

# Textual Transformations in Contemporary Black Writing in Britain

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## Abstract

While the first wave of Caribbean immigrant writers brilliantly explored race-related issues, black Britons like Andrea Levy, Zadie Smith and Caryl Phillips, among others, have sought to depart from earlier fiction, motivated in their project by the changing white face of Britain. In this article, I would like to argue that cultural change in Britain has deeply influenced literary production and has, consequently, laid the ground for a series of textual transformations. To capture instances of creative excess in contemporary black writing in Britain, I will bring under examination Caryl Phillips's (2009) novel *In the Falling Snow*. My intention is to show to what extent Phillips's work surpasses the 'noose of race' and already-familiar representations of multicultural Britain to celebrate a 'post-racial' society.

**Keywords:** Caryl Phillips, Caribbean diaspora, contemporary black writing, multiculturalism, polyculturalism

## 1. Introduction

Novels by pioneer West Indian writers in Britain, chief among whom are V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and Wilson Harris, to name but a few, have offered a lively palette of stories, bittersweet anecdotes, vivid experiences and profound meditations on the journey from the Caribbean to the metropolis. A particularly prominent feature of this fiction is the sense of social marginalisation and alienation experienced by post-World War II Caribbean immigrants to Britain, generically known as the *Windrush* generation.<sup>i</sup>

The trope of the solitary West Indian migrant floundering in London railway stations or wandering aimlessly in the alleyways of the city in search of descent housing is central to the large body of West Indian novels written during the 1950s and 1960s. *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), as suggested by Samuel Selvon's landmark novel, engage acrimoniously in setting in contrast the grim English weather to the tropical climate back home in the Caribbean archipelago. Another substantial feature of these novels of migration, as often referred to, is the portrayal of West Indian expatriates concentrating together in "imagined communities," Anderson (1983), seeking to support fresh off the boat new arrivals, while looking back with atavistic nostalgia to their imaginary Caribbean homeland.<sup>ii</sup>

While the first wave of Caribbean immigrant writers brilliantly explored the desire for return that haunted the Windrushers, contemporary black fiction in Britain, by contrast, dispenses with the idea of return, and more significantly, with establishing comparisons between the 'here' of black Britons and the 'there' of their progenitors. The descendants of the Caribbean diaspora in the metropolis like Andrea Levy, Zadie Smith and Caryl Phillips, among many others, have sought to depart from earlier fiction, motivated in their project by the changing white face of Britain. In this paper, I would like to argue that social and cultural change in Britain has deeply influenced literary production and has consequently laid the ground for a series of textual transformations. To capture instances of creative excess in contemporary black writing in Britain, I will bring under scrutiny Caribbean-born writer Caryl Phillips's novel *In the Falling Snow*, first published in 2009.<sup>iii</sup> Phillips's novel is set at the cross-currents between the familiar migration novels written by pioneer West Indian writers and the growing body of twenty-first century cosmopolitan fiction produced by black Britons. My intention in what follows is to show to what extent the novel exceeds in Phillips's terms the "restrictive noose of race" (Phillips, 2001, p. 131) and *clichéd* representations of multicultural Britain to celebrate a 'polycultural' (Prashad, 2001) cosmopolitan society. Examining Phillips's *oeuvre* offers, then, an entry into the engagement of contemporary black writers in Britain in developing a culture-predicated discourse that gives prominence to mixed-race identities and that squares with the demographic profile of new millennium Britain. To this extent, this paper argues that the representation of polycultural London in Phillips's novel exceeds hyphenated forms of identity to renegotiate the metropolis as a 'home space.'

## 2. Changing Currents: Superseding the Multiculturalism Model:

In 1978, Stuart Hall identified the relationship between the black diaspora and Britain as "the land which they are in but not of, the country of estrangement, dispossession and brutality" (Hall 1978), whereby 'blackness' is defined in terms of difference and resistance to the white mainstream culture. Hall's argument on the double-helix model of being 'black' in a nation that defines itself primarily as 'white' represents an avenue to explore the literature of the England-based black writers whose fiction has played a substantial role in transcending the limitations of modernity locked behind the

enclaves of ‘race’ and the ‘color line.’ Indeed, critics of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, namely Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, have released the term ‘diaspora’ from the confines of historicity and the topos of theology to explore novel avenues whereby ‘diaspora’ resists coupling with ethnic-centered identities. Khachig Tölölyan’s influential journal *Diaspora*, first issued in 1991, Stuart Hall’s series of referential essays and Paul Gilroy’s seminal works have significantly shaped the understanding of the diaspora as a metaphoric concept that transcends the Manichean binarism of ‘homeland’ and ‘host country’ to celebrate commitment to identity formation in a crossroads of cultural currents. Credited to these critics of cultural studies is their insightful adaptation of Benedict Anderson and James Clifford’s theoretical input on the diaspora(s) to the Afro-Caribbean context. For instance, Paul Gilroy’s criticism of ethnic-centered identities predicated on the ethos of essentialism start with *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack* (1987) to take a sharper critical tone in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) where he valorizes a kind of diasporic identity that looks back at origins only to construct “an imaginary anti-modern past and a postmodern yet-to-come” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 37). Gilroy’s project of the ‘black Atlantic’ delineates a counter-cultural model that interrogates immutable forms of identity promoted by “absolutist conceptions of cultural difference [...] to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (15). In this regard, affiliation to a particular geographic space, i.e. an ‘imaginary homeland,’ to evoke Salman Rushdie’s catchphrase, does not constitute a firm basis for identity, as the sense of *be-longing* depends on the potentialities of recreating one’s self in different homes. The diasporic identity *is* in essence fluid; one that contests the bounded scope of *topos* (space) and *chronos* (time) or the “sedentary poetics,” to borrow Gilroy’s terminology.<sup>iv</sup> Perceived as such, there seems to be little interest in reproducing and remaining true to the set of rules adopted in one’s ancestral culture while dwelling thousands of miles away on distant shores. In this case, the fracturing chasm between the ‘claustrophobia of cultural authenticity’ and (the cosmopolitan) space is likely to trigger a permanent clash between the legacy of “cultural identity” (Hall, 1990) and the cultural milieu.<sup>v</sup>

Aligned to Gilroy’s critique of an identity model that points to its origins, Avtar Brah ascertains in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996) that diasporic identities celebrate “*multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries*” (Brah, 1996, p. 194, original emphasis). Inspired by Benedict Anderson’s ideas developed in his seminal book *Imagined Communities* (1983), Brah argues that diasporic identities resist the nostalgic mist of homeland and cannot, therefore, be held captive within the confines of a monadic site called ‘home’ as the concept of diaspora, according to him, “places the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*” (Brah, 1996, pp. 192-193, original emphasis). Brah’s critique of origin-oriented approaches to identity testifies to the vitality of polysemy, fragmentation and difference for diasporic identities, perceived as bringing to fruition the negotiation between ‘imagined’ and “encountered communities” (Brah, 1996). In this respect, diasporic subjects are the offspring of cultural hybridity, rather than inheritors of nationalist legacies. This prospective vision implies that the diasporic self exists “in a place where the centre is always somewhere else” (Hall, 1995, p. 6). This elucidation is not meant to create a gypsy-like, ‘nomadic’ form of the diaspora, but rather to underline that hybrid identities are the product of a simmering mixture of cultures rather than a mosaic of ethnicities.

Predicating my argument on a conception of the diaspora as a counter-return narrative in the Afro-Caribbean context, I will attempt in my discussion to dispense with the long-hailed concept of ‘multiculturalism.’ It is my contention that multiculturalism has long served as a permanent reminder of a split diasporan identity, of the ‘*twoness*’ of belonging to Britain and to elsewhere.<sup>vi</sup> The argument I wish to advance is that ‘polyculturalism,’ as advocated by Vijay Prashad (2001), tends to be more accurate in the context of contemporary black writing, as it takes into account the sensibilities of fusion rather than mere co-existence. Pronouncing on the discrepancy between ‘multiculturalism’ and the polycultural approach, Prashad argues that:

A polyculturalist sees the world constituted by the interchange of cultural forms, while multiculturalism (in most incarnations) sees the world as already constituted by different (and discrete) cultures that we can place into categories and study with respect (and thereby retain 1950s relativism and pluralism in a new guise). (Prashad, 2001, p. 67)

Polyculturalism breaks with the schizophrenic nature of overt doubleness, as suggested by black *and* British, to celebrate Britishness as an inclusive concept in a cosmopolitan space. If Samuel Selvon qualified the early arrivals to the metropolis as ‘the lonely Londoners’ more than fifty years ago, the systematic racial profiling of post-War Britain classifying people into English versus foreigners no longer holds. Polyculturalism offers, then, alternative visions and sets forth transcending hyphenated and race-predicated conceptions of identity beyond “the high walls of parochialism and ethno-nationalism” (Prashad, 2001, p. 65). The offspring of black immigrants in Britain today are acquainted with the foggy London-scape, they do not share the sense of anticipation and alienation felt and experienced by their progenitors as they are simply at home.

Little surprise then, Phillips’s latest novel *In the Falling Snow* (2009) does not mark stop at the experience of the ‘Windrush Generation,’ epitomised in Earl Gordon and fellow Caribbean immigrants, but extends out to bring to the limelight the generations of England-born offspring like Keith and his mixed-race son Laurie. This understanding opens vistas on twenty-first century polycultural British society that is dismantling the presumed ‘polarities’ of Black and English while smoothly superseding hyphenated forms of identity. On the discrepancy between the first generation of immigrants and their children, Caryl Phillips observes in his collection of essays *A New World Order* (2001) that

“whereas they could sustain themselves with the dream of one day ‘going home,’ we were already at home. We had nowhere else to go and we needed to tell British society this” (Phillips, 2001, p. 242).<sup>vii</sup> Indeed, Phillips and his generation grew up with the sense that England *is* home, not the tropics, which suggests that attachment to Britain cannot be reduced to holding a British passport.<sup>viii</sup> Little surprise, then, that we read in *In the Falling Snow* that Keith and his “generation of kids, who were born in Britain [...] had no memory of any kind of tropical life before England” (FS 41), at least if compared to the generation of the first arrivals, like his father Earl and his friend Ralph. For this reason, I think that the commonplace term ‘second generation’ of immigrants is rather misleading as it does not capture the specificity of this England-born generation and as it inserts another “relationship of entailment” (Stein, 2004) to the Anglophone Caribbean, not to England, as their ‘original’ homeland. Thus, if the classification of early immigrants as ‘foreigners’ can possibly find reason in that they left the Caribbean for England, the so-called ‘second generation’ cannot fit under the same heading for the mere fact that they are either born, bred or both on English soil. Therefore, out of the profound sense that black Britons belong to England, the response of the younger generation “was different from that of [their] parents, who often held their tongues in order that they might protect their children” (Phillips, 2001, p. 276), which marks a break from the passivity that stigmatized the ‘Windrushers’ and declares the beginning of black resistance in Britain.

The experience of Keith in the novel foregrounds the willingness of the well-educated of this new generation of black Britons to challenge the limitations of a racist system. Phillips underlines that the battle for equality can be fought on different fronts and that activism is not merely rioting in the streets since other venues of intellectual militancy can be fruitful. One of the artistic forms of excess in the novel can be captured in Keith’s contemplation to write a three-part monograph on music in the 60s, 70s and 80s. On the one hand, Keith’s project points to his generation that resisted absorption into the scope of black history, which implies that the process of moving from the exclusiveness of “Englishness” to the inclusiveness of “Britishness” is conditioned by constructing a model of identity predicated on a cultural rather than on a racial basis. On the other hand, the three parts of the book are meant to answer the expectations of three distinct, yet intertwined generations. Keith’s book represents an artistic response adopted by a generation sandwiched between the uprootedness of their parents, the hostility of white English society and the growing alienation of their children, like Laurie, the hybrid son of Keith and white Englishwoman Annabelle.

### 3. Hybrid Identities and the Fracturing Generational Chasm:

Characters with mixed racial heritage have peopled recent fictional productions as a creative translation of the new demographic profile of twenty-first century Britain.<sup>ix</sup> The trope of the mixed-race person is crucial in Phillips’s novel as it bears witness to the metamorphic nature of British society and indexes how, as scholar John McLeod rightly argues, the different “kinds of British identities – Black British and beyond – are conceptualized in ways which supersede received racialised models of subjectivity and selfhood” (McLeod, 2010, p. 47). The increasing presence of hybrid characters in the scope of contemporary black writing bears witness to the changing white face of Britain in the new millennium. To support my argument, I will bring into the limelight the experience of Laurie whose central presence in the novel has a direct bearing on a hybrid generation born to black and white parents in Britain that has sought to stamp out the racism directed against their parents.

Another aspect of excess in the novel is that it traces connections and disconnections between generations of parents and offspring and explores the concerns of a new generation of hybrids, like Laurie, born to black and white parents. In this vein, *In the Falling Snow* foregrounds social change in Britain in different areas, most prominently in matters of ‘race’ and racism against black Britons. While Keith remains deeply focused on questions of ‘race,’ prejudice and identity, which are specific to his generation, these issues are out of tune with the new generation’s concerns and no longer stimulate their curiosity for the mere fact that teenagers like Laurie have not witnessed the brutality of mid-twentieth century racism, which may possibly explain the ever-widening chasm between Keith and his son. Obviously, the impact of racism on parents and children cannot be perceived through the same lens. What the experience of Laurie suggests is that this younger generation is more interested in contemporary issues, and to a large extent oblivious of the legacy of racism.

Laurie, as I have mentioned above, is the hybrid son of Keith and white Englishwoman Annabelle. Even though Annabelle and her husband live apart after this latter’s confession of a one night spent with his co-worker, the ‘couple’ remains linked by their son Laurie. The three years Laurie spends with his mother following her break up from Keith have served to widen the breach further between the 17-year-old teenager and his father who tries hard throughout the novel to understand the Britain of his son from his position as a middle-aged person. Indeed, Keith’s estrangement, aloofness and disconnectedness from his son do not spring from unwillingness to get in touch with Laurie, but rather from his insensibility towards the ‘change’ that marked Britain starting from the 1990s. If we assume that *In the Falling Snow* is structured on “partial discontinuity” between generations, as (McLeod, 2010) notes, it is equally valid to argue that it is a novel that captures the metamorphic character of British society. For instance, following Laurie’s interpellation by the police and then his discharge for committing no crime, Keith still wonders whether his son was abused during the interrogatory:

‘Did the police abuse you in any way?’

Laurie looks up at his father. ‘What?’

‘I’m talking about racial abuse. Did the interviewing officer verbally abuse you in any way?’

‘What are you on? The copper who interviewed me was black.’ (FS 227)

While Keith remains deeply focused on questions of ‘race,’ prejudice and identity, which are specific to his generation, these issues are seemingly out of tune with the new generation’s concerns and no longer stimulate their curiosity for the mere fact that teenagers like Laurie have not witnessed the brutality of mid-twentieth century racism. In this sense, Keith’s inability to achieve a compromise with Laurie bespeaks not just of his failure to understand his son, but more importantly of his total disconnectedness from twenty-first century black teenage Britons.

#### 4. Alternative Visions of the Metropolis:

No wonder then characters who populate contemporary black British writing dispose of familiar images and exhausted *clichés* about London as museum, petrified in history and Anglo-Saxon tradition. The marketing of a mythic image of London with “fog sleeping restlessly over the city” (Selvon, 1956, p. 23) attributes a sense of “unrealness about London” as if it were “some strange place on another planet” (23).<sup>x</sup> Westminster Bridge, Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park and many other familiar locales furnish the tableau of London. This is the London we read about in canonized fictional works and admire in postcards. This is the tourist brand of London. It is the very image of the city that early West Indian arrivals expected, identified with and yearned to discover. Yet, to the dismay of these fresh off the boat migrants, the British capital has preserved the banks of the Thames, marooned, as they are, between borders, banks and thresholds.

Contemporary black writers in Britain, by contrast, have sought to offer alternative visions of the city. As Phillips puts it in a recent essay entitled “A Bend in the River” (2012), “the fog of the first half of the 20th century has long gone, [...] exuberant and energetic London is clearly open for business and busy” (Phillips, 2012). The charm of London which has marked the literature of West Indian immigrants post-WWII has given way to a more realistic vision of the city, an image that counterpoints what Phillips calls “iconic London,” the fabrication of immigrants’ imagination, and as V.S. Naipaul has brilliantly expressed in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987):

Cities like London were to change. They were to cease being more or less national cities; they were to become cities of the world, modern-day Romes, establishing the pattern of what great cities should be, in the eyes of islanders like myself and people even more remote in language and culture. (130)

The celebration of polycultural Britain necessitates, then, a shift in focus from the London of Hardy and Wordsworth to a twenty-first century metropolis where participation is granted for all and no one could claim full ownership of the ‘home space.’ “Nothing holds the whole of Britain,” to pan on E. M. Forster’s motto. The white face of London, and by extension of Britain, is no longer representative of radical social transformations and the image of ‘iconic London’ no longer squares with new hybrid identities. To my mind, British history as inscribed in edified buildings stands as an eternal symbol of white integrity, rather than integration.

The conspicuous presence of hybrid forms of identity in literary productions requires, in turn, an adaptation of space, whereby events no longer take place in Victorian-style palaces, but rather in geographic locales that exceed the *déjà vu* with scenes set, literally, in suburbs, in dimly-lit alleyways and underground stations, and metaphorically on the banks of Thames. For instance, in *In the Falling Snow*, readers are on a virtual tour in London. However, the London we cross while reading the novel is perceived through different eyes. One of the remarkable passages that needs to be recognized for capturing Britain ‘before and after,’ as it were, is what I will refer to, following John McLeod’s appellation, the ‘Bridge scene.’ After their rather unsuccessful tour in London, Keith seeks once more to unlock Laurie’s silence while on Westminster Bridge.<sup>xi</sup> However, to Keith’s dismay, Laurie has a sharply different understanding of the new millennium Britain:

‘The thing is, Dad, I don’t know if things are the same now as they were when you were my age.’

[...]

‘So tell me then, how are they different?’

‘It isn’t about discrimination and stuff. I know that’s important, and that’s your job and everything, but it’s also about other things.’

‘Other things like what?’ (FS 167)

Phillips sets in contrast Keith, who is rather interested in the historical grandeur of London and the ever expanding business infrastructure that has markedly changed, if not disfigured, the face of the city he knew fifty years ago and Laurie who takes this middle-aged man for “some demented tour guide” (FS 163) with what he perceives to be his annoying discourse on London’s monuments. Conversely, while in the pod at the top of the London Eye, Laurie shows much interest in “the newly refurbished Wembley Stadium” (FS 161) rather than in his father’s woeful history lecture, which reflects the disparate interests and attitudes of father and son towards the city. “One would never want to dismiss the evidence of tradition,” as Phillips suggests, but, “there seems to be disjuncture between the narrative of British history, as evidenced in the landscape and buildings and the narrative of a twenty-first century polycultural society” (Phillips, 2012), vexing problems that motivate Phillips’s journey in “search of other visions of London” over the Thames.

## 5. Polyculturalism and Beyond:

To a certain extent social change in Britain has been registered, at least statistically. For example, in her introductory essay to the 2010 *Wasafiri* special issue baptised *Black Britain: Beyond Definition*, Bernardine Evaristo records that “in today’s UK, 48% of Black Caribbean men and 34% of Black Caribbean women have white partners” (Evaristo, 2010, p. 2). Indeed, one can only agree with Evaristo’s opinion that these figures point fairly to “the triumph of love over loathing, integration over separation, connection over tribalism” (Evaristo, 2010, p. 2). In addition, efforts have been made through multimedia, movies, rebellious music styles and new technologies to create an atmosphere of polycultural compromise that unites rather than divides whites, blacks and other ‘minority’ groups. While Keith’s generation, for example, found in the then emerging rebel Bob Marley and his songs the spirit of challenge, the new generation enjoys an ever-widening scope of entertaining facilities that goes beyond the literal and figurative meanings of the ‘color bar.’ Little surprise, then, that *In the Falling Snow* swarms with references to recreational facilities ranging from cyber cafés, internet and Wikipedia to iPods, DVDs and Hip Hop. This supposedly virtual connectivity, as it has proved to be more real than merely said virtual, has helped create what Gilroy refers to as the “transracial intimacy” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 215).<sup>xii</sup> In response to Keith’s contestation, expanding urbanism and the corporate business world have facilitated “contact across the color line” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 215) as ‘armies of business,’ conglomerates and “the commercial world” have proved to be color blind, loyal only to those able to feed them coins. Transracial “conviviality” (Gilroy, 2005) is further consolidated by the city-born Hip Hop as an urban form of artistic expression adopted and shared by all those who feel marginalized within their societies (Lipsitz, 1994). No wonder, then, that while Keith laments the loss of a familiar London landscape, unconsciously reminiscent of the virginity of West Indian islands, Laurie and city dwellers of his generation are reasonably more interested in city life and adopt for this reason urban modes of expression to voice their concerns. In this sense, mixed-race youths like Laurie have resorted to hybrid forms of expressions that suit best their identities, voting unanimously for mixed forms like Hip Hop, combining old and new styles, on the tangent between Jazz and country music, on the one hand, and ghettoized rhythms of urban rap, on the other (Lipsitz, 1994).

However, fervent optimism in regard to multi-cultural Britain can be debunked by statistics, testimonies, reports and other factual details revealing that racism is still prevalent in today’s Britain and that Keith’s skepticism in *In the Falling Snow* is realistic rather than amplified as it may seem to be. Indeed, we notice that the legacy of old problems inherited from parents and grandparents still continues to afflict the new generation of mixed-race children like Laurie. For example, in what relates to the relationship between black youth and police force, mistrust and discrimination still prevail. In this sense, (Evaristo, 2010) notes that “there are six times more stop-and-searches of black people than white people [and] the arrest rate for black people is around three times higher than that of white people” (Evaristo 2010, p. 2), which implies that black people, especially youngsters, are still ‘judged by the color of their skin,’ and therefore holding a central position in the arena of suspicion. At school, the situation is also alarming and stands reminiscent of the 1970s generation deeply influenced by white teachers’ low attitudes and confirmed by drop outs amongst black children. In this regard, British Prime Minister David Cameron acknowledges in the *Guardian* that “Black pupils are permanently excluded from school at more than twice the rate of white pupils. Some 9,500 black children leave primary school every year unable to read, write and add up properly” (Cameron, 2010, online). At university things have even been worse if we take into account that “of the 3,000 students who started at Oxford in 2008, only five are black Caribbean in origin” (Cameron, 2010, online). As for employment, the black presence has been deeply affected by the mediocre if not low educational achievements, which sounds logical. Research, as Cameron points out, reveals that “almost half young black people are unemployed, well over twice the rate for young white people” (Cameron, 2010, online). No wonder, then, that long periods of joblessness and low-income are likely to result in a growing rate of criminality among black people and other minority groups who already “account for approximately 27% of the total prison population” (Evaristo, 2010, p. 2) in Britain according to the 2006 Prison Reform Trust census. In governmental representation and British home affairs, claims that racism has shrunk is a rather tenuous argument. Suffice it to look at the composition of Mr Cameron’s cabinet to grasp the sense of the so-called democratic representation of those populating the nation with a solitary black person, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, joined to “twenty Oxbridge graduates, sixteen privately educated and four women” (Evaristo, 2010, p. 2). This can be counterpoised by the American model whereby presidency, for example, is no longer monopolized by ‘White Only’ politicians, which keeps Britain trailing behind rather than in the front of *real* change. If Gilroy gained prominence almost a quarter of century now for his *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack* (1987), it is important to point out that in 2013 ‘there ain’t no black’ offspring in London’s 10 Downing Street. Even though the ravage of prejudice against Afro-Caribbean immigrants can be said to have abated with the new millennium generation of black children, it is my belief that racism is still there, yet directed against other arrivals like Indians and Pakistanis who were overshadowed by the flux of West Indians in the 1950s and the following years and most recently Arabs and Muslims. If racism was primarily directed against the black community during the mid-twentieth century, the growing number of other minorities and their increasing presence in English society has contributed to alleviate the perils of racism against blacks as these minorities have equally received their proper quota of discrimination. In this regard, racism has been disseminated and distributed ‘democratically’ on the different ethnic minorities rather than disappeared, which makes one wonder to what extent is ‘post-racial’ Britain capable of resisting the burden of ‘race’ and the legacy of racial hierarchies.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>. Authoritative academic references, such as Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984) and Mike and Trevor Phillips's *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain* (1998) written in memorial of fifty years of the first *Windrush* landing document the arrival of the first group of Caribbean immigrants to June 1948. Indeed, there is consensus among critics on this rather 'official' version of the *Windrush* narrative whereby on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1948, the *SS Empire Windrush* set anchor at the harbor of Tilbury Docks, England carrying 492 male immigrants from Jamaica.
- <sup>ii</sup>. The predicament of West Indian migrants consists in their maroonage between a remote past in the Caribbean, their 'imaginary homeland,' to evoke Salman Rushdie's ubiquitous phrase, and a foggy future in England as members of an 'imagined community,' in Benedict Anderson's sense.
- <sup>iii</sup>. Further citations from *In the Falling Snow* will be henceforth abbreviated as (*FS*).
- <sup>iv</sup>. Gilroy formulates his contestation to anchor identity to specific spatio-temporal parameters in his evocative term "transcultural mixture" that vigilantly draws attention to "the purity-defying metamorphoses of individual identity in the "contact-zones" of an imperial metropolis" (Gilroy, 2000, p. 117). Worthy to note is that the inextricability of *topos* (space) and *chronos* (time), or the "sedentary poetics" in Paul Gilroy's terms, finds roots in Deleuze and Guattari's idea that "history is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 230).
- <sup>v</sup>. I owe the idea of 'claustrophobia of cultural authenticity' to African-American scholar Louis Chude-Sokei who advocated the concept in a keynote lecture entitled "The Newly-Black Americans: Africans, Immigrants and African-Americans" presented during the international conference "What is Africa to me now? The Continent and its Literary Diasporas" held at the University of Liège, Belgium in March 2013.
- <sup>vi</sup>. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois wrote memorably: "One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro."
- <sup>vii</sup>. Further references to Caryl Phillips's *A New World Order* (2001) will be mentioned in the text as (*NWO*).
- <sup>viii</sup>. Pioneer West Indian immigrants were privileged to enter the 'mother country' with British passports, which presumably entitled them to the same rights conferred on white English citizens. Worthy to note is that not just West Indians, but also African and Asian nationals of Commonwealth countries were conferred British citizenship by dint of the 1947 Nationality Act. For a thorough reading on the subject, cf. Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984) and Mike and Trevor Phillips's *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain* (1998).
- <sup>ix</sup>. Mixed-race characters appear in a good number of fictional productions notabene by contemporary black women writers. Among these, I would like to single out Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2001), Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) and *Small Island* (2004), Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* (2008) and Jackie Kay's *Red Dust Road* (2010).
- <sup>x</sup>. A similar image about the "Unreal City" of London appears in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922).
- <sup>xi</sup>. The bridge scene evokes William Wordsworth's sonnet "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" (1802) where the poet celebrates the serenity of the city of London and the splendour of its famous monuments.
- <sup>xii</sup>. Obviously Gilroy has adjusted the concept of "diasporic intimacy" developed in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) to discuss "transracial intimacy" in *Against Race* (2000) and "conviviality" in *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005).

## Notes on contributor

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