

The Notion of Being Other in Caryl Phillips's *Foreigners: Three English Lives*, Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, and Colum Mccann's *Transatlantic*

Thamer Amer Jubouri Al-Ogaili¹

Abstract

This article focuses on the issue of otherness in Caryl Phillips's *Foreigners: Three English Lives*, Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, and Colum Mccann's *Transatlantic*. The study will mainly concentrate on racism portrayed in these novels. The study's textual analysis will follow a close reading of the novels' racial issues, including identity and racial segregation, and the colonial interaction between the whites and the blacks. The novels serve as a panoramic embodiment of colonial clashed between the blacks and the whites during colonial times. Colonial suppression tackled in the novels will be scrutinized as a way of marginalizing the blacks at the hands of their white maters. This marginalization brings about a sense of otherness experienced by the blacks. When the blacks are marginalized, they spontaneously feel that they are suppressed and colonized. The feeling will be discussed as the sense of otherness per se. My study will further argue otherness as a main cause of changing the blacks' identity.

Keywords: Identity, Otherness, Post-colonialism, Racial Segregation, Slavery

Introduction

Racism is against human dignity in post-colonial studies. It advocates the voice of the suppressed black minority, and at the same time, it exposes the faults of the white's exploitive colonial powers. Both slavery and racism have a long history, and "since the early 1980s, slavery and racism have developed a body of writing that attempts to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between the blacks and the whites are always in contradiction" (Young, 2003, p. 2). In addition, post-colonialism focuses on the colonial reality in the black societies where "they have the right of being the same as the whites in terms of material and cultural well-being. The reality is that the blacks' inequality to the whites should be fortified in order to abolish slavery and racism caused by the whites" (2).

Moreover, slavery and racism result in a cultural division among the colonized black societies when "this division between the blacks and the whites is made fairly absolute in by the expansion of the whites' empires, as a result of which the whites could colonize and enslaved the blacks on the ground of racial segregation" (Young, 2003, p.2). Consequently, post-colonialism is concerned with the imperial plans to subjugate the blacks and harness them for the whites' colonial benefits. In this sense, racism emerges out as an imperial rule which "legitimizes" the whites' ability to exploit the blacks (2).

Being that so, post-colonialism deals with the whites' hegemony over the blacks' colonized territories, whereby the divisive territorial consequences of the whites' colonialism subjugate and control the blacks' belongings (Amoko, 2010, p. 12). In addition, the whites' racial segregation practices involve the control of the blacks' residential locations in order to impose socio-cultural influences upon the blacks. Therefore, colonial racism is a result of slavery created by the whites (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 38). The reduction of racism could not be achieved as far as the whites maintain powerful control over the blacks (Femia, 1981, p. 4).

¹ Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.

That is, the whites' enslavement and harsh marginalization of the blacks make them resistant, and consequently, opposing the whites' covetous agendas. Yet, the most negative powerful racial effect on the blacks' lives is their damage of their identity. Therefore, this essay will study the notion of racism and identity in Caryl Phillips's *Foreigners: Three English Lives*, Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, and Colum Mccann's *Transatlantic*. Such racism makes the blacks, and even other marginalized characters, suppressed at the hands of their masters. This treatment makes the blacks feel as if they are "other." In *Foreigners*, the notion of being other will be discussed in terms of racial segregation. In *Shame*, the notion of other is going to be examined in the light of the oppressed and the oppressor. In addition, the notion of other will be analyzed in relation to foreigners travelling to other countries in *Transatlantic*.

2. Phillips's *Foreigners: Three English Lives*

Foreigners: Three English Lives is a mix of historical events in a literary reportage; and the historical fact from which the stories are told focus on three black men whose lives represent inherently the racial practices in against black residents in the English communities. One of the characters is Francis Barber who is given to the great eighteenth-century writer Samuel Johnson, more friend than servant, offered an extraordinary extent of liberty which, when Johnson's dies, hastened his miser end.

Randolph Turpin, who achieved history in 1951 by winning over Sugar Ray Robinson, coming into prominence to be the first black world-champion boxer in Britain, gaining result while fighting for twelve years whose life ended in poor and despondent states. David Oluwale, a Nigerian stowaway who reached in Leeds in 1949, the actions of his life aroused many doubts about the authentic reality of English fairness and justice, and whose tragic death by the police in 1969 prove as a warning call for the whole British society. Each of these black men's tales is told in a different, perfectly recognized voice. Each exemplifies the complexity and events that lay at the heart the simple ideas of affliction that have been utilized to illustrate the tragedy of the black men's lives. In addition, each story discovers, in completely new ways, the themes of racism which have been a central issue in Phillips's superbly fictional works; where the sense of belonging, racism, slavery, and identity are severely exposed. The characterization of Negro is the representation of racism in the novel. It draws attention to how the British society treats the black minorities: "Negroes?" The man seemed confused... "Around here?" "I see. I suppose a gentlemen like you must be asking after Frank Barber?" (p.14). Here, the narrator describes how some negroes are racially discriminated at the hands of the British people. The blacks, like Frank Barber experiences this racism which makes him feel that he is marginalized or "other" by the British.

In postcolonial terms, racism represents the whites in the position of strong colonial forces. The whites have a complete control over the blacks. In *Transatlantic Memories of Slavery: Reimagining the Past, Changing the Future*, Elisa Bordin and Anna Schacci (2015) claim that colonial racism is made when the whites have "an entirely superiority over the blacks" (p. 53). In this case, the blacks embody the weak colonized nations "at the hands of their white counterparts" (p. 54). The blacks are invaded by the whites and are made a subject to exploitation. In other words, the white masters treat the blacks and their families in a harsh way to practice colonial sovereignty over them (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 67). Consequently, the white masters could torment the blacks by firing impolite or bitter words to harm the blacks.

In *Foreigners*, Barber's family is treated negatively by the whites. The host of Barbers' family speaks with them in immoral words to tell them that they are blacks: "I [the narrator] listened but chose to say nothing in response to my host's words... I stifled my contempt, for this outburst of false modesty on the part of my foolish host was perfectly transparent" (p.21). The narrator's discontent with the whites treatment of the black family is an indication of racial segregation. This is because the blacks wear "blackness mask" which makes them different form the other whites: "the spectacle of an individual attempting to hide his indifference behind a thin mask of concern is an altogether unacceptable sight" (p.60). In this sense, Colonial slavery also includes the whites' control over the blacks' names and ways of life. When the whites have domination and superiority over a black individual, they also have superiority over his naming traditions, such as family names of mother, husband, sisters, brother and so forth. Nicola Frith and Kate Hodgson tackle the whites' domination over the blacks' titles in *At the Limits of Memory: Legacies of Slavery in the Francophone World*. Frith and Hodgson (2015) argue that the whites are "blessed with colonial force which provides them with a total domination over the blacks' names and tilts" (p.116).

The whites exert powerful exploitation of the blacks in a way that enables them to take hegemonic leadership upon the blacks and their relatives; especially in terms of identity (p.117). Being that so, colonial racism entails the whites' oppressive colonization of the blacks' names or family titles. This is the essence of "dialogic racial ideology" which means the white masters and their sons have the same ideological plans to harness the blacks for slavery, racism, and social affairs (p.41). Once the slaves are subjugated, their sons are raised in racism to be servants for their white masters (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p.69).

Similarly, the blacks' names are manipulated in *Foreigners*. For example, young Quashey is changed in the course of the novel: "It is said that the boy's original name may well have been Quashey... his value was most likely five pounds... it was decided that the young Quashey, newly named Francis should be sent to Yorkshire to attend the Revd William Jackson's school in the hamlet of Barton, where it is hoped that he might acquaint himself with reading and writing" (p.25). Furthermore, the boy wants to be independent even he serves the whites: "The boy displayed a lack of enthusiasm in applying himself to even the most basic of household chores... clearly Johnson's benevolence had fed Francis' sense of himself as being somewhat independent and beyond any jurisdiction" (p.25). In essence, gaining independence is a reaction against racism. The boy aspires to be independent regardless the change of his name. In fact, his name is a part of his identity. But this identity becomes changing gradually and dissolves in the British society.

As argued earlier, racism grows out of the whites' subjugation of the blacks and their families. In *The Fiction of Imperialism: Reading between International Relations and Postcolonialism*, Phillip Darby (1998) describes the colonial relations between the whites and blacks in terms of an imperial domination (p.15). The whites have imperial powers since they could control the blacks for racism. Yet, the whites need time to have an "overwhelming occupation of the blacks and their plights" (Coker, 2015, p.96). The whites are in a progressive process to involve the blacks in their colonial exploitation. This exploitation increases the harsh position of the blacks. As a result, the blacks experience social plights.

In *Foreigners*, for example, Barber has many bad experiences, especially disease and poverty-stricken life: "in the case of Frank Barber... his final days hereabouts in Lichfield were not easy, filled as they were with both illness and poverty. Apparently, Mr. Barber squandered the not inconsiderable sum of money that his master left to him in his will" (p.20). Additionally, Barber's social conditions worsen because he is not taken care by the British society. He is not able to get by his life: "Furthermore, if you don't mind me saying, the fellow did let himself go, for when I last saw him, he'd lost all his teeth, and his face was severely marked with the pox.... The poor man appeared to be permanently fastened into coils of debt and anxiety" (p.21).

In *Postcolonial Comics: Texts, Events, Identities*, Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji (2015) assert that the whites deprive the black slaves of protection (p.26). The purpose behind this deprivation is to prevent the slaves from progress to be equal to the whites (Menon, 2010, p.74). The blacks are discriminated because they are from other societies. These societies are not like the British society. Barber, for example, is deprived of protection. His masters do not give him and care: "I knew full well that Francis Barber, without the protection of his master, would not be invited to join the company" (p.11). Moreover, the whites can hinder the blacks' lives by warning them against education (Szeman, 2003, p.83). They can also decrease the blacks' consciousness by torment in case they refuse to abide by the whites' orders. They have the power to "impose torture upon the blacks to make them more obedient to their colonial mentality" (McLeod, 2000, p.171). In this regard, racism culminates in the blacks' ignorance and torment by the whites. Accordingly, the purpose of racism is to fill a certain place with blacks for slavery.

For example, the spatial setting of *Foreigners* embodies the empty Britain before slavery. And the blacks are taken to Britain to fill the lack people in the British society: "Britain in the early fifties was a desolate place whose urban landscape remained largely pockmarked with bomb sites . . . the government lacked the resources to do anything about this bleak terrain" (p. 72). Some people are enslaved and brought to Britain for this purpose. The novel arrays some events when slavery began to spread in the British society: "Thousands of servicemen had returned after the war only to discover that there was no industrial machine for them to rejoin, and that jobs were scarce on the ground. The women who had manned the factories during the war found it difficult to readjust to their old roles as housewives and mothers" (p. 73).

But when Britain's society's population increases, some blacks, like Randolph Turpin, bring fortune and good reputation for Britain: "Britain was depressed and good times seemed a long way off . . . The opportunity of seeing boxers in action, particularly champion boxers like young Randolph Turpin, brightened up everybody's lives" (p.73). In this case, the blacks begin showing themselves in good and distinctive position in the white societies (Venkatachalam, 2015, p.145). They try persistently to show their sufferings to their white colonizers to arouse their pity. The blacks could gain much relaxation and exemption from racial labor if the whites sympathize with them (Whitlock, 2015, p.97). Consequently, the blacks are seen in disgust or repulsive appearances in the white communities. In *Foreigners*, the black babies arouse the British disgust. This is not because they are repulsive, but because they are treated on racial basis by the British: "The coloured baby that, much to some people's disgusts, she had given birth to twenty-three years ago in this very town was, on this day, the most famous man in England" (p.88). In the course of time, this color bias changes the black's identity:

In Britain things had been, until two years earlier, somewhat different. A clear colour bar had been in effect so that black boxers were prohibited from fighting for or holding the British title. They were allowed to fight for the British Empire title, but all weights black boxers, even if they were, like Randolph Turpin, born and bred in Britain, were treated as foreigners, and excluded from fighting for their own national championship. (p.78)

In the long run, the British society becomes racial: "In England, issues of race and class frequently operate hand in hand... Randolph Turpin would undoubtedly have suffered as much for his class as for his race... But in Wales everybody accepted him for what he was" (p.160). Thus, Randolph Turpin and other blacks try to prove strong and cope with the British society but in vain. They still suffer from racial segregation because they are "other" blacks. Consequently, their identity does not merge into the whites' society throughout the novel.

3. Rushdie's *Shame*

Shame tells the story of a misogynistic character. Rushdie begins the story by introducing the spatial setting; it is on a border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He concentrates the story on three sisters who rear a son, namely, Omar Khayyam. They teach him confidence and instruct him to be not shameful, the synonym Arabic word is 'sharam.' As such, Omar becomes interested in sexual matters and curious about his relations with women. Rushdie introduces conflict into the story when other characters are suspicious of Omar and his tendency towards immoral life. However, the theme of immorality is highly accentuated in the novel. Omar marries a woman named Sufiya who, at the end of the novel, decapitates him.

The issue of racism is different in *Shame*. It centers on the killing of people in a constant way. For example, Raza Hyder suffers from the hasn't of murder. Therefore, she becomes completely afraid of death even in her dreams: "Raza Hyder awoke to catastrophe from a dream in which he saw himself standing on the parade-ground of his failure before a phalanx of recruits all of whom were exact replicas of himself, except that they were incompetent, they could not march in step or dress to the left or polish their belt buckles properly" (p.151). She is afraid of killing. This is because she is threatened by persons who dislike women: "He [Omar] had been screaming his despair at these shades of his own ineptitude, and the rage of the dream infected his waking mood" (p.151). In addition, Omar becomes misogynistic against women; he holds racial bias against women, like Bilquis, from Arabic backgrounds: His first reaction to the news which Bilquis forced past lips that did not want to let it through was that he had no option but to kill the girl. 'Such shame,' he said, 'such havoc wrought to the plans of parents.' He decided to shoot her in the head in front of his family members" (p.151).

To argue this point, the postcolonial discourse posits the notion of racism on the basis of discrimination in terms of self-other relationship. Edward Said (1978), in *Orientalism*, argues that racial discrimination comes out of "power, of domination, of varying degree of a complex hegemony" between the blacks and the whites (p.5). Additionally, ethnic racism discrimination "is not innocent but profoundly connected with the operations of power" (p. 43). This is the measurement of self-other relationship which involves "the conventional axis of interaction between "the exploiter and the exploited" or the self and the other" (p.42). In this manner, the exploited and the exploiter relationship must create its own other; because of this other it can strengthen its own identity and superiority and "because of this other it can set off against the slavery as 'a sort of surrogate [alternative] and even underground [oppressed] self'" (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 78).

Omar, for example, exploits women for his pleasure. He does this on the ground of racial discrimination. This is also because he lost the sense of shame. Since he loses shame, he consequently loses some of his manly manners: "This word: shame. No, I must write it in its original form, not in this peculiar language tainted by wrong concepts and the accumulated detritus of its owners' unrepeated past, this Angrezi in which I am forced to write, and so for ever alter what is written" (p.31). He tends to replace the word "shame" with "sharam" because he does not like the origin of the word. He wants to emphasize the Arabic meaning of the word: "Sharam, that's the word. For which this paltry 'shame' is a wholly inadequate translation.... It was not only shame that his mothers forbade Omar Khayyam to feel, but also embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts" (p.31).

In post-colonial discourse, the emphasis of words' origins is a symbol of racism (Said, 1979, p. 82). Said's discussion of self-other relationship involves two parts, or opponents, in the racism. They are solely the oppressive and the oppressed (Loomba, 2015, p.35). The unfair prejudice of the other might cause destruction to the person who practices racial segregation (p. 18). As a matter of fact, the suppressed feeling of oppression and exploitation results in a certain resistance of the oppressor (p. 76).

Similarly, a sequence of killing events takes place in *Shame*: "The killings continued: farmers, pie-dogs, goats. The murders formed a death-ring round the house; they had reached the outskirts of the two cities, new capital and old town. Murders without rhyme or reason, done, it seemed, for the love of killing, or to satisfy some hideous need" (p.238). These killings are done to satisfy Omar's vicious needs. Other horrific events follow this destruction in the novel: The crushing of Haroun Harappa removed the rational explanation; panic began to mount. The search parties were doubled, and then doubled again; still the slow, circling pattern of blood continued. The idea of the monster Shame" (p.238). Here, Omar holds responsible for some of these destructions.

In this regard, post-colonialism addresses this issue in terms of racism. This is because resisting the oppressor is a very challenging endeavor for the oppressed (Loomba, 2015, p.64). The oppressed people who live in long racism time could not change their existential relationships with the oppressors overnight. They necessarily need some daring changes to prove their identity as human beings. In *African Realism?: International Relations Theory and Africa's Wars in the Postcolonial Era*, Errol Henderson (2015) tackles the way in which the oppressed fail to get independence of the oppressor's racial domination. Henderson contends that the oppressed people "live in an everlasting contest with the whites and they would not become autonomous because they comply with the self-other relationship" (p.164). The oppressed people have haunting thoughts of the whites who might torment them if they do not comply with their rules. Accordingly, the oppressed people plan to eradicate their oppressor to prove their identity.

To connect this to *Shame*, Sufiya considers her husband Omar as oppressor and she want to get rid of him. At the end of the novel, she remembers how she could kill Omar; and how she gained her independent identity by getting rid of his racial behaviors: "The memory of Sufiya Zinobia had become little more than a bad dream; he [Omar] was not even sure of its basis in fact, half-believing it was just one of the many hallucinations which the disease had sent to torment him" (p. 254). Here, she remembers how she tormented Omar because she has become completely fed up with him.

4. Colum Mccann's *Transatlantic*

The novel tells different historical periods. In Newfoundland, 1919, two aviators, Jack Alcock and Arthur Brown, travel across Atlantic journey to heal their wounds caused by the Great War. In Dublin 1845, Frederick Douglass discovers the Irish people sympathetic to the abolitionist cause which was centered on as famine ravages the Irish countryside. For example, the poor experienced hardships which are astonishing even to American slaves.

In New York 1998, Senator George Mitchell travels for Belfast leaving behind his wife and a child and encounter many people from different countries like Lebanon. These three iconic journeys are combined by a series of outstanding women whose personal tales are told in historical episodes. One of these episodes is the Irish housemaid Lily Duggan. Thus, *Trans Atlantic* is a deep contemplation on racial identity and deep-rooted history in a vast world which grows somehow different and changing as years pass on.

The novel tells the story of Brown in the first episodes. He suffers from separation from homeland. He still does not experience any racial segregation. However, he feels as if he a foreigner in the new places he visits: "Brown is momentarily taken aback – the thought of ditching at sea, of flailing at the water, floating for a moment on a wooden strut, or clinging to the rolling tanks" (p. 19). As a rule of thumb, the foreigners lose their identity as human beings when they are humiliated (Dessingué, 2015, p. 46). The new places they visit make them in a continual fear and unrest. This is the notion of losing human identity (p. 15). They try to impose fearful domination to prove being strong. In this way, they keep their lives safe in the new countries they visit. On the other hand, the foreigners remain submissive and obedient to save their lives in the host countries.

In *Transatlantic*, Mr. Chairman comes to visit Ireland. He meets many people. These people come from different ethnic nations: "The Arab. The Yank. The Judge. Your Harness. Mohammad. Mahatma. Ahab. Iron Pants. They even called him, for some reason, the Serb. He wasn't interested in playing himself Irish or Lebanese. Not for him the simple ancestral heart: he wanted to make himself the smallest continent possible" (pp.114-115). When he meets these people, Mr. Chairman knows how his identity is different from these people.

In fact, the travelers sympathize with their compatriots, and they know they way they are different from other people when they migrate to other places. This sympathy is tackled in Alexander Anievas et al.'s *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*. Anievas et al. (2015) claim that the colonial explanation of migration arouses the feelings of racial segregation in the travelers' psyches (p.61). They "appear nostalgic and wanting to go back to their home peripheries" (p.61). This is because they experience racial discrimination in their journeys. Racial segregation encompasses the preference of some places to others. To illustrate, when the travelers encounter segregation, they tend to choose some place live in order to prove their identity (p.61). In this respect, they are no longer staying in social places where segregation dominates the countries they travel to.

Mr. Chairman, in *Transatlantic*, feels that he is not important. He loses his significance a a human being in some Irish place. So that he could not go out or even, interact with other people: "Still he was sure some of them wanted a slice of anger from him. To stumble somehow. To say the wrong thing. So they could apportion the blame away from themselves. But he figured out ways to fade into the background, stuck into silence, looked over the rim of his glasses. He disliked his own importance in the process" (p.115). He feels very different from other people. The Irish do not judge him as equal to them. Thus, he suffers from racial segregation in the Irish society.

Additionally, racial segregation makes the foreigners impose observation over other people. The foreigners always watch the people of the countries they visit (Lam, 2015, p.93). As a result, they become worse, and are exposed to much racial segregation. The authentic racial segregation against the foreigners is depicted fictionally. Serge Moscovici (2000) approaches the dimension of such racism in *The History and Actuality of Social Representations*. Moscovici (2000) maintains that the foreigner "become the target agents of observations by the host people" (p.22). In colonial studies, belittling human dignity is deemed precarious in post-colonialism (Whitlock, 2015, p.194). When human beings are belittled or segregated, they lose their identity. The foreigners in the new societies come into a new world full of bias and marginalization (p. 195). The foreign travelers do not have sufficient opportunities to mix with the societies they visit. This is because they are racially marginalized. When the foreigners are marginalized, they begin suffering from psychic problems. As a result, the changes in their psyches bring changes in their identities since they are prone to racial segregation. Once they recognize their marginalization, they know that they are living in a low position in the host society.

In *Transatlantic*, the narrator tells his bad experience in some Irish places. He wants to go back home: "It's hardly hallelujah memory, but I must admit I was rather generous with my affection. Over the years, I had several affairs, most of them hurried and fretful and frankly dreary. A meeting in the car park, snatched moments in a golf-club bathroom, the cramped quarters of a patched-up yacht" (p. 268). Here, the narrator seems to be suffering from melancholy. He has not ever undergone this melancholic feeling. Therefore, he describes how other men make him feel that he is different from them: "The men all seemed to want mulligans with their lives. I went home to Lawrence, steeped in guilt and melancholy, promised myself never to stray again" (p. 268). The narrator's weird feelings are an exemplification of his psychic change. As his psyche changes, his identity also changes because he recognizes his low position in the Irish society. Thus, they recognize that they are "others" in the Irish society.

5. Conclusion

This essay has focused on the notion of being other in Caryl Phillips's *Foreigners: Three English Lives*, Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, and Colum Mccann's *Transatlantic*. The study analysis has emphasized the characters' positions in their societies. In *Foreigners*, the characters suffer from racial segregation which changes their identities. In *Shame*, however, the characters suffer from oppression. They do not find any equality. So, the main character gets rid of this oppression by killing her husband who represents racial segregation against women who come from Arabic backgrounds. As such, she gains her identity by killing her oppressive husband. Finally, the characters suffer from marginalization in their foreign travelling in *Transatlantic*. In Ireland, the characters feel that they are marginalized and not important. This negatively affects their psyches. Consequently, their changed psyches belittle their identity as human beings in the Irish society.

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