



**CHILDHOOD, MIGRATION-INDUCED TRAUMA AND IDENTITY CRISES IN
CARYL PHILIP'S A VIEW OF THE EMPIRE AT SUNSET AND THE LOST CHILD**

By

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Abstract

This article explores how Afro-Caribbean literature constructs childhood trauma and identity as a consequence of both historical and personal experiences of migration and exile in Afro-Caribbean Childhood narratives. Using Trauma and Postcolonial theoretical perspectives, the paper examines representations of intergenerational trauma rooted in slavery, colonialism, and forced migration, as they manifest in the interior lives of the young protagonists and unpack the colonial residue that shapes hybrid cultural identities and tensions between resistance and assimilation in Caryl Philip's A View of The Empire At Sunset and The Lost Child. Caribbean childhood narratives serves as lens through which writers examine issues of inherited trauma, cultural dislocation, and the search for belonging. These themes are especially explored in Caribbean diaspora narratives which often engage with issues of displacement, traumatic memory and their implications for identity formation and transformation. Afro-Caribbean childhood narratives underscore the critical nature of childhood as a precarious site where identity is shaped. The study shows that childhood is not a neutral or idyllic phase, but a contested space where trauma and identity are negotiated. While migration often exacerbates feelings of rootlessness and dislocation, it also holds potential for self-refashioning and cultural hybridity. Migration, as portrayed in these narratives, is both a site of rupture and a terrain for possible renewal. It shows that literature provides a powerful lens for understanding how postcolonial identities are constructed in the wake of trauma. It also reveals that for the Afro-Caribbean subject, healing and identity formation must be pursued not just through historical critique, but also through emotional reckoning and cultural reclamation.

Keywords: *Afro-Caribbean literature, childhood narrative, migration and trauma, identity, Caryl Phillips*

Introduction

Themes of childhood, identity crises, and trauma are ubiquitous in Afro-Caribbean literature, reflecting the historical and contemporary realities of migration and displacement. This is particularly evident in Caribbean diaspora narratives which often engage with issues of displacement, traumatic memory and their implications for identity reconstruction, especially through the viewpoint of a child (Hirsch, p.5; Metcalf, p.87). This is also evident in many Afro-Caribbean texts, where childhood becomes a lens through which writers explore issues of inherited trauma, cultural dislocation, and the search for belonging. Hirsch's idea of *post memory* and Metcalf's focus on childhood as a site of cultural rupture help illuminate how some Afro-Caribbean writers portray early childhood experiences as central to the formation of fractured diaspora identities. These are projected as representations of the complex experiences of Afro-Caribbean communities, and showcase the legacies of colonialism, slavery, and forced migration which have left indelible marks on personal and collective memories and identities. This view is corroborated by Bénédicte Ledent and Hazel Carby who observed that Afro-Caribbean narratives usually negotiate identity through the lens of historical trauma and diaspora rupture (Ledent p.53; Carby, p.44). These issues have thus become focal points in Afro-Caribbean literary criticism, reinforcing their relevance in broader discussions of memory, trauma, and diaspora identity.

In Afro-Caribbean contexts, the experiences of migration-induced trauma are often marked by a sense of loss, yearning, and the struggle to maintain a connection to the homeland while adapting to new environments reinforcing shared cultural heritage, and a social and political history (Clifford, 1994; Safran, 1991). In the Afro-Caribbean texts, like in many postcolonial societies, moments of migration, though painful, is usually portrayed as catalysts for personal growth, offering opportunities to reimagine identity beyond the confines of colonial legacies and inherited trauma. However, the experience of moving to a new country and adjusting to a different cultural environment often disrupts the sense of stability and belonging for children. The duality of feeling connected to both the homeland and the new country reflects the complex reality of growing up in a diaspora context.

Essentially, migration entails more than physical relocation; it often signifies a profound psychological and cultural shift. For children, migration disrupts familiar patterns, leading to challenges in identity formation. This dislocation fosters a sense of alienation and a continuous

negotiation between their inherited cultural heritage and the new societal norms they encounter. While migration often disrupts familiar patterns and complicates identity formation in childhood, it can also open avenues for self-discovery and cultural hybridity. For some migrant children, the experience fosters resilience, adaptability, and a broadened worldview. Stuart Hall, emphasizes the dynamic nature of cultural identity in diaspora contexts, underscoring its nebulosity. According to him, identity is not a fixed essence but a continuous process of transformation, shaped by historical and cultural experiences; it "... is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being' ... It belongs to the future as much as to the past." (Stuart Hall, 1990).

Childhood in Afro-Caribbean narratives is not merely a period of innocence or development but is deeply intertwined with the socio-political and cultural contexts of migration and trauma. The young protagonists in these narratives often grapple with the repercussions of displacement, both physical and emotional, as they navigate their dual existence between the homeland and the new environments to which they migrate. Afro-Caribbean childhood narratives frequently illustrate how the historical traumas of colonization and slavery, alongside the personal trauma of migration, profoundly shape the young characters' sense of self. These intersecting forms of trauma manifest in the characters' struggles with belonging, identity, and memory, underscoring the psychological impact of their journeys. Caribbean authors like Edwidge Danticat, Jamaica Kincaid and Caryl Phillips use the narrative of migration to explore how young characters are haunted by the past, often struggling to reconcile their present lives with a history of displacement and loss. In Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, for instance, the protagonist, Sophie's identity is continually shaped by both the trauma of her family's exile and the oppressive legacy of Haitian history (Danticat, p.84). Such works reveal how childhood in the Afro-Caribbean diaspora is not only a personal journey of growth but also a collective reckoning with historical and psychological trauma.

The complications engendered by migration-induced trauma perhaps occasions the centrality of the issue of identity construction in Afro-Caribbean childhood narratives. Caribbean childhood narrators like Caryl Phillips, Edwidge Danticat, Jamaica Kincaid and Patrick Chamoiseau among many others, narrate the complexities of growing up in a society marked by racial and cultural hybridity. These narratives portray fractured childhoods and quest for self-understanding and self-apprehension shaped by displacement and postcolonial realities (Dash, p.89; Ferguson, p.121). They often depict children grappling with their dual heritage and the

societal pressures to conform to specific racial or cultural norms. The struggle to define their identity amidst conflicting cultural influences is a recurring motif in these works. Therefore, trauma plays a significant role in the literary representation of childhood in Afro-Caribbean literature. The works of Edwidge Danticat for instance, and particularly *Everything Inside*, highlight how childhood is often disrupted by traumatic events such as migration, political unrest, and familial separation. Danticat's stories illustrate how children navigate these traumatic experiences, which shape their emotional and psychological development. The lingering effects of trauma are depicted as an integral part of the characters' journey toward self-discovery and healing.

The objective of this study is to explore how Afro-Caribbean literature constructs childhood trauma and identity as a consequence of both historical and personal experiences of migration and exile as portrayed in Afro-Caribbean Childhood narratives, using Caryl Phillips' *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018) and *The Lost Child* (2015). Trauma theory and Postcolonial theory were used to facilitate examination of intergenerational wounds rooted in slavery, colonialism, and forced migration, as they manifest in the interior lives of the young protagonists and unpack the colonial residue that shapes hybrid cultural identities and tensions between resistance and assimilation respectively in the texts. These were achieved by examining the narrative techniques adopted by the writer including the projection of symptoms mental health challenges such as fragmentation, interior monologue, and symbolic motifs which emphasize the psychological dissonance and resilience of migrant children.

Migration as a Cause of Trauma

As earlier established, migration is a central theme in Caribbean literature, which is a reflection of the realities in the Caribbean societies. It often reflect the region's colonial history and the post-colonial search for identity. Caribbean migration narratives frequently examine the displacement caused by colonialism and slavery, the quest for better opportunities, and the emotional and psychological costs of leaving one's homeland. Scholars such as Stuart Hall (1990) and Edward Glissant (1997) have emphasized the fluidity and complexity of Caribbean identities, shaped by transnational movement. As such, migration in the Caribbean is both a historical and emotional journey. This is why in many Caribbean narratives, migration is seen as a response to the disruption of traditional social and cultural structures, thus affecting not only physical but also the

psychological landscapes. Migration is a complex phenomenon that often involves significant psychological and emotional challenges, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers. Kirmayer *et al.* (2011) highlight the importance of systematically assessing patients' migration trajectories and culturally appropriate indicators of social, vocational, and family functioning. In a similar vein, Rousseau and Frounfelker (2018) report on the substantial burden of mental illness among immigrant populations. They emphasize the need for primary care providers to be aware of the unique mental health needs that arise from the complexities of migration. This highlights a critical area of concern, as many migrants may not receive adequate mental health care due to cultural and systemic barriers.

Migration is the first step to the development of a diaspora identity and this in the Caribbean history is the outcome of postcolonial experiences and realities, where identity formation is closely tied to the legacies of colonialism and forced displacement. Stuart Hall's essay, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, provides a foundation for understanding the ways identity is constantly negotiated within the diaspora. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* underscores the relationship between transnational movement of people of African descent and the ways in which cultural memory and history influence identity formation in the diaspora (Gilroy, 1993). Caribbean writers like Danticat in *Brother, I'm Dying*, narrates the deep trauma experienced by a child migrant who faces both personal and political upheaval. The traumatic separation from one's homeland and family underscores the profound emotional impact of migration on Caribbean children. In *Migration, Memory and Trauma in Olu Oguibe's Poetry of Exile* (2021), Ayodeji Shittu offers an insightful exploration of the experience of migration and the impact on the migrant through the needs to adapt to the host country, resulting in a disruption in the psychological wellbeing of the migrant. This mental state usually manifests symptoms such as anxiety, pessimism and uncertainty about the future amongst others. He identifies the experiences of the migrant using Olu Oguibe's poetry of migration and exile as a case study. Shittu underscores the fact that the exile/migrant poems written by the poet reveals the collective experience of immigrants, and acknowledge the complex political, social and economic contexts within which migrants and exiles exist.

In many Caribbean childhood narratives, cultural hybridity becomes a key element of identity construction. The experience of navigating multiple cultural worlds, whether through language, traditions, or values, often creates a hybrid identity for migrant children. Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, for instance, presents a creolized society where the blending of African,

European, and Indigenous influences forms the basis of a unique Caribbean identity. The protagonist's childhood experiences are steeped in this cultural hybridity, reflecting the ongoing process of identity formation through the intersection of multiple cultures (Chamoiseau, 1997). This process of creolization is also evident in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey*, which depicts a young girl growing up in Trinidad, but caught between the values of her traditional Caribbean upbringing and the Westernized education she receives. Hodge's portrayal of cultural hybridity highlights the tensions that arise in the lives of children as they navigate the complexities of multiple identities, constantly shifting between the Caribbean and the West (Hodge, 1970).

Migration, Childhood Trauma and Identity Crises in Caryl Philip's *A View of The Empire at Sunset and The Lost Child*

Caryl Phillips was born on March 13, 1958, in St. Kitts, a small island in the Caribbean. However, his family migrated to Leeds, England, when he was a few months old; they were part of the larger post-war migration of Caribbean families to Britain. Coming of age in England, Phillips attended Queen's College, Oxford, where he studied English Literature. His time at Oxford played a pivotal role in shaping his literary career, as he became deeply engaged with literature that dealt with the complexities of identity and cultural displacement (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007). Phillips's literary career began with the publication of his first novel, *The Final Passage* (1985), which tells the story of a young Caribbean woman who migrates to England, reflecting the experiences of many Caribbean immigrants. This novel set the tone for much of Phillips's later works, which often focus on the experiences of the African diaspora, the legacy of slavery, and the psychological impact of migration (Ledent, 2002). His second novel, *A State of Independence* (1986), continued to explore these themes, narrating the complexities of post-colonial Caribbean society. Phillips's most acclaimed work, *The Atlantic Sound* (2000), is a blend of travelogue, history, and personal reflection. It traces the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade through journeys to Liverpool, Ghana, and Charleston, South Carolina. This work highlights Phillips's interest in the historical dimensions of African diaspora identity and the enduring scars of slavery (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007).

Obviously Phillips' background and experiences as evident above influenced his exploration of themes of alienation, identity crises, and colonialism in *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018), a fictionalized account of Jean Rhys's life. A bio-fiction, the novel follows

Gwendolyn, Rhys's literary counterpart, from her Caribbean childhood to her adult life in Europe, revealing how colonialism and cultural dislocation shape her identity and writing. Opening in 1936 England, Gwendolyn prepares to revisit Dominica for the first time since childhood. Her troubled marriage and England's bleak environment contrast sharply with the vivid Caribbean memories that haunt her. Phillips contrasts the lush, sensory Caribbean with industrial London, underscoring Gwendolyn's deep but conflicted attachment to her homeland. Central to the novel is Gwendolyn's struggle with her mixed-race heritage. Raised in a racially stratified society, she feels trapped between the white colonial elite and the black population. Her longing for freedom is evident when she climbs a mango tree to avoid a colonial ceremony, prompting a servant to remark that she is "somewhere between coloured and white." This liminal identity follows her to England, where she remains an outsider. Her disillusionment with the imperial "motherland" is captured in her first impression of London, an image of cramped houses like "yard fowl in small coops." Although she spends years in England, she never fully assimilates. Her encounters with black women at different points in her life offer fleeting moments of connection and reflection on her own dislocation. In the end, Gwendolyn contemplates her life as part of a fading empire. The phrase *temps perdu* (lost time) captures her emotional defeat, but the beauty of the Caribbean endures, suggesting that colonialism, while destructive, could not fully erase the island's cultural and natural vitality.

In *A View of the Empire at Sunset*, Caryl Phillips examines how childhood trauma shapes identity, especially within the contexts of colonialism and migration. Ella (based on Jean Rhys, renamed Emily in the novel) endures early losses in Dominica: her father's death and emotional neglect from her mother, which leave lasting effects on her sense of self and belonging. Raised in a racially stratified colonial society, her mixed heritage places her in a liminal space, accepted by neither the white elite nor the black majority. This in-betweenness becomes central to her fractured identity and migration to Europe deepens her alienation. Seen as a cultural and racial outsider, Ella faces a new form of otherness in a predominantly white society. The disconnection from her homeland and the inability to assimilate into English life leave her unanchored. As her husband remarks, she often seems as if she has "gone back to her childhood" (*A View of the Empire at Sunset* 206), underscoring how unresolved trauma continues to shape her adult identity. Moreover, Phillips demonstrates a profound concern for the psychological condition of the child impacted by migration and emotional neglect, as reflected in Gwen's internal monologue:

Will her daughter forgive her? Already she feels guilty, for she knows she is making mistakes. O Holy Mother of Jesus, a child can never run away from an unhappy childhood. She knows this. Eventually the poor girl will become trapped by her childhood memories. (p. 25)

This moment underscores the intergenerational transmission of trauma, as Gwen's awareness of her daughter's future suffering mirrors her own unresolved past. Emily's struggles with attachment in her adult life stem from the emotional ruptures caused by her childhood migration. Her relationships are marked by dependency and fear of abandonment, reflecting the psychological instability rooted in her early displacement and loss. Phillips largely insists on Rhys's search for home, and he connects her constant sadness to this absence. The impossibility to come to terms with her pursuit and the consequent frustration are ultimately confirmed by Gwen herself when she declares that "A child can never run away from an unhappy childhood. She knows this." (215). Therefore, under this condition, childhood becomes a repository of painful memories that Emily cannot reconcile, thereby shaping her adult experiences and fueling her detachment from others.

Phillips narrates Emily's childhood in Dominica to explore her fragmented sense of belonging and the seeds of her adult struggles. In Dominica, Emily is depicted as being trapped in the racial and social hierarchies of colonial life. Her Creole heritage places her in a liminal space, neither fully accepted by the white colonial elite nor belonging to the Black majority. Thus, she is neither 'here' nor 'there' and this alienation is reinforced when Emily reflects on how her presence in Dominica is tied to a colonial structure that positions her as "different," even among her own people. Emily's relationship with her mother is a key source of emotional turmoil as reflected in Phillips description of Emily's longing for her mother's affection and her realization that such comfort is unavailable. For example, Emily recalls moments of her mother's aloofness: "Her mother's gaze seemed always to be elsewhere, on another child, another world." This early emotional neglect shapes Emily's future inability to form lasting relationships. The narrative revisits scenes of Emily's childhood, such as her recollection of Dominica's landscape. While the lush environment evokes beauty, it also symbolizes the colonial backdrop of her alienation. Emily's memories of Dominica are bittersweet, reflecting both a yearning for and an estrangement from the place she once called home. Her early experiences in Dominica, characterized by cultural

alienation and parental neglect, shape her adult identity and her migration amplifies these issues, leading to a fragmented sense of self. This reflects the broader narrative of Afro-Caribbean migrants who navigate complex identities shaped by both their heritage and the societies they enter.

Migration is central to Emily's experience, serving as both a physical and psychological journey; therefore, double displacement serves as a recurring theme; her migration to England does not bring the stability or acceptance she seeks. Instead, it exacerbates her feelings of alienation. She is perpetually an outsider, first in Dominica and later in England. Colonial and postcolonial identity in the novel critiques the idea of the colonial subject's assimilation into the imperial metropolis and Emily's inability to fully integrate highlights the hollow promises of colonial "belonging." In *A View of the Empire at Sunset*, Phillips uses migration to explore how Afro-Caribbean individuals navigate fractured identities, caught between a longing for home and the desire to belong in a world shaped by imperial power dynamics. In England, Gwen experiences the typical condition of migrants who cannot get accustomed to the mother-country; English people do not understand her because of her Caribbean accent, and she has to fight against a plethora of prejudices and stereotypes. Her identity is marked by her status as a perpetual outsider and her inability to assimilate into the British society, coupled with her enduring ties to Dominica, leaves her caught between two worlds. Phillips uses Gwen's struggles to illustrate the fragmented nature of migrant identity, where belonging becomes elusive. Gwen's return journey to Dominica in the novel represents not only a geographical relocation but also an emotional confrontation with her past, suggesting that identity for migrants like Gwen is inseparable from the unresolved tensions of memory and trauma. Caryl Philips evidently explores the situation of the migrant who seems to be unhappy in the new location. This is observable in Gwen's thoughts:

Perhaps when she saw her father again she might have stories of a now joyful country to counterbalance his unhappy memories. Perhaps she would be able to help him. (p. 214)

This picture captures the idea that many migrants look forward to a new place where they can be happy and forget the problems at home. Regardless, the sadness that engulfs migrants on their departure from home is palpable in the text as Philips portrays: "She held on to her boater and stared at England, but it remained impossible for her to empty her mind of the sadness of her final

hours in Barbados.”(p.214)

Caryl Phillips ties migration to the fracturing of identity. Therefore, Emily’s childhood in Dominica is characterized by a sense of alienation. As a Creole, she occupies a liminal position within colonial society; she is privileged but not fully accepted. Her migration to England only aggravates this fragmentation, as she finds herself marginalized in a society that views her as an outsider. In the text, Emily recalls the indifference she faces in London, where her accent and mannerisms mark her as "other." The narrative explores how this exclusion forces Emily to question her sense of self. In one poignant scene, Emily reflects on her childhood and realizes that her attempts to assimilate into English society are futile. "She had learned their words, their customs, but never their acceptance," she muses, capturing the futility of her quest for belonging. Emily’s attempts to assimilate into English society fail because her colonial background and personal insecurities clash with the expectations of the imperial Centre. Phillips uses Emily’s fractured identity to critique the colonial promise of belonging, showing how migration often results in alienation rather than acceptance. Migration in the novel is not just a physical journey but a psychological and cultural ordeal as seen in Emily’s move from Dominica to England which fails to resolve her sense of alienation but deepens it. She becomes "an exile everywhere," caught between a colonial identity and the unwelcoming metropolis.

In *The Lost Child*, Caryl Phillips uses childhood as a pivotal site where memory and loss intersect. The novel is structured in ten chapters and framed by the neo-Victorian narrative inspired by Emily Bronte’s last days of life and by the reimagined Heathcliff story of *Wuthering Heights*. The opening chapter begins in Liverpool and depicts the agony of a slave woman who has been abandoned to her lot by an Englishman who will later turn out to be Mr. Earnshaw, and the father of her child, the Brontëan Heathcliff. The second and penultimate ones complete the inter-textual construct of the novel, as they focus on Emily Bronte’s agonizing longing for her brother Barnwell, who in her reverie she identifies with Heathcliff, her fictional creation. The third and last chapters narrate the slave woman’s death and little Heathcliff’s forced homecoming with Mr. Earnshaw, who is bound for his new house in the moors, which the readers recognise as *Wuthering Heights*.

The other main storyline, set in the Midlands and London from the 1960s to the 1970s, deals with the tormented life of Monica Johnson, a middle class only daughter who falls in love with a young Caribbean immigrant, Julius Wilson, has two children and tries to survive the breakup of their relationship. She also tries to navigate the pain caused by Julius’ abandonment once he

decides to pursue his nationalist commitment back home. Lonely and destitute, she spirals into mental alienation and finally commits suicide after her younger son disappears, abducted by a local paedophile. The novel thus clearly builds on a postcolonial contemporary revision of the character of Heathcliff as Mr. Earnshaw's illegitimate son of mixed blood, born of a former slave in the foremost world slave market of the eighteenth century, the city of Liverpool. The story, thus follows a critical interpretation of Heathcliff's 'otherness' that was inaugurated by Susan Meyer's study on "reverse imperialism" in *Wuthering Heights*. It also resonates with Terry Eagleton's interpretation of little black Heathcliff as a figure who represents the impoverished Irish children who had arrived in Liverpool in 1845, at the time of Branwell Bronte's Emily's lost, deranged brother, visit to the city, with whom the novel's Byronic hero has "a strong kinship" (Eagleton 1996, p.3).

In *The Lost Child*, perhaps the most explicit representation of the young boy's displacement as the son of a black man and a white English woman occurs when he arrives in the new school, where he is the only black boy, looking "pathetically out of place" (LC 115) and realising he will not be part of that social environment:

"My name is Tommy Wilson" "And where are you from, Thomas?" "I'm from England." His fellow pupils release a volley of scornful cackling that threatens to swell into hysteria. (LC 117).

The dialogue subsumes identity, race, and nationhood and belonging in the painful exclusion which represents the common fate of all the lost children of the novel; the half-blood child, Heathcliff and the two brothers, who, like him nurses the slave woman, are also forced to become caregivers to their ailing mother (especially Ben, the smartest and older). The tripartite narrative layering, thus, eventually pulls the strings of the novel's inter-textual coherence, where each protagonist's plight is reflective of the others'. Far from finding its main significance in the mere re-righting of Bronte's masterpiece through the adoption of a combined biofictional and prequel narrative, *The Lost Child* is, among other things, an accomplished postcolonial text in its ideological and cultural assumptions, since the postcolonial in Phillips always intersects with other dimensions, which enrich its significance.

In *The Lost Child*, Caryl Phillips uses childhood as a site where memory and loss intersect. The narrative interweaves the experiences of Monica Johnson and her children with a reimagined

account of Emily Bronte's life. Monica's childhood memories, filled with loss, shape her future identity and relationships, especially with her son who grapples with the fragmented memories of his mother and the absence of a stable family structure, a defining aspect of his identity. This portrayal underscores how childhood memories, whether cherished or painful, play a crucial role in shaping an individual's sense of self and connection to the past. Phillips' depiction of Monica's early life reflects a pattern of displacement and emotional neglect, setting the stage for her eventual psychological unraveling. He describes Monica's loss in the following words:

She is her tall, gangling father's child, unlike Charlotte, who takes after the mother whom neither sister can fully recall. The numbness of loss followed them out of childhood and pursued them into adulthood (p. 83).

Her memories is often fragmented and melancholic, representing the persistent haunting of her past and emphasize the inescapable nature of childhood loss. In this way, Philips captures the problem of unhappiness in the state of migrants which also reflects in Monica's childhood. As a child, she is able to question the thought of whether her father is happy or not:

Daddy," she had once asked him, "are you happy?" She was barely twelve at the time and was balanced carefully on the arm of the settee with her legs dangling over the side. The question disturbed him, for he didn't know just what it was that his daughter was seeing that prompted her to ask such a thing. (p. 21)

The intergenerational transmission of trauma, which is central to the narrative, illustrates how the characters' identities are forged through the unresolved grief of their formative years. This theme aligns with Marianne Hirsch's concept of post memory, where the trauma of one generation is passed on to the next, affecting their identities. Ledent and O'Callaghan (2017) comment on the nature of migrant family situations as they note that it is ironic that in *The Lost Child*, the interactions of an extended and mutually supportive family of immigrant Pakistani parents and children, contrast so tellingly with the novel's failed English nuclear families in which case parents and children are estranged,; siblings disappear, and single mothers buckle under the task of childrearing. At this point, Caryl Phillips shifts his focus to the profound themes of family, loss, and the fragile bonds between parent and child.

The novel explores the traumatic impact of parental failures on children, depicting how these broken connections shape their identities and experiences. The narrative spans from eighteenth-century Liverpool to twentieth-century Leeds, illustrating the enduring nature of these struggles across time. Ben and Tommy emerge as the primary victims of their fractured family dynamics. The absence of their father creates a significant void, which is compounded by their mother's inability to fulfill her parental role, leading to their gradual abandonment. Tommy, the more vulnerable of the two, seeks the father figure he never had, ultimately falling prey to a pedophile introduced into his life by Monica. Ben, witnessing his family disintegrate, finds no solace in his foster family, who remain emotionally distant and unsupportive. Ben's experiences parallel those of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, as both are taken in by families that fail to provide true emotional support. Despite the immense adversity he faces, Ben proves to be resilient, distinguishing himself through his capacity to forge meaningful relationships. From his childhood friendships, including a close best friend, to his young adulthood, where he forms a bond with a girlfriend, Ben demonstrates remarkable strength in building connections.

Phillips further develops this motif by intertwining the story of a young boy, the child of a liberated slave, with that of Monica's younger son, who disappears in the Moors in the late 1960s. Emily Bronte's lost brother, Branwell, also becomes a part of this complex web of loss. As Phillips writes of Emily's delirium, where she merges fiction with reality, "She closes her eyes and dreams of the boy who came from the moors, but she cannot see him. The boy who went back to the moors" (Phillips, p. 95), conflating Heathcliff with her brother Branwell. Stephen Clingman highlights how this coalescence of family drama and creative fiction reveals Phillips' use of the bio fictive: "The lost children of the novel are linked in metonymic connection" (Clingman, 2018, p. 12).

Phillips' decision to keep one of his central characters in *The Lost Child* nameless is also part of the indeterminacy of his writing; quite unsurprisingly, the riddle of the eponymous lost child is never solved. There are several abandoned boys in the text: the Heathcliff figure; the wild boy from the moors in the character Emily Bronte's feverish dreams; her dead brother Branwell Bronte, to whom her father is referred in her musings as never getting over the loss of; and Monica's children, both her disappeared son Tommy and Ben, who is for all intents and purposes orphaned from a very early age. The intertextual echoes of the lost child figure extend beyond literature to historical events and pop culture, referencing the child murders in the Moors/Leeds in

the late 1960s and The Who's musical *Tommy*, which tells the story of an abused child. As noted by Ledent and O'Callaghan, from its opening, *The Lost Child* draws attention to the lost children of eighteenth-century northern England and the Black Atlantic: "...formerly enslaved Caribbean people who, for various reasons, found themselves in Britain; it also tells the story of their lost children and their children's children" (Ledent & O'Callaghan 2017, p. 2).

In *The Lost Child*, Caryl Phillips presents childhood trauma as foundational in the construction identity. Monica's experiences with emotionally distant parents and her struggles within her marriage emphasize the long-term impacts of early trauma. This dissonance between her expectations and reality exacerbates her feelings of isolation and abandonment. Phillips uses Monica's deteriorating mental state as a lens through which readers can view the complexities of identity formation amid trauma. The novel's fractured narrative of structure mirrors Monica's fragmented sense of self, showcasing how unresolved childhood trauma leads to a persistent identity crisis into adulthood. There is a recurring theme of absence, whether through the physical or emotional absence of caregivers emphasizes the void shaping Monica's and her children's identities. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), discusses how childhood trauma disrupts identity formation, leading to long-term psychological issues. This disruption is evident in Monica's identity as she describes herself as lost: "I've lost myself, you buffoon, which is pathetic, given how much effort I put into looking out for myself before I met you." (LC48).

This sense of alienation and crisis of identity reflect Herman's position that early trauma disrupts natural self-identity development. Alice Miller, in *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (1979), examines the effects of parental neglect and emotional abandonment on a child's self-concept. This is in tandem with Cathy Caruth's view in her seminal paper, "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History" (1996), in which she explores how trauma leads to self-fragmentation, complicating identity construction. Caruth's ideas about fragmented selfhood due to trauma aligns with Ben's struggle to maintain a coherent identity. This corroborates Stuart Hall's exploration of the challenges faced by children of the diaspora in forming their cultural and racial identities in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990). He), discusses the complexities of cultural and racial identity formation, particularly for children in diaspora contexts. Marianne Hirsch's concept of post memory, introduced in *The Generation of Post memory* (2012), addresses the transmission of trauma from parents to children. This theoretical perspective illustrates the generational impact of trauma.

According to Erikson, in *Childhood and Society* (1950), creating a sense of belonging is very critical to the formation of a healthy and stable identity development as can be seen in Ben's search for belonging. The impact of migration as a transformative yet destabilizing force in identity formation is evident in the lives of Monica and her children, whose identities are shaped by their displacement. Monica's move to Northern England, coupled with her internal migration into a fragmented psychological state, highlights the alienation that often accompanies migration. Each generation grapples with their identity in the context of inherited trauma and displacement. As Phillips suggests in the final section of the text entitled, "GOING HOME," the journey of finding one's place amidst the ongoing influence of past traumas is complex. Phillips provides multiple layers of evidence of trauma throughout *The Lost Child*, with Monica's story being central. Her mental breakdowns, depression, and estrangement from her family manifest her inner turmoil. The novel's depiction of her children, especially the eponymous "lost child," underscores the silent perpetuation of trauma. The children's neglect and emotional abandonment echo Monica's childhood, creating a cycle of trauma. Phillips' use of disjointed timelines and shifting perspectives reflects the disorientation caused by trauma as can be seen in Monica's mental health struggles and in the abandonment of her children which all together leave indelible marks on their psyches.

Identity, often described as the roles, goals, values, and beliefs people adopt to give life direction and purpose, is affected by trauma. Traumatic events can cause people to question their commitments to these roles and beliefs. For instance, roles as a parent or spouse can be profoundly affected by loss. Similarly, trauma can make goals seem less obtainable and challenge beliefs about the world, resulting in changed values and perspectives. Identity can also affect how trauma is perceived and experienced. The novel suggests that unresolved childhood traumas lead to a fractured sense of self, as seen in Monica's son, whose identity is linked to his mother's traumatic loss and family disintegration. The sparse dialogue and introspective prose convey the characters' inner desolation, highlighting trauma's pervasive impact. According to Bessel van der Kolk (2014), trauma is stored in the body, and later manifests in psychological and physical symptoms. Cathy Caruth (1996) argues that trauma leads to memory repression, which intrudes unexpectedly. This is evident in Ben's experience of intrusive memories. Judith Herman (1992) notes that trauma survivors often experience emotional numbing and detachment as coping mechanisms as can be seen in Monica's emotional detachment as a defence mechanism against overwhelming pain. Monica also experiences fragmented memory, which makes coherent recollection difficult, a

critical symptom of trauma (Felman & Laub, 1991) Ben's absorption of Monica's trauma exemplifies Hirsch's (2012) position that unresolved trauma is transmitted between generations.

Bhabha (1994) connects migration and trauma describing it as the trauma of cultural dislocation experienced by migrants, resulting in a fractured identity; the trauma of living between cultures. Migration and trauma are intricately linked in *The Lost Child*, with the physical act of migration often serving as both a cause and consequence of trauma. Monica's migration from a middle-class life to a more impoverished existence in the North of England captures the dislocation and cultural alienation that many migrants face. This migration exacerbates her sense of loss and disconnection, contributes to her psychological decline. Phillips also explores the historical migration of the Bronte family, drawing parallels between their displacement and Monica's experiences. The novel's portrayal of migration as a traumatic process underscores the enduring impact of displacement on the characters' identities. Phillips' narrative suggests that the trauma of migration extends beyond the initial act, permeating the lives of subsequent generations and shaping their understanding of self and place. As observed by Courtman (2015), Caryl Phillips weaves the historical trauma of the African diaspora with personal stories of migration, creating a layered narrative that resonates with broader socio-political issues of race and belonging.

Conclusion

The representations of childhood migration the associated trauma, and the impact on identity construction in Caryl Phillips's *A View of the Empire at Sunset* and *The Lost Child*, reveal how the legacies of colonialism, migration, and fractured familial relationships shape the inner lives and identities of their young protagonists. Phillips explores the emotional toll of dislocation and the burdens of historical memory, presenting migration not simply as a journey across borders, but as a psychological odyssey marked by unresolved trauma and identity fragmentation. His characters grapple with abandonment, racial alienation, and the ghosts of a colonial past, often caught in a state of stagnancy that hinders their sense of self and belonging. He illuminates the complex interplay of trauma, identity, and migration in postcolonial Caribbean contexts and affirms that the path to selfhood for the Afro-Caribbean child is fraught with psychological turbulence, but also marked by moments of insight and resilience. Ultimately, the texts call for a deeper understanding of how historical ruptures continue to echo in the intimate spaces of memory, shaping the ways in which identity is imagined, fractured, and, in some cases, mended.

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