallels", after a brief opening part with a selection of spiritual songs – in which the African slaves singing expressed many parallels with Jewish histories of suffering, mainly in Egypt and in Babylon – and a comment on each of them, I have decided to analyse four separate texts – three of them written by black intellectuals – in which the analogy between black people and Jews is dealt with by their authors. The first text is *The Jewish Question* (1898) by Edward Wilmot Blyden. In this pamphlet, Blyden explains that the Jews and the people of Africa share a history "of sorrow and oppression"[5]; he describes his fascination for the Jewish culture and tries to establish the connections between Africans and Jews. The second text is an article – "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto" – written by William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois in 1949, in which he reflects upon the concept of racism, thanks to the contribution of his personal "tours" through some European ghettos. The third contribution taken into account is the famous essay *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) written by Frantz Fanon. Through the pages of this essay, Fanon often identifies the Jewish man and woman as his brother and as his sister, explaining that they share a bond of misery, prejudices, stereotypes and abuse. Finally, the fourth text I would like to comment on is taken from the sixth chapter – "'Not a Story to pass on': Living Memory and the Slave Sublime" – of *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) by Paul Gilroy. The scholar says that there are some evident correspondences between the histories of Africans and Jews, both of them experiencing slavery, dispersal and exile. In addition, in order to describe these analogies, Gilroy makes reference to two important authors: Edward Blyden and Primo Levi.

Thanks to these fundamental theoretical approaches, I have developed the second and final section of my dissertation. Here, I will focus on four novels by Caryl Phillips: *Higher Ground* (1989), *Crossing the River* (1993), *The Nature of Blood* (1997), and *A Distant Shore* (2003).

Instead of devoting a chapter to analyse each of the novels, I would like to progress step by step, focusing on the themes and concepts that one can find in the four

[5] E.W. Blyden. *The Jewish Question*. Liverpool, Lionel Hart & Co., 1898, p. 3.

literary works, so that I can manage to draw the parallelisms existing among the different stories. Furthermore, in order to follow a fixed and constant criterion throughout the chapters of this work, I have decided to analyse the novels and their characters following the chronological order of publication. Before going to explain the structure of the three remaining chapter, I think it is important to spend a few words to give a summary to each novel.

Higher Ground: A Novel in Three Parts provides the readers with three different stories of isolation and loneliness. The first one – "Heartland" – is set in Africa at the time of the slave trade and the protagonist is a native man that collaborates with the white slavers; by working as intermediary and translator, this man loses contact with his fellow countrymen and gets more and more isolated. The second part of the novel – "The Cargo Rap" – recounts the story of a young Black American prisoner, named Rudi Williams, in the 1960s; Rudi is completely isolated in prison and his only contact with the outside world and the members of his family is through the numerous letters he writes. Finally, the last story of the novel – "Higher Ground" – deals with the experience of a young Jewish woman from Poland; she left her homeland and her family because of the Nazi persecutions and she is now coping with her new life in post-war England.

I would say that *Crossing the River* may be also labelled as "stories of lost children"; indeed, this other title may be applied to the three different experiences narrated in the novel. In the first section – "The Pagan Coast" – a man called Edward Williams travels from America to Liberia to find his former slave Nash. Back in America, they had developed a strong bond and, after Nash's departure, they used to stay in contact through letters; however, at one point, Nash stopped sending them, and now Mr. Williams is worried. The second part of the novel is "West" and it narrates the story of Martha Randolph; she is a former slave who travels west, hoping to reunite with her long-lost daughter. Finally, in "Somewhere in England", the readers are witnesses to the meeting and love story between a white Englishwoman, Joyce, and a Black American GI called Travis. Moreover, in this novel there is also a section – namely the third one, called "Crossing the River" – written as a captain's log.

The Nature of Blood gathers different stories concerning the so-called curse of being different; as a matter of fact, all the characters of the novels could be considered

outcasts, for one reason or another. Nevertheless, unlike the previous novels in which each section is dedicated to a single story, here the different stories are intermixed in a continuum. Stephan Stern is the first character we meet; he is a Jewish man that left Europe and his family behind and moved to then Palestine, in order to cooperate to create a new country in which Jews could be free. Secondly, Eva Stern – the niece of Stephan – is also Jewish; unlike her uncle, she does not leave Europe, thus she is forced to be a Jewess in the worst circumstances: Nazi Germany. The readers are also allowed to go back in time, with the histories of the Jews of Portobuffole and with Caryl Phillip's re-writing of the history of Shakespearean Othello. As a matter of fact, back in 1480, a group of Jews living in the small Venetian town of Portobuffole were the protagonists of a case of blood libel. Then, Othello's episode is set in the XVI century and it recounts the story of an African man who is desperate to become part of the white society of Venice. Finally, Malka's story takes the readers once again back to the XX century; here, we could see how hard it is for a black Jewish woman to integrate in a relatively newborn country.

Finally, *A Distant Shore* represents the contemporary encounter with the other. It is mainly focused on the personal dramas of two completely different characters, meeting in a sadly racist society. Dorothy and Gabriel/Solomon are truly two antipodal human beings. As a matter of fact, Dorothy is a mentally unstable and often racist woman living in England. Instead, Gabriel/Solomon – the most important character of the novel, as far as the analysis of this thesis is concerned – left Africa, because of the civil war and following the slaughter of his whole family; he decides to reach the distant shores of England to start a new life, but we all know that this path is extremely difficult and violent.

In this second part, as companion works to the novels mentioned above, I have decided to use two non-fiction works by Caryl Phillips – *The European Tribe* (1987) and *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) –, which are useful to focus on questions such as racism and on the concepts of journey and home. As a matter of fact, both works recount two journeys faced by the author himself. Firstly, *The European Tribe* deals with his personal *Grand Tour* in several European countries, where he has been able to reflect on racism and social discrepancies; by making this journey, Caryl Phillips wanted to

understand the Europeans, that is to say those people who also harmed both blacks and Jews. Then, *The Atlantic Sound* is the report of a journey connected to three of the locations of the Slave Trade – Liverpool, Accra and Elmina in Ghana, Charleston – with an extra stop in the Israeli Negev desert. Not only did Caryl Phillips visit the places that his ancestors saw; thanks to this experience, he could also reflect on the ideas of home and belonging.

Furthermore, to contribute to the development of this study, I have chosen other "supporting" texts that include two works by Primo Levi – *If This is a Man* (1947, 1958) and *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986) – in which he recalls his experience back in the extermination camp of Auschwitz and comments on many aspects of the life and people in camps. In addition, there are some other contemporary literary works – *Small Island* (2004) by Andrea Levy, *Becoming Abigail* (2006) by Chris Abani and *The Lamplighter* (2008) by Jackie Kay – that are useful to clarify a number of ideas discussed in the thematical analysis of the four novels. Finally, throughout the chapters, I have decided to exemplify and develop some concepts also by taking examples and quotes from a selection of renown films.

The second part of my dissertation is far more practical, consisting of three chapters in which I analyse the novels theme by theme; indeed, my study focuses on several topics and shared themes to be found in the four novels. The structures of the last three chapters are quite similar: after an initial explanation of the theme or issue I have chosen to deal with, there is the description and the analysis of a peculiar situation or of a character belonging to the novels.

The third chapter – "Shattered Lives: Hatred, Dignity and Loss" – is divided into two parts. The first section mainly deals with one of the most fundamental issues ever: the question of racial hatred. It was a central matter in the past and it is still an important argument of discussion nowadays. One may think that, given what happened in the past to a huge and sadly excessive number of people, racism should not be present in our contemporary society; nevertheless, its ghost is still a constant presence; we are all conscious about its perpetual presence and also Caryl Phillips is aware of that, since racism and the hatred deriving from it are a constant and pregnant presence in many of his novels.

Hereafter, the second part of the chapter is devoted to the idea of loss and its consequent trauma; the "loss" I would like to develop covers quite a lot of connotations. As a matter of fact, the loss that I am interested in is first of all the loss of personal dignity and of one's rights; in this part, there is also a reference to the concepts of *homo sacer* and bare life – developed by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben – in order to talk about the loss of citizenship and its effects on the Jews during Nazism. Secondly, the analysis goes on with the loss of one's personal identity, explaining what contributes to its creation and analysing what happens to a person when those elements are lost. Therefore, also the loss of the given name and the loss of one's family – above all, parents, siblings and children – are taken into account; finally, I have decided to explore what it means to lose the language of the mother country.

As a way to consider as many shapes as possible of the experiences shared by blacks and Jews, in the fourth chapter, titled "Black – Grey – White: Ambivalence, Mimicry and In-Betweenness", I have chosen to deal with the questions of ambivalence and mimicry. In this chapter, the vision of victimhood that usually accompanies blacks and Jews is slightly abandoned; in fact, the purpose of this section is to show them as full human beings, that is, people that also make mistakes. Primo Levi will be a fundamental presence in this chapter; as a matter of fact, ambivalence and mimicry could be easily linked to a concept that Levi describes in *If This is a Man* and mainly in *The Drowned and the Saved*: he calls it "The Grey Zone". Thanks to this explanation, in the first place, I start by dealing with the issue of ambivalence, analysing some "grey characters" to be found in Caryl Phillips's novels. Secondly, a part of this chapter is devoted to the explanation of a single important case of mimicry to be found in *The Nature of Blood*.

Finally, the fifth chapter – "There and back again: Towards Life and Death, towards Home and Hope" – brings the readers back to the beginning of this dissertation. As a matter of fact, this last chapter will deal with a number of journey experiences to be found in the novels. Not only have I chosen to describe the journeys that Africans and Jews were forced to take when they left their native countries; my discussion also deals with the movement backwards. For those people who could go back to their homelands, there is the encounter with a new and possibly changed society; instead, for those who were not able to return, there is still the constant hope and dream to return or,

at least, to find a new welcoming society to live in. Indeed, in the four novels by Caryl Phillips that I have chosen to analyse, a lot of characters have to face – or willingly decide to face – the experience of a journey; therefore, it is interesting to show the reasons, the violence or also the hopes, behind these movements.

Part I

CHAPTER ONE

Scattered People

1. Concerning the diaspora(s)

The term "diaspora" comes from the Greek word διασπορά meaning "scattering"[1] and it describes the voluntary or compelled movement of people from their homeland towards a new area.

If we search for the term on the Oxford English Dictionary, we notice something interesting, since its definition is divided into two parts:

1) The diaspora: the movement of the Jewish people away from their own country to live and work in other countries;
2) The movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country.[2]

We can see a similar situation in the Merriam Webster Dictionary:

1) *Diaspora* a: the settling of scattered colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile / b: the area outside Palestine settled by Jews / c: the Jews living outside Palestine or modern Israel;
2) A: the breaking up and scattering of people: MIGRATION <the black diaspora to northern cities> / b: people settled far from their ancestral homelands <African diaspora> / c: the place where these people live.[3]

This double definition is to be found in almost every dictionary. In general, the first connotation of the term refers to the Jewish experience, while the second deals with other groups that took – or were forced to take – the path of the diaspora. Therefore, simply looking at how the definition is built, we are able to understand how this term has developed in time and how, from a single reference, it has come to encompass several ones.

[1] The noun derives from the Greek verb διασπείρω (diaspeirō), meaning "I scatter", "I spread about".
[2] A.S. Hornby. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (New 8th edition). Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 418.
[3] Online version of the dictionary: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diaspora.

As a matter of fact, at the beginning, "Diaspora" (capitalized) was mainly used in relation to the Jewish experience because it was considered the most remarkable example of dispersed people. Indeed, the Jews were seen as the prototype, the paradigmatic specimen, of people suffering because of the compelled removal from their homeland. Moreover, as Khachig Tölölyan wrote, "[The] Jews of Alexandria first used [the Greek word "diaspora"] around 250 BCE to signify their own scattering away from the homeland into […] collective exile".[4] However, the term was gradually used to describe other minority groups, such as Armenians, Africans, Irish and Indians, which could as well be seen as the victims of a cruel oppressor who forced them to leave their home; in addition, it was employed to identify the areas in which a diasporic people lived, until it was extended further to deal with

> 38 different groups. In short, the label […] cover[s] almost any ethnic or religious minority that is dispersed from its original homeland, regardless of the conditions leading to dispersion, and regardless of whether, and to what extent, physical, cultural, or emotional links exist between the community and the home country.[5]

Recently, the term has also been used as "a metaphoric designation"[6] to refer to several categories of people, including immigrants, expatriates, refugees, expellees, who live in other countries.

Nowadays, diaspora scholars have identified various examples of diasporas: labour diaspora, in which people mainly leave their country in order to escape poverty, with the hope of finding a better job and better conditions of life abroad; imperial diaspora, as in the case of British people who left Britain to settle in their new colonies; trade diaspora, which was the case of Chinese or Venetian merchants who left their mother country in order to settle elsewhere and sell their goods (Cohen-*GD*, 18).

However, the classical and more commonly known example of diaspora, which I would like to focus on, is called victim diaspora. Behind this concept, there is the idea

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[4] K. Tölölyan. "The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Volume 27, Number 3, 2007. Durham (North Carolina), Duke University Press, 2007, p. 648.

[5] W. Safran. "Deconstructing and comparing Diasporas" in *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*. Edited by Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tölölyan and Carolin Alfonso. London, Routledge, 2004, p. 9.

[6] R. Cohen. *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*. London and New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 1.

that the scattering is the consequence of a tragic/traumatic event that people were subjected to in their mother country.

For instance, the Israelites were forced to leave their land after the Babylonian conquest and deported to Mesopotamia; the African diaspora began with the Slave Trade, when between the XVI and the XIX century thousands and thousands of people where boarded on ships bound for the Americas where they would become slaves. Other tragic/traumatic examples concern the first expulsions of Armenians by Byzantine rulers in the VI century A.D. or the migration of Irish people between 1845 and 1852 following the so-called "Great Hunger". A more recent example of diaspora is the consequence of the "end" of another one: when the land of present Israel was granted to the Jews after the Holocaust, the Muslim Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and to become refugees in the neighbouring countries of the Middle East.

These catastrophes and historical traumas are certainly part of the history defining these diasporic groups. Nevertheless, outside observers – mainly the citizens in the host society – state that victimhood is the predominant feature of the group; they hardly see them as "normal" people but only as victims. In his article called "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall states that the host society "had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other'".[7] As a black man, of course, the pronoun "us" he refers to in the text identifies the blacks; however, this concept of otherness can easily be employed to describe all the diasporic populations, always seen as the other, as victims and not fitting in the "welcoming" society.

As Kim D. Butler pointed out in her article "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse", all mankind "may be considered part of the African diaspora".[8] Africa, indeed, is considered the first continent to have been inhabited by human beings (it is said that the Australopithecus – the famous forefather of modern men and the first step in human evolution – came from eastern Africa) and the very first place from which a man could migrate. Therefore, all mankind can be considered diasporic.

[7] S. Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Edited by Jonathan Rutherford. London, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1998, p. 225.
[8] K. D. Butler. "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse" in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Volume 10, Number 2, Fall 2001. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2001, p. 189.

However, this very first dispersion from Africa towards other areas of the globe cannot be completely connected to our modern concept of diaspora. As we have seen so far, the idea of diaspora is filled with connotations of loss of the native land, victimhood, forced exile; on the contrary, even though there could have been a small percentage of people fleeing because of catastrophic events, the first migrating men moved from their native Africa mainly because they wanted to establish in some other places in order to start a new life there. Therefore, it could be seen as a case of voluntary movement from the home country and it has little to do with the archetypal idea of victim diaspora.

Being away from home is certainly not enough to be considered part of this huge diasporic process. As Butler says, "Diasporan status is not necessarily conferred automatically based on the location of a specific community outside the homeland, or on the fact that most of its individual members were born in dispersal".[9] The status of diaspora, even the status of the victim example, is not that simple to declare and we need to go deeper into our analysis.

In his work, German-born professor William Safran presented the criteria that have to be satisfied for a people to be considered diasporic; as it could be quite difficult to think about what defines a diasporic group, these criteria may be useful to clarify our ideas about the issue.[10]

First of all, diasporic people moved from one single specific centre – their original homeland – to at least two peripheral or foreign areas. The Jews were forced to leave Palestine and got dispersed in several regions of the Earth, such as Egypt, Spain, Poland, and Venice; on the other hand, the Africans had to leave their mother country following the inception of the Atlantic Slave Trade and scattered in the colonies to work as slaves.

These scattered people have always kept their original homeland in mind; a collective memory about it is indeed one of the main features of the group. Although

[9] *Ivi*, p. 191.
[10] W. Safran. "Deconstructing and comparing Diasporas" in *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*. Edited by Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tölölyan and Carolin Alfonso. London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 9-29.
Id. "The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective" in *Israel Studies*, Volume 10, Number 1, Spring 2005. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005, pp. 36-60.

they may be dispersed in faraway lands, their shared thoughts about home – whether connected to its geographical location, its history and even to the sufferings experienced back there – helped them to be closer to it, in spite of the physical distance. Moreover, they look at their native land as their true and ideal home. Even though these people were born somewhere outside the land of their forefathers, they keep these feelings and think about the land as a place to which both themselves and their descendants have to go back to, when the time is right to do that. Furthermore, the people of diaspora

> continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity, which reach across political boundaries, are importantly defined in terms of existence of such a relationship. That relationship may include a collective commitment to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its independence, safety, and prosperity.[11]

Indeed, even if they are in a foreign country, these people always hold their native land in high consideration, maybe in a higher one than the host nation. They are ready to support economically their home country, they remember it when praying and they feel solidarity with all the other scattered people belonging to the same group, since they all know that they live in the same situation. In the most impressive circumstances, some of them are even willing to die for a country they had often dreamed about. It is exactly what happened at the burst of the Yom Kippur War (fought between 6 and 25 October 1973, as part of the Arab-Israeli conflict), when several Jews coming from many countries around the world wanted to go to Israel to take part in the war, although it was possible that many of them never lived in Israel.

Not only do the people of diaspora are connected to their homeland: they establish a relationship with the host country as well. First of all, it must be said that this relationship is quite hard and uneasy to build. The diasporic group feels alienated, not fully welcomed and accepted in the new country; therefore, the group is isolated from the rest of the society. Sometimes, on the one hand, they may voluntarily choose not to mingle with the others: however, on the other hand, the host society doesn't want to welcome and accept the group, which is thus left to live in their ghettos and build their own solitary society within another one.

Therefore, the distinctness of their community could be their wish or their only chance to survive in time, "by maintaining and transmitting a cultural and/or religious

[11] W. Safran. "The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective" in *Israel Studies*, Volume 10, Number 1, Spring 2005. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005, pp. 37.

heritage derived from their ancestral home".[12] By living within the borders of their own community and their ghettos, for instance, both blacks and Jews have created a second African country and a second "land flowing with milk and honey"[13] in their various hostlands, so that they could profess their faith, perform their cultural traditions and try to live in a state of personal freedom. Diasporic people were used to "adapt to hostland conditions and experiences to become themselves centers of cultural creation and elaboration",[14] as re-creating the general state of their ancestral lands was possibly the only chance to hold out against the forced isolation, the sufferings and the deprivations experienced in a country that should have welcomed those groups.

Having outlined the general ideas around the concept of diaspora, I will focus on the main events connected to the two victim diasporas I am interested in: the Jewish and the Black diaspora. I will start with the Jewish experience; my choice is not made out of importance given to that particular event but because it's more ancient and because it is considered the prototypical example of diaspora.

2. The Jewish Diaspora

Del Giordano le rive saluta,
di Sionne le torri atterrate…
O, mia patria, sì bella e perduta!
O, membranza, sì cara e fatal!

(Giuseppe Verdi, "Va, pensiero")[15]

In *A History of the Jews*, Paul Johnson states that "the Jews are the most tenacious people in history".[16] They endured centuries of forced exile from their original homeland, of persecutions and social isolation. This suffering and condition of diasporic people began a long time ago; those events went across centuries and this negative

[12] *Ibidem*.
[13] As the land of the Israelites is referred to in the Scriptures.
[14] W. Safran. "The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective", p. 37.
[15] "Greet the banks of the Jordan, / and Zion's toppled towers… / Oh, my country, so beautiful and lost! / Oh, remembrance, so dear and so fatal". This is part of the chorus from the third act of *Nabucco* (1842).
[16] P. Johnson. *A History of the Jews*. New York, Harper Perennial, 1988, p. 3.

situation began to come to an end after it reached the most traumatic, brutal and inhuman event in the Jewish history – the Holocaust, also considered one of the worst events in human history – and only after a new land of freedom was granted to this people.

The *galut*[17] is part of their cultural legacy and the image of the "wandering Jew" is well known; it is said that the Jewish people were forced to live in diasporic conditions because of their part in killing Jesus Christ; they were blamed because they allowed the son of God to be judged by the laws of the Roman Empire, because they chose to free Barabbas over Jesus and, therefore, they were to be held responsible of his death on the cross. "By murdering Jesus, Jews have murdered life itself [and …] they could never be entirely innocent victims" (Cohen-*GD*, 26); they were condemned to perpetual wandering and to restlessness and many Christians saw that as the rightful punishment for their tremendous sin; however, this diasporic condition, their forced homelessness, started long before the crucifixion of Christ.

According to the Bible, the land of Canaan – corresponding more or less to current Israel, Lebanon and parts of Syria and Jordan – was granted by God to Abraham and all his descendants; it was not a permanent gift and, therefore, it could be revoked any time, without specific reasons. When a famine struck the land of Canaan, these people – led by Jacob,[18] Abraham's son – started to move to other areas, until they reached Egyptian lands. Always according to the biblical "tales", the Jews were reduced to slavery there and this condition lasted until the moment of the Exodus[19]; indeed, Moses led his people outside Egypt, delivering them from the captivity and helping them to settle in their Promised Land.

Nevertheless, if we deal with historically-proven facts, the Babylonian captivity is the very starting point of the Jewish diaspora. It all started in the IX century BC, when the power of the Assyrian empire started to increase; as a consequence, as they gradually conquered new territories, there was a mass deportation from those places. Among the others, this was also the case of Jewish people and this is considered their

[17] גלות, Hebrew word for "diaspora".
[18] Also called Israel.
[19] The Exodus probably took place during the reign of pharaoh Rameses II (1304-1237 BC).

first mass tragedy. Two centuries later, the Assyrian empire collapsed under the new force represented by Babylon and the Jews held captives under the Assyrians were then subjected to a more ruthless empire. The Babylonian exile, or Babylonian captivity, didn't cover a huge span of time,[20] but it represents quite a turning point in the Jewish history as, from that moment onwards, many Jews would always live outside their land.

When the Persian empire conquered Babylon in 539 BC, king Cyrus the Great had no wish to keep the Jews enslaved in his new territories; therefore, in 538, he issued an edict – known as the Edict of Cyrus – enabling all those taken to exile by Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar II to be free to return to Zion.[21] Many Jews chose to go back to Palestine, some went to Egypt but others decided to remain in Babylon, this time under a wiser ruler, thus establishing one of the greatest centres of Jewish culture.

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Figure 1: James Jacques Joseph Tissot, The Flight of the Prisoners.

After a period of relative tranquility, in 63 BC, Judea – the area of the whole Palestine region were Jews mainly lived – became a province of the ever-expanding Roman empire and Jews represented 10 per cent of the whole population of the Empire. It was a period of great tension since many anti-Judaic laws were issued; there was hatred towards them, not to mention the fact Jesus Christ was murdered in the Jewish

[20] It lasted less than a century.
[21] Often used as synonym for the *City of David* (Jerusalem) and, therefore, as an opposite term to *Babylon* (as the site of oppression).

territory “by his own fellow citizens”. Jews tried to revolt against the Romans but they failed; as a punishment, the holy city of Jerusalem was destroyed and left in ruins. In 135 AD, when Judaism ceased to be the national religion, the Jews were de-patriated and began to scatter throughout the Mediterranean areas and in central and Eastern Europe, establishing communities where they could live among themselves.

Their status started to worsen when Christianity became the official monotheistic religion in 313: for Christians, Jews were a problem to be fixed. As a matter of fact, their villages and synagogues were attacked, they were excluded from state office and the army and forced to live in conditions of degradation.

As we can imagine, until the end of the Middle Ages, life wasn’t easy for them, as, among other things, they were accused of blood libel (or blood accusation)[22] and of poisoning the waters. However, from the VIII century, many Jews began to settle in Spain, where they established florid communities, at first in the southern area of the country. When Christianity posed once again as a menace, as Jews could choose either to die or to convert, they moved northward, hoping to find a more tolerant reception. Nevertheless, Spain was threatened by the Islamic invasion and the northern regions of the country were also the lands in which the Catholic resistance began to awake. The life of Al-Andalus[23] came to an end in 1492, when *los Reyes católicos* (the Catholic monarchs) King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile completed the catholic *Reconquista* of Spain. As a consequence, Jews could remain there, only under the condition of converting to Catholicism; some of them just pretended to convert but they had to live in the constant fear of the terrible Inquisition.

The majority of them chose not to give up their faith; they were expelled and, therefore, another period of dispersion across Europe began. It was mainly after the expulsion of 1492 from Spain that the myth of the “Wandering Jew” officially spread. It seemed that they could find no rest in whatever city or area they decided to inhabit; there was hatred against them and all sorts of ill treatments. As the hosting population didn’t like living with them, it didn’t take long before the first ghetto was officially born: the Jews living in the city of Venice were segregated in a separate quarter in 1516.

[22] It was an accusation made against Jews; they were blamed of kidnapping and murdering innocent Christian children in order to use their blood for their religious rituals.
[23] It was the name given to Spain under the Islamic dominion.

Even though it had all the features of a prison, the ghetto was probably the best and safest place in which they could ever live; there, they could perform their jobs and pursue their own cultural life. Right after Venice, several other European cities followed this example.

A lot of Jews also chose to move from the Mediterranean area. Some went across the Atlantic Ocean, settling in areas such as the Delaware Valley and Rhode Island; especially from the 1560s, others chose to establish in the Russian territories and this decision led to a huge Jewish "colony" also in Poland, Bohemia, Lithuania and Ukraine.

While the Jews in America conducted positive lives, being an active part in economic and cultural activities, the Jews of the Russian empire didn't meet the same fate. First of all, they were slowly banned from state services and from factories. Despite all of these restrictions and discriminations, some Jews continued to prosper; however, their precarious status worsened when the major *pogroms* began on 29 April 1881. There were mob attacks against the Jewish communities, murderous acts and fires of synagogues; the gravity of the pogroms also resided in the fact that they were extremely encouraged by the tsarist government. As a consequence, many Jews didn't want to stay there anymore and this caused the second greatest Jewish exodus after 1492. Above all, they moved to Austria Galicia, Hungary, Germany and the United States.

The XX century probably marks the most important turning point in the history of the Jewish people. After the events of the Russian Empire, many Jews moved to Germany; also there, they were victims of anti-Semitic laws and extreme physical violence. Obviously, the climax of this hatred is to be located between 1933 and 1945, namely when Adolf Hitler was the Chancellor of Germany first and the *Führer* of Nazi Germany after. The Jews were "his lifelong obsession" (Johnson-*HJ*, 472) and in his *Mein Kampf* he promised "rightful" violence against them. Hitler's extreme hatred against the Jewish people was, first of all, a product of his personal conviction, as he believed that there was a Jewish conspiracy against all Germans; secondly, he chose them out for political reasons. As a matter of fact, German Jews were extremely rich and Hitler was convinced that they would destroy the economy of the country.

Therefore, destroying their power and their wealth was the first thing to be done. "To carry through the policy, the Jews had first to be identified, then dispossessed, then concentrated" (Johnson-*HJ*, 486): this was the Final Solution, what had to be done in Nazi Germany to destroy the "enemies of the state". Jews were thus stripped of their properties, expelled from public and social activities and deprived of their sources of income; moreover, it was decided that they had to be recognized by everyone by wearing the sadly-famous Star of David with the word *Jude* (Jew) in the middle.

Starting from 1933, concentration and extermination camps began to be established, but it wasn't until the beginning of the War that the Jewish prisoners were taken there, after having been deported from the ghettos in which they were forced to live. The camps were the first part of the Holocaust[24] itself; there, they were forced to work to death, basically starving and "living" in inhuman conditions. The second part of the Shoah began when the Nazi decided that the Jews in the camps had to be murdered in the camps' gas chambers and the order was proclaimed on 31 July 1941; the first gassing was carried out in Auschwitz. The countries supporting Nazi Germany during the war and the ones fallen under its control followed this dreadful anti-Semitic policy and deported their Jewish population. Although many Gentiles tried to save them from deportation by giving them shelter, it was estimated that nearly 6 million Jews died during the Holocaust: "No Jew was spared in Hitler's apocalypse […] No Jew was too old to be murdered […] No Jew was too young to die" (Johnson-*HJ*, 510-511).

When the war ended in 1945, many camps were liberated and the survivors were in sore need of some kind of justice; but what justice could really be done? The Nuremberg trials were just the beginning; what they really needed, the most rightful deed that could be performed was granting them "a permanent, self-contained and above all sovereign refuge where if necessary the whole of world Jewry could find safety from its enemies" (Johnson-*HJ*, 517). They were looking for a land where they could be free; they were looking for their long-lost Israel.

All things considered, it seems natural to ask how the Jewish people had survived all these centuries of suffering. Probably, it was the tenacity and the great resilience that they showed that kept them alive and together. As Paul Johnson wrote, there was "an extraordinary adaptability in the people, a great skill in putting down roots quickly,

[24] From the Greek ὁλόκαυστος (holókaustos: whole + burnt); also called Shoah, from the Hebrew השואה ("the catastrophe").

pulling them up and re-establishing them elsewhere, an admirable tenacity [… and] power of perseverance" (Johnson-*HJ,* 42). Maybe, they had luck or it was their faith in their God or even the never-forgotten dream of reuniting with their home. Or, as Stuart Hall said,[25] they remained united as their great sense of identity was what helped them to survive as an entity. What we know for sure is that Jews are a great example of endurance.

3. The African Diaspora

Old pirates, yes, they rob I;
sold I to the merchant ships,
minutes after they took I
from the bottomless pit.
But my hand was made strong
By the 'and of the Almighty.

(Bob Marley, "Redemption Song")

The Black or African diaspora is another great and important example of endurance through centuries.

More or less, we could state that we are all part of the same diaspora, the one starting in Africa when primitive men started to leave the continent.[26] Given the fact that the term "black" is almost always associated with the African lands and given the fact that probably the first men leaving it million years ago had a dark skin, it can be reasonably said that the Black diaspora is even older than its Jewish counterpart: the Black one is almost as old as time. Nevertheless, as stated in the first paragraph of the chapter, this first diasporic movement from Africa has to be considered a voluntary one; therefore, here, I would like to focus on the Black diaspora, starting from the historical events that made it the consequence of compelled movements out of Africa.

The Black and Jewish diaspora not only have in common the fact that the people involved in the process were victims experiencing horrible sufferings; they shared something else and we can start to summarize what they have in common with a date:

[25] In *The Stuart Hall Project*. Directed by John Akomfrah. British Film Institute, 2013.
[26] See §1, reference to K. D. Butler's "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse".

1492, "the two 1492s" as Robert Stam and Ella Shohat say.[27] Indeed, it was a key moment for both events, even though we deal with it more broadly speaking as far as the Back diaspora is concerned. First of all, 1492 is a noteworthy year in the history of the Jewish people around the world. On 2 January, the catholic monarchs completed the Spanish *Reconquista*; it resulted not only in the expulsion of the Muslim population from the Iberian Peninsula, but also in the exile of the totality of the Jewish community living there. Secondly, that same year was a very important moment in the history of black people as well, albeit they weren't completely aware of it back then. On 12 October, Christopher Columbus arrived in the still-unknown America: it was the event that paved the way for Colonialism and for the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Indeed, it started a period of exploitation and enslavement of the Amerindian native people; however, when people there began to complain about the conditions of the natives, it was suggested to use people from Africa instead. And this was how it all started.

Just as the Jewish diaspora, also the Black diaspora could be seen as a victim diaspora. As we know, Africans and Jews might often be studied and analyzed in comparative terms and the focus on the experience of diaspora works for both. Indeed, they are connected by the forced migration from their homelands – and thus by exile from there –, by slavery and by the same desire of finding a new home, or by returning to their native one, where they could live in freedom.

We can state that the Black or African diaspora – as we conceive it today – started when African people began to be forcibly taken to the Americas to work as slaves in the mines and in the tropical plantations belonging to the colonies, above all in Mexico, Brazil, the Caribbean and the United States. This wave of migration is to be set between the XVI and the XIX centuries.

This (in)human trade was the link between the Old World and the New World and it was called Middle Passage or Triangular Trade; it had its starting point in Europe, with European traders mainly going to the coasts of West Africa on ships in order to take people from there. European traders captured or bought native people and shipped them across the Atlantic Ocean to sell them in the Americas, thus forcing them to become slaves. Then, after having exchanged this people for goods produced in the

[27] R. Stam, E. Shohat. *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic*. New York, New York University Press, 2012, p. 155.

plantations, the ships could finally go back to the old continent and sell the products there. Nowadays, it is estimated that the whole number of African people involved in the slave trade is more or less 12 million.

A fundamental part of this process was the slave ship, which has become one of the most renowned symbols of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As Paul Gilroy wrote:

> The image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa and the Caribbean […]. The image of the ship – a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion […]. Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs.[28]

Ships are a symbol. As Gilroy explains, they are a living world in motion across lands and across cultures: on board, there were indeed African people, coming from different parts of the continent, speaking different languages and belonging to several different cultures. Each one of the slave ship represented a little world. This image of the ship may have some positive connotations; however, I would like to focus more on the negative conditions that this ship travel entailed.

As a matter of fact, people were transported in chains and mainly in the dark. In order to take as many people as possible across the ocean, the space for each one of them was incredibly small. Of course, the ships' sizes were quite different but, more or less, 700 slaves-to-be could be packed on them. Not only were there problems of reduced room; as the movie *Amistad*[29] shows in a harsh but exhaustive way, the people on board had to survive with little food to eat and had to face terrible dangers of scarce hygiene, dysentery, dehydration, various diseases and also bad treatment on the part of Europeans, who could easily beat, whip and torture them.

There is a reason to explain why the Atlantic Ocean is also called the Black Atlantic to refer to that period. The term was first used by Paul Gilroy in 1993, in his essay *The Black Atlantic*. First of all, the adjective "Black" is related to the colour of the people's skin on board of the ships. Secondly, the other connotation linked to the word is the most never-to-be-forgotten one; "Black" is here referred to death itself. During the

[28] P. Gilroy. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London, Verso Books, 1993, p. 4.
[29] *Amistad*. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Main cast: Morgan Freeman, Anthony Hopkins, Djimon Hounsou, Matthew McCounaghey. HBO Films, 1997.

crossing, because of the distressing conditions they had to endure, many African people died before reaching the Americas. Of course, there were suicides as well, with people seeing death as the only way to escape their horrible fate, but many of them died because of the unhealthy context on board. As a consequence, to avoid having rotting bodies in the final part of the travel, the ship crew threw them into the Ocean.

Furthermore, those slaves could simply be killed because of money. Indeed, it was a common practice for the people involved in the slave trade to set insurance on the slaves' lives as cargo. Thus, when on board, if they ran out of potable water or food shortage, the crew would throw some slaves into the ocean, causing their death by drowning. By getting rid of some of those "commodities", the Europeans prevented the remaining "cargo" to die before reaching the American shores.

Figure 2: William Turner, The Slave Ship.

As shown in one of the most famous and tremendous scenes of *Amistad*, those people were simply thrown into the Atlantic Ocean in order to prevent shortage and in order to avoid losing money because of those black slaves that couldn't resist without food and water. Obviously, the crew had to get rid of the corpses so that they could completely hide their crimes.

> Roger Sherman Baldwin: Cinque describes the cold-blooded murder of a significant portion of the people on board the Tecora. Mr Holabird sees this as a paradox. Do you, sir?

> Captain Fitzgerald: Often when slavers are intercepted, or believe they may be, they simply throw all their prisoners over board and thereby rid themselves of the evidence of their crime.
> Roger Sherman Baldwin: Drown hundreds of people?
> Captain Fitzgerald: Yes.
> William S. Holabird: It hardly seems a lucrative business to me, this slave trading. Going to all that trouble, rounding everybody up, only to throw them all overboard.[30]

What better graveyard than the huge, deep Black Atlantic? The death toll isn't clear; it has been estimated that the average number of people dying during the travel was about 18 to 20 percent per ship. Still, we should not confide in numbers too much; for instance, a Dutch ship that navigated in 1737 had 716 "passengers" when it left Africa but 700 of them perished before arriving to Americas.

Those people who made it "safe and sound" to their new "homes" were thus ready to be completely enslaved. Nevertheless, if we think about all those African people in the context of the slave trade, we should not call them people. We should call them commodities; indeed, when they were still on board, the European crew treated them as mere cargo. Then, when they landed, they were treated once again as objects since slave auctioneers and owners didn't treat them as human beings anymore.

When they arrived in the Americas, they were immediately sold in the local auctions:

> They are thoroughly examined, even to the smallest Member, and that naked to both Men and Women, without the least Distinction of Modesty. Those which are approved as good are set on one side; and the lame and faulty are set by as Invalides… the remainder are numbred, and it is entred who delivered them. In the mean while a burning iron, with the Arms or Name of the Companies, lyes in the Fire; with which ours are marked on the Breast. […]; but we take all possible care that they are not burned too hard, especially the Women, who are more tender than the Men.[31]

As we can see from this description, these human beings were treated in the same manner as cattle or, even worse, as mere objects. Like the selection of Jews in the concentration camps during the Holocaust, African people bound to become slaves were divided into two groups: who could work and who could not work (the *Invalides*) and none of them was spared since even children were sold there. Those who could actually work, were seen as no more than chattel, which is a word defined by law as a movable

[30] *Amistad*, dialogue between Roger Sherman Baldwin (Matthew McCounaghey), Captain Fitzgerald (Peter Firth) and William S. Holabird (Pete Postlethwaite).
[31] Cited in Ronald Segal, *The Black Diaspora*. London, Faber & Faber, 1995, p. 28. Also in R. Cohen. *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*, p. 41.

and tangible article of personal property: this was the perfect label for a slave without rights.

Figure 3: Eyre Crowe, Slaves waiting for Sale.

As we can imagine, life didn't get better at all when they started to work. In general, the slaves could be employed in plantations, in mines or also in the houses belonging to their masters. If they were designated to work in this last site, they would be butlers and maids; if women, they would become nannies for the owner's offspring or they would be used to satisfy the master's rapist instincts.

This condition of forced exile from their real home lasted until the XIX century, when the abolitionist movements began to rise and become established among the enlightened communities. Of course, there is not a fixed date of the end of slavery, because it depended on each European country involved in the Trade.

However, it often happened that a first date for the end of slavery was set but it took several other years in order to put an end to it for good. For example, as far as the British Empire was concerned, the bill that made the slave trade illegal – the Slave Trade Act – was passed by the Parliament on 25 March 1807 but, the real epilogue of the Trade was achieved in 1838. Thus, as writer Jackie Kay wrote in 2007, we should try to think about what it would be like "being an enslaved African in 1807, knowing the trade was supposed to have stopped because people in Britain had decided it was

evil, and still being subjected to endless beatings and whippings, and still not getting a sniff of free air for another 31 years".[32]

When it truly ended, not all of the diasporic people decided to go back to Africa. Indeed, some of them decided to settle in the countries where they had been forced to work but, this time, they would start a life as free men and women. As a consequence, they mixed with the local populations, creating new hybrid human beings. The contribution of this African ancestry was massive, since they helped the growth of the populations of Brazil, the United States and the Caribbean.

4. Dreaming about Home

> Maria: They destroyed my family, they killed my friends and they forced me to abandon the people and the places that I loved. […] "Restitution: the return of something to its original state". Now that made me think… You see, I would love to return to my original state. I would love to be a happy woman living in this beautiful city. Like so many of my generation, I had to flee and I'll never forgive them for preventing me from living here.[33]

In *Woman in Gold*, at first, Maria didn't want to go back to Vienna – the city where she was born and grew up in; as a Jewish woman during Nazism, although she suffered back there, she realized that Vienna was still her home and part of her life. Therefore, as in the case of many people forced to leave their homes, even though they could represent the places where horrible events happened, the tie remains strong and there will always be the desire of going back to where one truly belongs.

A salient feature of the diaspora is the fact that dispersed people maintain a tight bond with their homeland or with the idea of their homeland. As Karen Fog Olwig explained in her article,[34] even though there is a displacement from home, there is still an important attachment to the place of origin on the part of the diasporic subject; therefore, in spite of the geographical and physical distance, there is a mental closeness, a sense of rootedness and belonging with the original home country.

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[32] J. Kay. "Missing Faces" in *The Guardian*, 24 March 2007. London, Guardian News and Media, 2007.
[33] Words uttered by Maria Altmann (Helen Mirren) in the movie *Woman in Gold*. Directed by Simon Curtis. Main cast: Helen Mirren, Ryan Reynolds, Daniel Brühl. BBC Films, Origin Pictures, 2015.
[34] K. Fog Olwig. "Place, Movement and Identity: Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in a 'Caribbean' Family" in *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*. Edited by Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tölölyan and Carolin Alfonso. London, Routledge, 2004, p. 55.

"A homeland is imbued with an expressive charge and a sentimental pathos that seem to be almost universal. Motherland, fatherland, native land, *Heimat*[35], the ancestral land, the search for roots" (Cohen-*GD*, 103); Cohen says that the desire to return is "almost universal". As a matter of fact, on the one hand, there were diasporic people who actually got back to their mythical homelands; however, on the other hand, there were also some of them who did not. Tölölyan wrote that "we must be careful not to locate the diasporic's home in the ancestral homeland too easily":[36] for many diasporic people, the ancestral land is the land of suffering. Of course, the bond with it will always remain but it isn't enough to make them choose to return; indeed, these people may want to build a new home in a new country. The words of Avtar Brah clearly summarize this feeling:

> Where is home? […] "home" is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of "origin". […] The problematic of "home" and belonging may be integral to the diasporic condition […]. Not all diasporas inscribe homing desire through a wish to return to a place of "origin". […] The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings.[37]

As if they were in an in-between position, between the ancestral homeland and a new homeland – wherever it could be –, the people of the diaspora are forged by this double kind of location: they are both the place where they came from and the place in which they were forced to live as exiles but that they came to possibly appreciate. As a consequence, we should not consider odd the fact that some dispersed subjects chose to start a new life, away from the country they once called home. They are nothing less or nothing more than those who chose to go back: it's a choice of life and it doesn't mean that the tie with their ancestral homeland becomes weaker.

As far as the Jews are concerned, the turning point of their status as homeless people was 14 May 1948, when David Ben Gurion (1886-1973) proclaimed the birth of Israel. The choice to create a Jewish state on the present Israeli territory wasn't made

[35] It means "homeland" or "birthplace" in German.
[36] K. Tölölyan. Diaspora Studies: Past, Present and Promise" in *The Oxford Diaspora Programmes*, Number 55, April 2012. Oxford, Published by The International Migration Institute (IMI, University of Oxford), 2012, p. 11.
[37] A. Brah. *Cartographies of Diaspora – Contesting Identities*. Milton Park (Oxfordshire, England), Routledge, 1996, pp. 192-193.

out of nowhere. “The Jews had a romantic and historical claim to Palestine” (Johnson-*HJ*, 430). Leaving aside the biblical tales, first of all, it coincides more or less with the very first land from which the Jews started to scatter; secondly, having sensed the dangers deriving from anti-Semitism, many Jews began moving to the Palestinian areas already at the beginning of the XX century.

Nevertheless, the conception of a Jewish state had already been developing for at least 60 years, when the journalist and lawyer Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) began to process his ideas about the so-called modern Zionism.

> The Russian horrors made Jews think: was it not possible to bring into existence an ideal community where Jews were not merely safe, not just suffered, or even tolerated, but welcomed, at home: a place where they, and not others, were masters? Of course Zionism was not new. It was as old as the Babylonian exile. (Johnson-*HJ*, 374)

The dream started to take an actual shape in the wave of European anti-Semitism, namely after the Russian pogroms and after the well-known Dreyfus *affaire* (1894-1906). Although it was fascinating for some Jews, some others didn’t really accept the idea of another diaspora: they felt at home where they were, whether in Germany or France, or Italy, or Poland. However, one of the “rules” in the Zionist movement considered the fact that the Jews scattered around the word were free to return to the ancestral home or to remain in their new settlement.

It was after the extreme sufferings experienced in the Nazi camps and the atrocious murder of 6 million Jews that the need to create a Jewish state became a priority. Up to 1945, Palestine had been a British protectorate which hosted both Jews and Arabs; the tensions between the two groups were high and Great Britain asked for the UN’s support. In 1947, the UN proposed a plan for the creation of a Jewish state and an Arab one on the Palestinian territory; the Arabs didn’t agree with this plan but it was approved nonetheless, since the majority of the state representatives voted in favor of the creation of a Jewish state on that soil.

As a consequence, on 14 May 1948, also thanks of the support of the then two main powers – president Truman’s United States and Stalin’s Soviet Union – which recognized the legitimacy of the Jewish state, David Ben Gurion declared the official birth and independence of Israel. After two millennia, the Jews had “a place on Earth.

At last".[38] The wish made in the *Hatikvah*[39] – the national anthem of Israel, taken from a poem written by the Ukrainian Naftali Herz Imber in 1877 – was at last becoming reality:

> As long as deep within the heart
> a Jewish soul stirs,
> and forward, to the ends of the East
> an eye looks out, towards Zion.
>
> Our hope is not yet lost,
> the hope of two thousand years,
> to be a free people in our land
> the land of Zion and Jerusalem.
> To be a free people in our land
> the land of Zion and Jerusalem.[40]

However, in spite of the official recognition coming from the UN, the conflicts between Israel and the Muslim-Arab population that once lived in Palestine have lasted until today. Apparently, the Independence War of 1948, the Six-Day War of 1947, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the threats of Black September as well as other perpetual attacks and killings were not enough to sedate the tensions and try to come up with a possible solution.

Life wasn't easy for black diasporic people either. We know that, almost like the Jews, "black Africans have been victimized by capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, forcibly uprooted from their homelands, and dispersed, only to be subjected to disabilities and persecutions in their host societies".[41] Because of slavery, racism and other forms of violence, some people belonging to the black diasporic tradition started to develop their ideas of a black kind of Zionism, and this was how movements like Pan-Africanism or Rastafarianism began to rise. Using Bob Marley's words in his "Redemption Song", these movements had to be used to begin to "free [them]selves from mental slavery / none but [them]selves can free [their] minds": they were African-American people's ways to react against racism and oppression.

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[38] These are the words uttered by Avner's mother (Gila Almagor) in *Munich*. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Main cast: Eric Bana, Geoffrey Rush, Daniel Craig, Ciarán Hinds, Mathieu Amalric, Ayelet Zurer. Amblin Entertainment, The Kennedy/Marshall Company, 2005.
[39] Literally, "the hope".
[40] The lyrics are taken from http://www.hebrewsongs.com/?song=hatikva.
[41] W. Safran. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1991. Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1991, p. 89.

Pan-Africanism was born before Rastafarianism, already at the end of XVIII century. The idea behind this movement was that all people of African descent – therefore, with former slaves in the genealogical tree – were interconnected with each other and, in addition to sharing the same history (of suffering), these people were supposed to share the same destiny. The main focus of Pan-Africanism was to reinforce the solidarity among these people and its paramount interest was to create a state in Africa, specially made to accept and welcome all the African-Americans. The Promised Land which was identified in order to welcome all those people was Liberia, even though the neighbouring states were taken into account as well. Nevertheless:

> African "Zionist" efforts have not been successful and have not gone beyond the "repatriation" of several hundred blacks from the United States, the West Indies, and England to Sierra Leone in the eighteenth century and the settlement of small groups of American blacks in Liberia in the nineteenth century.[42]

As a matter of fact, a precise black homeland idea could not be easily identified; black Africans were far too rooted in the new lands – even though not fully accepted – to think to return to Africa. When slavery truly came to an end, indeed, many former slaves decided to remain where they had been forced to move. They chose to do that because they were free and they could decide where to live, also because they had started a family in a new society; furthermore, the children of those ex-slaves were probably born in the Americas, which was the only world they knew. Of course, they didn't forget about where they first came from and "their homeland myth is translated into solidarity with African liberation struggles, […] including the fight against apartheid in South Africa and demands for increased economic aid to African nations".[43]

Secondly, the movement called Rastafarianism was born in Jamaica in the 1930s; it is a religious movement and takes its name after Ras Tafari (1892-1975), also known as Haile Selassie I, emperor of Ethiopia. Their ideas were taken from the Bible – above all, they looked at the tradition of the diasporic Jewish population – and Pan-Africanism. "Rastafarians initially looked forward to a literal repatriation to their African ancestral homelands through the agency of the Ethiopian Emperor. Increasingly, however, African repatriation was regarded less as a literal return than a

[42] *Ivi*, p. 90.
[43] *Ibidem*.

figurative one".[44] A total migration back to African countries was indeed almost impossible to be achieved, also because many people of African descent chose not to go back and preferred to start a new life elsewhere.

[44] B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (Second edition). London, Routledge, 2007, p. 187.

CHAPTER TWO

Parallels

We have learnt that Africans and Jews have shared the experience of diaspora: they were uprooted from their homelands and sent to a place where they were forced to "live" in terrible conditions; their status as slaves and unwanted people changed after many years and they began to build new lives, either returning to their long-lost home countries or establishing somewhere else.

However, this is just the beginning, since there is much more to be said about what unites them. In the previous chapter, we have seen that the idea of identifying Liberia as the land of freedom in which black people were to return was inspired by a similar Jewish dream and concept: going back to Israel to be a free Jew among other free Jews. Furthermore, also the Rastafarian movement took many of its religious ideas from the Biblical stories dealing with the Jewish population and their dispersion all around the world.

But, there are more common points to explore. As a matter of fact, during the slavery of African people in the southern countries of the United States, a new kind of song was born: the spiritual song, also known as negro spiritual. Mostly popular between the XVIII and the XIX centuries, these songs accompanied the slaves working in the plantations. Most of these spirituals were expressions of religious faith; moreover, it is worth quoting them in this analysis because of the parallelisms established with the Jewish tradition and history. Indeed, being a black African slave in a white society also meant being in contact with a Christian background; therefore, these people were exposed to a lot of sermons and stories taken from the Bible. Of course, what they could really see in there was a parallel between their own story of exile and the diaspora of the Jews; the Babylonian captivity, as well, was set in relation to their own condition of prisoners.

Because of this resemblance, characters like Moses or names connected to the Jewish diaspora and their native land are to be found in a great amount of spiritual songs, composed mainly between the XVIII and the XIX centuries – unfortunately, the exact dates of composition are unknown. There is a long list of songs whose lyrics contain elements dealing with this kind of comparison; however, I selected only three of them,[1] in order to show some shared themes and situations.

> Swing low, sweet chariot
> Coming for to carry me home
> Swing low, sweet chariot
> Coming for to carry me home
>
> I looked over *Jordan*, and what did I see?
> (Coming for to carry me home)
> I saw a band of angels coming after me
> (Coming for to carry me home)
>
> […] [Emphasis added]

This spiritual called "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" contains an explicit reference to the Jordan river. In several biblical stories, this river had been described as a place of miracles; moreover, after Moses's death, Joshua led the Israelites towards the Promised Land and, during the journey, they had to cross it. Most likely, it is a symbol of freedom, meaning that the crossing is the final step to complete the long-awaited journey and reach a land of peace and freedom. Thus, this could be easily juxtaposed with the African experience as it could also reflect the desire of freedom of the slaves.

Another interesting parallel could be found in the spiritual called "Wade in the Water":

> Wade in the water
> Wade in the water, children,
> Wade in the water
> God's a-going to trouble the water
>
> See that host all dressed in white
> God's a-going to trouble the water
> The leader looks like *the Israelite*
> God's a-going to trouble the water
>
> See that band all dressed in red
> God's a-going to trouble the water
> Looks like the band that *Moses* led
> God's a-going to trouble the water

[1] All the lyrics are taken from https://www.negrospirituals.com/songs/index.htm.

[…]

If you don't believe I've been redeemed
God's a-going to trouble the water
Just follow me down to the *Jordan's stream*
God's a-going to trouble the water

[Emphasis added]

Apart from another reference to the Jordan river, here we can also see some connections with the story of the Israelites escaping from Egypt – probably their worst land of oppression and slavery, according to the Holy Scriptures – under the lead of Moses. As far as the African slaves were concerned, the United States were one of the main sites of black oppression; obviously, these people wanted to leave the country and, with this song, they were probably expressing the hope to find a second Moses to deliver them from slavery.

Finally, a remarkable and strong example may also be identified in the verses of "Babylon's Falling":

Pure city,
Babylon's falling to rise no more
Oh, Babylon's falling, falling, falling
Babylon's falling to rise no more.

Oh, Jesus, tell you once before,
Babylon's falling to rise no more
To go in peace an' sin no more
Babylon's falling to rise no more

If you get there before I do
Babylon's falling to rise no more
Tell all my friends I'm coming too.

[Emphasis added]

The words "Babylon's falling" obviously refer to the end of the Babylonian captivity.[2] Historically, Babylon was the land in which the Jewish people had been held as captives for many years. Metaphorically, it has developed from its original meaning and grew until including other similar histories of oppression. Therefore, with the addition of the word "falling", it means the end of oppression and of slavery in a distant country. This spiritual possibly represents another glimpse of hope expressed by all those slaves who, of course, dreamt about being free again, as a consequence of the falling and abolition of the slave system.

[2] See chapter one, §2 "The Jewish Diaspora".

It didn't take long for some important scholars to show interest in the parallelisms clearly existing between the experiences of blacks and Jews. Mainly starting from the end of the XIX century and going through the whole XX century, four scholars – three of them of African descent – investigated this analogy, greatly contributing to the totality of studies dealing with black and Jewish histories.

I will analyse these four works following their chronological order of publication: the pamphlet *The Jewish Question* (1898) written by Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912); the article called "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto" (1949) by W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963); *Black Skin, White Masks* (originally written and published in French in 1952 and translated into English in 1967) by Frantz Fanon (1925-1961); *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), by Paul Gilroy (born 1956).

1. A Black Point of View on *The Jewish Question*

Edward Wilmot Blyden was an educator, writer and politician born in the West Indies, who then emigrated to Africa, mainly operating in Liberia and in Sierra Leone, where he also worked as a diplomat. He was keen on many different topics, above all on the situation of black people in America and on the concepts and hopes developed around the Liberian nation.

In a letter to Mr. Solomon[3] – an acquaintance, or maybe even a friend of Blyden – written on 12 September 1898, the author declares that he had always been interested in Jewish culture; therefore, uniting this interest in Africa and African people, he decided to deal with these two parallel histories in this pamphlet, which was then sent to Solomon. According to Blyden, the African and the Jewish are histories "almost identical of sorrow and oppression" (*JQ*, 3).

To him, the Jewish question is "the Question of Questions [...]. The Jews […] are an indispensable element […] in the spiritual culture and regeneration of humanity" (*JQ*, 5); therefore, it was extremely important for him to go deeper into the topic, also by analysing the history and the language of Jews. Blyden's fascination for the Jewish

[3] To be found at the beginning of E.W. Blyden. *The Jewish Question*, p. 3.

world began to bloom when he was a child; indeed, he grew up in the Danish island of St. Thomas (West Indies) surrounded by Jewish neighbours and children. He was attracted by Hebrew, the synagogue, their prayers and their songs.

Firstly, he starts to set the analogy between Africans and Jews by talking about Zionism; the author explains that the wish made by the Jewish people to return to the land of their forefathers closely resembles the dream that was then beginning to push the Africans in America to go back to their land. Even though he considers these two "desires" quite similar, they are not completely identical. As far as the Jews are concerned, "[their return] to the land of Israel was in its way an act towards the fulfilment of prophecy"[4]; on the other hand, the return of "the Africa Negro was an act of utmost piety, independent of divine prescription".[5] Precisely, the only difference between these two returns thus resides in the religious component that is to be found in the desire of the Jews: the pledge made by the God of the Hebrews to his people to live in their promised land. Instead, the "black return" has nothing to do with religion: there is only the desire to live in a land of freedom.

Secondly, he goes on by dealing with their two similar histories of persecution throughout the centuries:

> Egyptian Pharaohs, Assyrian Kings, Roman emperors, Gothic crusaders, Spanish inquisitors, aye, and unhappily, Russian prosecutors alike, devoted their energies to the fulfilment of this common purpose – the destruction of the Hebrew. (*JQ*, 9)

Thus, he claims that "the history of the African race – their enslavement, persecution, proscription, and sufferings – closely resembles that of the Jews" (*JQ*, 7).

Throughout the pages of his pamphlet, it is unquestionable to say that Blyden shows a profound respect and awareness of the painful experiences of the Jewish people; he supports the theories of the Zionist movement as he affirms that their claim to the Holy Land is completely sensible and rightful. Nevertheless, his words do not exclusively show a blind glorification of the Jewish population. As a matter of fact, by assuming an African point of view and later showing his extended biblical knowledge, Blyden says that the Jews had apparently ignored "the great body of the 'Dark Continent'" (*JQ*, 16) in their writings. He wonders whether they have a word of comfort

[4] M.J.C. Echeruo. "Edward W. Blyden, *The Jewish Question* and the Diaspora – Theory and Practice" in *Journal of Black Studies*, Volume 40, Number 4 (March 2010). Los Angeles, Sage Publications, Inc., 2010, p. 560.
[5] *Ibidem*.

for all the people of African descent all around the world, people who experienced their same suffering and persecution. Of course, all mankind owes a debt to the Jews; however, the Jews and the whole humanity as well owe an "immense debt to Africa" (*JQ*, 16), as it was also in Africa that the nomadic people coming from other parts of the world – including the Jews – developed into their future nations.[6]

After this premise, the text takes a more pronounced biblical turn. Indeed, Blyden explains that there has always been a connection between Africans and Jews since the days of Noah and his sons, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and king Solomon. The last three names have a clear connection with the African lands: born in the current land of Israel, Joseph – Abraham's great grandson – "was sold, through the jealousy of his brethren, into Egypt, and rose to greatness and power" (*JQ*, 18); Moses was born in Egypt, he grew up there, took the leadership of the Jewish slaves and freed them from bondage, taking them to the Promised Land; finally, king Solomon had sexual relations with the Queen of Sheba[7] and probably gave birth to Menelik I, the first Solomonic Emperor of Ethiopia. Even though these are all important figures, I would like to focus on the analysis of Noah's offspring and Abraham's.

It all started with Noah and his three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Indeed, after the Flood, the three sons of Noah generated the people of the world: Shem was the father of the Semitic people (including the people of Israel); Ham was the ancestor of the Hamitic race, the people inhabiting the African lands; finally, Japheth was the progenitor of the Japhetic population, which spread through Europe. As the whole mankind is linked through to the sons of Noah, it means that there is an obvious bond between black African people and Jews. Nevertheless, the Semites appear to be the luckiest ones, since they are the descendants of a first born. On the contrary, the Hamites occupy an inferior position: because of Ham's transgression against his father,[8] the Hamites had been cursed and according to the *Talmud*, "Ham and his descendants [have] the role of slaves".[9]

[6] At the time of the redaction of this document, he explained that there were many Jews who chose to remain in the African lands; similarly, those who left Africa developed there their awareness and identity as a single population.
[7] A nation more or less corresponding with the present Eritrea, Somalia, Yemen and Ethiopia.
[8] The nature of Ham's transgression and the reason why Noah cursed him are still unclear and debated.
[9] M.J.C. Echeruo. "Edward W. Blyden, *The Jewish Question* and the Diaspora – Theory and Practice", p. 555.

As far as Abraham was concerned, he had two sons: an illegitimate one called Ishmael, born in Egypt, and a legitimate one named Isaac, who shared the religion of his father. Ishmael was the rejected seed, being born from Abraham and Hagar out of wedlock; instead, though he was not the first born, Isaac was the "promised seed" *(JQ*, 17), being the legitimate son of Abraham and his wife Sarah. Following the words of the Holy Scriptures, Blyden identified Ishmael with Africa and the Islamic religion; moreover, the four continents were to be divided between the two sons, according to their religion: Europe and America to Isaac[10] and Asia and Africa to Ishmael. Consequently, Ishmael could be considered the progenitor of African people and of Muslims, while Isaac was one of the patriarchs of the Jewish people.

Thanks to these explanations, we can easily see that the African people have always been in an inferior position: because of Ham, they are a cursed population and, because of Ishmael, they are considered the rejected branch of Abraham's progeny. However, both Ham and Shem are the sons of the same father, both Ishmael and Isaac were born from Abraham's seed.

Therefore, seeing the sufferings of his own people, Blyden expresses some pleas, hoping that the Jews will listen to them.

> I would earnestly plead for Africa, especially at this crisis in her history, and entreat Israel to remember that land of their sojourn and early training, to assist Ethiopia to stretch forth her hands unto God, and gather from that country the remnants of the tribes of Israel, according to the prophecy of Zephaniah, "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my suppliants, even the daughters of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering".
> The regions beyond "the rivers of Ethiopia", from the standpoint of the prophet in Palestine, can be none other than the Nigritian regions and all West Africa. (*JQ*, 21)

When someone is suffering, they can be understood mainly and better by those who had suffered before. As a matter of fact, sharing the same experiences of horror and suffering, the Jews are the ones who can better help the African people in their moments of need. Blyden is sure of that, also because the Jews have a special bond with Africa, having lived there for a long time and having grown up in that society as well, developing into a cohesive population. Quite probably, the moment of need that Blyden

[10] Although Isaac is not formally assigned with the land of Israel (it's part of the Asian continent), he was faithful to the God of the Hebrews, just like Abraham.

is referring to is colonialism and its consequent horror perpetrated by the Europeans. Indeed,

> The sons of Japheth […] partitioned Africa among themselves […] and everybody knows what is taking place there. We dread the consequences of their work upon that continent. We know how heavy the hand of Japheth is upon the darker races of the earth. We know how incapable he is of preserving even the physical life of the weaker tribes of humanity; and we know his indifference, while pursuing his material enterprises, to the spiritual conditions. (*JQ*, 22)

European colonialism left Africa in terrible conditions. Blyden of course knew what was happening in his continent, as he was aware that Europe felt superior and didn't hesitate to destroy the humanity of African people. Here, we read his second plea addressed to the bloodline of Shem and Isaac:

> Now Africa appeals to the Jew – the other son of Abraham, preserved during so many years, and through so many vicissitudes – to come with his scientific and other culture, gathered by his exile in many lands, and with his special spiritual endowments, to the assistance of Ishmael. (*JQ*, 23)

Blyden wrote this pamphlet to direct the attention of Jewish intellectuals to the situation of the African continent. The Jews suffered in the past and are still experiencing suffering; according to Blyden, the Africans are living one of the worst conditions ever and the Jews should look at them and try to help. Only a brother in misery can understand someone in pain. Only a brother in misery can truly help.

2. Of Racism(s) and Ghettos

Among the four intellectuals chosen for the investigations of this chapter, W.E.B. Du Bois is "different" because is the only one who does not have manifest African descents; he was an American sociologist, historian and Pan-Africanist. During his life, he visited Poland three times and each time he was moved by what he saw there. Probably, his most important impressions are dealt with in one of his articles, called "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto".

One of the most debated concepts in his works was racism. When he studied in Berlin, he only knew about race problems in America, which seemed to him "at the time

the only race problem and the greatest social problem of the world".[11] However, one of his peers told him that he should have developed his knowledge on the topic, by studying the problem of the Poles in the German Empire: they could not get proper education, speak their language, follow certain careers, and they were perpetually insulted. Du Bois was astonished since, as far as the United States were concerned, the main racist issues dealt with skin colour, slavery and examples of near slavery.

Definitely, it was in Europe that W.E.B. Du Bois became aware of the myriad of problems afflicting humanity. In particular, when he travelled to Poland – Krakow and Warsaw – he discovered the so-called Jewish question or Jewish problem: "it had never occurred to me until then that any exhibition of race prejudice could be anything but color prejudice" (*NWG*, 470). Jews are not recognizable by the colour of their skin but they were the object of racism, regardless.

In order to better understand the problem, he chose to visit some European ghettos. He went to the Jewish ghetto in Berlin, but what really changed him was visiting the ghetto in Warsaw in 1949, right after the end of the horrors of the Second World War. Du Bois thought he was prepared to the probable horrors of Warsaw, having seen race riots and the marching of the Ku Klux Klan "but nothing in [his] wildest imagination was equal to what [he] saw in Warsaw in 1949" (*NWG*, 471). Obviously, he was not ready, as it was also impossible for him to understand how a civilized country such Poland could treat its fellow citizens. Indeed, in the Warsaw ghetto, all around him was destruction:

> There had been complete, planned and utter destruction. Some streets had been so obliterated that only by using photographs of the past could they tell where the street was. And no one mentioned the total of the dead, the sum of destruction, the story of crippled and insane, the widows and orphans. (*NWG*, 471)

His experience in the several European ghettos was life-changing, as it allowed him to develop his points of view around the idea of racism. Before visiting Europe, he only conceived racism as something solely identifiable and linkable to the concepts of slavery, emancipation and skin colour; after his European experience, he realized racism wasn't uniquely recognizable in the religious question either. Therefore, he was able to broaden his awareness, since at the end of the day:

[11] W.E.B. Du Bois. "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto" [1949] in *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 469.

> The race problem in which I was interested cut across lines of color and physique and belief and status and was a matter of cultural patterns, perverted teaching and human hate and prejudice, which reached all sorts of people and caused endless evil to all men. (*NWG*, 472)

As well as others before and after him, Du Bois understood that both racism against the blacks and racism against the Jews – together with other forms of racism – are all "one crime against civilization" (*NWG*, 472). W.E.B. Du Bois closes his article with one final prayer, something that may be seen as an echo to what Edward Wilmot Blyden wrote half a century before. Jews, blacks and all the people in the world should remember their past of suffering and they should not fight against each other; instead, they should cooperate because the pursuit of freedom is – or should be – a problem of all the human beings.

3. Black Skin, White Masks / Jewish Skin, White Masks

Frantz Fanon wrote the essay called *Black Skin, White Masks* in order to better analyse and understand the relationship existing between the blacks and the whites. The former are subjected to a deep and oppressive inferiority complex: since they just want to be white, the blacks often wear a white mask to cover their dark skin.

Therefore, in the seven chapters of this essay and in its conclusion, Fanon examines this issue deeply, thus hoping to find a solution to cure the black human beings of the world. Even though the main problem is to be identified in the black faction, Fanon wrote this essay also for the whites. The black man sees the white as an example of perfection, someone to be mirrored, and probably the white man enjoys this condition. These two parts are kept confined; as a consequence, Fanon wants to find a way to set both the blacks and the whites free from the chains that they surely contributed to make. One possible solution for their liberation might be the use of language to build some sort of communication.

Certainly, the most considerable focus of *Black Skin, White Masks* is set on the black/white relationship and the disalienation of black people; nevertheless, Fanon found some space in order to examine the status of the Jews and consider its analogy with the blacks. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon was the voice through

which the third world could speak. For obvious reasons, it is not possible to immediately identify the Jews with the third world; however, they can be seen as belonging to a subaltern and inferior position and, because of this, Fanon can also speak for them.

It is mainly in three chapters of the essay that Fanon deals with the comparison between the Jews and the blacks.

First of all, in the fourth chapter, "The So-called Dependency Complex of Colonized Peoples", Fanon begins his analysis by acknowledging that there is indeed an analogy between the acts of racism perpetrated against black people and the "anti-Semitic mentality".[12] With the support of the words by Aimé Césaire[13] and his *Discours sur le colonialism* (1956), we can see the hatred against these two peoples from another perspective:

> When I hear that Negroes have been lynched in America, I say that we have been lied to: Hitler is not dead; […] when I learn that Jews have been insulted, mistreated, persecuted, I say that we have been lied to: Hitler is not dead; when, finally, I […] hear that in Africa forced labour has been inaugurated and legalized, I say that we have certainly been lied too: Hitler is not dead.[14]

A few years have passed since the fall of the Nazi regime. Nevertheless, when you hear that free acts of hatred and persecution have been perpetrated against those who had already suffered a lot before, you feel that the fall was in fact meaningless, since that violence continues undeterredly.

Fanon carries on with his analysis by declaring something quite important: those who are in an inferior position – and may belong to the minority – do not make themselves inferior; on the contrary, it is in the others that we can locate the sources of racism and also anti-Semitism. As a matter of fact, "the colonial, even though he is 'in the minority', does not feel that this makes him inferior. […] it has never occurred to a single black to consider himself superior to a member of the white minority" (*BSWM*, 68). By explaining this with ideas generally employed while dealing with colonialism, Fanon says that the white – the colonizer, the superior, the hegemonic part – will never feel inferior, even if he is part of a small group of whites surrounded by a bigger

[12] F. Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks.* London, Pluto Press, 2008, p. 64.
[13] Poet, author and politician from Martinique (1913-2008).
[14] Words by Aimé Césaire, quoted from memory (*Discours politiques* of the election campaign of 1945, Fort-de-France); also to be found in F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 66.

number of black native people. This happens because this kind of minority has power, which also consists in creating feelings of inferiority and subalternity. “The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior” (*BSWM,* 69).

This “mechanism” works for the Jews as well, even though they only represent a small number of individuals in almost every society. They were not formally colonized – as they didn’t live in a single country of their own – but they were often relegated to live in ghettos. Furthermore, they were stripped of any power; as a consequence, the white gentiles always decided for them and had power over them. This could be a clear echo to the black experience and we can also see it in one of Sartre’s reasonings: “The Jew is the one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start… It is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew” (*BSWM,* 69).[15] At the end of the day, Stuart Hall’s words concerning identity could not be more truthful: you are what they see you. No matter what, the subaltern identity could often be built and filtered through the eyes and the power of the hegemonic other.

In the fifth chapter, “The Fact of Blackness”, Fanon also deals with the question of stereotypes; this idea can be undoubtedly linked to what was said in the previous paragraphs. As well as the eyes of the superior other, stereotypes contribute to the creation of someone’s identity. Sometimes, because of their absurdity, they are not even taken into consideration; but, some other times, stereotypes are so deeply rooted in the mentality of the hegemonic part that they end up defining those occupying the “inferior positions”, such as Jews and blacks.

Blacks are often judged according to the stereotypes built around them. A black person isn’t considered able to speak properly and is often accused of being a savage and a cannibal; moreover, “the Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly” (*BSWM,* 86). Since these stereotypes about the blacks are so deeply rooted in the white mentality, every black man is often expected to behave like the man described by the stereotypes. This supposed inferiority and this distorted image of theirs is almost impossible to escape.

[15] Original quote to be found in Jean-Paul Sartre. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. New York, Grove Press, 1960, p. 69.

As far as the Jews are concerned, Sartre said that they "have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotypes that others have of them, and they live fearing that their acts will correspond to this stereotype" (*BSWM,* 87).[16] The others have built stereotypes for the Jews as well and they live in the constant fear of them. Nevertheless, Fanon explains that they are – more or less – in a more favourable position than the blacks. As a matter of fact, if blacks are sealed in their blackness, many Jews can still be sealed in their whiteness since the majority of them are lucky enough to have a white skin.

> [A Jew] is a white man, and, apart from some rather debatable characteristics,[17] he can sometimes go unnoticed he belongs to the race of those who since the beginning of time have never known cannibalism. What an idea, to eat one's father! Simple enough, one has only not to be a nigger. Granted, the Jews are harassed – what am I thinking of? They are hunted down, exterminated, cremated. […] The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. (*BSWM,* 87)

However, sometimes even the white skin is not enough to save you from violence. At first, Fanon recognizes that they are luckier than the blacks; however, this "superior condition" of the Jews didn't help them and they were victims of hatred and violence nonetheless. After all, blacks and Jews continue to be fellows in suffering and abuse; as a black man, Fanon finally realizes that the Jew is his "brother in misery" (*BSWM,* 92). In his memories, the words uttered by his philosophy professor are re-evoked: "'Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you.' And I found that he was universally right. […] Later I realized what he meant, quite simply, an anti-Semite is inevitably anti-Negro" (*BSWM,* 92).

Finally, in the sixth chapter, "The Negro and Psychopathology", Fanon goes on analysing the problems of Negrophobia, anti-Semitism and the stereotypes built around them, often referring to psychiatric points of view.

In many societies, Jews are feared because they have always been considered avid. Because of their financial power, they could potentially be everywhere in the society and controlling anything, from the banks to the government; therefore, they may be seen as a danger. On the other hand, when one thinks about the blacks, the "danger" label is never discussed. "In the case of the Jew, one thinks of money and its cognates. In that of the Negro, one thinks of sex" (*BSWM,* 123). Indeed, the general imagery

[16] Original quote to be found in J-P. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew,* p. 95.
[17] For example, the big nose stereotype.

about the Jews tends to identify them as a sort of second Shylock or Fagin; instead, the black man is often imagined with big genitals and behaving with promiscuity and savagery.

> The Jew is attacked in his religious identity, in his history, in his race, in his relations with his ancestors and with his posterity; […] every time that a Jew is persecuted, it is the whole race that is persecuted in his person. But it is in his corporeality that the Negro is attacked. It is as a concrete personality that he is lynched. It is as an actual being that he is a threat. […] The Jew […] is suspect because he wants to own the wealth or take over the positions of power. But the Negro is fixated at the genital. […] Two realms: the intellectual and the sexual. […] The Negro symbolizes the biological danger; the Jew, the intellectual danger. (*BSWM*, 125-127)

Undoubtedly, there are some differences between blacks and Jews. Still, it is evident that they suffered in similar ways, always bound by their condition of scattered people and by the fact that, for one reason or another, they had been rejected by the society – and sometimes they are still alienated nowadays. As Fanon declares, "both of [them] stand for Evil" (*BSWM*, 139): the Jewish man killed Jesus and he is greedy; the black man is ugly, he is a savage, he eats his fellows and, first and foremost, he is a worse form of evil than his peer in sufferings because he is black. Directly and by choice, they do not have any fault but, at the end of the day, either sealed in their whiteness or in their blackness, both the "diasporic Jew and the colonized black"[18] are the victims of oppression and the Evil of mankind.

4. Children of Israel and Children of Africa

The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness is a fundamental essay to study if we truly want to understand the true reality concealed behind the histories of diaspora, especially the Black/African one.

As a matter of fact, the author Paul Gilroy did something out of the ordinary, as he declared that the Black Atlantic could be read as a counter-culture of modernity. By acknowledging the fact that the blacks do have an important place in history, we come to understand that, in fact, they built cities, railway and wealth. They were more than a

[18] Expressions used by Bryan Cheyette in *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History*, p. 58.

constant presence among the other human beings; therefore, we should re-read modernity by taking into account what they did to increase the power of our Western societies.

Furthermore, we can re-read the black men as the very first modern men: coming from various parts of Africa, when they travelled on the ships to reach the lands of their new life of slavery, they got in touch with a myriad of other cultures, listened to different languages and types of music. As a matter of fact, not only were those contacts an important part of the Transatlantic exchanges; they also contributed to enhance the whole culture of mankind.

Although this essay is mainly devoted to the study of the African diaspora, Gilroy also found some space to display the parallelisms existing between the black experience and the Jewish one. Indeed, in the sixth chapter "'Not a Story to Pass On': Living Memory and the Slave Sublime" – mainly in the paragraphs called "Children of Israel or Children of the Pharaohs?" and "Black Culture and Ineffable Terror" – the author examines the shared experiences of blacks and Jews, also by analysing Blyden's The Jewish Question and my making reference to the writing of the Italian Jewish writer Primo Levi.

Right at the beginning of the paragraph, Paul Gilroy declares that "the term 'diaspora' comes into the vocabulary of black studies and the practice of pan-Africanist politics from Jewish thought" (*BA*, 205). Mainly, it was used from the late XIX century onwards, when movements like Zionism or Pan-Africanism began to develop. Since many of the pan-Africanist ideas have been inspired by the history of the Jews, the theorists of black studies thought that the ideas of the original Diaspora – the Jewish one – were appropriate for their experience as well. Together with this idea of scattering, they understood that they shared much more: forced exile from homelands, slavery and suffering.

Gilroy explains that a fundamental role in showing the connections and the differences existing between blacks and Jews has to be accredited to Edward Wilmot Blyden and his important pamphlet, *The Jewish Question*. As Blyden had already explained,[19] in the first place, the parallels and the closeness between them are to be

[19] See also §1 – "A Black Point of View on *The Jewish Question*" – of this chapter.

seen in the biblical stories as well. Indeed, we can see them in the relationship between king Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and in the progeny of both Noah and Abraham. Furthermore, we know that, having lived also in African countries for quite a long time, the Jewish civilization got enriched by these "black" contacts. Therefore, maybe without really even knowing it, they have been entangled since the beginning of times.

Secondly, they both share the concept of returning to their native homelands. Indeed, the desire of returning to Africa expressed by black people clearly resembles the wish to go back to the promised land of Israel. As they want to return to a point of origin, it obviously means that there had been a previous detachment from it: "the condition of exile, forced separation from the homeland, provides a second linking theme" (*BA*, 208).

Finally, as Gilroy explains, "the idea that the suffering of both blacks and Jews has a special redemptive power, not for themselves alone but for humanity as a whole, is a third common theme" (*BA*, 208). Once again, what Blyden explained almost a century before fits perfectly: blacks and Jews can be considered "the spiritual saviours or regenerators of humanity" (*JQ*, 11). Probably, what Paul Gilroy – together with Blyden – is trying to display with this final contact point is the fact that the dreadful experiences undergone by the blacks and the Jews are not only something to be remembered and reflected upon by the numerous victims of violence. On the contrary, also those people who perpetrated this kind of violence and those who witnessed it should always keep that idea in their minds as a memento for the times to come, something to be used to meditate, to acknowledge mistakes and as a way to find a possible redemption. If this "goal" is ever going to be achieved, blacks and Jews together will be the saviours of mankind.

Gilroy goes on with his analysis by saying that the theories of the connection took a turning point after the Holocaust, since it was considered a moment of no return in the history of humanity. Of course, the author does not dare or even want to minimize what happened but,

> I want to resist the idea that the Holocaust is merely another instance of genocide. I accept arguments for its uniqueness. However, I do not want the recognition of that uniqueness to be an obstacle to better understanding of the complicity or rationality and ethnocidal terror to which this book is dedicated. (*BA*, 213)

The writer's words are extremely powerful. It is undeniable that the Holocaust is an event without precedents in history, but we should always keep in mind that all its horrors, all the sufferings it caused could be always "fruitful in making sense of modern racisms" (*BA*, 214).

Furthermore, Paul Gilroy explains that Primo Levi and his writing represent an interesting and useful source of comparison to show the connections between blacks and Jews. Above all, in *The Drowned and the Saved* and *If This is a Man*, Levi employed some terms that could be used to establish the analogies between the Jewish and the black experience of slavery – for instance, he often refers to the Jews in the camps using the term "slave" or "slavery". "We are slaves, deprived of every right, exposed to every insult, condemned to certain death":[20] this quotation could be easily interchanged to describe the Jewish experience as much as to deal with black slavery. As a matter of fact, he said that one of the purposes of the extermination camps was the system of slave labour, "useful" to exterminate those that the Nazis considered the inferior races. Africans too were seen as inferior races and their condition of slavery and forced labour is a sad story. Furthermore, both share the same attempts of trying to resist their status as slaves. Even though those were mostly unsuccessful actions, they tried to escape from the camps or the plantations; or, they at least tried to rebel against the unbearable living conditions they were forced to endure every day.

Finally, Levi's explanations concerning "the nature of the journey to the camp and the condition of namelessness [… find] equivalents in the literature and history of racial slavery in the new world" (*BA*, 215). What immediately comes to our minds are the train journeys of the Jews and the ship journeys of the African slaves, as well as the fact that both of them were deprived of their names: this "is the mark with which slaves are branded and cattle sent to slaughter, and that is what you have become. You no longer have a name; this is your new name".[21] Thus, the Jews simply became a series of numbers on their forearms and the African slaves had to change their given names according to the desires of their owners.

[20] P. Levi. *If This is a Man* [*Se questo è un uomo*, 1947, 1958]. Translated by Stuart Woolf. London, Abacus, 2013, p. 45.
[21] P. Levi. *The Drowned and the Saved* [*I sommersi e i salvati*, 1986]. Translated by Raymond Rosenthal. London, Abacus, 2013, p. 132.

To sum up, we have seen that these theorists have identified many contact points between the black and the Jewish experience. One way or another, there is something atavistic and ancestral in the two of them. Indeed, Primo Levi said that the suffering experienced by the Jewish population is “the ancient grief of the people that has no land, the grief without hope of the exodus which is renewed every century” (If, 16); it is undoubtedly an ancient sorrow, as they had stayed away from their ancestral home almost since the beginning of times. Similarly, by also paying attention to the biblical events, we have seen that the condition of inferiority shared by all the blacks is already to be found in the progenitors of humanity.

Of course, the two cases are different but we can say that they progress on almost parallel roads. However, it is important to understand that all these histories of suffering are useful to get a new awareness on humanity.

Part II

CHAPTER THREE

Shattered Lives: hatred, dignity and loss

So far, we have seen that history, music and several renowned studies show several contact points uniting two worlds that, at a first and maybe inattentive look, appeared so distant. Of course, the parallels are not over yet, since more are to be found through the pages of some of the novels written by Caryl Philips. Starting from this chapter, the focus will be to analyse what unites the black and the Jewish experiences in these novels: *Higher Ground* (1989), *Crossing the River* (1993), *The Nature of Blood* (1997) and *A Distant Shore* (2003).

In movies, we watched scenes showing bottles of ketchup emptied on the heads of black guys sitting in some American cafes[1] or Christians expectorating at some Jews wearing red hats on the Rialto Bridge[2]… When we begin to reflect upon the histories – both older and, unfortunately, contemporary – of blacks and Jews, probably the first ideas that come to our minds are related to racism, hatred and, consequently, to the very important questions of human dignity, human rights and their loss. Historically, we could state that both blacks and Jews are people that lost everything; not only did they lose their dignity and their rights; in a sense, they also lost their identity. As a matter of fact, as a person, apart from your own dignity as human being, you are also defined by your culture and the people surrounding you; therefore, in this chapter, other meanings connected to "loss" are going to be developed: the loss of a family and the loss of one's native language.

[1] Scene taken from *The Butler*. Directed by Lee Daniels. Main cast: Forest Whitaker, Oprah Winfrey, David Oyelowo, Cuba Gooding Jr. Laura Ziskin Productions, 2013.
[2] Scene taken from *The Merchant of Venice*. Directed by Michael Radford. Main cast: Al Pacino, Jeremy Irons, Joseph Fiennes, Lynn Collins. UK Film Council, 2004.

Nevertheless, before completely devoting the analysis to the characters and themes developed by Caryl Phillips, it is worth spending a few lines to talk about a play that was published more than four centuries ago: *The Merchant of Venice*, by William Shakespeare. This famous play was also a source of inspiration for this work, because it contributed to develop this reflection on the analogies between them, especially concerning the ideas of racism and hatred.

In a century when equality among human beings still was an unthinkable question, but ghettos were dawning and racial hatred was already meaningful, Shakespeare once again proved to be wise and have foresight. The two quintessentially outcast characters of the story – the black Prince of Morocco and the Jewish moneylender Shylock – may indeed represent the literary forefathers of blacks and Jews.

First of all, the Prince of Morocco is the "exotic" suitor of Portia. He comes from a distant African country and, possibly, he is nothing like the other suitors; when he goes on stage, the Prince prevents the possible negative comments against him by saying:

> Mislike me not for my complexion,
> The shadowed livery of the burnished sun,
> To whom I am a neighbour and near bred.[3]

None of the other suitors is like him and, possibly, not even Portia has met anyone like him before; he knows that he is different but he doesn't want the woman to have a bad opinion of him. Therefore, he starts by saying that he shall not be judged by the darker colour of his skin and made an object of racial hatred; to him, his dark skin is a badge of honour because it is the result of the golden sun that shines over his lands. Clearly, it a wish that he makes in order to be accepted. It could be a key to read and to explain the current black situation: the main feature that distances them from the white men is the colour of their skin; they did not choose it and, therefore, they should not be hated for that.

Finally, the well-known monologue uttered by Shylock plays a similar role when dealing with the Jewish experience:

[3] W. Shakespeare. *The Merchant of Venice* [1596-1598]. London, Macmillan, 2010, p. 37, verses 1-3.

> He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what's the reason? *I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?* If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.[4]
>
> [Emphasis added]

Shylock is angry with his debtor Antonio and all the other men that despised him because of his religion, who eventually asked for his help when they needed money. Apart from the vengeful tones of his speech, the interesting part is to be found in its central lines; here, Shylock "works to humanize himself as a Jew"[5] and he is advocating for some equality and respect for his fellow Jews. With a series of rhetorical questions, the Jewish character proves that a Jew has the same body, the same feelings and the same weakness of all the Gentiles. Once again, the main difference between Jews and Christians is only one: not the colour of the skin – at least, not directly – but the religious path they choose to follow. In spite of this, they are exactly the same; as a consequence, they should not be the victims of this kind of hatred.

1. Mislike us not

It all started because blacks and Jews have always been different – of course, not in their eyes or in those of an open-minded human being – but in those of the blind people surrounding them; they were considered different because of the darker shade of their skin and because of the religious and moral laws they chose to follow. It is not the purpose of this study to truly understand why this hostility against them set in motion; I am not here to develop some moral investigations on the causes of this hatred. Instead, the purpose of this chapter is to focus especially on the consequences derived from this great animosity.

[4] *Ivi*, p. 58, verses 51-65.
[5] A. Kitch. "Shylock's Sacred Nation" in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Volume 59, Number 2, Summer 2008. Washington DC, Published by Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington DC) in association with George Washington University Press, 2008, p. 150.

Because of this alleged difference, feelings of hatred began to arise. First of all, it is important to say that both blacks and Jews were identified as racial groups: they were mainly classified according to their physical appearance, their origins and their behaviour. For example, as far as blacks were concerned, "colour became the means of distinguishing between groups of people and of identifying the behaviour to be expected of them".[6] According to these racial ideas, their dark skin implied a specific kind of behaviour and, therefore, a status of inferiority. As for the Jews, at first, they were not to identified by their physical features – even though, during Nazism, their look supposedly did not conform to the descriptions concerning the so called Aryan race; they were simply despised and alienated from society. For example, German people were indoctrinated "in the idea that the Jews were an evil, anti-social inferior race against whom Germany had to defend itself".[7] Of course, the stereotypes built around them did not help either. The blacks were lustful savages and cannibals; the Jews had "bigger backsides, differently sized and shaped skulls, bigger noses, a greater propensity towards crime and do not like to mix".[8] Almost everywhere they went and lived, blacks and Jews were thus victims of this violent racial hatred, as everyone considered them inferior and enemies of the society.

Caryl Phillips has always been interested in these two parallel experiences of suffering, being sometimes a victim of racism himself and also because "his grandfather was Jewish, and perhaps it is this connection running through the 'blood' that made him link the sufferings of the Jews with those of the Africans, and those of African descent".[9]

Already in *The European Tribe* – his first collection of essays published in 1987 – he contemplated the question of hatred, especially during his stay in Venice. At first, he analyses the Shakespearean figure of Othello, a lonely black man in a completely white Venice; "the colour of his skin means that he cannot disguise this fact from others. In

[6] B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p. 182.
[7] E. Sicher, L. Weinhouse. *Under Postcolonial Eyes: Figuring the "Jew" in Contemporary British Writing*. Lincoln and London, Published by the University of Nebraska Press, for the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism (SICSA), The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012, p. 3.
[8] C. Phillips. *The European Tribe* [1987]. New York, Vintage, 2000, p. 69.
[9] K. Singh. "Caryl Phillips and the Question of Political Identity" in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*. Edited by Bénédicte Ledent and Daria Tunca. Amsterdam-New York, Editions Rodopi B.V., 2012, p. 31.

short, he feels constantly threatened, and is profoundly insecure. […] Othello is an alien, socially and culturally" (*ET*, 47). Othello is darker than the men and women surrounding him, he knows that he is different but he tries to dissimulate that by trying to better conform to the Venetian environment. Who has never tried to conform whenever they felt different and isolated?

Always in Venice, he visited the first ghetto ever created and immediately saw the analogies between blacks and Jews.

> That an American black might respond with contempt to an American Jew who told him, "I know what it means to be persecuted; I am a Jew", is easily understandable, particularly so when the tradition that is responsible for the European oppression of the Jew is a Judeo-Christian one, the same that continues to oppress black Americans. […] The Jew is still Europe's nigger. […] Jews […] I naturally identified with them. (*ET*, 53-54)

As scholars – such as Edward W. Blyden – had already theorized, they could truly understand each other because of the similar violent and horrible experiences they were forced to endure. Caryl Phillips himself admitted that he could easily see a parallel between his status as a black man and the status of a Jewish person: both are possible victims of racial hatred.

Following the reflections in the essays, Phillips started to develop these same themes of hatred and racism in his novels.

Travis is the very first victim of racial hatred we can read about in the novels I have chosen to deal with. In *Crossing the River*, he makes his appearance in the final part of the novel – "Somewhere in England", in the years between June 1942 and May 1945 – where the reader learns that he is a black soldier of the army of the United Sates serving in England during the Second World War. One of the keys to understand this character could already be found in the description above: he is a black soldier among white people in a basically white society. There, he faces "xenophobic resentment",[10] also being the victim of his G.I. peers' hatred.

Only Joyce, the female protagonist of this section, feels "secure" and confident enough to get to know him, and even to fall in love with him. The woman is not racist at all, she is not afraid of the hatred surrounding him and she is the only one who treats him as a human being. Yet, she is aware of the suffering he has to endure. Even another

[10] F. Boutros. "Bidirectional Revision: The Connection between Past and Present in Caryl Phillip's *Crossing the River*" in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, p. 185.

US army officer tells her that many Black Americans, including Travis, "are not used to us [white people] treating them as equals".[11] His peers do not really care about him and they think this hatred is something ordinary. Not to mention the same racial hatred shared by the white English community: Len, Joyce's former husband, warns her "I hear there's talk about you and an American. […] I don't think you should have friends like that" (*CR*, 213). It seems that Len does not care about Joyce moving on with another man; the main problem is connected to the fact that she chose a coloured man to move on.

In *The Nature of Blood*, the issue of racial hatred stays connected to past events, ancient ones but also closer to our times. Starting from the last years of the Middle Ages[12] and finishing by exploring various years of the XX century, in this novel Caryl Phillips explores several episodes of racism. It could be said that this text gathers various stories in which the main theme is linked to the curse of the bloodline: the characters are cursed because of the tradition they were born in. Above all, in *The Nature of Blood*, Phillip's investigation deals with some Jewish characters who are cursed only because they are Jewish. They are all victims of hatred and they are cursed because of their Jewishness; yet, they do not have any guilt, apart from having been born Jews.

A young Jewish girl called Eva Stern living in Nazi Germany is the prototypical victim of racial hatred. There, she faces the humiliation and wickedness often endured by the Jews living in an Arian society.

> There was humiliation. There was the daily anxiety of being easy prey for groups of men who ran through 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 the waiting and the worrying. There was the knowledge that you might be pointed out by classmates or friends or colleagues. There was the constant bullying. […] There was blackmail. […] And everybody dreamt of escape to America. But in the meantime, there was humiliation.[13]

Jews were not safe where they lived. They were hated so much, that they could not live in those societies anymore. Yet, they could not run away. Eva experiences this very same lack of safety as she undergoes acts of free violence, likely perpetrated by

[11] C. Phillips. *Crossing the River* [1993]. London, Vintage, 2006, p. 145.
[12] Since the episode dedicated to the Jews of Portobuffole basically covers all the themes that are to be developed, a whole paragraph of this chapter will be devoted to its analysis.
[13] C. Phillips. *The Nature of Blood* [1997]. London, Vintage, 2008, pp. 85-86.

some other teenagers: “Yesterday they beat me. […] Three boys had pushed me and kicked me and called me names”. Not even a young girl is safe and the terrible truth is to be found in the words uttered (*NB*, 88-89) by her sister Margot: “You see, Eva, in spite of everything that we have lost, they still hate us, and they will always hate us” (*NB*, 88).

And now, imagine being woman, black and Jewish at the same time: this is the story of Malka, an Ethiopian Jewess moving to Israel to start a new life. Following the reasonings of Frantz Fanon,[14] being a Jew, Malka already occupies an inferior position; her curse is even worsened by the fact that her skin is black. Imagine now a woman like Malka in Israel in the 1980s, at a time when it has been existing for probably less than forty years. During those years, Israel was still a recently-created country, that needed to develop and become even more aware of the world and the people surrounding it. Even a country created for those who suffered could see the ghost of racism.

Malka is a stranger, she is aware of her possible alienation and she knows that she could be a victim of racial distrust; she can encounter people with prejudices and feelings of mistrust against her. “You can be honest with me. You do not want us here, do you?” (*NB*, 210): she asks this rhetorical question to Stephan Stern – Eva’s uncle living in Israel. After a night of passion spent together, he almost expresses the usual prejudices: “In the morning, she was gone. His first thought was to make sure that his wallet was still in his jacket pocket, but he resisted this ungenerous impulse” (*NB*, 211). This was another meeting between two people haunted by the ghost of racism.

Finally, in *A Distant Shore*, Gabriel/Solomon is the umpteenth racial victim. In a time of civil war in an unknown African country, his name was Gabriel and he decided to escape after the slaughter of his family by a group of soldiers; like many others before him, he decided that the only way to improve the quality of his life would be going away. After a long harsh journey to reach Europe and after a not-so-welcoming meeting with the British state – including an imprisonment with a charge of rape – Gabriel decides to change his name into Solomon Bartholomew to start a new life as a new-born man and finally find some peace.

[14] See chapter two, §3 “Black Skin, White Masks / Jewish Skin, White Masks”.

However, England is still haunted by that same monster called racism; both in Weston and in the previous town he inhabited in Scotland, Solomon is a stranger coming from an unknown African country and his life is characterized by "loneliness in a 'white' village and the increasingly explicit threat he receives".[15] Indeed, he has no friends and the only person determined to build a sort of relationship with him is the mentally-instable Dorothy Jones. Obviously, he is not allowed to integrate in the new society as soon finds himself victim of the hatred of the local skinheads: "I have noticed how they look upon my person, and I know that they have anger towards me. […] They follow me, and spit at my back, and they laugh. […] They do not know who I am".[16] These men do not what to know who Solomon is, they simply consider him an easy target for their violence.

After seven threatening letters and other deeds of disrespect and vandalism against his person and his property, unfortunately it does not take long to get to the point of no return.

> Paul [one of the skinheads] picked up a stone and smacked him on the head and he went down. Then they all started to brick him, but it didn't take long before he wasn't moving no more. […] So they decided to push him in to make it look like an accident. […] I thought of my friend lying face down in the water like a dead fish. (*DS*, 54, 59)

Through the words of Dorothy, we come to know that in the end, Solomon is killed in what seems like an execution. His murder made him another innocent victim of racism, anger and groundless hatred.

2. Losses

The spread of racial hatred – throughout Europe for the Jews and basically throughout the whole world for the blacks – triggered an enormous concatenation of consequences having terrible effects on these people. One of the main outcomes that this chapter is going to develop is connected to the concept of loss. In this case, there are two kinds of loss to be dealt with: a more "humanitarian" loss, namely something

[15] T. Bonnici. "Negotiating Inclusion in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*" in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, p. 290.
[16] C. Phillips. *A Distant Shore* [2003]. London, Vintage, 2004, p. 282.

linked to freedom, dignity and human rights; a more "identity-like" or "emotional" loss, this time connected to the loss of family and to the loss of the native language.

The poem written by Primo Levi – an epigraph to *If This is a Man* and here translated by Stuart Woolf – is a good example to introduce the various concepts of loss that will be developed throughout the remaining part of the chapter:

> You who live safe
> in your warm houses,
> you who find, on returning in the evening,
> hot food and friendly faces:
> consider if this is a man
> who works in the mud
> who does not know peace
> who fights for a scrap of bread
> who dies because of a yes or a no.
> Consider if this is a woman,
> without hair and without name
> with no more strength to remember,
> her eyes empty and her womb cold
> like a frog in winter.
> Meditate that this came about:
> I commend these words to you.
> Carve them in your hearts
> at home, in the street,
> going to bed, rising;
> repeat them to your children,
> or may your house fall apart,
> may illness impede you,
> may your children turn their faces from you.

These are people without any dignity left, without name and without security of any kind. Primo Levi warns the reader that unfortunately there were (or are?) people like the ones he describes; he exhorts to think and to question whether these people are still human beings or not.

2.1. Where is My Dignity? Where are My Rights?

We are familiar with images of African slaves employed in Mandingo fights to please their masters,[17] or with Jews in a street of Nazi Poland who, while waiting to cross the road, were ordered by some Nazi soldiers to dance with each other.[18]

As depicted in the previous scenes, one of the most immediate outcomes of racial hatred against someone is the loss of their dignity and their rights. During slavery and under the Nazi regime, indeed, Africans and Jews respectively were not only the victims of violence and insults; as a matter of fact, it was commonly thought that they had to be humiliated and deprived of anything that they could be robbed of. For example, even

[17] Scene taken from *Django Unchained*. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Main cast: Jamie Foxx, Christoph Waltz, Leonardo DiCaprio, Kerry Washington, Samuel L. Jackson. The Weinstein Company, Columbia Pictures, 2012.
[18] Scene taken from *The Pianist*. Directed by Roman Polanski. Main cast: Adrien Brody, Thomas Kretschmann, Emilia Fox. Canal+, Studio Babelsberg, 2002.

before becoming slaves, African people were commodified: they were considered mere objects waiting to be sold – they were even less than animals. As for the Jews, they were stripped of their houses, their money and all their properties and sent to live in the ghettos. Both were forced to leave their houses, thus becoming homeless; moreover, in the case of Jews, they were even deprived of their nationality, so that it was easier for the Nazis to imprison them in death camps. To sum up, they were all deprived of their rights and no one cared anymore about the generally-shared idea that "as men are all equally made in God's image, they have equal rights in any fundamental sense" (Johnson-*HJ*, 156).

What also characterized the Jewish suffering during Nazism was the fact that they were formally deprived of their citizenship. Humiliating them and forcing them into the ghettos was indeed not enough; Jews also had to be downgraded at the level of non-citizens. In order to clarify this event, it is useful to quote the concept of *homo sacer*, developed by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (born 1942). Before explaining what a *homo sacer* is, Agamben states that there are three kinds of life: *bios* – the political existence – thanks to which a man exists and has rights; *zoe* – the animal existence – meaning the simple fact of coming to life just like animals; finally, bare life – or naked existence – which is something outside the law and politics. This third kind of life also implies that the individual detaining it is a living dead, since they are located between life and death.

Somebody may really become a non-citizen; as a matter of fact, "citizenship was something of which one had to prove oneself worthy and which could therefore always be called into question".[19] The Nazi regime could indeed decide who was a citizen and who was not; Jews were alienated from the public and political life of the society they lived in. Thus, they had to give up what Agamben calls *bios*, because they were not considered worthy of being German – for example – anymore. At first, they lost all their rights, since they could not work, participate in the public life and live outside the ghetto; then, as a final humiliation, they even lost their nationality. This could be done because according to *La déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (*The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, 1789), you do not have rights

[19] G. Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* [*Homo Sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, 1995]. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 132.

simply because you are a human being; you have rights because you are a citizen, that is to say a human being belonging to a nation.

Consequently, the Jews all became *homini sacri*, sacred men. The adjective "sacred" has nothing to do with religion; coming from Latin, it means "separated" and in ancient Rome it identified someone put on trial because of a crime. This criminal – this *homo sacer* – having committed a deed against the law, was an outlaw and thus could be killed with impunity. Similarly, the Jews living under the Nazi regime were outside the law because they were deprived of their rights as citizens; and a man deprived of rights is not a man: he is bare life, a *homo sacer*. The status of a sacred man is even worse than that of an animal; indeed, being born as an animal, you simply ignore what *bios* and rights mean. On the contrary, if some individual lives a bare kind of life, the man knows what he has lost, because he was used to enjoy the life of rights. This was the case of Jews: they knew how their life was before losing everything.

> And one of the few rules to which the Nazis constantly adhered during the course of the "Final Solution" was that Jews could be sent to the extermination camps only after they had been fully denationalized (stripped even of the residual citizenship left to them after the Nuremberg laws).[20]

The Nuremberg Laws, introduced in 1935, also forbade mixed marriages and extramarital intercourse between Jews and non-Jews and declared that only those of German descent could be worthy citizens; the unworthy people – like the Jews – were declared enemies of the State. The final step was thus the deprivation of their citizenship and nationality. Only after this, Jews were ready to be sent to camps to die.

For Jews, life in Nazi camps probably meant the complete erasure of what remained of their dignity. Even though some tried to resist this process of de-humanization and to rebel, the purpose of these camps was indeed the complete annihilation of their humanity. As a matter of fact, "Jews were exterminated not in a mad and giant holocaust but exactly as Hitler had announced, 'as lice', which is to say, as bare life".[21] Thanks to the texts of Primo Levi, the readers can understand "the

[20] *Ibidem*.
[21] *Ivi*, p. 114.

unreasoning and irrational nature of the death camps".[22] The question of human dignity is a central theme both in *If This is a Man* and *The Drowned and the Saved*.

> It is not possible to sink lower than this; no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so. Nothing belongs to us any more; they have taken our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen, they will not understand. They will even take away our name: and if we want to keep it, we will have to find ourselves the strength to do so, to manage somehow so that behind the name something of us, of us as we are, still remains. (*If*, 28-29)

This is a gradual process into degradation, starting from the very moment in which the Jews arrived in the camps. Levi explains how Jews were stripped of everything and how they were immediately shown as inferior beings. In the Nazi point of view, of course, all these processes had a reason. Their pride had to be taken away and even their humanity. Slowly, they were turned into animals. They were animals in the way they were obliged to "eat": "this way on eating on our feet, furiously, burning out mouths and throats, without time to breathe, really is '*fressen*', the way of eating of animals, and certainly not '*essen*', the human way of eating, seated in front of a table" (*If*, 84-85), "[we ate] without a spoon, the daily soup could not be consumed in any other way than by lapping it up as dogs do" (*D&S*, 126). They were animals everyday:

> We had lived for months and years at an animal level: our days were encumbered from dawn to nightfall by hunger, fatigue, cold, fear, and a space for reflection, reasoning, experiencing emotions was wiped out. We endured filth, promiscuity, and destitution, suffering much less than we would have suffered from such things in normal life, because our moral yardstick was changed. (*D&S*, 78)

This process of animalization was probably the last step separating them from death. At that point, they were reduced to an empty shell, a ghost of what they were before all that suffering, as they had been stripped of every single thing that defined them as human beings. Probably, the purpose of degrading them so much was because their murderers could feel less guilty. There is quite a difference, indeed, between killing an equal human being and slaughtering an almost living dead.

These same issues developed by Giorgio Agamben and reported by Primo Levi could also be found in some literary work, also dealing with black experiences of slavery and of new slaveries as well.

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[22] R. Eaglestone. "You would not add to my suffering if you knew what I have seen: Holocaust Testimony and Contemporary African Trauma Literature" in *Studies in the Novel*, Volume 40, Numbers 1 & 2, Spring and Summer 2008. Denton, University of North Texas Press, 2008, p. 82.

For instance, in *Becoming Abigail* (2006) by Chris Abani, a young Nigerian girl called Abigail is taken to London by her relative Peter under false promises; there, she is essentially forced into an experience of (new) slavery. Abigail is forced to be a prostitute and, as a punishment for her supposedly bad behaviour, Peter treats her like a prisoner in his home. Thus, the girl lives in a dreadful state of degradation, undergoing a process of animalization:

> And this is how she was made. Filth. Hunger. And drinking from the plate of rancid water. Bent forward like a dog. Arms behind her back. Kneeling. Into the mud. And the food. Tossed out leftovers. And the cold. And the numbing of limbs that was an even deeper cold. […] Without hands, she bit at the itches from blood vessels dying in the cold. From the intimacy of dirt. Bending. Rooting. Biting. Her shame was complete.[23]

This description is not completely different from the words employed by Primo Levi to deal with the Jewish degradation in Nazi camps, when they were forced to live and act like animals.

Furthermore, in *The Lamplighter* (2008), the author Jackie Kay shares with the reader various experiences of African slavery in the sugar plantations, by relating the stories of apparently five different women. When they had to be sold at the auctions, these women and other slaves were referred to as animals, as "good breeding stock"[24]; once they became slaves, they had "no rights, no rights of man, no rights of woman, not even the right to life" (*Ll*, 63). Even in this case, we can see that the terminology is interchangeable between the two groups.

Caryl Phillips has chosen to deal with these themes in his novels, in particular in *Higher Ground*, *The Nature of Blood* and *A Distant Shore*.

Firstly, the leading character of the second section of *Higher Ground* – "The Cargo Rap" – is a good spokesperson to deal with the questions of slavery, dignity and human rights. Rudi Williams is indeed a young Black American who is – the time of the story covers a time lapse set between January 1967 and August 1968 – in prison after a robbery. We know that he has been in prison for some years and there are more ahead; he is a victim of loneliness and isolation and his only way to get in touch with the outside is by writing letters, mainly to his family and his lawyers. As in captivity he cannot express himself, it is in these several letters that he is able to write whatever

[23] C. Abani. *Becoming Abigail. A Novella*. New York, Akashic Books, 2006, p. 93.
[24] J. Kay. *The Lamplighter*. Highgreen (Tarset-Northumberland, UK), Bloodaxe Books, 2008, p. 32.

comes to his mind; sometimes, it is very impressive to read such deep thoughts in the words of a young boy.

In his writings, Rudi deals with the situation of black people in the United States in the 1960s; by doing that, he is basically trying to instil some awareness in the minds of the members of his family. Above all, in the letters to his sister Laverne, he tells her the stories of black men and women who tried to do something to build a future of rights for their fellows and to resist white oppression; all of that is made to convince his sister of the fact that every single Black American could do something to make their living conditions better. For example, he reports the story of Harriet Tubman (1822-1913), who is recalled as a sort of Moses, "leading her people north to the promised land. […] Nineteen times she made her pilgrimage down south in the years before the so-called emancipation, and in all in she brought back over three hundred brother and sisters to New York, Philly or Boston".[25]

At some point, after so many years of captivity, his condition becomes unbearable to him, since his stay in the maximum-security row continually gets prolonged because of his behaviour; he is suffering so much that he even uses Holocaust terminology to describe his own status of victim in prison. Therefore, he frequently calls the prison "Belsen" (*HG*, 69, 84, 145); he wonders if also in Nazi Germany they used to torture their prisoners by suddenly turning the lights on (*HG*, 72); finally, he compares the prison guards to the Gestapo police (*HG*, 127). Furthermore, Rudi makes another pregnant parallel, as he makes a comparison between his contemporary society and the slave plantations; indeed, "he regards the US as a 'plantation society' in which emancipation has yet to happen".[26] These parallels are extremely harsh; probably, through Rudi's words, Caryl Phillips is also expressing some social condemnation, both about the conditions of prisoners and the status of Black Americans in the 1960s.

However, at the end of the day, he wants to resist and endure; in the eyes of the authority keeping him there, he thinks he is perceived as "a symbol of something they must destroy" (*HG*, 146). Rudi does not want to become a ghost, he does not want to become bare life; he had been the umpteenth victim of an injustice but he still has

[25] C. Phillips. *Higher Ground: A Novel in Three Parts*. New York, Vintage, 1989, pp. 121-122.
[26] S. Craps. "Jewish/Postcolonial Diasporas in the Work of Caryl Phillips" in *Metaphor and Diaspora in Contemporary Writing*. Edited by Jonathan P.A. Sell. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 194.

dignity and rights and, with a final hope, he closes his last letter: "I will return to you a whole, honorable, and clean man" (*HG*, 172).

In *The Nature of Blood*, we see another kind of imprisonment and another example of bare life: Eva Stern in a concentration camp. She is a Holocaust survivor, but what she had endured in the camp would leave a permanent mark on her and would be a constant and menacing ghost to her future.

> Hungry. Angry. Pathetic people clinging meekly to the remnants of their lives and wondering if, through hard work, they might earn the right to live. […] My hair is removed by a woman who wields large blunt scissors. The woman seems to relish the thought of inflicting pain. […] We all look the same. Grotesque figures, naked and without hair. (*NB*, 163, 165)

Eva's words convey a sense of degradation; we see men and women who are nothing but ghosts of their previous selves, who have nothing left to fight for. This decay is not only a mental and moral one, it is not only to be linked to the loss of their rights; it is also to be seen from the outside. Indeed, once they arrived in the camps, their clothes were taken away and their hair cut. All of them had to look the same: an infinite series of grotesque figures without even their dignity left. Their degradation was then complete.

Caryl Phillips also gives the reader a contemporary vision of these issues in *A Distant Shore*, thanks to the character of Gabriel. After leaving his native country, he reaches England, where – among the many acquaintances he makes – he meets the 15-year-old Denise. Because of a "misunderstanding" he is imprisoned, since her father denounced him of his daughter's rape.

While in prison and while speaking with his lawyer Katherine, the reader also witnesses Gabriel's meeting with the law and the British state. Gabriel is basically an example of bare life; when he left his country to reach England, he gave up his rights, partly because he arrived in England as an illegal migrant. It is Katherine who tells him: "remember, you have no rights in this country and they can just throw you out" (*DS*, 116); the only way for him to be recognized as a human being is to become an asylum seeker. This is what his lawyer advises him to do; thanks to her, he also decides to go north and to change his name into Solomon – an interesting choice, if we think that this

name is linked to the Hebrew word *shalom* meaning "peace". We know that he did not find any peace in his new life.

2.2. Identity and Traumas

Apart from the tremendous loss of dignity and human rights, there are other kinds of loss that are enough to provoke a trauma in a person: the loss of personal identity, mainly connected to the loss of a name, the loss of family and children and the loss of a mother tongue.

Africans and Jews sadly shared another experience of trauma. When the former became slaves in America and when the latter were interned in Nazi camps, they became objects and in order to formally indicate their "passage of property", they were forced to undergo another process of annihilation and degradation: the change of name. *What's in a name?* Each name – either an old one or a new one – recounts a different story. First and foremost, a name defines people, as it is the first sign that represents them to other people; a name can also be related to the family history, thus having a deep meaning. Therefore, depriving someone of their name is an act towards the annihilation and destruction of their identity and personality.

Indeed, when slaves became the property of their new masters, they had to change their names. Nevertheless, unlike Gabriel – in *A Distant Shore*, who voluntarily changed his name –, these people were forced to do that and had no possibility of agency. Once again, Jackie Kay and her *The Lamplighter* are useful to understand this kind of humiliation:

> Constance: […] I was given a new name.
> Mary: Mary MacDonald
> Constance: Constance
> Black Harriot: Black Harriot
> […]
> Constance: I was named Constance. / Constance so that I would behave myself / so that I would be a virtue / […] I would forever be constant.
> […]
> Black Harriot: I had a few names before this one. (*Ll*, 33-34)

Changing a name is like trying to kill the old self of a person. It could also mark the end of their previous life as free human beings and, at the same time, the beginning of a new life as objects.

Jews experienced something similar in concentration camps. When they arrived there, they were stripped of their names when they were tattooed on their forearms; unlike the slaves, they were not given a new name but an identification number. The shame and humiliation were even twice as much, as for many Orthodox Jews – strictly following the Mosaic laws and the *Leviticus* – it is forbidden to mark their skin with tattoos.

> *Häftling* [(prisoner)]: I have learnt that I am Häftling. My number is 174517; we have been baptized, we will carry the tattoo on our left arm until we die.
> […] We are the slaves of the slaves, whom all give orders to, and our name is the number which we carry tattooed on our arm and sewn on our jacket. (*If,* 29, 81)

Primo Levi thus confirms for Jews the same destiny undergone by the slaves in Americas; indeed, the number on a Jew's forearm was the symbol of the new condition as a slave.

The identity of a man or a woman is also shaped by the people who are around them. Apart from one's friends or love interests, it is mainly the family that defines who a person is. Consequently, imagine the weight of the trauma that losing a family could mean. In his novels, Caryl Phillips skilfully poses this question as well and its answer may be found in all the books taken into consideration in this dissertation.

In the third section of *Higher Ground* – "Higher Ground" – the reader learns that Irina lost her family, after she was encouraged by her same family to escape from Poland to reach England with a children's transport. In the first place, she had to escape because they were a Jewish family during the Nazi regime. Back in her home country, she left her parents and her sister Rachel; Irina's "life ended" (*HG,* 207), because she had an extremely close bond with her family.

Once in England, she changed her name into Irene to start a new life, maybe away from her old Polish self. At first, in England, she had a husband called Reg and she also lost the child they were expecting. After leaving her husband, she moved to London, where she met Louis, a man from the Caribbean. Irene thought she would find

happiness again with this man but her hope did not last long; eventually, Louis told her that he would go back to his home country.

All these events and losses have contributed to make Irina/Irene a shattered woman. She lost her family, her child, her husband, a possible new love and probably even her youth. Her desperation could be perceived in the aura of loneliness around her and also in her suicidal instincts. After a first attempt to commit suicide by throwing herself under a train, she commits this last desperate act after Louis left.

> She could see the snow falling against the black sky and she cried out, fearful of the long night ahead, more fearful of the morning, for ever lost without the sustaining love. […] Irene wrapped herself in the curtain and waited patiently for either the new day or the woman visitor, whichever one arrived first. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one". (*HG*, 218)

The ending is open, as we do not know if her attempt of suicide will eventually prove "successful". However, she truly had the intention to give up her life because of the very last words she utters at the end of her section; they belong to the *Shema Yisrael*, a prayer pronounced by Jews before death or as death approaches.

Crossing the River might as well be defined as the story of lost children. The novel itself opens in a very peculiar way, as its prologue reports the lament of a father who sold his three children after the crops failed. He needed the money to live on and the only way he thought to do that was indeed selling his kids. "My Nash. My Martha. My Travis. […] Children, I am your father. I love you. but understand. […] A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children" (*CR*, 1-2). In his words, we can hear the desperation of having committed such an extreme act and from these very words we can already foresee that the novel would be about lost families.

In the second section, "West", Martha Randolph is another woman who lost everything. She was a slave who, during that period, got separated from her husband Lucas and her daughter Eliza Mae. "She no longer possessed either a husband or a daughter, but her memory of their loss was clear" (*CR*, 78); the memory of the family she lost has haunted her for many years, even after her deliverance, when she tried to build a new life with a man called Chester. However, after his death, the memory of her daughter and the trauma are still persistent and Martha decides to travel West, towards California, hoping to find her long-lost Eliza Mae. Unfortunately, the woman perishes during the journey; the ghost of trauma is persistent even at the moment of Martha's

death, as "in the last vision before she dies, she does meet her daughter, but she is shocked by how she has developed and by the attitude that she has adopted to secure her integration in the US society".[27] She dies a lonely and miserable death because, even though she sees her daughter, she sees a changed Eliza Mae; in her dream, her daughter calls herself Cleo and this change could be interpreted as a path that her daughter chose to follow in order to break the bond with her past of slavery.

The fourth section of the novel, "Somewhere in England", deals with the story of another lost child: Greer. However, Greer was not really lost; he was given up by his mother Joyce. After her first disastrous marriage, young Joyce hopes to find love again in Travis, the American black soldier serving in England. Despite the racism against him, Joyce finds a little happiness and soon gets pregnant. But this love is not bound to last long, as Travis dies shortly after the wedding. Joyce is alone once again and she realises that her son – who "[is] like coffee" (*CR*, 228) – will be another innocent victim of that racist world. Despite Joyce's love, the best solution for Greer is thus to live away from her.

Greer is only one among the many colour-mixed children – the "half-caste babies"[28] as Andrea Levy calls them in her novel *Small Island* – conceived during the Second World War. His story also echoes that of Michael, in *Small Island*, also given up by his white mother Queenie Bligh. Just like Joyce, she thought it was best for him to grow up with coloured parents, as a way to keep her son safe from the brutality of a racist society: "had he really no idea why we, two white people, could not bring up a coloured child?".[29] Without any doubt, this was a question posed by many women.

The Nature of Blood displays the profound trauma endured by Eva during and following her experience in a Nazi camp. Before being imprisoned in the camp, she was weakened by several acts of racism against her and also by the separation from her sister Margot.

When she reached the camp, she got immediately separated from her father and mother. There, she is all alone, living a degrading bare life and being forced to burn the

[27] F. Boutros. "Bidirectional Revision: The Connection between Past and Present in Caryl Phillip's *Crossing the River*" in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, p. 181.
[28] A. Levy. *Small Island*. London, Headline Review, 2004, p. 522.
[29] *Ivi*, p. 520.

bodies of dead Jews. This experience is extremely traumatic for her and the transformation into a ghost-like figure is not far. Even when she is delivered from the camp and taken to a displaced persons camp, she is a ghost unable to live outside her own-built mental prison; while Eva's name means "life", she appears deprived of the life itself, as "her present is suffocated by the traumas of the past".[30]

Her mother was such a constant presence in her older life, and her trauma is so dreadful, that Eva cannot go on without being haunted by her ghost. All by herself in the new camp, Eva starts to see her mother; she talks to her and even plans to run away with her. Unfortunately, the illusion does not last long and Eva soon realizes: "it is simply another day. Why sit here any longer? There is no Mama. There was never a Mama, neither in this camp nor in the last. […] No. Mama is gone from me and I am alone" (*NB*, 46).

Eva has completely broken whatsoever remaining contact she might still have with the real world. We can see that in the "relationship" she thinks she has with Gerry, an English soldier who shown mercy, kindness and a little affection to her. As a matter of fact, her desire of not being alone in the world pushed her to forge a letter of the soldier in which he invited her to join him in England to get married. Eva eventually reaches London but the truth is soon revealed; what the future has for her is only a terrible mental breakdown and a probable suicide. Thus, Eva lives "concealed and confined […] in [a] space that became not only [her] prison but [also her] tomb".[31] After surviving the Holocaust, she remained confined into her own personal psychological prison; however, combined with the unbearable trauma of loss, it was so oppressive that it ended up killing her.

Finally, it is also worth dealing with the African trauma of Gabriel in *A Distant Shore*.

> Gabriel watches from the cupboard and tries not to breathe. First they will shoot Gabriel's ageing father. […] The boys are playing with his father, and then "Smokin' Joe" puts his gun to the back of Gabriel's father's head. While the others continue to laugh and taunt his father, "Smokin' Joe" casually pulls the trigger and the skull explodes. Small pieces of brain fly in all directions, and Gabriel's mother and two sisters begin to scream. […] "Brutus" unclips his pistol and pumps a

[30] H. Thomas. *Caryl Phillips*. Horndon (Tavistock, Devon, UK), Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2006, p. 62.
[31] Slightly modified quote, taken from H. Thomas. *Caryl Phillips*, p. 66.

> single bullet into the back of both sisters. […] "Jacko" is the last to mount the younger sister. […] "O.J." shoots Gabriel's mother in the chest. (*DS*, 83-85)

Gabriel used to be a soldier in this unnamed civil war and his nickname back then was "Hawk". He knew what violence was but imagine being a witness to your family's slaughter. He was hidden, but he saw everything, including abominable acts of rape. Because of the violence of the soldiers, Gabriel lost his entire family. His only chance for the future will be to find another country to live in, but the ghost of his family will probably accompany him forever.

To conclude this part, it is also worth spending a few words to explain the issue of the loss of the mother tongue. Indeed, it is also the native language that contributes to make up a person's identity. When someone leaves the mother country and they are forced to live in a society that often does not reflect the native one, these people may gradually lose what united them with their previous home. If you do not practise it, the native language may be part of this lost heritage. Forced to live outside his native Nigeria, Chris Abani perfectly knows the importance of this issue: "but you are losing language, your language, and faster the longer you don't use it".[32]

Caryl Phillips's rewriting of the story of Othello in *The Nature of Blood* offers an interesting point of view on this question; this character is a stranger in Venice, a place in which no one can speak his native African language. Othello is thus completely alone: "there is nobody with whom I might share memories of a common past, and nobody with whom I might converse in the language that sits most easily on my tongue" (*NB*, 160). If you cannot share your native language with the others, you do not use it and the only possible ending to this story is the loss of what unites you to the mother country. However, it seems that Othello does not really express the fear of losing his mother tongue. The man is indeed desperate to integrate in the Venetian society; having accepted that he will always be different because of his skin, he is maybe prone to forget his language, as a way to feel more welcomed in that white world.

The novelist also deals with this kind of loss in *A Distant Shore*, by showing his reflection in the words of Solomon:

[32] C. Abani "Coming to America – A Remix" in *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*. Edited by Annalisa Oboe and Shaul Bassi. London and New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 120.

> My only real regret was the lack of anybody from my own country with whom I might talk. My language was drying up in my mouth, and sometimes, when nobody was around, I would place my language on my tongue and speak some words so that I could be sure that I was still in possession of it. (*DS*, 284-285)

Almost the same reflection developed by Othello – more or less five centuries earlier than Solomon – is here even more intensified and inflamed. While Othello was only aware of the fact that he could not share it with anyone, Solomon declares that he is frightened that he might lose his native language, if he could not share it; he is aware of this possibility and he is afraid of it, since probably he is not ready yet to close his past with the mother country.

As a way to conclude this third chapter, a separate part must be dedicated to a special episode of *The Nature of Blood*: the story of the Jews of Portobuffole. Based on real events, this section of the novel well gathers many of the themes developed in this third chapter.

The episode, set in a Venetian small town called Portobuffole in 1480, perfectly displays a case of blood libel against the Jewish people. Together with the other accusation of poisoning the wells, the Jews were even accused of kidnapping and murdering Christian children in order to use their blood for their Passover rituals – or *Pesach*, to commemorate the delivery of Jews from Egypt. In this novel, the readers are witnesses to the injustices endured by three Jews – Servadio, Moses and Giacobbe – accused of having murdered a blond beggar child called Sebastian New. After this event, "a moment of racial and religious hysteria erupts".[33] These Jews are immediately held responsible for the murder and they are arrested, together with other people apparently involved in the horrible fact. To the reader, it may appear clear that the trial against them will be a complete farce.

As in many other towns, in Portobuffole the Jews were the object of racial hatred and hostility; however, formally, the Jewish community was granted some "rights", including the right to exercise usury, to refuse to lend money and to live the way they liked; they also had duties, mainly connected to their profession of moneylending.

[33] S. Clingman. "Forms of History and Identity in *The Nature of Blood*" in *Salmagundi Journal*, Number 143, Summer 2004. La Vergne (Tennessee), Ingram Periodicals Inc. for Skidmore College (Saratoga Springs, NY), 2004, pp. 153.

Nevertheless, there was a heavy anti-Semitic sentiment on the part of the population and on the part of the Christian church. After the fact of Sebastian New, the gentile community had a lot of suspicions against the Jews and the doge's representative Andrea Dolfin had little choice but to order their arrests. Supposedly, the Jews were guaranteed rights during their trial as no one could be arrested without evidence and no one could be sentenced to death without a proof or confession of their guilt. In this case, Servadio, Moses and Giacobbe "were obliged to take an oath that they would freely volunteer the truth" (*NB*, 97). They were supposed to tell the truth no matter what, even despite the several tortures perpetrated against them.

During the development of the trials, the only proof incriminating the Jews – apart from some hateful Christian witnesses – was that the young beggar boy was seen entering the house of Servadio, but no one saw him leaving it. The defendant lawyers from Padua at least tried to defend the Jews:

> They quoted all of the passages from the scripture which affirmed that, for the Jews, nothing is more impure than blood. […] How could they possibly have been able to feed themselves on blood? [The defendants] reminded those present that Jews followed the Ten Commandments, which declared that it was forbidden to kill, and the prophet Moses also specifically forbade the Jews to eat blood. (*NB*, 149-150)

However, the judge and the other lawyers chose not to listen to these statements; instead, they only paid attention to the confessions they got following the tortures – but because of this, almost certainly not reliable. Despite the efforts of the scholars from Padua, Servadio, Moses and Giacobbe were considered guilty and condemned to die on the burning scaffold in St. Mark's Square.

They were not respected even in the day of their death, as "before arriving in the square, the condemned had been exorcised in order that they might be ready to receive the Holy Rite of Baptism. However, the three Jews rejected this last-minute offer of conversion, preferring to die as sinners" (*NB*, 154). They were to be exorcised as if they were some evil creatures and not human beings; nevertheless, the three men decided not to undergo this final humiliation. Finally, they met their death:

> [Servadio] lifted his eyes and began to pray aloud. […] As they approached the wooden scaffolding, Servadio's fellow Jews could not continue walking, and two soldiers were forced to take the Jew cowards under their arms and drag them forwards. […] Servadio continued to pray. "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one*". […] The loud crackling of flames began to obscure the voice of Servadio. […] And then the flames enveloped everything, and one could see only fire. As the blaze consumed flesh and blood, the spectators, on both land and water, were deeply moved by the power of the Christian faith and its official Venetian guardians. Later, when

> the flames had abated, an executioner approached with a long-handled shovel. He put it between the smocking coals and when he pulled it out it was full of white ash. He threw the ash into the air and it dispersed immediately. (*NB*, 154-156)

As in a sordid public execution, the Christians are there to witness the infidels' death and to see Hellfire rightfully punishing their sins. Mainly Servadio managed to stay true to the spirit of the Jewish religion until the very end, by pronouncing the *Shema* prayer, also as a way to offer comfort to Moses and Giacobbe, who were too traumatized to do that. The final image is extremely powerful: the grey ashes of the Jews are thrown and dispersed into the air, a sad echo to what will happen to the fellow innocent Jews during the Holocaust.

In the end, the readers are not given the chance to know what really happened. We do not know if they did kill Sebastian to use his blood – which is quite improbable – or whether, for instance, the beggar boy simply entered the house of Servadio to get some money. We are not allowed to know the truth, because the historical reports are not clear on the issue; the only thing that matters is that, probably, once again some Jews were held responsible for something they did not do.

Nevertheless, at the end of the day, it is crystal-clear that these Jews were the victims of racial hatred; furthermore, they were taken away from their families and their houses, they could not completely defend themselves while in trial, their voices were not listened to, they were tortured and murdered without mercy. "Just" another deprivation of human rights, another crime against humanity.

Coming back to the questions posed by Primo Levi in his poem – consider if this is a man, consider if this is a woman – the only possible answer is yes: we can consider these people human beings. It is undeniable that blacks and Jews endured extreme experiences of suffering. In those moments, even in their worst conditions of degradation, some of them tried to keep their humanity until the last glint of it was extinguished. Of course, among them, there are the drowned and the saved, there are those who fought and those who gave up the fight and lost without even trying. All the racism they had to endure and all the dignity they were deprived of have contributed to make blacks and Jews who they are today: people aware of what they lost and regained

through suffering and fights. After all, they – more or less – got equal human rights and the state of Israel.

As they remembered those events, also the other human beings should keep those sufferings in mind. We should remember that some human beings made their fellow human beings suffer; as Paul Gilroy said, we have to remember to become more aware and inclined to believe that the redemption of mankind is something essential for the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

Black – Grey – White: ambivalence, mimicry and in-betweenness

A very thin border separates what is right from what is wrong, good from evil, life from death and real from fake. All things considered, what is a man willing to do in order to be accepted and to survive? How far would he go to save himself? Is he ready to cross the threshold that separates the subalterns from the hegemonic and powerful ones? Is he disposed to forget about his previous self and his older mentality to follow or mimic a new one?

These questions do not have a regular and immediate answer; however, we have life experiences that enable us to understand the conditions and the reasons that might lead a person to act and to behave in a certain way. Therefore, the themes of ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry connected to human behaviour deserve a special focus in this work.

What is important to remember while dealing with human beings, one of the main features that characterizes them as fully and truly living creatures, is the fact that we are all multifaceted. Human beings are indeed never fixed: they are made of light and shadows, of positive sides and negative ones, they can be righteous but also make mistakes. As a consequence, the nature and the peculiarities of a certain environment or of a special situation require people to adapt and, maybe, even act in a way that nobody would have ever thought about.

A man or a woman could be ordered to forget about their own equals, perhaps even to betray them, as a way to please someone else – the powerful ones. In this case, these “changing” people mainly belong to the subaltern side; they may agree or not, but they have to do whatever they are asked by those people who have a hold on them.

Sometimes, they could even end up enjoying their new role, as it somehow represents a tiny change from their usual condition as inferior people.

Furthermore, there could also be situations in which the purpose is to be accepted by the others and to feel integrated in their own environment; therefore, coming from a different world, a man or a woman may choose to forget about their past, their original habits belonging to their older lives, and try instead to emulate the culture, the behaviour and the mentality expected in a different society.

As far as blacks and Jews are concerned, obviously they are human beings like anybody else in the world. Yet, it is indisputable that they have a very complicated history and they lived through several life-changing situations; mainly in the past, we know that they suffered and that they lost something important for them. Because of this, they have often been identified as victims of violence and hatred. However, each story normally has two points of view; as a matter of fact, also black and Jewish experiences may be analysed applying a second lens, which is useful to shed some light on frequently hidden events concerning the protagonists of those histories.

As a consequence, it is also fundamental to show the other side of the coin and to understand how they behaved in some situations and how they acted towards their fellows, mainly during slavery or when they were in ghettos and camps. Sometimes, they were required to do something following an order; thus, it is also important to realize what they did in order to survive the evil surrounding them. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that "the position of victims is revealed as unstable and shifting".[1]

Indeed, despite the irrefutable nature of the experiences of sufferings they had to go through, it is almost impossible to regard all the people involved as innocent victims. There were those who were given a special power and authority over the others and eventually took pleasure in what they did; there were those who decided to leave their previous world behind to become part of another one: these are people who are normally seen as inferior and do whatever they can – even by acting in a negative and often immoral way – to change their status.

[1] M. Rothberg. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, p. 163.

In order to broaden the number of themes to be covered in this dissertation and explore other parts of the parallels existing between blacks and Jews, in this chapter, their usual vision as innocent victims of history and as martyrs will be partially abandoned. Indeed, this fourth section will be focused on a slightly "negative" side of their stories.

Of course, the purpose of this chapter is not to show them as evil human beings and to forget about the obvious sufferings they had to endure. We do not want to judge them; as this dissertation deals with some aspects of the histories of blacks and Jews, it is essential to consider as many sides as possible, be they positive or "negative". Therefore, the real purpose of this chapter is to show and analyse some ambivalent behaviours – shown in their times of pain – mostly taken from the novels of Caryl Phillips. The first part of the chapter will be devoted to the concept of ambivalence, mainly linking it to what Primo Levi called "The Grey Zone"; instead, the second and final section of this chapter will deal with literary examples of ambivalence and mimicry.

1. Grey Zones and In-Between People

Before shifting our attention to concrete examples of ambivalence and in-betweenness, it is fundamental to understand what "ambivalence", "hybridity" and "mimicry" mean – three correlated terms used to deal with the relationships between colonizer and colonized, but that are also useful in critical theory to understand some behaviours of black and Jewish people.

First of all, the term ambivalence denotes a "continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite";[2] therefore, the ambivalent subject shows contradictory and inconsistent feelings towards something or someone. In the context of colonialism, the colonizers – the hegemonic part – wanted to make the colonized subjects closer but, at the same time, they wanted to keep them distant. The ambivalence was thus in the fact that the colonizers wanted to make the subaltern

[2] B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p. 10.

people similar to them; however, simultaneously, they wanted to mark the differences existing between them.

As a consequence of this ambivalent feeling, there is "mimicry". Indeed, as far as they were concerned, the colonized subjects did their best to try to reproduce the behaviours, the habits and the values of the colonizers. Nevertheless, "the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer".[3] As a matter of fact, in British colonial times, for example, there were people who were Indian in their blood and in the colour of their skin; yet, at the same time, those Indians were basically English in moral values, behaviours and preferences.

No matter how hard they tried to mimic and copy the colonizers, there was always a degree of difference that could not be cancelled; as a consequence, these colonized subjects were hybridized people. Because of their attempts to mimic the others, these "hybrids" lost their original identity and found themselves stuck in an in-between position or in an ambivalent space, which made them lose their starting traits. As a matter of fact, they were in a sort of limbo, since they were not part of the group who chose not to mimic other people and they could not belong to the hegemonic group either, because their differences were always present and persistent.

Referring to the acts of mimicry mainly performed in the colonized countries, the philosopher Homi Bhabha said, "almost the same, but not quite"[4]; this sentence well encompasses the three keywords described above. There is a subject who lives under the life conditions set out by a hegemonic part; as a consequence, the subaltern tries to mimic the manners of the other. In this process, the subaltern gives the previous self up in order to achieve the traits of the hegemonic people; however, at the end of the day, the difference between the two is always there and the one who tried to mimic is forced to stay in a perennial in-between position. Those subjects were almost the same, but they always missed something that distanced them from their goal.

These same concepts and ideas are also useful to describe and analyse the circumstances of all the people belonging to the so-called "Grey Zone", an important

[3] *Ivi*, p. 125.
[4] H. K. Bhabha. "Of Mimicry and Man" in *The Location of Culture*. London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 86.

concept developed by Primo Levi in *If This is a Man* and, above all, in *The Drowned and the Saved*.

Having been imprisoned in Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration/extermination camp, Primo Levi shares a direct experience of the horrors of the lagers, by also offering a description of the range of prisoners he encountered.

> The Jewish Prominents form a sad and notable human phenomenon. In them converge present, past and atavistic sufferings, and the tradition of hostility towards the stranger makes of them monsters of asociality and insensitivity. They are the typical product of the structure of the German Lager: if one offers a position of privilege to a few individuals in a state of slavery, exacting in exchange the betrayal of a natural solidarity with their comrades, there will certainly be someone who will accept. He will be withdrawn from the common law and become untouchable; the more power that he is given, the more he will be consequently hateful and hated. (*If*, 101-102)

These men and women, the Prominents, were clearly in an in-between position. Primo Levi explains that in the majority of cases, these privileged ones were non-Jews; however, when they were needed, even Jewish prisoners could be "useful". On the one hand, they still belonged to the subaltern class of the Jewish victims; nevertheless, on the other hand, they were chosen by the Nazis and given some power, which was supposed to be used against their comrades. Furthermore, these people were also extremely dangerous, as:

> When he is given the command of a group of unfortunates, with the right of life or death over them, he will be cruel and tyrannical, because he will understand that if he is not sufficiently so, someone else, judged more suitable, will take over his post. Moreover, his capacity for hatred, unfulfilled in the direction of the oppressors, will double back, beyond all reason, on the oppressed. (*If*, 102)

These Prominents were cruel against their fellows because they were ordered to act in a certain way. At first, they were frightened because, if they refused to follow the rules of the Nazis, they would pay the mistakes they made with their lives; still, in the long term, some even ended up enjoying their new roles and poured all their frustrations – and maybe their sense of guilt – on the other prisoners, also by using violence.

Nevertheless, this issue is much more complex. In *If This is a Man*, the author gives us a little reference to this category of people; yet, it is mostly in *The Drowned and the Saved* that he really deals with the phenomenon, also by giving it a proper name: the Grey Zone.

"The network of human relationships inside the Lagers was not simple: it could not be reduced to the two blocks of victims and persecutors" (*D&S*, 32-33); indeed, sometimes, they tended to confuse and overlap: if the victims represent the white zone and the persecutors belong to the black one, there is a group of people – to be identified with the subaltern part of the victims and prisoners – that gives life to this grey group or Grey Zone. Indeed, it is among the prisoners that a further distinction shall be made: the simple ordinary prisoners and the privileged ones.

The job of these privileged prisoners mainly consisted in collaborating with the Nazis in power. Of course, they were not kindly asked to collaborate; although in a position of privilege, they remained prisoners nonetheless, thus they were obliged to do that. Nevertheless, after having forgotten the initial trauma deriving from "betraying" their fellows, these people whether pushed by "terror, ideological seduction, servile imitation of the victor, myopic desire for any power whatsoever, […] cowardice, [or] finally lucid calculation" (*D&S*, 40) began to act as collaborators.

First of all, it is important to keep in mind that there are various kinds of Grey Zone; also, according to its type, the degrees of privilege and power – and consequently, of guilt – could vary. The lowest level of the Grey Zone was indeed occupied by those who worked as sweepers, washers, night-watchmen, checkers of lice and scabies, messengers, interpreters, lower assistants and so on; all things considered, despite their few privileges, Levi said that "they were poor devils" (*D&S*, 41) nonetheless. The worst ones, as they were more powerful and eventually more ruthless, were the chiefs – also called *Kapos*. Mainly, they were chiefs of the labour squads, barrack chiefs or clerks; furthermore, they were heinous people since "they were free to commit the worst atrocities on their subjects as punishment for any transgression, or even without any motive whatsoever" (*D&S*, 43-44).

Potentially, anyone could become part of the Grey Zone. At first, Jewish prisoners were not even recruited as *Kapos* – supposedly, they were not even considered worth of that "privileged position"; indeed, at first, it was much more common to see a Polish woman like Zofia "Sophie" Zawistowski[5] holding the position of privileged clerk of a Nazi officer, or having a gipsy or a common criminal working as barrack chief. It was

[5] A political prisoner of a lager portrayed by Meryl Streep in *Sophie's Choice*. Directed by Alan J. Pakula. Main cast: Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline, Peter MacNicol. ITC Entertainment, 1982.

only when the number of interned Jews reached extremely high levels that they were selected too to become *Kapos* or to work in the lowest levels of the Grey Zone.

In addition, Primo Levi deals with another disturbing example of members of the Grey Zone: the *Sonderkommandos*. "Whoever belonged to this group was privileged only to the extent that […] he had enough to eat for a few months, certainly not because he could be envied. [… They were] the group of prisoners who were entrusted with the running of the crematoria" (*D&S*, 48). Most likely, they had the most dreadful, inhuman and savage tasks: they had to keep the order among the new arrivals destined to die immediately in the gas chambers; furthermore, once the victims were dead, the *Sonderkommandos* had to extract their bodies from the chambers, take the gold teeth from their mouths and cut their hair, select their clothes and footwear to make a better use of them; when this "raid" was over, their task consisted in taking the corpses to the crematoria and, finally, in eliminating the only things that remained of those people – the ashes. These prisoners "were deprived of even the solace of innocence" (*D&S*, 52): they were reduced to mere vultures, whose task was to take care of the other prisoners' death.

There was no easy way out to escape the cruel and degrading faith of becoming *Sonderkommandos*. With the arrival of the prisoners' convoys, the SS carefully chose who would become a "grey person"; also, they did not hesitate to murder those people who refused to fulfil these duties. Apart of a possible desire to survive, those who accepted to perform the task must have thought, "If I did not do it, someone else worse than I would" (*D&S*, 70). Their ambivalence is not to be identified in the fact that they were cruel towards their comrades or that they punished them – they did not have this privilege. Instead, their new status as grey human beings was achieved as they were forced to act as perpetrators of violence, just like the SS. One way or another, they were obliged to mimic their own oppressors, dirtying their hands with the blood of their own fellow inmates. Moreover, the SS wanted to humiliate, degrade and, possibly, pass their own sense of guilt onto them: "it must be the Jews who put the Jews into the ovens, it must be shown that the Jews, the sub-race, the sub-men, bow to any and all humiliation, even to destroying themselves" (*D&S*, 50).

Therefore, to sum up, this description provided by Primo Levi well conforms the definitions of the three key words: ambivalence, mimicry and hybridity. As a matter of

fact, the members of the Grey Zone were victims of ambivalence because they were granted more power, but they were still prisoners. Furthermore, they were ambivalent people themselves: on the one hand, they somehow learnt to accept their position of privilege hoping to survive and get better conditions of life; on the other hand, although some of these grey men enjoyed their roles – exercising their violent power over the others – some continued to feel guilty because of the violent acts they were forced to perpetrate against their own comrades. Also, they were obliged to mimic their own oppressor, by being violent towards the other and being in a superior position, willingly or unwillingly.

Finally, they were hybrids. Because of the ambivalence and the mimicry they had to live with, these men were grey people forced in a status of in-betweenness; as a matter of fact, they were not "white" anymore as normal victims/prisoners and they could not be worthy enough to be "black" like their oppressors.

Clearly, Primo Levi discussed the Grey Zone exclusively referring to his experience in the concentration/extermination camp. Nevertheless, the Grey Zone could also be identified while dealing with the ghettos or even in the plantations or mansions where black slaves worked. Concerning the black and the Jewish collective consciousnesses, some ambivalent and well-known figures may immediately come to our mind; two renown movies are in this case enough to prove the point: *Django Unchained*[6] and *Schindler's List*.[7]

Firstly, in *Django Unchained* the best representative of the Grey Zone for black people is to be identified in Stephen (Samuel L. Jackson). Already in his first appearance in the movie, we can see his ambivalent behaviour, in his conversation with his master Calvin Candie (Leonardo Di Caprio):

> Stephen: Calvin, just who the hell is this nigger you feels the need to entertain?
> Calvin: Django and his friend […] are customers. And they are our guests, Stephen. And you, you old decrepit bastard, ought to show them hospitality. You understand that?
> S: Yes, sir. Him I understand. But I don't know why I have to take lip off this nigger.
> C: You don't have to know why. Do you understand?
> S: Yes, sir. I understand.
> C: Well, good. They're spending the night. Go up in the guest bedrooms and get two ready.

[6] Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Main cast: Jamie Foxx, Christoph Waltz, Leonardo DiCaprio, Kerry Washington, Samuel L. Jackson. The Weinstein Company, Columbia Pictures, 2012.
[7] Directed by Steven Spielberg. Main cast: Liam Neeson, Ralph Fiennes, Ben Kingsley, Caroline Goodall. Amblin Entertainment, 1993.

> S: He gonna stay in the Big House?
> C: Stephen, he's a slaver. It's different. […] You got a problem with that?
> S: No, I ain't got no problem with it, if you ain't got no problem burning the bed, the sheets, the pillowcases and everything else when this black-ass motherfucker's gone. […] Can't believe you brought a nigger to stay in the Big House.[8]

Throughout the movie, we learn that he is an old house slave, who has probably spent his whole life working for the same family in the same mansion. Stephen is also the chief of the other house slaves, thus he has quite a lot of power over them; as a consequence, also pushed by the strange emotional relationship he has with his master, he feels entitled to be cruel and ruthless towards the other slaves.

In the conversation reported above, it is evident that Stephen shows deep respect towards mister Candie; also, he is so devoted to his master that he quietly receives all the insults that Candie addresses to him. On the other hand, we could also perceive the hatred he feels towards Django (Jamie Foxx) – as well as towards the other black slaves – as he cannot understand why a black man is almost treated and accepted in Candie's mansion like a white man. Stephen despises Django, also by being racist against him and calling him "nigger" – the typical white insult against black people.

Secondly, also in *Schindler's List*, we can see multiple examples of characters belonging to the Grey Zones. Already in the scenes set in the ghetto of Krakow, we can see some grey men. For instance, a Jewish man called Marcel Goldberg (Mark Ivanir) is recruited to work as a collaborator – working as a sort of ghetto policeman – whose duty consisted in checking the documents of the Jews living in the ghetto. While explaining his new privileged status to his Jewish friend Poldek Pfefferberg (Jonathan Sagall), Goldberg says that his superiors – the Nazis – "are not as bad as everyone says. Well, they're worse than everyone says, but it's a lot of money".[9] Goldberg acknowledges his new privileges and he is pleased with his new status; as the movie goes on, it seems that he ends up enjoying it and he even makes fun of his unluckier fellow Jews – "Poldek! Enjoying the weather Poldek?"[10] – and laughs at them, who are in line in winter waiting in order to receive the permissions to work. Nevertheless, although in a slightly more privileged position, they remained slaves to the Nazis.

[8] Quote from *Django Unchained*.
[9] Quote from *Schindler's List*.
[10] *Ivi*.

Nothing more: their privilege was just temporary, as they ended up dying in camps just like the other Jews.

Finally, the movie provides us with another example of Grey Zone; however, here, we see a grey woman that clearly does not enjoy her relatively facilitated life. Helen Hirsch (Embeth Davidtz) is indeed personally chosen by Amon Göth (Ralph Fiennes) – the commandant of the concentration camp – to work as his house maid. As Primo Levi had explained, she clearly belongs to the lowest level of the Grey Zone because she is just a servant. Of course, she was saved by the hardest work of the Jews in the camp, sometimes she got extra food and she had a nearly comfortable bed to sleep in; however, she has to endure the insane passion that Göth feels towards her, which he manifests by beating her.

2. Caryl Phillips's Grey-Ambivalent Characters

Caryl Phillips offers the readers a complete perspective on his characters; therefore, he is not afraid of showing also their – more or less – negative sides. It is mainly in three of his novels – *Higher Ground*, *Crossing the River* and T*he Nature of Blood* – that we can detect some references to the concepts of ambivalence and Grey Zone.

The first section of *Higher Ground*, called "Heartland", is a "story about someone who collaborated".[11] As a matter of fact, the narrator/protagonist is an unnamed African man,[12] who has had an active role in the Atlantic slave trade; the main part of this story is set in a slave fort, where the Narrator works as a guard to the fort, as an intermediary between the slaves-to-be and the British slave traders and as a translator. Therefore, he is one of the many African men that collaborated with the British to turn his fellow countrymen into slaves.

[11] R. Bell. "Worlds Within: An Interview with Caryl Phillips" in *Callaloo*, Volume 14, Number 3, Summer 1991. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, p. 594.
[12] From now on, he will be simply called the Narrator.

However, the Narrator points out that, "within the confines of the Fort my position is secure, if low and often unbearable. I now find it difficult to conceive of a life either before or after this place. I need to feel safe" (*HG,* 19). He thinks he is safe as long as he stays in the slave fort, also thanks to his closeness to the white governors in charge of it; indeed, it often happened that the responsible of the fort asked the Narrator to tell something about himself and his village, almost considering him as a person he can talk with. Yet, he is still a black man and he will never be like the white British. In addition, the latter only "tolerate his presence as long as his human claims are silent";[13] the British stand such a close black presence providing that he remains docile, not interfering in questions – such as the trades of his fellow Africans – that do not concern him at all.

Furthermore, the Narrator is completely on his own. Because of his relative closeness with the slave traders, he is despised by his fellows, who see him as a traitor. "They blame me because I am easily identifiable as one who dwells with the enemy" (*HG*, 24). They hate him and, consequently, the Narrator almost lives in a total state of isolation, also because he is frightened that the others might hurt him: "I have cut myself off from these villagers to such an extent that I have actually become their enemy; perhaps my life is in danger?" (*HG*, 27).

Definitely, he is a hybrid man: of course, he is not accepted by the white men as part of their group and, even more, he is rejected and detested by the other black men since they only see him as a turncoat who helps the enemy to send them to die across the Black Atlantic. His punishments for this in-between position are loneliness and isolation.

Also in *Crossing the River* we can see an example of ambivalence. Nash Williams is the central and moral focus of the first part of the novel – "The Pagan Coast"; he is a former slave who moved to Liberia to work as a missionary. The readers learn a lot about him and his ideas thanks to the letters he used to send to his ex-master Edward.

[13] I. Najar. "Caryl Phillip's 'Heartland' and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness: Revisiting Fear – An Intertextual Approach" in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, p. 140.

Indeed, it is in this correspondence that we see "the disappointment of Nash, […] upon his arrival in Liberia, which he believed to be the one true home for his race".[14]

We cannot really say that Nash is a member of the so-called Grey Zone; however, he perfectly fits the main definition of ambivalence: the continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. As a matter of fact, probably when he was still in America, Nash began to develop a lot of hopes and positive feelings about Liberia, which will be reflected in the very first letters he sends to mister Edward: "Liberia is a fine place to live in. […] A colored person can enjoy his liberty in this place, for there exists no prejudice of color and every man is free and equal. […] Liberia, the beautiful land of my forefathers…" (*CR*, 18).

However, in Liberia there are a sense of displacement – he developed a completely different idea about it – and ambivalent feelings in Nash's person, as he soon realizes that the reality is much more different: "I am striving to do all the good I can amongst these natives. […] To this end I am even speaking a little of their crude dialect" (*CR*, 23). He immediately distances himself from the native population and he believes their language is primitive and savage. Nash's judgements on them become harsher day by day, since he almost seems disappointed from what surrounds him:

> In conversing with the natives, I often ask them how it us they cannot read and write like the white man […], and I generally receive reply that their gods hade asked them to choose between the land and their livestock, or books, and they had chosen the former. […] The native is generally resigned to finally admitting that this white man does talk true, for I think they have become much fond of me. (*CR*, 32)

More or less, he views them as savage people. It is in his words that we can perceive a little racism and sense of superiority towards the natives; he sees them as inferior and, at the same time, he appreciates the fact that they consider him superior – almost the same as a white man. Therefore, despite the clear distance he has found between himself and them, he is attracted by the Natives nonetheless. Indeed, in his last two letters to mister Edward, we learn that Nash is slowly recovering some trust in Liberia and its native population. He married a native woman and had a son with her; with this last letter, it is clear that he has slowly begun to appreciate the country, its people and its traditions.

[14] C. Phillips. J. Sharpe. "Of This Time, of That Place. A Conversation with Caryl Phillips" in *Transition*, Number 68, 1995. Bloomington, Indiana University Press (and W.E.B. Du Bois Institute), 1995, p. 158.

Finally, in *The Nature of Blood*, we have two examples of ambivalence. First of all, a few lines should once again be devoted to the very first connotation of ambivalence: wanting something and contemporarily wanting its opposite. This emotional push is mainly to be identified in Stephan Stern and in his meeting with Malka, the black Jewess. The man is certainly attracted by her – since they spend a night together – but, at the same time, there is also a sense of intra-Jewish racism in his thoughts. Indeed, he almost admits that he does not want black people in Israel: "dragging these people from their primitive world into this one, and in such a fashion, was not a policy with which he had agreed. They belonged to another place" (*NB*, 212). Also, after the night together, he is afraid that she might have stolen his wallet.

Nevertheless, undoubtedly, the character of Eva Stern is the most important example of ambivalence in the novel, because she well represents the original Grey Zone, which Primo Levi linked to the concentration camps. On Caryl Phillips's part, there is a "refusal to portray Eva as a saintly innocent":[15]

> Today, they continue to burn bodies. (I burn bodies.) Burning bodies. First, she lights the fire. […] Clothed bodies burn slowly. Decayed bodies burn slowly. In her mind she cries, fresh and naked, please. […] Do not look at those who watch. (I always know where the nearest guards are. I always know what they are doing. I never volunteer for anything.) […] Death has swept another soul from off her feet. […] Death is so happy, os fleet-footed, so free. A tempting invitation. […] (Please do not let me discover anybody that I know.) (*NB*, 171-172)

Thanks to Primo Levi's thorough descriptions, we can state that Eva was part of the *Sonderkommandos*: she was in charge of burning the bodies of the fellow Jewish prisoners, thus she was a close eye-witness to these horrors. Yet, reading her words, it is clear that she is ashamed of this privilege because she feels she has an enormous guilt towards the others.

Unfortunately for her, she played an important role in the process of mass murder of the Jews; moreover, she succeeded in escaping the camp – alive of course – and this contributed to destroy her own mind.[16] She is a "saved" because she is still alive and she can also tell her story; however, together with the trauma of loss, she cannot stand the fact that she survived, while others – that she contributed to kill – did not. And the sense of guilt for what she had done will accompany her throughout her – brief – life. "In the

[15] S. Craps. "Linking Legacies of Loss: Traumatic Histories and Cross-Cultural Empathy in Caryl Phillips's Higher Ground and The Nature of Blood" in *Studies in the Novel*, Volume 40, Numbers 1 & 2, Spring and Summer 2008. Denton, University of North Texas Press, 2008, p. 200.
[16] See chapter three, §2.2 "Identity and Traumas".

same ways that Eva ashamedly associates her own survival with the death of others, the chronic anxiety, insomnia and shame of the survivors are carried forward. […] She exists in a suspended state" (Thomas-*CP*, 69). Caryl Phillips did not want to portray a completely innocent victim of the Holocaust; these ghosts haunting her are her own punishment.

3. Caryl Phillips's Othello: A Case of Mimicry

The re-writing of the history of the Shakespearean Othello by Caryl Phillips provides the reader with an interesting point of view on the question of mimicry. As a matter of fact, in *The Nature of Blood*, the readers are the eye-witnesses of Othello's multiple attempts to conform to the white society of Venice.

Othello is an African general who was asked by the Doge to lead the Venetian armies in Cyprus. During his stay in Venice, he is a black stranger, but he does not want to be perceived as an alien; therefore, Othello immediately tries to conform and integrate in the white society as much as possible. Back in Africa, he left his wife, his child and also his native language; in Venice, it seems that he wants to forget them because they will prevent him from completely being part of that society. As a consequence, he almost never mentions his previous family and Othello is only interested in trying to make a good impression on his new fellow citizens. Therefore, he slowly "becomes an 'ex-coloured man' as he tries to 'forget his blackness'" (Thomas-*CP*, 56).

His mimicry process develops step by step. First of all, he begins by adopting Venetian clothes: "I wondered if my new costume might convince some among these Venetians to look upon me with a kinder eye. It was this desire to be accepted that was knotting my stomach and depriving me of sleep" (*NB*, 122). Then, he falls in love with Desdemona, a Venetian woman he ends up marrying.

The desire for integration becomes a constant in his life and he gets more and more isolated. He does not seek contacts with his family back in Africa, nor does he look for the company of other coloured men – supposing that there were some in Venice

at that time. Phillips also explains it in *The European Tribe*, "there is no evidence of Othello having any black friends, eating any African foods, speaking any language other than theirs. […] It is clear that he denied, or at least did not cultivate his past".[17]

This will/hope for integration and acceptance has made him blind to the world surrounding him, as it seems he has forgotten that he is actually different and that he could be seen with concerns because of his black skin. This blindness can be found in his meeting with the Jewish ghetto of Venice, where he went to get help to answer a letter from his beloved.

> And what a strange place was this walled ghetto. […] I continued to wander, but the further I entered the ghetto, the filthier the alleyways became, and the more oppressive these tall hovels appeared. […] I had entered this underworld. My exploration had unnerved me somewhat, for it was well known that these Jews were fortunate in their wealth. 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? (*NB,* 129, 131)

In the ghetto, Othello discovers the "secret Venice" or the "underworld", as he calls it. Definitely, he is curious as he walks in its streets, because he has never seen anything like this ghetto. Othello is not able to understand the reason why such rich people like the Jews chose to live in such an oppressive and soiled place; the worst and saddest point of his reasonings is that he cannot realize that these people have never chosen to live like that – they were forcedly sent there. Therefore, the man does not comprehend – or does not want to – that "the Ghetto is the proof that Venetians hide those Others who are too different. […] However, Othello does not make a connection between himself and those Others".[18]

To him, the Venetian society is almost perfect and, in his mind, it is absolutely impossible that the population condemned the Jews to live in a separated part of the city. Obviously, Othello does not understand that they had been separated because they were different and because they refused to conform. He cannot "perceive the precariousness of his own position"[19] and he thinks he is free from the ghosts of racism and hatred – even though, at one point, he may have felt some racist feeling on the part of his servant Iago. Othello is "safe", as he did anything in his power to conform; yet,

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[17] C. Phillips. *The European Tribe*, p. 51.

[18] E. Sicher, L. Weinhouse. *Under Postcolonial Eyes: Figuring the "Jew" in Contemporary British Writing*, p. 134.

[19] B. Ledent. "A Fictional and Cultural Labyrinth: Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*" in *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, Volume 32, Number 1, January 2001. Calgary (Alberta, Canada), University of Calgary Press, 2001, p. 188.

he does not realize that it was only this exhausting and annihilating process of mimicry that "saved" him from being distanced from the white heart of society. However, at the end of the day, is it really integration if you have to destroy your true self? When you are wearing a mask, you are a mere lie; yet, for how long are you willing to wear it?

Referring to the members of the Grey Zone, Primo Levi said: "I believe that no one is authorized to judge them, not those who lived through the experience of the Lager and even less those who did not live through it" (*D&S*, 59). As well as the description of the Grey Zone, this judgement perfectly fits the situations of ambivalence involving the black people and the Jews outside the lagers.

We are not entitled to understand why Stephen the butler was so mean and ruthless towards his black fellows, why Othello chose to leave his African family behind and live like a white man of Venice; we are not able to get the reason why some Jewish Kapos were cruel towards their comrades and why some Jews were chosen among the others to receive more or less privileges. Also, we do not have the right skills or experiences to judge why Eva Stern did not prefer death to her task of burning bodies. We do not know the circumstances that led them to act in a certain way – we will never know them. Therefore, once again, we should pay attention to Primo Levi and keep his words in mind: "each individual is so complex an object that there is no point in trying to foresee his behaviour, all the more so in extreme situations. […] Therefore, I ask that […] a judgement of them be suspended" (*D&S*, 61).

CHAPTER FIVE

There and back again: towards life and death, towards home and hope

To be rooted is perhaps
the most important
and least recognized
need of the human soul.

(Simone Weil)

This dissertation opened with an analysis of the issue of diaspora(s), studying its definitions and its development in time; then, the analysis has continued with a special focus on two of the most important dispersions of our history: the Jewish Diaspora and the African Diaspora. Therefore, as a way to close the circle begun with the first chapter, the conclusion is going to deal with the theme of the journey and some of the connotations that it could imply.

A man or a woman can make a journey to discover their long-lost origins and trace their roots, they travel to find a new home or to go back to where they feel they have always belonged. Moreover, they may also be taken away from their homes and forced to go somewhere else, dramatically changing their lives and habits. However, if we go deep into the meaning of the word "journey" and if we look at it metaphorically, we shall make one further distinction: one can travel towards life and one can travel towards death. While a person may leave a place to start a new life somewhere else, dying can be seen as the very last journey to be made by a person. Sometimes, life-destinations or death-destinations may end up overlapping; as a matter of fact, a travel starting as the pursuit of happiness and life could result in sadness, loneliness and death.

Once again, blacks and Jews have something in common: various experiences of journeys with multiple meanings. This final chapter is going to explore this issue in two separate parts, proceeding chronologically. Indeed, the first section is going to be

devoted to examples of journeys of black people, starting from their ship voyages to reach the American plantations. The second part is going to deal with a number of Jewish journeys; in this case, the starting point is represented by the train travels leading them to concentration/extermination camps.

However, before dedicating to the travel experiences of black and Jewish people, it is also worth talking about the journeys made by Caryl Phillips himself. Being black, of Caribbean descent, with a part of Jewish blood and being also a British citizen, it is difficult "for him to define himself in terms of a particular place. […] Travel is therefore a significant part of his life and the physical journey becomes a physic movement to confront his own confusions".[1] Because of this, Caryl Phillips's travels are an appropriate opening to this last chapter.

First of all, in *The European Tribe* he recounts his own one-year Grand Tour across several European countries. Starting from Casablanca, visiting continental Europe, then the islands, Norway and finishing in Russia, Caryl Phillips also travelled across cultures, races and different identities. In all the countries and cities he visited, the author had the chance to reflect on the question of racism and on the presence of black people in a typically white soil.

"Nothing could escape my gaze" (*ET*, 24): the author carefully looked at who and what was around him. Everywhere he went, he encountered poverty, clear social discrepancies, ethnic mixture, several skin colours and languages, immigrants living in suburbs – sort of contemporary ghettos – and still traces of racial hostility, in spite of all the terrible events that took place in Europe not so long before. Of course, anything that he saw provided him with a reasoning on the condition of black people in Europe, realizing that "blacks who live in the midst of a White society feel 'like a transplanted tree that failed to take root in foreign soil'. There is a sense of social and cultural alienation".[2]

[1] J. Miller Powell. "Hybrid Inventiveness: Caryl Phillips's Black Atlantic Subjectivity – *The European Tribe* and *The Atlantic Sound* in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, p. 103.
[2] L. Lindsey. "*The European Tribe* by Caryl Phillips" in *Journal of Black Studies*, Volume 20, Number 1, September 1989. New York, Sage Publications Inc., 1989, p. 113.

Caryl Phillips confirms that the European attempt for integration is miserably failing; therefore, his Grand Tour has resulted more in "a mirrored reflection of [Europe's] 'dark', hidden past rather than a sycophantic glorification of its 'cultured' achievements" (Thomas-*CP*, 37). Of course, he is aware of the cultural importance of Europe and he is still emotionally connected to the Continent; however, he cannot remain silent and indifferent to the fact that hostility against those who are perceived as different is still a pregnant problem in Europe.

The Atlantic Sound, instead, reports a completely different journey. Indeed, it is his "personal quest to three of the most important 'gateways' or cities of the triangular Slave Trade – Liverpool, Accra in Ghana and Charleston – as he repeats the 'rite of passage' he made as a child on his journey from the Caribbean to Britain during the 1950s" (Thomas-*CP*, 71). Moreover, the prologue is dedicated to the first part of his tour, across the Caribbean and the Atlantic – before reaching England; finally, in the epilogue, Caryl Phillips recounts the last stop of his travel: the Negev desert in Israel.

Liverpool is the first crucial stop of his journey. In the XVIII century, it was one of the most important European cities involved in the slave trade. To the author, even when he was a child, Liverpool appeared as a dangerous city; at the moment of his stay there, Phillips saw it as a city in a deep state of decline, "where the past casts a 'deep shadow'" (Thomas-*CP*, 72) and where the people are cynical and depressed. To his eyes, it almost seems that the city has gone on with its life having forgotten the tragedy of slavery.

During his flight to Ghana and during his stay there, he had the chance to reflect on the concept of home and belonging. As a matter of fact, Africa is the ancestral homeland for many black men; instead, Caryl Phillips thought:

> *The* question. […] A coded question. Are you one of us? Are you one of ours? Where are you from? Where are you really from? And now, here on a plane flying to Africa, the same clumsy question. Does he mean, who am I? Does he mean, do I belong? Why does this man not understand the complexity of his question? […] "So, my friend, you are going home to Africa. To Ghana." I say nothing. *No, I am not going home*.[3]

Where is home for a black man, born in the Caribbean but living in England, who has never lived in Africa? Home is indeed a very complex issue; he wrote, "I wish my

[3] Caryl Phillips. *The Atlantic Sound* [2000]. London, Vintage, 2001, p. 98.

ashes to be scattered at the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at a point equidistant between Britain, Africa and North America, [a place] I have come to refer to as my Atlantic home".[4] Ghana has been a great source of reflections both on his origins and on the past history of the country. There, he visited Elmina, a slave fort where people were kept before being sent to Americas; the fort is also considered a memorial site for those who died in the slave trade – the African Holocaust. In the end, Philips states that he does not consider Africa his home, but he will always feel strongly bound to its population. Then, Charleston in South Carolina is another city involved in the slave trade, since it was the most important port between Philadelphia and the Caribbean and it "welcomed" over 30 percent of the slaves arriving from Africa. Here, through to the figure of judge Julius Waties Waring,[5] the author reflects on the issues of dignity and equality.

One final mention on the last part of Caryl Phillips's voyage should undoubtedly be made. In Dimona – a small town in the Negev desert – he encountered a community of African Americans who "believe themselves to be descendants of the Hebrews dispersed throughout the world, and have thus undertaken an exodus to their 'true homeland'".[6] Their movement to Israel – as a sort of second Exodus, starting from America and Africa – may represent their own freedom from the darkest period of all: slavery. These voluntary exiles think they are the chosen ones, but Phillips appeared more concerned on their stateless status. At the end of the day, it is better to truly belong to a nation than to pursue an ideal that seems a little anachronistic – an ideal that separates you from the society and that will always make you be perceived as an alien.

1. Black Journeys

Generally speaking, when one thinks about the journeys of black people, the first image that comes to mind is connected to ships. Of course, the crossing was a journey towards death, for multiple reasons.

[4] C. Phillips. Phillips, Caryl. "Conclusion: The 'High Anxiety' of Belonging" in *A New World Order: Selected Essays*. London, Secker & Warburg, 2001, p. 304.
[5] Julius Waties Waring (1880-1968). He was a US federal judge who played a fundamental role in the first battles of the American Civil Rights Movement.
[6] M. L. López Ropero. "Travel Writing and Postcoloniality: Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*" in *Atlantis*, Volume 25, Number 1, June 2003. Alicante (Spain), AEDEAN: Asociación Española de estudios anglo-americanos, 2003, p. 59.

First of all, those African people going to the Americas would reach their new "homes" as living human beings – at least theoretically. Actually, they were destined to become slaves, that is to say people without any control on their lives and their dignity; therefore, they would live in America as objects or as almost dead people. Secondly, there is a fundamental reason why the Ocean connected to the slave trade is also called the Black Atlantic. As already explained,[7] thousands of people were already intended to die during the long and devastating ship journey. As a matter of fact, these people were kept in the dark, in chains, with little food to eat; they could not wash themselves properly and they were forced to live in inhuman hygienic conditions. In the end, many of them died either because of the unhealthy environment around them or because they decided to commit suicide, as a way to escape what the future would set aside for them.

In some contemporary literary works, with regards to the many deaths occurred during the journey, it is interesting to read some parts dedicated to the crossing, mainly written following the points of view of the white crew. They often give us a completely different perspective on the trade; indeed, the members of the crew do not see these people as human beings, but as objects that have to reach a specific destination. These pages provide the readers with an inhuman and brutal gaze on this terrible traffic of children, men and women.

For instance, the third section of *Crossing the River* is the journal of voyage of a ship called *Duke of York*, written by Captain James Hamilton. Actually, in this ship's log there are few references to the slaves; indeed, the majority of entries are dedicated to the weather, to the stops of the crossing and to other aspects of the journey. As far as black people are concerned, Captain Hamilton only refers to them when he writes how many slaves were on board and how many slaves they had to bury. In this case, we notice that he does not see them as people but only as numbers: "this day buried 2 fine men slaves, Nos 27 and 43" (*CR*, 116) and "before midnight buried 3 more women slaves (Nos 71, 104, 109). Know not what they died of, for they have not been properly alive since they first came on board" (*CR*, 124).

[7] See also chapter one, §3 "The African Diaspora".

In *The Lamplighter* by Jackie Kay, the readers can find a similar ship's log; indeed, in the several parts called "Shipping News", there are many pieces of information concerning the crossing and the many deaths accompanying it.

> Macbean: The *Annapolis* reached London – less than a third of the slaves survived. […] Wednesday 29 May – Buryed a Boy slave, No 86 of a flux. […] Thursday, 13 June 1709 / Buryed a woman slave, no 47.
> […]
> Black Harriot: Into the howling, moaning Atlantic. Into the open-grave-green sea. Into the choppy waters, another body. […] Into the turbulent waters, another body yet. (*Ll*, 12)

As an echo to the journal of voyage to be found in Crossing the River, also in this text the slaves are referred to as nothing more than simple numbers. It is well known that many people died during the crossing; on board, the crew could not allow to transport several rotten corpses to America – and give them a proper land burial place there. As a consequence, the dead bodies were simply thrown into the Atlantic Ocean; however, the departed remained a constant presence on board with "the smell of the dead carried across the water to the Port" (*Ll*, 45).

In the end, a man or a woman leaving Africa could not foresee their destiny on board. They had two choices: they could reach the plantations more or less alive and accept their future of slavery; or, since the very beginning, they could resign themselves to the idea that they would meet death already during the journey. In any case, it was a journey towards death.

In Caryl Phillips's novels, many black characters have undertaken the experience of a journey and each of them has its own meaning.

After their experiences away from home, many people decided to go back to the land where they truly felt they belonged: Africa. There was not a proper and fixed time to return there. As a matter of fact, they began to go back to the lands of their forefathers when slavery came to an end; besides, the "luckiest" ones among them could move to Africa – or wherever they wanted – rightly after they were freed by their masters; then, in the XX century, there were also several black people who chose to "go back" following years of oppression and deprivations of dignity and human rights.

Exactly like Nettie Harris,[8] who moved to Africa to work as a missionary, hoping to forget the oppression she endured in her youth.

A similar path is taken by Nash Williams in *Crossing the River*. After being made a free man by his American master Edward Williams, Nash chooses to return to Africa – "a continent belonging to the native African, and to nobody else" (*CR*, 8) – and work as a missionary in the country that best represented the freedom that many former slaves were looking for: Liberia. Like many others before and after him, Nash returns to Africa following a policy developed by the American Colonization Society in order "to repatriate former slaves on the west coast of Africa. […] Africa would be civilized by the return of her descendants, who were now blessed with rational Christian minds" (*CR*, 8-9). Therefore, having received a Christian education, Nash probably feels honoured to be sent to Liberia and become a missionary. He has developed a lot of expectations on this dream country:

> [Liberia] is the home for our race, and a country in which industry and perseverance are required to make a man happy and wealthy. Its laws are founded upon justice and equality, and here we may sit under the palm tree and enjoy the same privileges as our white brethren in America. Liberia is the star in the East for the free colored man. It is truly our only home. (*CR*, 18)

Liberia was considered a Promised Land by the several Africans displaced; consequently, Nash is extremely happy to undertake this journey towards his original homeland. Certainly, the descriptions that he had in mind did not really correspond with the reality; however, having put his missionary intents aside, he is able to build a new family and a new life there.

At the end of the day, Nash's journey is double, being both away from home and towards it. As a matter of fact, probably his parents, or grandparents, were forced to leave Africa – their mother country – as part of the slave trade; therefore, it is possible that Nash was born in America. When he is encouraged to move to Liberia, he leaves his former home – sadly connected to a history of slavery and violence – to go to a land that he has never seen; nevertheless, returning to the land of his forefathers was his only chance to get freedom and equality. No matter how it turned out, Nash's journey is certainly towards a new life.

[8] Character of the novel *The Color Purple* (written by Alice Walker in 1982), portrayed by Akosua Busia in *The Color Purple*. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Main cast: Whoopi Goldberg, Danny Glover, Oprah Winfrey. Amblin Entertainment, 1985.

In "West" – the second section of *Crossing the River* – there is a journey that started like a movement towards life. Indeed, after the death of her partner Chester, former slave Martha Randolph decides to look for her long-lost daughter Eliza Mae. They got separated many years before, when they were bought by different masters; therefore, at this point, feeling that she is alone in the world, Martha decides to go westwards, where she hopes she might find her Eliza Mae.

Nevertheless, this journey to find her daughter is the natural sequel of another one that started long before, when she arrived in America: "through some atavistic mist, Martha peered back east, beyond Kansas, back beyond her motherhood, her teen years, her arrival in Virginia, to a smooth white beach where a trembling girl waited with two boys and a man. Standing off, a ship" (*CR*, 73). Years later, Martha is already an old woman and her forces are abandoning her. Yet, she does not give her hopes up, since she feels "that she, too, must become a part of the colored exodus that was heading west. […] Eliza Mae was once again back in her mind. […] Perhaps her girl-child had pioneered west?" (*CR*, 87-88).

She is not alone in her crossing of these many American countries, as she travels with a big group of black people that decided to go west on wagons, hoping to find a new job. Martha cooks for the other people and help in the routine chores; however, the journey is long and tiring and, combined to her work, she soon becomes exhausted and unable to go on.

> I was with exhaustion, but I still managed to keep my misery to myself. Until yesterday. When it became clear that I was unable to prepare any more meals. […] I occasionally begged a ride on a wagon while all other walked. But then, this final humiliation. […] This frustrated man sat before me with a stern face and shared with me his water ration. […] Six weeks ago, I was one of them. But times have changed. […] They took upon themselves this old, colored woman and chose not to put her down like a useless load. Until now. (*CR*, 91-92)

The other pioneers are forced to leave her behind to go on with the journey. Finally, Martha accepts her fate and the fact that she will never see Eliza Mae again. A journey that started with a will to find a missing piece of her heart and soul ended up for Martha as a meeting with a lonely miserable death.

Finally, in *A Distant Shore*, we move towards a typical contemporary situation: the journey of a refugee hoping to find a new home. Gabriel decides to leave his native country in Africa for two reasons: there is a brutal civil war going on there and his

entire family was slaughtered by the soldiers. He is completely alone there and he decides to reach the distant shores of Europe to start a new life, hopefully away from violence and loneliness. Therefore, "he decides to join the mass of refugees who leave their lives and homes behind, looking for a safer place and a new name in an allegedly better world – Europe".[9] His – not so legal – journey towards Europe is going to be long and difficult. The first means of transport he uses is a truck:

> Gabriel is the last man to climb in, and no sooner has he found a small space in which to lie than he feels the oppressive weight of a heavy tarpaulin being tossed over him and tightly secured to the sides of the truck. […] This first part of their journey is not going to be pleasant. He can feel the dampness of other men's perspiring bodies, and it is not possible to distinguish whose arm or leg is pressed up against him. […] Gabriel knows that if he is going to live again then he will have to learn to banish all thoughts of his past existence. […] Life is taking him beyond this nightmare and to a new place and a new beginning. (*DS*, 94)

There are a lot of poor devils like him – also referred to as "the cargo" (*DS*, 97) – hoping to start a new life away from a place that does not allow them to live properly and peacefully; just like them, Gabriel is full of hopes and all he wants is leaving his past behind. The following parts of the journey are completed on board of a very crowded plane – where "the refugees are crammed into […] like slaves on a slave ship"[10] – on buses and on boats; finally, the last long-awaited step to reach England should be represented by a train. Yet, the migrants were not supposed to travel in the train but on the top of it; at the moment when he should jump on it, Gabriel refuses to commit the act. After this, his only chance to reach the English shores are, once again, the boats; indeed, other illegal migrants tell him that boats are mostly unprotected and nobody would notice them.

Eventually, Gabriel reaches England but we all know that his life in this new country has not met his expectations. Indeed, he is convicted and imprisoned for some time and, after his deliverance, he soon falls victim of isolation and racial hatred. His journey towards hope and a new life is, in the end, revealed to be a journey towards

[9] A. Di Maio. "A New World Tribe in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*" in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, p. 260.
[10] P. Tournay-Theodotou. "Strange Encounters: Nationhood and the Stranger in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*" in *Caryl Phillips: Writing in the Key of Life*, p. 294.

death, as "a son who survives the slaughter of his family in Africa is found floating face-down in a filthy canal in England".[11]

2. Jewish Journeys

It is well known that Jewish journeys began long ago, back to Babylon, back to the Spanish *Reconquista* and so on. Jumping forward to a more contemporary period, the majority of European Jews still were obliged to leave their homes and move somewhere else. While the journeys of African people are often connected to the image of the ship, the Jewish ones during the XX century are mostly associated with trains. Once again, Primo Levi provides the best descriptions:

> There were twelve goods wagons for six hundred and fifty men; in mine we were only forty-five, but it was a small wagon. […] Goods wagons closed from the outside, with men, women and children pressed together without pity, like cheap merchandise, for a journey towards nothingness, a journey down here, towards the bottom. […] We suffered from thirst and cold; at every stop we clamoured water. (*If*, 17-18)

They had to undergo an extremely long and difficult journey in inhuman conditions. Already since the voyage, they were treated as less than human beings; basically, they were objects and, therefore, they travelled on goods wagons and freight cars towards the camps:

> Convoys of ordinary freight cars were employed for an extraordinary purpose. […] There is not a diary or story, among our many such accounts, in which the train does not appear, the sealed boxcar changed from a commercial vehicle into an ambulatory prison or even an instrument of death. It is always packed, but the number of persons who, on each occasion, were jammed into it seems to be based on a rough calculation: from fifty to one hundred and twenty, depending on the length of the journey and the hierarchic level that the Nazi system assigned to the "human material" being transported. (*D&S*, 118-119)

They were cargo, human material literally packed in too small a place. In those cases, the wagons of a train – a symbol that used to represent human scientific progress during the Industrial Revolution – then turned into a prison or, in the worst of cases,

[11] J. Scott. "The Nature of Refuge: *A Distant Shore* by Caryl Phillips" in *Salmagundi Journal*, Number 143, Summer 2004. La Vergne (Tennessee), Ingram Periodicals Inc. for Skidmore College (Saratoga Springs, NY), 2004, p. 168.

into a cemetery. Either they died on trains or in camps, these Jews were travelling towards death.

An echo to these dreadful descriptions can be found in *The Nature of Blood*, through the voice of Eva Stern.

> Eva looked at a woman who slept with her mouth open and wondered how she managed not to choke, for the smell was unbearable. […] And then she noticed a girl of her own age, perhaps a little older. It was her time of the month, but she could no longer hide the blood. More than any of the others, Eva felt for this girl in her moment of humiliation. Lying in straw sodden with faeces and vomit, all classes and social distinctions had disappeared. She watched as a young boy, like the rest of them crazy with thirst, licked the sweat from his mother's fevered arm. (*NB*, 161-162)

On the train heading to the camp where she has been destined, Eva travels with her parents –both condemned to die in the camp – and, of course, with a multitude of different people, coming from different social classes. Nevertheless, in spite of their wealth or position, they are all treated like cattle, left there suffering thirst and hunger. In addition, in these inhuman conditions in which they were forced, shame and humiliation are exactly the same for everyone on the wagon.

This violent contemporary Jewish scattering began to finish in 1945, after the end of the Second World War and after the Allies delivered the few "living" Jews from the Nazi concentration and extermination camps. In order to leave the older life behind, many Jews who experienced the camps or some "luckiest" one who did not – but who knew nonetheless what racial hatred was – decided to move somewhere else to start a new life. But where?

> Stern: Have you been in Poland?
> Russian soldier: I just came from Poland.
> Stern: Are there any Jews left?
> [No answer from the soldier]
> Jewish man: Where should we go?
> Russian soldier: Don't go east, that's for sure. They hate you there. I wouldn't go west either, if I were you.[12]

These shattered Jews had nowhere to go. They could not go back to the houses they owned before the ghettoization because either they were destroyed during the bombings or they had been confiscated by the Nazis – and the Jews could not prove that those houses were theirs. As a consequence, they needed a place where they could live

[12] Quote from *Schindler's List*.

in peace, freedom, dignity and equality; they needed a place where they could be safe from the remaining racist gazes and from the risks of a second Holocaust.

That is why, in 1948, they formally got the promised land they have always dreamed of: Israel.[13] It was their ancestral homeland and, in addition, many European Jews had already moved there, as they began to feel that their security and freedom in Europe were being jeopardized by the latest waves of racial hatred. From all over the world and especially from several European countries, the Jews returned to Israel, the land of their forefathers, after centuries and centuries of forced absence. Of course, not every Jew was obliged to move to Israel; as a matter of fact, some Jews chose to remain in Europe or even to move to the United States, where there were already large communities.

In *The Nature of Blood*, there are some journeys representing the hope and the willingness to find a new home.

Already in the 1930s, after escaping pre-war Nazi Germany, Stephan Stern moved to Palestine where he would collaborate with other Jews living there to found the future state of Israel. When the novel opens, we are at the end of the Second World War and Stephan is in Cyprus; at that time, the island was used as a halfway base to welcome all the Jews moving from Europe to the newborn land of Israel.

In the first pages of the novel, Stephan Stern talks with Moshe – a boy who has survived the Holocaust – about their new country:

> "Tell me, what will be the name of the country?"
> "Our country," I said. "The country will belong to you too."
> 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".
> […] Distant, yet so tantalizingly close. Our troubled land. Palestine. Israel. (*NB,* 3)

To a boy who escaped the horrors of the camps and the Second World War, the idea of a country in which Jews could leave among their fellows in a state of peace seems of course a distant and unattainable hope: "Israel. Palestine. He knew of no such country. As yet, none of them did. Only in their minds" (*NB,* 7). But it was a hope that

[13] See also chapter one, §4 "Dreaming about Home".

was in fact becoming reality, as the Jews scattered across the world could finally live in a country that would be a true homeland for them. They would have a place to truly call home, away from racism, violence and death.

Right after the end of the War, also Eva Stern is free to move somewhere that she may call home. After the meeting with Gerry – the British soldier she met in the displaced persons camp – she decides that her new home would be London, exactly where Gerry lives. After her first experience of journey towards the death camp, to Eva, this train travel to London represents hope and the chance to come back to life in a new home. Of course, she used to associate the image of home with her parents and her sister Margot; nevertheless, they are all dead and she is alone. At this point, she is desperately trying to find a place where she might feel welcomed one more time; therefore, Eva "tries to find the "welcome" she associates with home by travelling to England to find Gerry",[14] since he is the only man she apparently feels safe with. Thus, she only has one place to go. "I sit on the train and stare out of the window. Light rain carried on sea air. […] I try to avoid those who stare at me. […] So this is England" (*NB*, 189).

However, unfortunately, this hope for a new life is only in her mind. After finding Gerry's house and his wife at the door, Eva suffers a mental breakdown and she is taken to hospital. At this point, the author reveals what was behind her journey to London; indeed, Eva forged a letter in which she was asked to move to London by "Gerry". After the several traumas she endured, she could not distinguish dream from reality anymore. Eventually, the only chance for her, the only journey still possible is towards death. Finally, she probably commits suicide; despite "having survived the Holocaust, she cannot survive the world it leaves behind".[15] Eva is not able to go on with her sense of guilt, her loneliness and with what she probably perceives as a refusal on Gerry's part. Whether she commits suicide or not, it is clear that her life ended at 21 years old.

The last journey to be taken into account is Malka's journey towards a new homeland, towards the end of XX century; she is a black Jewish girl from Ethiopia, who

[14] M. Calbi. "The Ghosts of Strangers: Hospitality, Identity and Temporality in Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*" in *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Volume 6, Number 2, Fall 2006. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, p. 50.
[15] S. Clingman. "Forms of History and Identity in *The Nature of Blood*", p. 152.

has decided to move to Israel to start a new life. Malka travelled by plane to reach the Promised Land:

> On the plane there were no seats. Just mattresses on the floor where we could squat, but most remained standing. […] My sister and I wandered, in this new land, would our babies be born white? We, the people of the House of Israel, we were going home. No more wandering. No more landless. No more tilling of soil that did not belong to us. What is your name? Malka. Malka, do not be shy. You are going home. And when we arrived, and stepped down off the plane, we all kissed the ground. We thanked God for returning us to Zion. (*NB*, 203)

She is one of the many Jews who were scattered in several countries, away from their true mother country. After the birth of Israel, she has the chance to live in a country in which she could be a free Jew among other free Jews. Despite their conditions on the plane, Malka's description is full of hopes and positive expectations regarding the new land.

Yet, what about the colour of her skin? As a matter of fact, even though they are Jews, these people are not completely welcomed since, as Malka would tell, they are relegated in some ugly houses at the edges of the cities, as in a sort of ghetto. Malka asks herself whether is this to be considered home and whether they are truly the brothers of their fellow white Jews. Is it? Are they? She knows that it is not true that everyone wants them in Israel; however, Malka is strong and she will survive this.

It could be said that journeys belong to the DNAs of both black and Jewish people. They have always been so accustomed to either forced or voluntary movements that it became a fundamental part of their histories and lives.

At the beginning, they only moved towards forced labour, racial hatred and violence, humiliation, social alienation and even towards death. In their new so-called "homes", they were slaves or people obliged to live in a ghetto, away from everything and everyone. Nevertheless, after centuries of pains and horrors, their negative situation slowly began to reach its conclusion. Mostly thanks to the movements of return to Africa, the birth of Israel and the fights for human rights and dignity, blacks and Jews could finally hope to find a place to be safe. After the long oppression, they chose to stay in the place where they had always lived, to move anywhere else or even to repopulate the lands of their forefathers. Therefore, following the third option, there were "Africa for the Africans at home and abroad" (*HG*, 124) and Israel as a safe haven

for all the Jews of the world; they finally got the lands that they deserved, which they had been forced to leave. They needed a pause from what they experienced and they needed to feel rooted and emotionally connected to a place where they could really belong and be accepted once again in their lives.

However, it is well known that the problems did not end only because these people found some peace and roots; racism is still a haunting ghost, human rights are still far away for many people and, in the happiness derived from the birth of a new nation, some people have forgotten that it resulted in the dispersal and the suffering of other human beings.

The latter is especially the case of Palestine; its vicissitudes date back to 14 May 1948, when the state of Israel was born. Since the beginning, it has been impossible to achieve a balance between the Jews and the Palestinians already living in the area. Indeed, the UN wanted to create both a Jewish state and an Arab one for the Palestinians on the territory; however, despite the refusal of the Arab population, the Jews settled there nonetheless. After this first friction, it has been a succession of wars, bombings and terrorist attacks; if one faction violently struck, the other one answered with more violence.

What was barely considered during this constant fighting were the civilians belonging to the Palestinian side. As a matter of fact, the Israelis have been mainly safeguarded, as they have been living in a democratic nation and their rights have been granted to them. On the contrary, the Palestinian civilians have been completely left alone. Some of them unwillingly decided to seek asylum in welcoming Muslim countries; instead, some others remained, thus becoming the victims of a forced "cohabitation" on the same soil. Basically, history has repeated itself, as this entire situation could be considered the sequel of what happened to the Jews. The Palestinians are now reduced to the same bare life and injustices that the Jews experienced in the past.[16] Indeed, when the Jews settled in the state of Israel, the Palestinians were deprived of their land – in which they had lived for centuries – and thus of their citizenship; also, they had to give up their freedom and their rights. In addition, they have been frequently exploited for work purposes by the neighbouring populations –

[16] See chapter three, §2.1. "Where is My Dignity? Where are My Rights?".

including the Israelis – and abandoned when they were not needed anymore. Considering this situation and following the ideas developed by Agamben, contemporary Palestine could be seen as a camp – just like the concentration camps – perennially occupied by Israeli armies, in which its people are reduced to living dead, deprived of any human right and forbidden to get support, including the medical one.

Nowadays, many countries of the world simply pretend that the so-called "Palestinian question" does not exist. However, as far as the Jews living in Israel are concerned, they should exactly know what suffering and pains look like. As Edward W. Blyden and W.E.B. Du Bois had stated, those people who suffered should always remember what they had endured and help other suffering people get through their problems and pains. Both Israeli and Palestinian politicians – notably, Shimon Peres (1923-2016), Yitzhak Rabin (1922-1995) and Yasser Arafat (1929-2004) – have tried to find a solution, in order to live peacefully on the same soil and have the Palestinian state recognized by the rest of the world. Nevertheless, these negotiations have always been stopped by extremists belonging to both sides. At the end of the day, why is it so difficult for them to overcome this barrier without killing other people in the meantime? Would it be impossible to find a mediation and help them find peace? Sadly, a solution to the "Palestinian question" still seems a distant utopia.

CONCLUSION

Not all those who wander
are lost.

(J.R.R. Tolkien)

In an interview, Caryl Phillips said, "I want these people to have their own voice. Remember, many of these people simply haven't been heard from".[1] To listen to their incredible manifold voices, we have really gone far enough in time and space. As a matter of fact, we have learnt something about the profound feeling of isolation and loneliness that accompanies an African man who collaborates to send his fellow countrymen to become slaves and die overseas. Or, we have heard the voices of an old black mother and a younger white mother who, for one reason or another, have been forced to get separated from their children. A Holocaust survivor has narrated her dreadful experience in the camp, her shame for having been a member of the *Sonderkommandos* and her pain for having lost anyone that she cared about. Finally, an African man who has reached the distant shores of England has shared with the readers his war experience back in his native country and the difficulties to build a new life and be accepted in a foreign country.

Without the efforts of this brave novelist, these voices and these lives would have remained in the dark, without any chance to be delivered from this prison – a prison that lasted too many years. In addition, without his words, the analogies shared by the experiences of these black and Jewish characters would have been consigned to oblivion and been easily forgotten.

At the beginning, I also said that it could be dangerous to make a comparison between such apparently different histories, because it could be not only hard but also disrespectful. Nevertheless, blacks and Jews have proven to be more similar than we might have thought; "all misery bleeds the same colour blood. Everyman's persecution

[1] S. Clingman. "Other Voices: An Interview with Caryl Phillips" in *Salmagundi Journal*, Number 143, Summer 2004. La Vergne (Tennessee), Ingram Periodicals Inc. for Skidmore College (Saratoga Springs, NY), 2004, p. 132.

is everyman's crusade"[2] and, because of this, it could also be considered natural and rational to compare two histories of suffering. In addition, this is exactly how multidirectional memory should work. As a matter of fact, we should not have a competitive kind of memory and see each historical event or experience as something unique and without equals; on the contrary, we have to make some efforts in order to equate them. As far as blacks and Jews are concerned, the comparative analysis of this dissertation has proven effective. Thanks to the three points of view – history, intellectual interventions and literary works – I have chosen to follow, many analogies have been highlighted and analysed. As a matter of fact, not only are they united by the experience of diaspora, but also many scholars saw them as "kindred spirits"; moreover, thanks to the voice of Caryl Phillips – supported by real or similar true stories – one could notice that they have shared experiences of racism and deprivations, sad episodes of ambivalence, journeys towards death but also common hopes and dreams to live their lives away from violence.

Furthermore, with multidirectional memory "the past [is also] made present. […] Memory is a contemporary phenomenon, something that, while concerned with the past, happens in the present. […] Our relationship to the past does partially determine who we are in the present".[3] Of course, we do not live in the past but in the present; yet, the past is always with us, since it represents our passage on the Earth and our achievements. As a consequence, remembering the past and the people who lived, suffered and hoped in it is the best way to honour and respect them. Obviously, to make this hope truly come true, not only should we remember the positive aspects of history; above all, we must carry the negative ones with us, such as dispersion, violence and sufferings. As Tolkien said in a poem, "not all those who wander are lost"; indeed, thanks to these acts of remembering, we keep in our minds those histories of dispersion, suffering and all that originating from it. By doing this, we could prevent them from getting lost and forgotten as time goes by.

"My hope […] is that the survivors […] feel confident that we are renewing their call to remember, that we will not only make known their own identities but in the

[2] E. Black. "In Germany's Extermination Program for Black Africans, a Template for the Holocaust" in *The Times of Israel*, 5 May 2016. Jerusalem, *The Times of Israel*, 2016, p. 18.
[3] M. Rothberg. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, pp. 3-5.

process help form a meaningful collective conscience for generations to come"[4]: these words were part of a long speech uttered by director Steven Spielberg, during a 2015 ceremony for the commemoration of the Shoah. Clearly, these words are a direct answer to the purpose of the multidirectional memory: making the events of the past as something that also belongs to the present. Finally, this additional effort towards the achievement of a full multidirectional memory also echoes what Paul Gilroy stressed in *The Black Atlantic*: the redemptive power of these episodes of suffering. In this case, any act of remembrance is also useful to awaken the consciousness of mankind, instil the human and moral duty to reflect and be thus helpful for the generations to come. Of course, history cannot be reversed; nevertheless, remembrance and consciousness could be an act of redemption, in order to build a better future.

[4] Spielberg's complete speech can be read here: www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2927180/Spielberg-warns-growing-anti-Semitism-Holocaust-event.html.

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Acronyms:

- *JQ*: E. Blyden, *The Jewish Question*
- *NWG*: W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto"
- *BSWM*: F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*
- *BA*: P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*
- *Ll*: J. Kay, *The Lamplighter*
- *D&S*: P. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*
- *If*: Id., *If This is a Man*
- *CR*: C. Phillips, *Crossing the River*
- *DS*: Id., *A Distant Shore*
- *ET*: Id., *The European Tribe*
- *HG*: Id., *Higher Ground*
- *NB*: Id., *The Nature of Blood*
- Cohen-*GD*: R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*
- Johnson-*HJ*: P. Johnson, *A History of the Jews*
- Thomas-*CP*: H. Thomas, *Caryl Phillips*

Fratelli emarginati:
analisi delle analogie fra diaspora ebraica e africana attraverso percorsi storici, teorici e letterari

Apparentemente, Ebrei e Africani si presentano come due popolazioni piuttosto distanti e differenti l'una dall'altra. In effetti, a una prima analisi, sembra che l'unico loro punto in comune sia una simile storia di dispersione. Tuttavia, guardando e studiando attentamente non solo i fatti storici, ma anche certe opere letterarie e di studiosi, possiamo vedere che esistono molte più somiglianze.

Potrebbe altresì sembrare immorale e sbagliato voler comparare storie di sofferenza come queste; spesso i coinvolti pensano che la loro tragedia personale non possa (e non debba) essere paragonata a nient'altro. In ogni caso, come altri hanno già pensato prima di me, non ho intenzione di sminuire la tragedia di nessuno, né risultare irrispettosa. Pertanto, la soluzione migliore è affrontare la questione con cautela, rispetto e razionalità. Fondamentale risulta quindi l'idea sviluppata da Michael Rothberg: la memoria multidirezionale. Infatti, in quanto pensatori aperti e illuminati, non dobbiamo limitare il potere della nostra memoria, considerando gli eventi nella loro unicità e nel loro essere fatti isolati; al contrario, dovremmo sforzarci di trovare corrispondenze (laddove è sensato farlo) tra gli eventi e vedere che cosa condividono le popolazioni umane. Solo in questo modo la nostra memoria può veramente dirsi multidirezionale.

Il parallelismo principale tra le storie ebraiche e africane si può notare subito dal punto di vista storico. Nel saggio intitolato *Global Diasporas,* il sociologo Robin Cohen identifica varie tipologie di movimenti diasporici; nella fattispecie, tanto la diaspora ebraica quanto quella africana vengono etichettate con l'espressione "victim diaspora", indicando che la dispersione è l'effetto di un evento tragico o traumatico che una determinata popolazione ha subito nella propria patria. Per esempio, molti secoli fa, gli Israeliti furono costretti a lasciare la propria terra in seguito alla conquista dei Babilonesi; invece, la diaspora africana fu un effetto della tratta degli schiavi quando

migliaia di Africani vennero imbarcati per le Americhe. Oltre ai traumi storici, la caratteristica principale di questi gruppi è il loro status di vittime; più volte nella storia, sia gli Ebrei che gli Africani hanno soddisfatto questa condizione.

Basandoci sui criteri sviluppati dal professor William Safran, si evince che oltre al movimento da un luogo originale verso territori stranieri, entrambi i popoli hanno sempre serbato nei propri ricordi la terra natale; nonostante l'evidente distanza geografica, questo ricordo ha mantenuto i "dispersi" vicini alla madrepatria, quantomeno dal punto di vista affettivo. Inoltre, questo sentimento si è tramandato nel tempo: spesso, persino i discendenti della diaspora guardano alla terra degli antenati come al luogo ideale ove fare ritorno. Infine, entrambi i popoli non sono riusciti a farsi accettare dalla popolazione del paese ospitante; così, sono stati emarginati e relegati nei ghetti.

Dopo il periodo di schiavitù a Babilonia, molti Ebrei non sarebbero più tornati nella Terra Promessa. Da allora, la storia fu un continuo ripetersi: leggi anti-giudaiche, odio e spostamenti in luoghi dove non furono mai accettati. Un ulteriore picco diasporico si verificò nel 1492, quando la comunità della Spagna fu posta di fronte a una scelta: conversione o espulsione. Coloro che decisero di non convertirsi furono costretti a spostarsi verso nuovi territori. Tuttavia, è il XX secolo il principale punto di svolta nella storia ebraica, sia in negativo che in positivo. Innanzitutto, con le leggi razziali del regime nazista, gli Ebrei d'Europa persero qualsiasi diritto; in seguito, con la seconda guerra mondiale e la deportazione nei campi di concentramento, perse la vita la maggior parte degli Ebrei europei. Tuttavia, questo secolo risulta anche relativamente positivo, in quanto venne deciso che il popolo ebraico aveva diritto al proprio luogo sulla terra. Fu così che lo stato di Israele (ri)nacque ufficialmente nel 1948.

La diaspora africana interessò invece i secoli compresi tra il XVI e il XIX; oggigiorno, si stima che circa 12 milioni di Africani vennero coinvolti nella tratta degli schiavi. Essi venivano strappati dai loro paesi natali e deportati nelle Americhe dove avrebbero lavorato come schiavi nelle piantagioni, nelle miniere e nelle proprietà degli schiavisti. Molti di loro persero la vita laggiù ma altri perirono durante la traversata dell'Atlantico, a causa delle malsane condizioni di vita a bordo. Il "carico" umano che riusciva a raggiungere le Americhe veniva poi trattato come bestiame o, addirittura, come un mero oggetto. Fu solo con la fine della schiavitù che l'ormai popolo afro-

americano poté godere di qualche miglioramento. I diritti sarebbero stati ancora un obiettivo distante ma, nel mentre, molti si costruirono una nuova vita, sia restando in America che tornando in Africa.

Se decidessimo di approfondire le nostre conoscenze relative a questo legame tra Ebrei e Africani e ci addentrassimo al di fuori di un ambito prettamente legato alla storia, scopriremmo che esistono molti più punti in comune tra queste due popolazioni. In effetti, soprattutto dalla fine del XIX secolo in poi, molti intellettuali si sono dedicati allo studio delle analogie esistenti tra i due gruppi.

Lo scrittore e politico americano Edward W. Blyden scrisse il pamphlet *The Jewish Question* nel 1898. Per Blyden, quella ebraica è la questione delle questioni, poiché il popolo ebraico rappresenta l'elemento indispensabile per la rigenerazione dell'umanità. Innanzitutto, l'autore sostiene che gli Ebrei e i popoli africani condividono una storia di dolore e oppressione. In seguito, i due popoli sono legati dal medesimo desiderio di fare ritorno alla terra dei propri padri. Inoltre, Blyden identifica varie corrispondenze anche dal punto di vista biblico, in quanto Ebrei e Africani sono uniti sin dai tempi di Noè e Abramo. Tuttavia, nel suo pamphlet, non c'è solamente il rispettoso encomio del popolo ebraico; infatti, Blyden afferma che, nonostante l'indiscutibile legame tra le due genti, gli Ebrei hanno a volte ignorato le sofferenze dei loro "simili". Tuttavia, rimane una speranza, ossia che il popolo ebraico si renda conto delle sofferenze dei propri compagni Africani – le loro stesse sofferenze – e li aiuti nei momenti di bisogno.

Anche il sociologo W.E.B. Du Bois ha apportato il suo contributo. Nell'articolo "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto", riflette sul concetto di razzismo, memore della propria esperienza in Europa. Prima, Du Bois concepiva il problema dell'odio razziale soltanto per la popolazione nera degli Stati Uniti; presto, tuttavia, si rese conto che era un problema molto più ampio. Fu soprattutto quando vide i ghetti ebraici d'Europa che si accorse dei molti problemi che affliggevano l'umanità. Pertanto, il razzismo contro i neri, contro gli Ebrei e le altre forme di odio razziale rappresentano uno stesso crimine contro la civiltà; la comunità nera e quella ebraica, insieme a tutte le altre che hanno sofferto, dovrebbero quindi unirsi nella lotta per la conquista della libertà.

Nel saggio *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon abbandona brevemente la relazione bianco/nero per esaminare anche la situazione degli Ebrei; egli, infatti, li considera fratelli – *brothers in misery* – del popolo africano. Entrambi sono stati vittime di razzismo e persecuzioni; inoltre, sia i neri che gli Ebrei sono spesso stati giudicati in base ai falsi stereotipi costruiti sui pregiudizi e sulle male lingue. In seguito, Fanon riconosce che gli Ebrei hanno avuto qualche vantaggio sui neri, grazie al colore prettamente chiaro della loro pelle; tuttavia, ciò non li salvò dall'essere vittime di odio razziale. Indubbiamente, ci sono delle differenze tra i due; comunque Fanon afferma che entrambi hanno sofferto a causa del Male provocato da altri esseri umani. Sono inoltre legati dalla comune condizione di popolo disperso e dall'essere perennemente rifiutati (per la loro religione, le abitudini, il colore della pelle e anche per le colpe degli antenati) dalla società bianca e/o cristiana circostante.

Infine, Paul Gilroy affronta la questione nella parte finale del suo saggio *The Black Atlantic*. Facendo riferimento al pamphlet di Blyden e agli scritti di Primo Levi, Gilroy analizza le evidenti corrispondenze tra le due storie. Oltre alla diaspora e all'esilio, Ebrei e Africani condividono il desiderio di ritornare nelle loro terre natali, Israele e Africa. Inoltre, secondo Gilroy, la memoria delle sofferenze e del dolore patiti da questi due popoli ha un potere di redenzione verso l'intero genere umano. Infatti, il ricordo di quanto le due popolazioni hanno patito in passato deve servire come elemento di riflessione, in modo da poter trovare una redenzione e una via di salvezza per i peccati degli uomini. Infine, la triste esperienza della schiavitù rappresenta un ulteriore punto di contatto; infatti, nelle piantagioni americane e nei campi di concentramento nazisti, vivevano in totali condizioni di schiavitù, venendo inoltre privati del loro nome, dei loro diritti e della loro dignità in quanto esseri umani.

Nel mondo della letteratura contemporanea, si notano ulteriori corrispondenze; in questo panorama, un esponente fondamentale è Caryl Phillips. Di lui, ho scelto di analizzare quattro romanzi: *Higher Ground* (*HG*), *Crossing the River* (*CR*), *The Nature of Blood* (*NB*) e *A Distant Shore* (*DS*). I molti personaggi introdotti (sia Ebrei che di origine africana) e i vari temi trattati mi hanno permesso di trovare importanti corrispondenze, tanto all'interno del medesimo romanzo quanto comparando opere differenti.

Nei romanzi, uno dei principali punti di contatto tra Ebrei e neri è la questione dell'odio razziale. Per via della religione, del colore della pelle o per odio pregresso e spesso infondato, entrambi i popoli sono stati vittime di razzismo nel passato, e spesso continuano a esserlo anche nel presente. Per esempio, Travis (*CR*) è la prima vittima di razzismo che incontriamo: un soldato americano di colore che non viene accettato né dai suoi commilitoni né dalla società circostante; l'unica persona che tenta un approccio è Joyce, con la quale vivrà un'intensa, seppur breve, storia d'amore. In seguito, vediamo anche del razzismo nelle storie di Eva Stern e Malka (entrambe in *NB*). La prima è una giovane ragazza ebrea che vive in Germania, durante il regime nazista; possiamo dire che è il prototipo della vittima di razzismo, continuamente sottoposta a violenze e umiliazioni, la cui unica colpa è quella di essere di "razza" ebraica. Malka invece è un'ebrea di colore, originaria dell'Etiopia, che si trasferisce nel novello Israele per iniziare una nuova vita; qui, purtroppo, dovrà affrontare episodi di razzismo e sfiducia. Infine, con Gabriel (*DS*) vediamo l'odio razziale nel suo stato più attuale: un rifugiato africano costretto a rimanere un estraneo in Inghilterra, al quale viene impedito di integrarsi e di costruirsi una nuova vita.

Un altro punto che unisce le due esperienze è la perdita, e il possibile trauma che ne consegue. Nell'analisi dei romanzi, ho scelto di affrontare il tema inteso dapprima come perdita della dignità e dei propri diritti. Durante la schiavitù, gli Africani venivano trattati come animali od oggetti, in quanto gli schiavisti li ritenevano inferiori. Invece, durante il Nazismo, gli Ebrei non erano più ritenuti degni di essere cittadini di uno stato; dopo essere stati privati di proprietà e impiego, i nazisti tolsero loro la cittadinanza e i diritti che ne derivano. Tutto ciò veniva compiuto prima che gli Ebrei fossero deportati nei campi; fu appunto in questi luoghi che essi persero quasi ogni traccia di dignità rimasta. Come spiega Primo Levi in *Se questo è un uomo*, gli Ebrei non potevano cadere più in basso di così: il processo di degradazione era quindi completo.

Tra i personaggi di Caryl Phillips, incontriamo Rudi (*HG*), che ha perso la propria libertà ed è costretto a restare in prigione per molti anni, e spesso in isolamento, per aver rubato pochi dollari; qui, paragona questo stato di degrado ai campi nazisti. Oppure, troviamo di nuovo Eva Stern (*NB*) e siamo testimoni del suo degrado personale nel campo. Infine, ancora con Gabriel/Solomon (*DS*) vediamo un uomo che, dopo aver abbandonato i propri diritti della madre patria, viene posto di fronte alla legge in un

paese straniero: in quanto migrante illegale, non ha nessun diritto nemmeno in Inghilterra.

Un altro significato legato al termine perdita è quello relativo all'identità personale e a tutti i fattori che ne contribuiscono alla formazione. Vari elementi intervengono in questo sviluppo, primo fra tutti il nome. La perdita del nome di battesimo è un triste punto di contatto tra Africani ed Ebrei: i primi, da schiavi, dovettero prendere un nuovo nome secondo i desideri del padrone; i secondi, una volta giunti nei campi, diventavano dei meri numeri tatuati sulla pelle.

I personaggi perdono anche dell'altro: famiglia e madrelingua, due elementi molto importanti per la vita di una persona. Irina (*HG*) ed Eva (*NB*), entrambe ebree, sono unite dalla perdita della propria famiglia. Irina è stata costretta a separarsi dalla sua per scappare dalle leggi razziali; una volta in Inghilterra, non riesce ad andare avanti con la sua vita: il ricordo di ciò che ha perduto è troppo grande e questo la porta al suicidio. Eva invece ha dovuto dire addio alla sorella e ai genitori, questi ultimi morti nel campo di concentramento; anche per lei il trauma è talmente forte che non riesce più a distinguere la realtà dalla finzione. Martha e Joyce (*CR*) sono legate dalla perdita dei propri figli. Martha è un'ex schiava; molti anni prima, era stata separata dalla piccola Eliza Mae e questa perdita la segna per tutta la vita. Invece, Joyce è stata costretta ad abbandonare il suo Greer, nato dalla relazione con Travis, per tenerlo lontano dalla brutalità di una società razzista. Infine, Otello (*NB*) e Gabriel/Solomon (*DS*) hanno in comune la perdita della madrelingua. Il primo non se ne dispiace, in quanto vede quella lingua come un ostacolo alla sua integrazione; il secondo, al contrario, ne è molto turbato dal momento che la sua lingua madre, dopo la morte dei suoi familiari, rappresenta l'ultimo legame con la sua terra.

Un'ulteriore analogia tra Ebrei e Africani è stavolta rappresentata da una questione non del tutto positiva: l'ambivalenza a volte dimostrata e il loro dare il tutto per tutto pur di integrarsi.

Il significato originale di ambivalenza è il costante fluttuare tra desiderare un qualcosa e il suo opposto. Ma il significato del termine si è arricchito e perciò mi interessa approfondire l'aspetto legato al concetto che Primo Levi chiama zona grigia; esso è stato introdotto in *Se questo è un uomo* e ulteriormente sviluppato ne *I sommersi*

e i salvati. Nei campi, i membri della zona grigia appartenevano formalmente alla categoria delle vittime; tuttavia, pur rimanendo sempre e comunque prigionieri, avevano anche dei privilegi che li distinguevano dagli altri. Questi uomini grigi erano di vari tipi: i livelli più bassi erano occupati da spazzini, sentinelle notturne, lavandaie, messaggeri…; al livello più alto c'erano invece i kapo, che avevano funzioni di comando e, per questo, potevano esercitare la violenza sugli altri prigionieri. Un'altra tipologia di zona grigia è rappresentata dai membri del Sonderkommando, che esercitavano la mansione più terribile e disumana di tutte; essi infatti erano costretti a estrarre i corpi dalle camere a gas, razziarli di tutto ciò che poteva essere utile, portarli ai crematori e, infine, sbarazzarsi delle ceneri.

Tutti loro, sia che lo facessero volentieri o meno, venivano privati dello status di vittima innocente, restando sospesi in una zona di mezzo tra gli altri prigionieri e gli oppressori nazisti. Per quanto riguarda la parte africana, un possibile esempio di zona grigia può ritrovarsi in tutti quegli schiavi di casa che avevano una posizione di privilegio e rilievo rispetto a tutti gli altri schiavi, che lavoravano duramente nelle piantagioni della proprietà o nelle case dei padroni. Questi neri di casa erano tanto crudeli nei confronti degli altri schiavi quanto estremamente docili verso i padroni.

Anche Caryl Phillips ci mostra vari esempi di zona grigia. Il "narratore" senza nome (*HG*) ne è un rappresentante in Africa, durante il periodo della tratta degli schiavi; infatti, collabora con gli schiavisti per mandare i suoi conterranei in America. Questa sua situazione di privilegio è però deleteria, in quanto lo ha fatto isolare e guardare con odio e circospezione dal resto della comunità. Con l'ex schiavo Nash Williams (*CR*), si ritorna al significato originale di ambivalenza, poiché possiamo vedere sentimenti contrastanti verso la Liberia e la sua popolazione. Prima di trasferirsi nel paese africano (come percorso intrapreso a seguito della liberazione), Nash aveva sviluppato molte aspettative sul luogo; tuttavia, una volta giuntoci, è continuamente diviso da opinioni contrastanti sui nativi e la loro cultura. Ritornando alle vicende di Eva Stern (*NB*), apprendiamo che è stata un membro del Sonderkommando. Nelle sue parole, leggiamo vergogna a causa di quanto dovette fare; sicuramente, anche questo enorme senso di colpa ha contribuito a destabilizzare il suo precario equilibrio mentale.

Infine, con Othello (*NB*), vediamo la sfida di un uomo per integrarsi in una società straniera. Più che all'ambivalenza, questo personaggio risponde a un chiaro

atteggiamento di *mimicry*, traducibile più o meno con "imitazione". A Venezia, pur di farsi accettare, dimentica il suo io e la sua vita precedenti; di conseguenza, adotta abitudini e cultura tipiche della nuova città, sforzandosi al massimo pur di cercare di apparire come uno di loro. Tuttavia, questi tentativi di imitazione lo hanno isolato e reso cieco di fronte alla precarietà della propria condizione: nel momento stesso in cui smetterà di conformarsi, o commetterà un errore, verrà subito rifiutato.

Quasi tornando alle vicende della diaspora, in modo da chiudere il cerchio, l'ultimo tema in comune che ho scelto di prendere in esame è quello del viaggio. Dietro ogni singolo viaggio, ci sono molteplici ragioni e significati. Qualcuno purtroppo è stato forzato a compiere un viaggio verso la morte, altri invece hanno viaggiato verso la vita e la speranza; infine, si può viaggiare anche per ricercare le proprie origini.

Dopo la fine delle rispettive schiavitù, Ebrei e ormai Afro-Americani erano abbastanza liberi di andare dove volevano. Molti Ebrei d'Europa, infatti, si sono spostati negli Stati Uniti o sono rimasti in Europa; altri ancora hanno fatto ritorno nella Terra Promessa, dove avrebbero potuto essere degli Ebrei liberi in mezzo ad altri uomini liberi. Per quanto riguarda i discendenti della diaspora africana, molte persone scelsero di rimanere in America, dove avrebbero combattuto per i propri diritti; altri scelsero, come gli Ebrei, di andare alla ricerca di una nuova vita in Africa, cioè il luogo da cui cominciò la loro dispersione.

Anche nei romanzi di Phillips, si aprono diversi scenari e significati di viaggio. Dopo la fine della propria condizione di schiavo, Nash (*CR*) si trasferisce in Liberia, in qualità di missionario; egli ne è onorato, poiché considera quel luogo come una terra promessa per tutti i neri dispersi. Martha (*CR*), dal canto suo, affronta un viaggio tanto di speranza quanto di morte: il suo scopo è infatti quello di ritrovare la figlia perduta; tuttavia, il viaggio sarà estremamente faticoso ed estenuante e terminerà, tristemente, con la sua morte solitaria. Infine, con la storia di Gabriel/Solomon (*DS*) siamo testimoni di una migrazione illegale verso l'Europa; egli ha accettato di compiere questo viaggio, speranzoso di poter iniziare una nuova vita di pace in Inghilterra.

Dal lato ebraico, vediamo altrettanti viaggi ricchi di significato. Le parole di Eva (*NB*) spesso riecheggiano le parole di Primo Levi e rievocano il trauma affrontato da molti altri ebrei: il viaggio di morte verso i campi di concentramento. Eva intraprenderà

anche un viaggio verso l'Inghilterra: lì spera di costruirsi una nuova vita ma, nel suo futuro, c'è solo morte. Invece, suo zio Stephan (*NB*) fu uno dei molti Ebrei che raggiunsero l'allora Palestina (il futuro Israele) già prima della guerra, per lavorare alla costruzione dello Stato Ebraico; in seguito, accoglierà molti profughi europei, preparandoli all'idea di una nazione di libertà. Infine, la storia di Malka (*NB*) ci mostra il suo viaggio dall'Etiopia verso Israele: anch'ella spera di costruirsi una nuova vita ma il razzismo è una presenza ingombrante e sempre in agguato.

In conclusione, possiamo dire che ci sono molti punti in comune tra le storie e le esperienze degli Ebrei e degli Africani. Non mi è sembrato sconveniente paragonarle; anzi, mi è risultato utile per stimolare la memoria e i ricordi degli eventi passati. La nostra memoria non deve essere competitiva e farci pensare che un determinato avvenimento sia più importante di un altro; al contrario, essa deve essere multidirezionale. Con questa tipologia di memoria, il passato si fa presente; inoltre, con le analisi di eventi e storie paralleli, si possono far tornare in superficie persone e avvenimenti che, altrimenti, si perderebbero nei meandri della storia. Di conseguenza, tramite la memoria multidirezionale e le analogie tra due situazioni apparentemente diverse, possiamo rendere omaggio a queste storie, rispettarle e farne tesoro nel presente e nel futuro. Come disse J.R.R. Tolkien in una poesia inserita ne *Il Signore degli Anelli*, non tutti coloro che hanno vagato sono perduti. Infatti, il solo modo per continuare a tenere vive e onorare queste storie di dispersione, con tutto ciò che ne è derivato, è ricordarle.

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