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Memory in Caryl Phillips's novel *Crossing the River* (1993)

Susanne Pichler

English Department, University of Innsbruck, Innrain 52, Austria. E-mail: supi73@gmx.at

ABSTRACT. This article explores the themes of memory and remembering as well as the relationship between memory and diaspora in Caryl Phillips's prize-winning 1993 novel *Crossing the River*. While the first part of the paper discusses theoretical and methodological issues in memory studies, the second part deals with an analysis and interpretation of the novel, which, it is hoped, provides interesting insights into Phillips's multifaceted use of (the concept of) memory and what it entails.

Keywords: memory, diaspora, home, belonging.

RESUMO. Memória no romance *Crossing the River* (1993), de Caryl Phillips. Este ensaio investiga os temas da memória, do relembrar e do relacionamento entre a memória e a diáspora no romance *Crossing the River* (1993), de Caryl Phillips. Enquanto na primeira parte discutem-se problemas teóricos e metodológicos nos estudos sobre a memória, a segunda secção analisa e interpreta o romance, o qual proporcionará aspectos interessantes sobre o uso multifacetado que Phillips emprega do conceito de memória e sua consequências.

Palavras-chave: memória, diáspora, lar, pertencer.

> For ten years, this man has made me happy. For ten long years, this man has made me forget – and that's a gift from above (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 84).
>
> Among the great struggle of man - good/evil, reason/unreason, etc. - there is also this mighty conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away, the dream of roots and the mirage of the journey (RUSHDIE, 1999, p. 55).
>
> I think it is important that people remember (ECKSTEIN, 2001, p. 42)

Introduction

In the last couple of decades, concepts of history, memory and the past have reached an immense topicality. Historian Kerwin Lee Klein convincingly holds that today's world is characterised by a "memory industry" (KLEIN, 2000, p. 127), and by an "obsession" (HAMILTON, 1994, p. 26) with processes and products of memory. Given this "boom of unprecedented proportion" (HUYSSEN, 1995, p. 5), as Andreas Huyssen calls it, "memory", according to Wulf Kansteiner, is an "intellectual challenge" (KANSTEINER, 2002, p. 180), and an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and international phenomenon of immense social, political and cultural relevance (see ASSMANN, 1999, p. 16; see ERLL, 2005, p. 1). The disciplines "doing memory work" (RADSTONE, 2000, p. 12) – e.g. history and memory studies, philosophy, psychology, and psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology and neuropsychology, neurobiology, law, sociology and political science, educational science, film and media studies, archaeology, architecture and art history, Holocaust and cultural studies, and, not to forget cultural and postcolonial studies -, all in different ways and to different degrees, deal with 'memory' and its interrelated issues.

Looking at this impressive spectrum of disciplines engaging in memory work, several questions are crucial: what is it that these disciplines study? Is it processes of remembering? Is it memory as something that we possess (see RADSTONE, 2000, p. 4)? Is it memory and/or history? Is it collective/cultural[1] memory and/or individual/autobiographical memory? And, one may further ask, which methodologies and concepts do the disciplines use in order to study memory? Psychological, cultural, social, historical or a combination of these? Answering these questions adequately would certainly fall outside the remit of this paper. Suffice it to say that the area of memory

[1] In the German context, leading scholars like Jan and Aleida Assmann focus on the notion of collective memory, which, for them, has a communicative as well as a cultural component. In the Anglo-American context, by contrast, the notion of cultural memory has displaced the discourses of individual (psychological) and of social memory. See: Assmann (1999); Assmann (1995); Bal (1999).

study "has developed into a fragmented field" (CONFINO, 1997, p. 1387), a field in which a myriad of conflicting and contesting terms proliferate. Take, for instance, 'public memory', 'collective memory', 'cultural memory', 'social memory', 'traumatic memory', 'autobiographical memory', "postmemory" (HIRSCH, 1997), or "prothetic memory" (cf. WILSON, 1998, p. 113-133), to name but a random few. Given this terminological proliferation and the complexity of the entire field, it is not at all astonishing that lines between various concepts cannot be drawn. True, this might prevent some from venturing out into the field of memory (see HUTTON, 1993, p. xxv) but Patrick Hutton strongly advises us to probe into 'memory' (see HUTTON, 1993, p. xxv) and gain insights that, - at first glance perhaps -, might not be pervaded by memory at all, and into others that are so to a great extent.

For the purpose of this paper, i.e. for an analysis of memory, diaspora, home and belonging in Phillips's "Crossing the River" (1993), I consider it vital to briefly discuss two areas in memory studies that have been intensively investigated over the last decades: the first concerns the relationship between memory, history and the past, and the second has to do with memory, location, home and belonging.

Mainly inspired by Maurice Halbwach's work on collective memory and Pierre Nora's influential considerations about "milieux de mémoire" and "lieux de mémoire" (cf. NORA, 1989, p. 7-25), historians have come up with a distinction between what they consider to be two fundamentally opposed approaches to the past: a memory orientation on the one hand, and a historical orientation on the other. A historical stance designates "a reflective exploration of past events considered along the axis of irreversible, linear temporality, with a view to understanding their situated particularity, their causes and consequences" (KATRIEL, 1999, p. 100). History, according to Maurice Halbwachs, lacks continuity since it gives the impression that everything changes from one event to another and from one period to another (cf. HALBWACHS, 2007, p. 142). Furthermore, history's methodology, Halbwachs maintains, is to compare and contrast events and facts, the aim of which is to offer us a "comprehensive vision of the past" (HALBWACHS, 2007, p. 143) made up of "detail added to detail […] from a whole that can in turn be added to other wholes" (HALBWACHS, 2007, p. 142). What he also stresses is the fact that the historian makes judgments an external, detached perspective since "[…] he is not located within the viewpoint of any genuine and living groups of past or present" (HALBWACHS, 2007, p. 143).

By contrast, a memory orientation towards the past, Halbwachs was convinced, incorporates and redesigns historical knowledge by integrating it into cultural memory. Halbwachs, whose focus was on how groups remember and how they perpetuate their collective/collected[2] pasts, claimed that groups had a strong influence on the content of individual memories. Collective memory, unlike history, is marked by continuity, a continuity which "is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive" (HALBWACHS, 2007, p. 140).

French historian Pierre Nora bases many of his findings about "milieux de mémoire" and "lieux de mémoire" (NORA, 1989, p. 7-25) on Halbwachs's insights, some of which, however, are extended and refined. In his oft-quoted preface to his multivolume edition "Les Lieux de Mémoire" (1984-1992) of France, "Between Memory and History: "Les Lieux de Mémoire", Nora describes the difference between memory and history, yet also, in contradistinction to Halbwachs, highlights their indissoluble link.

> Memory is life, […]. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only affects those facts that suit it… History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. … Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative (NORA, 1989, p. 8-9).

These different orientations, or approaches to the past coexist as part of our cultural consciousness

[2] Olick neatly works out the basic implications of collective memory. The first is collected memory which is based on "individualistic principles: the aggregated memories of a group" (OLICK, 1999, p. 338). As far as collective memory is concerned, Olick highlights, amongst other dimensions, that in societies there are institutions that "stimulate memory in ways and for reasons that have nothing to do with the individual or aggregate neurological records" (OLICK, 1999, p. 342).

and each contributes differently to our experience of the past and the present. Nora's insights are extremely significant not least because they clearly underline that memory and history should not be seen as diametrically opposed, but rather as dialectically related. Moreover, what is also made explicit is that memory does not store the past as 'it really was'. Memory, the majority of disciplines in memory studies agree upon, is not simply based on "some objectifiable past, the deposits of which it stores to be recuperated as sediments in […] a culture, dug up like the archaeologist's shards and put together again to form a clear vision of origins and evolutions" (GOMILLE; STIERSTORFER, 2003, p. 7). Rather, memory has more to do with "recherche than with recuperation" (HUYSSEN, 1995, p. 3), a 'recherche' of "a usable past" (ZAMORA, 1997) which rests upon "the needs and desires of the present" (GOMILLE; STIERSTORFER, 2003, p. 7). This process, to be sure, is shaped by and modified through selection, distortion (see SCHACTER, 2000), and interpretation (see TERDIMAN, 1993).

Looking at another important field in memory studies we observe that recently much critical attention has been put on the relationship between memory and location. Here, particularly the relationship between memory and diaspora, and issues of home and belonging, have moved into the centre of investigation. Focusing on the "precarious position of communities in displacement" (BARONIAN et al., 2007, p. 9), in their 2007 publication "Diaspora and Memory". Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics", Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephen Besser and Yolande Jensen, succinctly explore similarities and differences between the concepts of 'memory' and 'diaspora'. Reviewing the literature on diaspora, it soon transpires that scholars have tried hard to establish constitutive features of social formations that may or may not qualify as diaspora (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 304). The notion 'diaspora' has been used to refer to the more traditional set-ups of diasporic existence – such as traumatic uprooting of "an identified and self-identifying group to multiple sites of dispersion, sustained over generations" (BARDENSTEIN, 2007, p. 20) – to a wider use of the term that would include any group or minority who can trace their origins back to a location, e.g. a nation, a country, a region, other than the one in which they (currently) live (see BARDENSTEIN, 2007, p. 20). In fact, aware of the difficulty - if not to say impossibility -, of neatly delineating the implications of the term 'diaspora', and the existence of various forms of "diasporic existence" (BARONIAN et al., 2007, p. 9), Baronian et al. select one criterion that they consider fundamental of any diasporic existence and any diasporic identity: memory. "[M]emory [is] understood as the complex relation of personal experiences, the shared histories of communities and their modes of transmission" (BARONIAN et al., 2007, p. 11). Baronian et al. argue that movement and mobility not only characterize 'diaspora', but also 'memory' as "something that is always in flux and notoriously unreliable" (BARONIAN et al., 2007, p. 12). True, memory is in flux, it is unstable, and it strongly depends on "re-articulation and re-enactment" (BARONIAN et al., 2007, p. 12) in order to be passed on and kept alive. It is precisely through re-enactment and re-articulation that diasporic memory in particular spins "threads of continuity" (BARONIAN et al., 2007, p. 12) among members of a local diasporic community, and among other diasporic groups, sometimes transhistorically and translocally. Significantly, in the latter case, location may lose some of its importance, so that "[m]emory, rather than territory, is the principal ground of identity formation in diaspora cultures" (FORTIER, 2005, p. 184), as Anne-Marie Fortier tells us. She goes on to posit that "memories, in diaspora, are place-based, but they are not necessarily place-bound" (FORTIER, 2005, p. 184). Needless to say, this has profound implications for the notion and construction of "home away from home" (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 302). Home, I would like to stress, is both real as much as imagined, and home, as Bell Hooks observes, "[a]t times […] is nowhere" (HOOKS, 1984, p. 19).

All this said, what is it that diasporic identities remember, and what it is that they forget? Which are the themes that are perpetuated transhistorically and translocally? Is the past retained in the present 'memory' or 'history'? Can we assume that it is primarily traumatic experiences that diasporic identities (tend to) "actively forget" to use Ramadanovic's term (RAMADANOVIC, 2001, p. 48) or are they imprinted in the characters' minds? How and when do diasporic identities establish 'home' and a sense of feeling (at) 'home' away from 'home'? How do diasporic writers deal with these highly complex and topical issues? Is Avtar Brah right in suggesting that in diasporic writing 'home' is "a mythic place of desire" (BRAH, 1996, p. 192)?

Caryl Phillips, "Eastern Caribbean" (LEDENT, 2002, p. 2) born British writer of immense

international acclaim, is one such diasporic writer, who, particularly in "Crossing the River" (PHILLIPS, 1993), deeply probes into questions of memory, diaspora, 'home' and belonging.

"Crossing the River" (PHILLIPS, 1993) was on the shortlist for the 1993 Booker Prize, and received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1994 (cf. http://www.carylphillips. com/awards.html). In "Crossing the River", Phillips tackles slavery "head-on" (LEDENT, 1997, p. 271). He engages with "an accident of history" (ECKSTEIN, 2001, p. 39), an accident in which millions of men, women and children were forcibly removed and displaced from their 'home'[3], in which family ties were severed, and in which millions of people had to undergo the Middle Passage. Slaves were exposed to indescribable torture, hurt and pain, not only onboard slave ships but also in their new contexts, far away from home. This is a pain which has survived translocally and transhistorically, and Phillips's approach to the subject matter is twofold: first, like a historian, he deals with slavery from a detached, external perspective. Phillips, amongst other things, intensively studied facts and figures about the slave trade[4], "the history of the slave letters", and the trajectories of "blacks who pioneered west" (JAGGI, 1994, p. 26). His intention, unlike a historian's perhaps, is clearly not to convey a coherent, continuous history, a "comprehensive vision of the past" (HALBWACHS, 2007, p. 143), nor to offer a critical analysis of how history became so destructive. More importantly, it is to show the effects of history, the fragments of a (trans)local, (trans)historical cultural memory that is unstable and in flux, "in evolution […] vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation" (NORA, 1989, p. 8). Secondly, as a writer, then, he "points out and fills in the pervasive ellipses in Western historiography by way of the (literary) imagination" (BRÖCK, 1994, p. 24). Looking at "history […] through the prism of people who have been nominally written out of it, or have been viewed as the losers or victims in a particular historical storm" (JAGGI, 1994, p. 26), Phillips "conjures up largely unchronicled moments in black history" (DAVISON, 1994, p. 92). He explores an eclipsed past, a past that "surges like a mighty river" that "empties [itself] into the present" (PHILLIPS, 2000, p. 220), and that carries "an atemporal sense of the presence of the past in the present" (KATRIEL, 1999, p. 99-100). To be sure, the past does not stop in the present but projects itself "forward into the future" (KATRIEL, 1999, p. 33) as Bénédicte Ledent states, and thereby "changes our perception of the present reality" (LEDENT, 1999, p. 33). Thus, Phillips digs up individual and "cultural traumas" (EYERMAN, 2001, p. 1), and breathes new life into them by telling individual stories, by using "memory as alternative and ambivalent history within the individual" which "may be taken to illustrate his interiorisation of the diaspora in his novels" (LEDENT, 2009, p. 200). So Phillips skilfully complements and completes a historical orientation to the past by a memory orientation to the past, which is both "recuperation and recherche" (HYUSSEN, 1995, p. 3).

'Recuperation and recherche' entail an intense and deep probing into Phillips's characters' minds and into their voices, black and white. The outcome of such a process is a polyphony of voices, a "verbal give-and-take" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 31) in which "there are no voiceless words that belong to no one" (BAKHTIN, 1986, p. 122).

> Everything that is said, expressed, is located outside the "soul" of the speaker and does not belong only to him. The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener also has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have heir rights (after all, there are no words that belong to no one) (BAKHTIN, 1986, p. 121-122).

Moreover, "prior to the moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, on other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 293-294). So what is important is the fact that the speaker or author is not the only voice producing statements about the past. Phillips's voice is not the only one we hear, just as his characters' are not the only ones we hear. There are voices and memories of other texts, voices and memories of other pasts and other histories, which, altogether, vie for attention and thus make the novel a "fair" (JULIEN, 1999, p. 88) tale. It does not, as could be assumed, blame white characters for their horrendous deeds, nor does it excuse them. Myriad connections, both real and imaginary, both concrete and abstract - , combine roots and routes and thus allow "us to look simultaneously at the differences

[3] The novel, as Gail Low rightly points out, deals with "questions of kinship" (LOW, 1998, p. 132), "paternalism and responsibility" (DAVISON, 1994, p. 93), social/collective memory, and the "renewal of identity" (LOW, 1998, p. 132); it establishes a unity that is at once fictive and performative, and yet also real (see LOW, 1998, p. 132).

[4] In his acknowledgements Phillips expresses his obligation to John Newton's eighteenth-century "Journal of a Slave Trader", which helped him 'compose' Part III, 'Crossing the River' (see PHILLIPS, 1993).

and continuities in black experience" (GILROY, 1993, p. 54). Significantly enough, the various and varied connections are established, first of all, by the many characters that, due to dire, horrible and tragic circumstances, are enslaved, expelled from their homeland and dispersed to many different places so that they, for better or for worse, lead a diasporic existence, "orchestrated by the historic injunction to keep on moving" (GILROY, 1996, p. 23) and secondly, through memory that is individual, collective and cultural, through memory that is at once "unique and plural" (NORA, 1989, p. 8).

According to Gail Low[5], "[…] what emerges is a productive tension between remembering as performance and performance as remembering" (LOW, 1998, p. 131). Paul Gilroy diagnoses that it is "integral to […] narratives of loss, exile, and journeying" (GILROY, 1993, p. 198) – and Phillips's "Crossing the River" is such a narrative -, that they

> […] serve as mnemonic function: directing the consciousness of the group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and its social memory. The telling and retelling of these stories plays a special role, organising the consciousness of the "racial" group socially and striking the important balance between inside and outside activity – the different practices, cognitive, habitual, and performative, that are required to invent, maintain and renew identity (GILROY, 1993, p. 198).

"Crossing the River"[6] (PHILLIPS, 1993) is made up of four sections, each of which deals with partings, journeys, losses, and hurts. Three of them are set in three different continents, - the US, Africa, Europe -, and the fourth is set on board a slave ship off the Sierra Leone Coast. The narrated time stretches over more than two centuries, from 1752 to 1963. Interestingly enough, the four narratives "The Pagan Coast" (p. 7 - p. 70), "West" (p. 71 - p. 94), "Crossing the River"[7] (p. 95 - p. 124) and "Somewhere in England" (p. 129 - p. 232) are framed by a prologue and an epilogue, in which the voice of an African farmer is audible. The African farmer is the father of three children, Nash, Martha, and Travis. He utterly bemoans his "desperate foolishness" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 1) of selling them to the captain of a slave ship. "I sold my children. I remember" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 1). "And occasionally, among the sundry, restless voices, I have discovered those of my own children. My Nash. My Martha. My Travis. Their lives fractured" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 1). His voice, full of pain and hurts, is not only his alone, but – in Bakhtinian fashion –, also the voices of the protagonists of the four narratives, and the voices of the entire African diaspora, past and present.

The first narrative, "Pagan Coast", is set in Liberia, Africa. The year is 1841. The narrative moves backward in time to 1834. The protagonist is Nash Williams, one of the African father's children sold to Captain Hamilton, an English captain of a slave ship. Nash Williams, an educated freed slave, has lived in America for most of his life with his master Edward Williams, whom he has always admired. Edward Williams, likewise attached to Nash, sends him to Liberia to do missionary work for the American Colonization Society, partly to "divest himself of the burden […] of being a slave-owner, a title which ran contrary to his Christian beliefs" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 13). After twelve years of missionary work in Liberia, Nash starts to send letters 'home' to Edward Williams, reporting about the many difficulties he has encountered in setting up a mission school, in teaching the word of God, and in tilling the soil; and yet, Nash is enthused about the fact that Liberia, "the beautiful land of my forefathers, is a place where persons of color may enjoy their freedom" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 18). Liberia, Nash goes on to explain, "is truly our only home" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 18). Pleased about these initial renderings, Edward is all the more baffled to learn that Nash has no desire whatsoever to hear anything from his master any more (see PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 8). What could have happened that has led to Nash's drastic step? Edward Williams leaves America on board a ship, falls seriously ill, recovers and from Sierra Leone ventures out to Liberia to search for his Nash. From the letters that Nash was constantly sending to Edward we learn that his initial enthusiasm started to fade, slowly but steadily. Part of Nash's disappointment and transformation can be explained when looking at his memories about America, and the loved ones left behind, "Aunt Sophie, George, Hannah, Peter Thornton, Fanny Gray, Aggy and Charlotte, Miss Mathilda Danford, Henry, Randolph and Nancy" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 20). Being away from America, he muses over the significance of concepts like belonging and home. Although he mentions time and again that Liberia is the home of the free

[5] I wish to apologize to Gail Low for not having properly acknowledged some of her quotes from her 1998 article "'A Chorus of Common Memory': Slavery and Redemption in Caryl Phillips's "Cambridge" and "Crossing the River"". "Research in African Literatures", v. 29, n. 4, p. 122-140, in an earlier article of mine published in "Anglia". Unfortunately, the uncorrected proofs were printed!

[6] The novel, as Gail Low rightly points out, deals with "questions of kinship" (LOW, 1998, p. 132), "paternalism and responsibility" (DAVISON, 1994, p. 93), social/collective memory, and the "renewal of identity" (LOW, 1998, p. 132); it establishes a unity that is at once fictive and performative, and yet also real (see LOW, 1998, p. 132).

[7] This section will not be focussed upon in this article. The reason is that questions of remembering are not that pertinent in this part of the novel.

coloured man, he wishes "to come home as soon as possible" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 35). Why is it that the Liberian home has turned into a non-home? From his letters it becomes obvious that Nash feels cut off from civilization, seeing that he is surrounded by "ignorance which drape[s] the shoulders of my fellow blacks" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 21), and by "their crude dialect" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 23). He feels deprived of his emotional attachment with Edward and his loved ones, and the place he has always harboured the fondest memories of, "America, […] a land of milk and honey" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 25). The more time elapses, the harder it becomes for Nash to share and communicate his memories with his likes. He feels stranded on the other side of the Atlantic, which clearly, like a chasm, drives a wedge between Edward, America and his former self. In a moment of bitter despair, Nash writes to Edward saying that "there are many things I cannot discuss with my native wife, for it would be improper for her to share with me the memories of what I was before. I am to her what she has found here in Africa" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 42). Hence, Nash's sense of himself "depends crucially on [his] subjective experience of remembering [his] past" (SCHACTER, 1996, p. 34) – a past that, to his mind, is exclusively connected to America, a past, the memories of which he cannot share with anyone in Liberia. In one of his last letters to Edward, Nash writes: "You, my father, did sow the seed, and it sprouted forth with vigor, but for many years now there has been nobody to tend to it, and being abandoned it has withered away and died" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 63). Brockmeier, referring to Middleton, reminds us that individual and collective experiences are combined through the "principle of continuity" and the "principle of interpretation" (BROCKMEIER, 2002, p. 18), which means that there exists "a connection between the temporal and the interactional dimension of human experience" (BROCKMEIER, 2002, p. 18). The "shared horizon of experience, understanding and orientation" (BROCKMEIER, 2002, p. 18), a prerequisite for a sense of belonging, coherence and stability, has disappeared for Nash. This explains why Nash's notion of himself as well as of the group he feels attached to have changed drastically. Confused about being called a white man by the 'natives' (see PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 32), Nash feels lost. Recalling his American past is painful since he can no longer engage with it; he is no longer part of a cultural memory that is American. He crushes under the burden of having been forsaken by historical circumstances at large, including his father, and also Edward. Memory, to Nash, no longer shapes his cultural sense of belonging, and social order. Severing the ties to his former 'American' self, he chooses to abandon the mission school, decides to marry three times, sets up a new life in the interior of "this Liberian paradise" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 62), far away from anyone. And to be sure, his Liberian life is not a happy one, as Bénédicte Ledent points out. "His jubilation at his new-found freedom rings hollow, however, for his wholesale adoption of African customs is as inappropriate as his former exclusive allegiance to Christianity" (LEDENT, 2002, p. 128). On arriving at Nash's place, Edward Williams is shocked to see how Nash lived, and how Africanized he must have been, something Nash alluded to in one of his letters to Edward (see PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 61-62). Unsurprisingly, Edward feels guilt[8] and shame well up since, in a way, he realizes that he is responsible for Nash's "demise" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 66), regretting having "banished not only Nash, but many of his other slaves, to this inhospitable and heathen corner of the world" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 52). The memory of this is like "an open wound" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 43), which, presumably, cannot be dressed. Edward draws the conclusion that it can only be detrimental if one is to engage with a "past and a history that are truly not [one's] own" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 52). But, which past and which history does Edward mean? Nash's American past and history, Nash's Liberian past and history or even his own?

The second narrative, "West", is set in pre- and post-Civil War America. In this short section, Phillips again weaves a displaced individual "into the broader canvas of the African diaspora" (LEDENT, 2002, p. 108). The protagonist of this part is Martha Randolph, an ex-slave, now frontierswoman on her way to California, to the west, where freedom awaits people like her on the other side of the river. Too old and too exhausted to keep up track with the pioneers heading West, Martha is left behind in Denver. Given shelter for a night by a woman she does not know, in a city she does not know, Martha senses that death is fast approaching. In the last remaining hours of her life, deserted by everyone, even by God - "Her course was run". Father, why hast thou forsaken me?" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 73) -, she keeps drifting in and out of memories of a life that reveal human tragedies of unfathomable proportions. Her memories are in flux, they are

[8] Edward's guilt is a "parental guilt" (ILONA, 1995, p. 6), as Anthony Ilona points out.

unstable, they migrate and, most importantly, they are "re-articulat[ed] and re-enact[ed]" (BARONIAN et al., 2007, p. 12) in order to be shared, shared with those having gone through the same or a comparable experience, and shared with us readers. Although there is no addressee present to communicate her memories to, she feels compelled to mentally reach out to those she had to abandon and, at the same time, to forsake.

Her memories take her back to the moment when she, as a young girl, was sold into slavery. And Phillips's biblical allusion – "Father, why hast thou forsaken me?" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 73) - (see http://www.justforcatholics.org/a139.htm) revealed in Martha's thought above needs to be read in this very context too. "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. Her journey had been a long one. But now the sun had set" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 73). Recalling her separation from Africa, and her 'crossing the river', the Atlantic first, the Missouri later, Martha's journeys are all journeys of uprooting, of displacement, and dislocation, similar to Nash's. It is the "contradictions of and between location and dislocation that are a regular feature of diasporic positioning" (BRAH, 2007, p. 286) as Brah reminds us. Engulfed by a sense of dislocation and loss in Denver, Martha's mind again wanders off and drifts to the time when her last owners told her that "we shall have to sell you back across the river" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 80). From there, her memory moves on to recall people who shaped her sense of self and her life: her first husband, Lucas, her friend, Lucy, and her second husband, Chester. More importantly, however, she also remembers her beloved daughter Eliza-Mae and recalls one word, over and over again: "Moma" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 74), a word of incredible significance which she cannot and will not forget – never. Martha recollects the moment when slave auctioneers bought Lucas and Eliza-Mae.

> I did not suckle this child at the breast nor did I cradle her in my arms and shower her with what love I have, to see her taken away from me. ... My Eliza-Mae holds on to me, but it will be of no avail. She will be a prime purchase. I want […] to encourage her to let go, but I have no heart. 'Moma' Eliza Mae whispers the word over and over again, as though this were the only word she possessed. This word. This word only (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 77).

It is no coincidence that Martha's own painful parting from her African father and Eliza-Mae's from herself are firmly interlinked. Ever since this "shameful intercourse" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 1) between the African and the slave trader that initiated a world-wide scattering of Africans, the guilt-stricken father has been haunted by "the chorus of a common memory" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 1), which now lives on in Martha. Not only is Martha's father, the African farmer, haunted by this shared memory of losing a loved one to the system of slavery, and of family break-ups, but Martha is too. Martha "[…] sometimes hears voices […]. Voices from the past. Some she recognized. Some she did not. But nevertheless, she listened" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 79). These voices from the past she attentively listens to and evaluates bind her to "a shared memory of a commonly inhabited and similarly experienced past" (BROCKMEIER, 2002, p. 18), a past that is so unique, and yet also so collective. It is unique, because it is her very personal past that reverberates in the present, in the moment of telling her story, and it is cultural because Martha is part of this collective, diasporic memory of "loss" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 78). Low rightly suggests that Martha is connected to diaspora "via the pain of original loss" (LOW, 1998, p. 136), a loss which can be read on several planes: loss of her original family, loss of her husband Lucas and her daughter Eliza-Mae, loss of Lucy, her dear friend, who, in the meantime has achieved freedom on the other bank of the Missouri, loss of the happy, though short-lived, love she cherished with Chester, after having been released by her last owners, the Hoffmann family. And this is where her train of thoughts comes to an abrupt halt: thinking of the Hoffmanns, and how she left them, truly turns into a "multi-temporal configuration of experience" (BROCKMEIER, 2002, p. 21) in which times blur, in which no separation between the present and the past can be made[9].

> And then Martha heard the barking of dogs, and she tumbled into a ditch. (Lord, give me my Lucas's voice.) She waited but heard nothing, only silence. (Thank you.) Eventually, Martha climbed to her feet and began to run. (Like the wind, girl). Never again would she stand on an auction block. (Never.) Never again would she be renamed. (Never.) Never again would she belong to anybody. (No sir, never.) (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 80).

[9] Both Julien and Low underline that Phillips skilfully renders this by having a heterodiegetic narrator blend into Martha's words and thoughts (See JULIEN, 1999, p. 89; LOW, 1998, p. 136).

In this particular instance, Martha is immersed into at least four worlds of memory that only at first glance seem to be unconnected. At second glance, however, we realize that they are not: the memory of her running away, the memory of being sold into slavery as an adult, the memory of being sold into slavery as a child, and the memory of her beloved Eliza-Mae also being sold into slavery. Martha remembers according to frames that emphasize the different aspects of her experienced reality in slavery, where, obviously, there is a continuum between her self and the community. Martha projects the images of her original separation from Africa (see PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 73) onto concrete settings, i.e. the African beach, and the slave ship she is to enter. These places are true 'lieux de mémoire', in Nora's terminology, i.e. "[…] any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" (NORA, 1997, p. xv). The places Martha recalls are places of significance for an entire community of (enslaved) people, who, like Martha, were forced to leave their home, to set up home away from home, left only with a "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland" (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 304). She returns to the past, to places of the past, as if forced to do so constantly and repetitively. Her remembering is "[...] a willed remembering" (KING, 2000, p. 158), a form of "rememory" (MORRISON, 1988, p. 36) in which her thoughts return to an earlier (traumatic) moment which one cannot afford to forget[10]. Forgetting she cannot and she never will, even if "I was free now", she muses, "but it was difficult to tell what difference being free was making to my life, only I was more contented […] on account of my Chester" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 84). "For ten years, this man has made me happy. For ten long years, this man made me forget – and that's a gift from above" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 84). True, forgetting can be a gift from above, but "forgetting the unforgettable that affects the children of diaspora" (LEDENT, 2009, p. 202) is impossible. "[S]ens[ing] […] the dangers of forgetting" (GILROY, 1997, p. 318), she is driven by a responsibility to recall places, events, people, gestures, emotions and feelings, "[...] to materialize the immaterial" (NORA, 1989, p. 19), to remind herself of who she is and how she has become what she is. Interestingly enough, unlike Nash, for instance, Martha imagines meeting and ultimately being "reunited" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 89) with her daughter, which takes much of her pain away and offers her soothing and comfort in the face of death. She pictures Eliza Mae as a beautiful woman, married to a schoolteacher, and the mother of three children (see PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 94). Martha concludes her story with the words: "She would never again head east. To Kansas. She had a westward soul which had found its natural-born home in the bosom of her daughter" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 94). In a way, these performative "acts of memory that constantly rework and reinvent the content of what is being remembered" (BARONIAN et al., 2007, p. 15) create a new coherence for Martha. This is achieved, first of all, because Eliza-Mae is, like her, a mother, and secondly, because her imaginary reunion with Eliza-Mae "[…] is […] a powerful, incorporative, and transfigurative one" (LOW, 1998, p. 136) that enables her to move on, hopefully into a much better future, to find peace within her self, to find 'home' in the presence of her daughter, to be reconciled in death.

The background of the fourth narrative, "Somewhere in England", is Word War II. We hear the voice of Joyce Kitson, a Yorkshire working-class woman who tells her life-story which is rendered in the form of diary entries. The diary entries, an externalization and immortalization of memory, surprisingly enough, are not, as one would expect, presented in a chronological order. Again, like in the sections before, Phillips 'experiments' with fragmentation - temporal and spatial -, a fragmentation that Julien reads as "a metaphor for fractured communities, fractured families, and fractured hearts" (JULIEN, 1999, p. 93), and one could add, fractured history, too. Moreover, the a-chronological time scheme is indicative of the fact that memory, as we have seen in the section "West", does not stick to a linear structure, but is rather something that is in flux, something that is "fluid" (LEDENT, 2009, p. 199). Here again, the similarities between memory and diaspora are foregrounded since movement and mobility characterise both.

At the beginning, Joyce's entries exclusively deal with historical events and personalities: Hitler, Churchill, and the Queen. Besides facts and figures, Joyce records the immediate consequences of this

[10] Morrison's concept of rememory is referred to particularly in the context of memory and trauma (See KING, 2000). In her novel "Beloved", Morrison writes about 'rememory': "'Some things you forget. Other things you never do. […] Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my "rememory" (my emphasis), but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there inside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened" (MORRISON, 1988, p. 36). 'Rememory' means that something takes place again, and again, and again with increasing intensity.

"accident of history" (ECKSTEIN, 2001, p. 39)[11], which she diagnoses to lie in the tearing apart of families, the taking away of loved ones to serve in the war. This is 1940. Of course, these accounts strongly link up with and remind us of Martha's break-up of family ties, of Nash's break-up of his American 'family', albeit in a different context, in a different age. Interestingly enough, in many of her short entries, Joyce focuses on the year 1943, a year of great significance to her. It is then that she meets and marries Travis, a black GI from Alabama, stationed in Yorkshire, the third symbolic 'child' the African father had to sell into slavery in 1752. Sadly enough, Travis dies on an Italian beach in 1944, and Joyce is left behind with their son Greer, whom she gives away for adoption. Then, her entries jump forward to 1963, the year Greer comes to see her while her other children are at school. In another entry, devoted to events in 1939, Joyce's thoughts circle around her highly difficult relationship with her mother, which is partly due to an absent father figure, and then wander off to 1943 again to ponder over the narrow-mindedness of the villagers. The villagers, unwilling to 'cross the river', i.e. to do away with colour prejudice and stereotypical thinking[12], would look suspiciously at Joyce and Travis walking along, thinking that "he was just using me for fun" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 202). Len, Joyce's ex-husband, for instance, throws "ugly words" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 216) at Travis, and calls Joyce "a slut" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 214). Surprisingly enough, it takes quite a while until Joyce 'confides' the piece of information concerning Travis's skin colour to her diary; it takes a lot of courage for this relationship with Travis, which is motivated by love, but also by loneliness, and Joyce's former unhappy marriage to Len. Joyce dis-places the existing mental borders, she crosses them and so does Travis, but they remain the only ones – and the price they have to pay is very high, indeed. First, Joyce has to fight hard to persuade the Registrar to marry them. Their marriage, Joyce hopes, will not only legitimise their love, and keep Travis in England (see PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 225) but will also offer their unborn child a good start into his life. And then the second big obstacle to be overcome are the Jim Crows segregation laws which forbid Travis and Joyce to enter the US. This means they would have to struggle hard to have their love acknowledged in the hostile British context. Allowed to return to England from Italy "on compassionate leave" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 225), Travis and Joyce cherish happy moments together. Unfortunately, Travis has to go back to war again, never to return into her arms. The diary entry which memorizes and immortalizes Travis's death dates 1945. A telegram is handed over to Joyce, a telegram which only says: "To die at first light on the Italian coast" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 229). The rest Joyce imagines and the picture she paints is devastating. "A young man screaming in pain, shouting out for mercy to a God he no longer believed existed. A man with blood flowing like red wine from his open veins. In a strange country. Among people he hardly knew" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 229). Travis, like Nash and Martha, led a diasporic existence in a country that was not his own, among people he hardly knew, among people who turned away from him. In a way, he too was thrown into a history that was not his either. This rings a familiar chord with and echoes, in Bakhtinian fashion, the voices of Nash and Martha who, in similar moments of despair, ask "Father, why hast thou forsaken me?" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 73). All of the protagonists, irrespective of place and time painfully remember this (absent) (God) figure. And so does Greer, the youngest child of the diaspora, at a later stage in his life. This is something that Joyce also deems worthy of preserving in many of her diary entries. Joyce reveals that as a product of her times, urged by "a broader social and historical circumstance" (ILONA, 1995, p. 8), she gives her child Greer, "my beautiful son" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 228) away for adoption. "It seemed the right thing to do, but I was stupid" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 224), she discloses almost apologetically to Greer. And yet, however painful this step and the exclusion from the community are, she keeps on moving by symbolically becoming the African father's daughter (see PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 235) who starts a new life with another man and a new family. At the end of her diary, she returns to the first meeting with her son where it says: "I almost said make yourself at home, but I didn't. At least I avoided that. Sit down. Please, sit down" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 232). Is it her guilt that lets her shy back from hugging Greer tenderly? Unlike Julien, who suggests that "diaspora is an inescapable circle for those who, in Joyce's particular case, lost sight of themselves" (JULIEN,

[11] I read the war as another 'accident of history'.

[12] For Ledent in this section 'crossing the river' "relates to the mental borders that need to be crossed again and again in order to meet others" (LEDENT, 2002, p. 110).

1999, p. 92), I would tend to argue that Joyce has neither lost sight of herself nor of her son Greer, nor of her beloved Travis. She is a survivor, a survivor who, like Nash, Martha and Travis, is "representative of the stories of the lives of the original children of the prologue" (LOW, 1998, p. 132); she, too, has overcome many hardships, she, too, "arrived on the far bank of the river, loved" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 236). "But my Joyce, and my other children, their voices hurt but determined, they will survive the hardships of the far bank. […] Survivors all. Survivors. In their diasporan souls a dream like steel" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 235-236). The survival of all the descendents of slaves, represented by "the many-tongued chorus" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 235), is a survival of diasporan identities through time and space. Phillips says that "I wanted to make an affirmative connection, not a connection based upon exploitation or suffering, or misery, but a connection based upon a kind of survival" (DAVISON, 1994, p. 93).

Conclusion

Significantly enough, the anonymous African father of the prologue and the epilogue is not only the addressee of "the haunting voices" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 236) that he has been hearing for 250 years (see PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 236), but also the keeper and distributor of this diasporan memory. This memory is shared with others through "mediational/semiotic means" (WERTSCH, 2002, p. 12) which, in an "ex-centric communicative circuity […] enable[s] dispersed populations to converse, interact and even synchronise" (GILROY, 1996, p. 22). Therefore, it is no wonder that in the epilogue the African father is also hearing "reggae rhythms of rebellion and revolution [...] in the Caribbean" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 236), "Samba, Calypso, Jazz" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 236), and "the saxophone player in Stockholm" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 236). So the "seeds of new trees" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 2), which the children "carry within their bodies" (PHILLIPS, 1993, p. 2) have sprouted across the Atlantic, in different continents, in different cities, in many hearts. Memories, thus, have travelled, transcended boundaries, produced and discoverd "new places to speak, new territories to remember and forget" (BARONIAN et al., 2007, p. 15). Memory "is the bond that unites societies, creating images that attain the truth value of a symbol, even if deviating from facts. As such, "[…] memory becomes the creative imagining of the past in service of the present and an imagined future" (BEN-AMOS, 1999, p. 299). Bénédicte Ledent rightly holds that Phillips's "Crossing the River", is "[t]he intellectually honest approach to the past, which we must keep revisiting from the ever-shifting perspective of today, […] through the imagination rather than through ideology" (LEDENT, 2009, p. 205).

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