

# Postcoloniality, Atlantic Orders, and the Migrant Male in the Writings of Caryl Phillips

Elena Machado Sáez

In his review of anglophone Caribbean literature, “The Novel in the British Caribbean,” A. J. Seymour looks specifically at the representation of the exile’s return in order to imagine the future trajectory of Caribbean letters.<sup>1</sup> Seymour laments the common thread that emerges in the novels of writers such as V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming, and John Hearne—the negative depiction of the migrant male. The male heroes in these works return to the Caribbean after having lived in exile in order to participate in or incite political change, only to emerge at the end of their struggles as tragic failures. Seymour figures these pessimistic plots as symptomatic of a residual anticolonialist attitude among Caribbean writers still obsessed with resistance: “I have the impression that the British Caribbean novelist is still writing from a position of opposition to the powers that be, and has not yet seen the region making an act of possession of its political powers.”<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, Seymour sees this oppositional stance as passé in view of the “new political independence for national units” in the Caribbean. For Seymour, the

1. A. J. Seymour, “The Novel in the British Caribbean,” *BIM* 11 (1967): 239–40.

2. *Ibid.*, 239.

moment of independence figures as a complete break from the colonial hold of empire in terms of economics, politics, and culture. With the postcolonial moment defined by full independence, Seymour calls for the colonial thematics of resistance to be replaced by a nation-building aesthetic, one that is “optimistic in a forward-looking sense.”<sup>3</sup>

Caryl Phillips forms part of the postcolonial generation of Caribbean writers; however, there is a distinct difference between Phillips and the nation-building novelists imagined by Seymour. While Phillips’s work does depict the challenges faced by the Caribbean in a postcolonial age, his texts “are not sweeping calls to social action.”<sup>4</sup> Phillips’s more recent writings, *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) and *A New World Order* (2001), consistently refute the possibility of solidarity, rejecting the idea that a community with shared cultural values could emerge from and be united by the horrors of slavery, colonialism, and migration. Phillips’s writings allude to a postcolonial problematic outside of the logic of Seymour’s consideration. Rather than conceiving of the postcolonial moment in terms of full independence, Phillips’s postcolonial is defined by neocolonial relations of power. In turn, Phillips alludes to a shift in the formulation of politics itself such that the primacy of political freedom is no longer a privileged concept within the public sphere. In its place emerges the centrality of the individual body as commodity within an Atlantic order of globalization. In this article, I will discuss how Phillips narrates the persona of the isolated migrant male as the representative subject of the neocolonial Caribbean. Beginning first with Phillips’s recent travel writing, in which he represents collective political movements as impossible, I will then examine his early novel, *A State of Independence* (1986), as Phillips’s closest engagement with the literary project of nation building. Phillips’s turn towards nonfiction writing in the later half of his career can be understood in terms of the development of the migrant male persona in *A State of Independence*, as well as in terms of the challenges faced by the shift from colonialism to postcolonialism in the Caribbean as the foreclosure of political freedom with the emergence of a biopolitical new world order.

Caryl Phillips has commented that all of his writing takes as its subject the intersection between travel, history, and identity: “It is the same story rewritten in many ways. I feel it is my duty to tell the story and I can’t stop telling it.”<sup>5</sup> Phillips regards himself as

3. Ibid.

4. Jenny Sharpe, “Of This Time, Of That Place,” *Transition* 68 (1995): 154–61. See 155.

5. Petra Tuomi, “Prize-winning Novelist and Barnard Professor of Migration and Social Order, Caryl Phillips, Leads an International Life of Writing, Academics and Screenwriting,” *Barnard Campus News*, 26 November 2002, [www.barnard.columbia.edu/newnews/news62000a.htm](http://www.barnard.columbia.edu/newnews/news62000a.htm).

“a writer and traveler observing the residue of empire.”<sup>6</sup> This detached stance facilitates a certain critical position as well. The traveling subject in Phillips’s nonfiction texts, *The Atlantic Sound* and *A New World Order*, is overwhelmed by the historicity of his travels. This historicity includes the remnants of the transatlantic slave trade, the migrations that followed the dismantling of the colonial system, and the shifts in global labor, which affected Phillips’s parents. Contextualization is both the mission and curse of this traveling subject. To see these ghostly remains while others, blinded by historical amnesia and materialism, do not, produces an educating mission and a pessimism about humanity and the future of equality within a new world order. There appears to be no exit from this repetitive cycle of history and violence. The hyperconsciousness of Phillips’s migrant persona brands him as an outsider to the present.<sup>7</sup> Phillips represents himself as an indifferent and even cynical bystander to the movements that seek to negotiate the historical inheritance of slavery, and these attempts to construct an alternative mythology of history seem naïve as Phillips heralds a new age of global interaction on a different scale and different terms. Within this new context, it is as though the migrant male “cannot afford to be moved” and must remain detached from any emotive identification.<sup>8</sup>

In *The Atlantic Sound*, Caryl Phillips traces the histories of migration and displacement within the geographic space of the Atlantic Ocean. The nonfiction text is divided into sections that not only locate travel as the organizing principle behind Phillips’s narrative but also evoke a circular negotiation of belonging and identity: “Atlantic Crossing,” “Leaving Home,” “Homeward Bound,” and “Exodus.” Within the course of his travelogue, Phillips traces the routes and historical remains of the transatlantic slave trade’s legacy, traveling between Guadeloupe, Liverpool, Accra, Charleston, and Israel.

The opening passage of *The Atlantic Sound* finds Phillips on a banana boat, reenacting his parents’ migration from the Caribbean to Britain, a movement that defines them as part of the *Windrush* generation. The concept of community via migration, however, is precisely the myth Phillips seeks to demystify within his text, and in this sense “Atlantic Crossing” is emblematic of Phillips’s writing in both subject and tone. While Phillips’s journey mirrors that of his parents, he is under no illusion that this brings him closer to understanding their experience:

6. Caryl Phillips, “English Literature and Empire,” interview with Alastair Niven, *The British Library*, London, 20 September 2000, [www.fathom.com/story/story\\_printable.jhtml?storyId=122056](http://www.fathom.com/story/story_printable.jhtml?storyId=122056).

7. Darryl Pickney also comments on Phillips’s “recessive presence” in *The Atlantic Sound*. Pickney, *Out There: Mavericks in Black Literature* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002), 107–57.

8. *Ibid.*, 155. The migrant male as developed in *The Atlantic Sound* and *A New World Order* represents the dead end of *A State of Independence*’s formulation of this persona.

For me this will be no Atlantic crossing into the unknown. I fully understand the world that will greet me at the end of the journey, but for the West Indian emigrant of an earlier generation the Atlantic crossing was merely the prelude to a larger adventure—one which would change the nature of British society.<sup>9</sup>

**SMALL  
AXE**

The hope that these earlier immigrants carried with them, “the hope that the mother country would remain true to her promise that she would protect the children of her empire,” is what differentiates them from Phillips.<sup>10</sup> This knowledge, or cynicism, enables Phillips to view his journey within a certain historical context: the future of disillusion facing the immigrants of the *Windrush* generation as well as the history of empire that prompted their travel to its center. Phillips can only identify on one level with this traveling population, which includes his own parents: “I know now how [my mother] and all the other immigrants felt as they crossed the Atlantic; they felt lonely.”<sup>11</sup> As Phillips travels, visiting ports in the Caribbean as well as in Costa Rica and Guatemala, his observations point to isolation as a principal facet of migration. Describing the atmosphere of despair that pervades the boat, Phillips continually asserts the impossibility of a traveling community, that this shared experience could never lead to the development of any kind of migrant kinship.

This picture of isolation is repeated throughout *The Atlantic Sound* while Phillips also provides a sense of how history has been erased or commodified. His narrative voice frames these spaces historically, creating an interference with the populations’ own attempts to formulate a new communal identity. For example, Phillips juxtaposes Liverpool’s symbolic erasure of its ties to the slave trade alongside the journey of a nineteenth-century African trader to the city. This recontextualization sharply critiques not only the way in which Liverpool officially buries its past but also the notion of authenticity invested in the black British community there, which is used to rationalize the antagonism aimed at the more recently arrived Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the island. The submerged presence of history in Liverpool stands in stark contrast to the commercialization of this same history in Accra as part of Panafest, an event targeted at African Americans who make a journey “home” to Africa. Within his narrative on the Pan-African celebration, Phillips includes an account of the area’s connection to and participation within the slave trade, highlighting the festival’s investment in formulating a diasporic identity for profit and the way in which its own historical narrative contradicts

9. Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2000), 7.

10. *Ibid.*, 20.

11. *Ibid.*

this mission by identifying the slaves as criminals who deserved their captivity. Emphasizing Elmina's role as a slave trading post, Phillips figures the mission of the Pan-African festival as a hypocritical valuation of diaspora. Phillips also makes note of how this attempt to recover a communal identity is overdetermined by another global trade, cultural tourism, by describing the quantity of mass-produced publicity materials and advertisements with the Panafest logo—specifically, the “black Panafest T-shirts.”<sup>12</sup> Throughout *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips targets the formulation of home within various communities in Africa, the United States, and Britain by pointing to the historical residue of the slave trade.

While calling attention to the way in which the systems of slavery and colonialism still influence contemporary interactions, Phillips moves to describe another, more recent, organizing structure in his introduction to a collection of his essays and reviews: *A New World Order*. Journeying between sub-Saharan Africa, New York City, London, and West Africa, Phillips repeats the mantra of the migrant: “I recognize this place, I feel at home here, but I don't belong. I am of, and not of, this place.”<sup>13</sup> The black diaspora links these spaces, but there remains another layer of complex associations that confounds Phillips's ability to belong. According to Phillips, history had dealt him “an ambiguous hand” of cards, complicating any search for home.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, this ambiguity is also derived from the context in which Phillips finds himself, the context of a “new world order.” This twenty-first-century world is defined by migrancy; it is a “world in which it is impossible to resist the claims of . . . the asylum seeker or the refugee.”<sup>15</sup> The newness of this world stems from the collapse of the “colonial or postcolonial model.”<sup>16</sup> While acknowledging this as providing the potential for political liberation, Phillips views the new order of migrancy with skepticism, as a place devoid of simple identifications, where “nobody will feel fully at home.”<sup>17</sup> Rather than allowing for the development of a community or solidarity via movement, Phillips identifies migrancy as an isolating condition derived from the contemporary global context. He also announces the arrival of “one global conversation with limited participation open to all, and full participation available to none.”<sup>18</sup> The global network appears to not only restrict access

12. Ibid., 169.

13. Caryl Phillips, *A New World Order* (London: Vintage International, 2002), 4.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 5.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

but also create what the concluding title of Phillips's collection calls "the high anxiety of belonging." The two histories of slavery and globalization converge to preclude the contemporary development of a coherent subjectivity or kinship and therefore the possibility of resistance via solidarity.

Discussing his fiction, critics assert that Phillips could "qualify as one of his own characters."<sup>19</sup> This conflation of author and fictional character is derived from the prominent figure of the male traveler within Phillips's writing, which constitutes a theorization of the migrant subject in relation to a new global context. The migrant travels the intersection of history and globalization, attempting to reconcile knowledge regarding their pervasive influence with the desire to challenge and resist these forces even as they continue to shape all human interaction.<sup>20</sup>

Phillips's fiction receives a great deal of critical praise for navigating this strait, in particular those texts that challenge genre and narrative form.<sup>21</sup> The most critically popular of these works are *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993), and *A Distant Shore* (2003), although there also remains some critical interest in his earlier plays as well as his first novel, *The Final Passage* (1985). These later novels have been hailed as endorsing a migrant subjectivity as well as a Pan-Caribbean and Pan-African sensibility.<sup>22</sup> Phillips's popularity as a writer has earned him many awards, such as the Malcolm X Prize for Literature and the Guggenheim Fellowship, in addition to

19. Caryl Phillips, "Caryl Phillips: The Trauma of 'Broken History,'" interview with Ivan Kreilkamp, *Publishers Weekly*, 28 April 1997, 44.
20. For an analysis of history as a theme within Phillips's writing, see Andrew Armstrong, "Bloody History! Exploring a Capacity for Revision: Restaging History in Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* and Caryl Phillips' *The Nature of Blood*," *Jouvert* 6, no. 3 (2002): 24–39; Kathie Birat, "A Shameful Intercourse: Meaning and Signifying in Caryl Phillips's Novels of the Slave Trade," *Ré-inventer le réel: actes du colloque GRAAT/CERCA, Université de Tours, 26–27 Septembre 1997* (Tours: L'Université, 1999), 33–47; Ángeles De la Concha, "The End of History. Or Is It? Circularity versus Progress in Caryl Phillips' *The Nature of Blood*," *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies* 22 (2000): 1–19; Renee Therese Schatteman, "Caryl Phillips, J. M. Coetzee, and Michael Ondaatje: Writing at the Intersection of the Postmodern and the Postcolonial" (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 2000). *DAI* 61 (2000): 605.
21. María Lourdes López Roperó, "Irony's Political Edge: Genre Pastiche in Caryl Phillips' *Cambridge*," in *Beyond Borders: Re-defining Generic and Ontological Boundaries*, ed. Ramón Plo-Alastrue and María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro (Heidelberg: Winter, 2001), 131–37; Rebecca Wheeler, "Rewriting the Colonized Past through Textual Strategies of Exclusion (Maria Edgeworth, Raja Rao, J. M. Coetzee, Caryl Phillips)" (PhD diss., Ball State University, 2002). *DAI* 63 (2002): 591; Sylvie Chavanelle, "Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge*: Ironical (Dis)Empowerment?" *International Fiction Review* 25, no. 1–2 (1998): 78–88.
22. Bronwyn T. Williams, "A State of Perpetual Wandering: Diaspora and Black British Writers," *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 3, no. 3 (1999): 38–52; María Frías, "Out of the Kumbia: Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* (1985)," in *On Writing and Race in Contemporary Britain*, ed. Fernando Galván and Mercedes Bengoechea (Alcala de Henares: Universidad de Alcala de Henares, 1999), 163–70; Hank Okazaki, "Dis/Location and 'Connectedness' in Caryl Phillips," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 6, no. 2 (1994): 88–96.

a place in the *Contemporary World Writers* book series. He serves as the head editor of a Caribbean literature series published by Faber and Faber and has occupied the position of endowed chair in migration and social order at Barnard College since 1998.

In order to trace the development of migrancy as a theme within Phillips's writing, this article will move from its earlier discussion of Phillips's recent nonfiction texts to a reading of an earlier work, which will delve further into the representation of the migrant male. My interest lies in reading *A State of Independence* (1986) precisely because it is a work that has often been overlooked in the course of Phillips's writing career. The reasons for this lack of critical attention stem from the novel's nonfragmented linear narrative format and a subject that has been deemed too autobiographical for critical interest: the exile's return to the Caribbean.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the conventional format and autobiographical context of the narrative, I argue that the novel's overtly cynical rendition of a migrant subject has led to a general silence regarding this early work, since its cynicism acts to disrupt celebratory diasporic readings of Phillips's fiction. Through its return plot, *A State of Independence* also privileges the Caribbean as a space wherein the effects of history and global commerce have most concretely formed a challenge to cultural production and identity. In *A New World Order*, Phillips himself argues that "the synthesizing new world order of the Caribbean provides the perfect model for the age in which we live . . . the answer is to be found in the culture and literature of the Caribbean archipelago."<sup>24</sup>

The critical reception of *A State of Independence* is minimal if not nonexistent.<sup>25</sup> Bénédicte Ledent's monograph on Caryl Phillips, published as part of the *Contemporary World Writers* series, and Richard Patteson's *Caribbean Passages: A Critical*

23. In her monograph on Caryl Phillips, Bénédicte Ledent argues that *A State of Independence* is a disappointing work "because it lacks the structural boldness that contributes to the complexity of *The Final Passage*, and also characterises Phillips's later fiction." Bénédicte Ledent, *Caryl Phillips* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 40. Ledent's reading of *A State of Independence* remains fixated upon the autobiographical dimension of the novel, condensing the discussion of the novel to the influences of Phillips's trip to St. Kitts in 1983.

24. Phillips, *A New World Order*, 132.

25. Despite the centrality of migration within the plot of *A State of Independence*, the extensive bibliography about Phillips's diasporic vision fails almost uniformly to include the novel in this discussion. For example, see Bénédicte Ledent, "'One Is Exiled When One Refuses to Obey the Commandments of Conquest Mission.' Religion as Metaphor in Caryl Phillips's Diasporic Philosophy," *Missions of Interdependence: A Literary Directory*. *Cross/Cultures* 58 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 121–30; Claude Julien, "The Diaspora and the Loss of Self in Caryl Phillips's Fiction: Signposts on the Page," *PALARA: Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association* 1 (1997): 98–105; Günter H. Lenz, "Middle Passages: Histories, Re-memories, and Black Diasporas in Novels by Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson, and Caryl Phillips," *Crabtracks: Progress and Process in Teaching the New Literatures in English*. *Cross/Cultures* 57 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002); Bénédicte Ledent, "Ambiguous Visions of Home: The Paradoxes of Diasporic Belonging in Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*," *EnterText* 1, no. 1 (2000): 198–211. For further examples please see the essays cited in note 22.

*Perspective on New Fiction from the West Indies* make up most of the small body of critical analysis on *A State of Independence*. Ledent provides a succinct review of the novel's place within the context of Phillips's literary career, locating the novel as a minor work that continues to draw on the themes of migration and colonialism using the conventional form of the homecoming plot. As it traces Bertram Francis's return to the Caribbean after a twenty-year exile, the novel is decidedly antinostalgic because of Bertram's frustrated attempts to reconnect and belong once again. Returning in hopes of obtaining a successful business position within a post-independence Caribbean, Bertram finds that he is not welcome. Bertram's own mother and his best friend, Jackson, see him as a stranger, an intruder, and a traitor. Ledent argues that Bertram's return is anticlimactic because "the 'colonial structure' of the Caribbean has remained untouched despite undeniable economic, social, and political advances."<sup>26</sup> The novel, through Bertram's multiple rejections, figures these advances as superficial, leaving the anticlimax to be defined by the change of power from the British colonial structure to the neocolonial structure of U.S. capitalist imperialism.

Ledent's analysis is fractured by a desire to follow the plot's narrativization of this shift and reassert the autobiographical connections between the text and the author. While Ledent admits that the narrative itself seeks to distance the geographic location from St. Kitts by omitting these localizing particulars of time and place, she continually reinserts this autobiographical context, claiming that Bertram "lands in St. Kitts" and that the novel is a "demythologised analysis of the political situation in St. Kitts at the time of its independence from Britain, as seen through the eyes of a returnee."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in his chapter "Caryl Phillips: The End of All Exploring," Patteson not only argues in a footnote that the Caribbean island in the novel is "transparently St. Kitts" but in an aside to the reader also asserts, "*A State of Independence* serves as a rather good travel guide to St. Kitts."<sup>28</sup> This insertion of a specific locality into a narrative that eschews such localization stems from both critics' conflation of Phillips as author with the fictional traveling male subject of the novel. Ledent completes her analysis of *A State of Independence* by wondering "if Phillips could have been able to analyse the Kittian scene so cogently had he not felt close to his subject."<sup>29</sup> In discussing Bertram's perceptions of his native island as being those of an outsider, Patteson parenthetically

26. Ledent, *Caryl Phillips*, 42.

27. *Ibid.*, 52.

28. Richard Patteson, *Caribbean Passages: A Critical Perspective on New Fiction from the West Indies* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 115–41.

29. Ledent, *Caryl Phillips*, 53.



notes that these are “implicitly, Phillips’s impressions as well.”<sup>30</sup> These readings appear to stand in opposition to Phillips’s own assertion that *A State of Independence* is “not autobiographical.”<sup>31</sup>

For Ledent and others, Phillips’s subject is literally phrased as himself—and Phillips often reacts to this kind of conflation by very ambiguously drawing the line between his personal life and the fictional lives he narrates. One of the most detailed discussions of Phillips’s second novel and its autobiographical context can be found in a 1986 interview with Kay Saunders. The discussion centers on the events that informed the writing of *A State of Independence*, in particular, Phillips’s visit to St. Kitts on the eve of independence in 1983. Phillips states that his novel is “based on absolute historical veracity to the point of being dodgy in terms of my relationship with the government of the country I come from.”<sup>32</sup> This duplicity is an extension of the text’s omissions regarding geographic setting, time period, and authorial voice. St. Kitts is never named as the location of the narrative; the named capital in the fictional text is Baytown rather than that of the actual capital of St. Kitts, Basseterre. The resistance to grounding the text in a specific time, space, and “reality” allows for the transposition of this specific event of independence onto the whole of the Caribbean.<sup>33</sup> The novel nevertheless treads a thin line between this Pan-Caribbean construct and the locale of St. Kitts, since the opening epigraphs are quotes about St. Kitts by Marcus Garvey and local newspapers, and the narrative concludes with the date and location “St. Kitts, 20 June 1985.” The question of dressing autobiography as fiction becomes entangled with the issues of context and accuracy that generally surround historical narratives. Phillips merges the categories of autobiography, fiction, and history to engage in the narration of a story about the Caribbean as both a local and universal space. The critical conflation of author with fictional character is a product of this deft manipulation of genre, locale, and context.

During the course of the 1986 interview, Phillips also calls into question the viability of independence as a state for Caribbean nations by using heterosexual relationships as a metaphor. Phillips indicates that his critique of independence from colonial strictures is linked to the representation of “the relationship between the men and the women [as]

30. Patteson, *Caribbean Passages*, 129.

31. *Speak Fiction and Poetry!: The Best of Bomb Magazine’s Interviews with Writers*, ed. Betty Sussler, Suzan Sherman, and Ronalde Shavers (New York: G+B Arts International, 1998), 194.

32. Caryl Phillips, interview with Kay Saunders, *Kunapipi* 9, no. 1 (1987): 44–52, 45.

33. Many other Caribbean novels similarly present fictional settings or refuse to ground the texts in a specific locality, such as V. S. Naipaul’s *Guerillas*, Robert Antoni’s *Divina Trace* and *Blessed Is the Fruit*, as well as Paule Marshall’s *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*.

very problematical.”<sup>34</sup> Patsy, Bertram’s former lover, “realises very early on, something which is implicit in the title: there is no such thing as a ‘state of independence,’ either for the country or for them as individuals.”<sup>35</sup> Autonomy is “neither true for the islands nor for the individuals,” and interpersonal relationships consequently take on a critical importance in revealing the impossibility of the independence project, especially that of Bertram and Patsy.<sup>36</sup> The novel also hints that the product of their relationship, their son, Livingstone, represents the future of the Caribbean. Phillips figures Livingstone as a “new beginning,” one that might include “another kind of awful exploitative rebirth,” since the character appears as “a new colonial product.”<sup>37</sup> Phillips’s writerly play between the local and global as well as the historical and the personal is in keeping with the novel’s attempt to imagine the new world order that the post-independence Caribbean enters. I will consequently discuss the way in which history and the transition between the colonial and neocolonial are depicted in *A State of Independence*, following with an analysis of how the male subject as exile is reinserted into a space of belonging via a biopolitical route,<sup>38</sup> despite the disjunction created by the shift in the dominant power structures which he struggles to comprehend. While the critical work on *A State of Independence* seeks to connect the novel to Phillips’s personal experience of exile, my reading will focus on the relationship of the fictionalized traveling male subject to the grounded female subject as the plane upon which the new world order is inscribed.

The epigraphs that frame *A State of Independence* signal the concerns of the text. The first quote is from a speech given by Marcus Garvey in St. Kitts, telling his audience to “make St. Kitts your Garden of Eden,” for “if you don’t do it other men will do it for you.”<sup>39</sup> While reiterating A. J. Seymour’s nation-building call, Garvey’s comments also imagine a masculine territory of conquest; this terminology is reapplied to define the mission of independence and Bertram’s mission of return as decidedly masculine national projects. The two epigraphs that follow are from St. Kitts newspapers, and these competing political narratives negatively depict the opposition’s candidate for

34. Phillips, “Caryl Phillips,” 48.

35. *Ibid.*, 49.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, 50.

38. My use of the term “biopolitical” has been shaped by Paul Gilroy’s essay “After the Love Has Gone: Bio-politics and Ethno-poetics in the Black Public Sphere,” in *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book*, ed. The Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 59. I will return to Gilroy’s formulation of this dynamic as well as his attempt to both critique and reevaluate it later in this article.

39. Caryl Phillips, *A State of Independence* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), 7. Subsequent references to the novel will appear parenthetically in the text.

election. These passages mark St. Kitts as a space of conflict and corruption on a local level, and therefore serve as a response to Garvey's utopic formulation of independence. Divisiveness and political rivalries appear to contradict Garvey's image of an independent nation as a Garden of Eden but reinforce the formulation of politics as a male-dominated sphere. The final quote enters into the world of the novel itself, blurring the boundaries between history and fiction by citing Jackson Clayton, Bertram's childhood friend and the deputy prime minister of the fictional nation in *A State of Independence*. The passage refers to the shift in colonial powers, with Jackson explaining that "living State-side now" is a preferable state of affairs since "England never do us a damn thing except take, take, take" (p. 7). Jackson's assertion regarding "living under the eagle" not only alludes to U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean but also undermines Garvey's definition of independence as a new state of being, as an autonomous utopia. The title of *A State of Independence* takes on another meaning, that of a state within the system of U.S. global capitalism.

Bertram's return foregrounds the historical shift in structure and power within the Caribbean. Although Bertram defines his journey as a homecoming, the people he encounters recognize him as an outsider and tourist. The experience of defamiliarization Bertram encounters is directly connected to the transhistorical limbo that the Caribbean represents in the novel. One of the main factors throwing Bertram off balance is his inability to understand the changes that independence has and has not brought to the island. Bertram finds that even reinsertion into his personal, familial life has been compromised by his exile. His mother, in particular, presents herself as one of the multiple obstacles thwarting his search for home, for a space of belonging and identity.<sup>40</sup> Bertram seeks to reconnect via humor, laughing and gently scolding his mother for her shock at his presence: "See, I told you I'd come back" (p. 49). While Bertram announces his return, he formulates it in such a way so as to remove the formality, "trying to make it less of an announcement" (p. 49). Despite his insistence on retaining a certain casual tone to his conversation, Bertram must explain the purpose of his return and its connection to independence as well as his own separatist mission. Interestingly, when his mother laughs at the naïveté of his plan to set up a business that doesn't depend "on the white man," Bertram is then at odds with his desire to personalize his estranged relationship with his mother (p. 49). His reaction comes in the form of an educating mission, thinly veiled as charity but actually locating himself as a superior, as a

40. Patteson interprets Bertram's expulsion from his mother's home in terms of "an uncoupling from his past and consequently, from a continuous self rooted in the past." Patteson, *Caribbean Passages*, 127.

colonizer: “To him her laughter was simply the cackle of ignorance, and he felt obliged to educate her” (p. 51). By privileging his travel experience, Bertram sees his migrancy as enabling him with a certain knowledge and worldview that his mother does not possess. Bertram formulates himself as a migratory subject with a superior perspective regarding the political situation on the island: “He spoke now with an indignation fuelled by his knowledge that she had seldom, in her sixty years on this earth, left Sandy Bay, let alone the island” (p. 51). By pitting these two characters against each other, Phillips provides a fierce critique of the elitism that can arise out of the valuation of migrancy, structuring a hierarchy of knowledge that privileges those who have had the means to travel over those who have not.

That this dichotomy is figured in terms of the male traveler versus the settled female is not accidental. By comparing himself to other female characters, Bertram struggles to identify himself as a migrant native rather than a traveling foreigner. Women emerge as the measuring stick by which Bertram will gauge his ability to belong. The novel opens with Bertram looking at the sleeping woman seated next to him on the airplane. Seeing her hold a guide in her lap, Bertram imagines that this is “her first time in the Caribbean” (p. 9). Her presence comforts Bertram: “Her flouting of regional ignorance somehow made him feel a little easier at the end of what had been a worrisome flight” (p. 9). Her obvious status as a tourist enables Bertram to take the posture of a real returnee to the island, by comparison. Bertram acknowledges that he could not assume this position otherwise: “He felt grateful that she was not a regular visitor who might have taken it upon herself to educate him about his own country and further disturb the feelings of guilt that lay inside him” (p. 9). Bertram’s gratefulness lies in his ability to claim the island as more his home than that of the tourist, and therefore he can avoid facing the very real gap of time and distance disrupting this ability.

The presence of a second woman in the airport, however, does challenge Bertram’s claim to native status. This woman, a “severely attired elderly woman,” holds a greater claim not only to the homeland but to migrancy as well (p. 13). Bertram describes her as a “true national” because her visits back and forth from England are only performed in order “to see grandchildren” (p. 13). The elderly woman creates a contrast for Bertram, reminding him of his outsidership: “The speed with which she followed him down the steps towards the baggage reclaim section only served to confirm in his mind for, unlike him, hers was a home-coming hastened by familiarity” (p. 13). The elderly woman’s facility at navigating the airport calls into question both Bertram’s formulation of home and his return journey as a homecoming. In addition, the elderly woman is also more familiar

with travel itself, since she regularly reenacts her journey of return. Her very existence destabilizes Bertram's contention that he can truly represent the migrant subject.

The relationships between women and men within *A State of Independence* constitute a metaphor for the relationship between the migrant community and the home-nation. More specifically, sexuality plays an important part as an associative factor in differentiating between the structures of colonialism, transmodernity, and globalization. For Bertram, the past is defined by his relationship with his brother. The journey home meant facing his greatest fear: that "he might return and find that his mother had died and nobody, not even Dominic, had bothered to write and let him know" (p. 26). Instead, Bertram returns to find that his brother Dominic died and nobody wrote to tell him. Looking at his childhood home, Bertram recalls the "moments in the last twenty years when he felt sure he would never have the courage or the means to set foot once again on his island" (p. 27). Rather than dwelling on those memories of his experience in England, the narrative travels to the Caribbean past, to the moment when Bertram as young boy obtained the scholarship. The childhood memories designate the brother's relationship as a homosocial bond and the narrative explains this as a product of absence—the absent father created a special dependency between the brothers. Bertram remembers that "because of their father's perpetual absence, Dominic had come to depend on Bertram more than a younger brother would normally do" (p. 34). As a result, the brothers are inseparable and share every facet of their lives: "They played together, ate together, slept and worked, they even lost their virginity together, having persuaded a local girl that if she did it twice it would be impossible for her to get pregnant" (p. 34).

The familial relationship of brotherhood appears as a metaphor for colonialism. The absent colonial power creates a closed circle of local power in the Caribbean, a homosocial space that derives its authority via the performance of heterosexuality.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, the novel depicts the social sphere as dominated by men whose exploitation of women bonds them together, in the same way that Bertram and Dominic take advantage of a young woman in order to consecrate their manhood. In addition, the narrative points to this concentration of power and bonding within the male population as a temporary or finally inappropriate relationship upon which to build an independent nation. Bertram describes the disconnection as inevitable in some sense, a rite of passage into adulthood. More specifically, this bond is broken by Bertram's exile as well as

41. This calls to mind the epigraphs opening *A State of Independence* and the way they already define the public political sphere as the territory of men, a closed homosocial space for nation building.

his physical relationship with Patsy. The homosocial relationship between the brothers is consecrated by the unified entrance into a female body. As a result, Bertram's sexual relationship with Patsy defies the social contract with his brother because he does not allow his brother to fully participate in that experience. After Bertram has sex with Patsy for the first time, he finds Dominic is furious. Dominic wanted to continue "doing everything together," but Bertram insists that "we must learn to move in our own way too" (p. 47).<sup>42</sup> The brothers' relationship is linked to a temporary, undeveloped sexuality, representative of a closed masculine Caribbean society that cannot continue to survive as such. The homosocial nation building the novel attributes to Marcus Garvey ultimately figures as an unproductive space.

Independence, represented by Bertram and Patsy's heterosexual relationship, is short-circuited as the future of the Caribbean emerges within the context of American imperialism, which the narrative associates with both a feminized exploited position as well as a homosexual relationship. Bertram's conversations with Lonnie, the owner of a local bar, emphasize sexuality as the defining aspect of the public political sphere. Lonnie explains that the only way to make money in the Caribbean is to open up to foreign investment, and this process is equated with "selling out." In the market of cultural tourism, this involves the hypercommodification of Caribbean culture and even bodies. Lonnie asserts that "as a people we come like prostitutes just lifting up our skirts to anybody with cash" (p. 132). The exploited body is a feminized one, such that the Caribbean as a global product is also feminized. The implication is that Caribbean society, defined as male dominated, is emasculated by engaging in a neocolonial relationship with the United States. An economy that relies upon a "Big Burger contract" or on selling "the little Yankee mailboxes with a flag on them" stifles the cultural production and labor of the Caribbean itself (pp. 131–32). The future of globalization within the Caribbean is described as engendering an unequal balance of power that is imagined in terms of a homosexual relationship: "I guess if you really want to make some money in this country you best butter up your arse and point it towards New York" (p. 131). The tone of Lonnie's comments clearly identify this position as not only undesirable but unnatural for the body of the recently liberated Caribbean masculine subject.

42. The rift between the brothers is marked by an unequal access to family knowledge as well. Despite Dominic's attempt to visit his father, only Bertram is given the opportunity to attend his father's funeral. Again the colonialist metaphor is extended to imagine the inequalities in terms of access to power and knowledge within the Caribbean.

With both the past and future referencing sexuality as pathological, the transmodern space of the present has a “stuck-in-between” quality. Bertram’s description of the cane cutters on independence day formulates this in-betweenness in terms of inaction, complacency, and, most importantly, impotence. The cane cutters “were now free for the day but still walked like condemned men with neither hope nor desire . . . as if they had just witnessed the world turn full circle, knowing that fate no longer held any mystery for them” (p. 18). Alongside these impotent male bodies, Bertram sees the “young girls wagging their hips crazily and throwing out their chests where breasts did not yet exist” (p. 18). The men, while freed from their work for the day’s celebration, are not physically liberated—rather, they appear emasculated, devoid of manly desire. The girls, on the other hand, possess undeveloped bodies that are incongruously full of desire. The juxtaposition of these bodies reinforces the narrative’s foregrounding of sexuality as a metaphor for the social structure of the Caribbean, one that is hopelessly perverse. The impotent male body and the desirous female body are unable to connect or engage with each other. In turn, the narrative positions this disconnection of heterosexual desires as detrimental to community development, solidarity, and liberation.

The focus on the body and sexuality within *A State of Independence* constitutes a narrativization of biopolitics as a strategy or response to the negative effects of colonialism, exile, and globalization. Obstructed heterosexual desire consequently contextualizes Bertram’s isolation. Bertram’s journey involves a rerooting of the migrant male via sexual intercourse with the female body. My use of the term “biopolitics” to describe this process is indebted to Paul Gilroy’s essay “After the Love Has Gone: Bio-politics and Ethno-poetics in the Black Public Sphere.” Focusing on the shift within the African American public sphere from the 1960s to the contemporary scene, Gilroy is particularly concerned with the movement away from public culture as a space for protest. Gilroy mourns the loss of a public and popular discourse that focused on freedom as a political goal whose attainment was possible by fostering social consciousness and solidarity. Commenting on the absence of this political discourse within contemporary black culture, Gilroy explains, “Where the unseasonal fruits of counterculture become popular and the marginal moves into the mainstream, it would be absurd to expect to find politics programmatically constituted.”<sup>43</sup> The intensity and outreach of globalization’s coopting impulses obstruct the development of a resistant politics located in the

43. Gilroy, “After the Love Has Gone,” 54.

margins. The concept of biopolitics forms part of Gilroy's attempt to value the contemporary black public sphere and popular culture, composed of public figures in music and sports, as proffering a different mode of resistance via the representation of the body. The political formulation of freedom has been supplanted by a focus on physicality and biology, such that the coordinates of the body define the parameters of identity. Gilroy explains the "racialized biopolitics of fucking" in terms of a valuation of identity solely based in the physical body, and hence "certain exemplary bodies . . . become instantiations of community."<sup>44</sup> The body "engages in characteristic activities—usually sexual or sporting that ground and solicit identification if not solidarity."<sup>45</sup> Gilroy's critical analysis of the black public sphere defines biopolitics as a space, albeit precarious, in which to formulate cultural production and resistance: "I want to suggest . . . that it is the association of repudiating progress with the assertive pursuit of sexual pleasure that provides a distinctive historical embodiment of the dismal moment in which public politics becomes unspeakable and biopolitics takes hold."<sup>46</sup>

In *A State of Independence*, Bertram's biopolitical journey brings him to reconsider his relationship to Patsy. Having suffered multiple rejections by his mother, Jackson and others, Bertram seeks out Patsy, his childhood lover. Bertram's motivation stems from his isolation as well as Patsy's representative status: "He was as unsure about his relationship to her as he was about his relationship to this island he still insisted on calling his home" (p. 119). The relationship between Bertram and Patsy emerges as a negotiation of belonging and identity. Bertram reconnects with his home, with the Caribbean, by reinitiating a heterosexual relationship with Patsy, who consequently forms the site for grounding his migrant male subjectivity. When Bertram first visits Patsy, he finds himself second-guessing his behavior, wondering what is appropriate. Instead of walking into her yard and calling out her name, Bertram stands by the fence and shouts. Bertram interprets his reluctance to cross over the border of Patsy's fence as a sign of his assimilation into British culture and "his imported manners" (p. 89). His critique of these manners lies in the assertion that "too much had happened between the two of them for him to get English on her now" (p. 89). Through their past intimacy, Bertram has already crossed over the borders into Patsy's body—and it is this experience that makes irrelevant the need to follow his imported social standards. Having "known" and crossed into the territory of the woman's body via a heterosexual relationship, there is no need

44. Ibid., 59.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 58.



for Bertram to reinsert a physical or emotional distance between them. Bertram's return journey must then include a reconnection with Patsy, a conjugal union that will finally allow Bertram to belong as an insider in the Caribbean, via the inside of Patsy's body. Bertram's initial view of Patsy as a foreign body is proven false, not only by the logic of biopolitics within the text but also by Patsy's open and unreserved welcome. While Patsy hugs him, Bertram is alarmed by the "ease with which he fell back into her arms," but "at least someone had finally accepted him with unqualified joy" (p. 91).

Why is Patsy *the* character that finally initiates Bertram's homecoming? She clearly embodies the acceptance that Bertram is searching for and yet the context of their physical relationship appears to be the only logic by which this acceptance is possible. Nevertheless, Bertram is at first distrustful and continues to differentiate between Patsy's private home and the public space he feels safer occupying. When Patsy invites him into her home to read the local newspapers and catch up on the political goings-on nationally, Bertram turns her down, insisting that he would rather "sit in the sun" and wait for the events to carry themselves out publicly. Bertram reasserts his individuality and his need to pay personal witness, alone, outside of Patsy's home-space and perspective. In response, Patsy brings the newspapers outside for him to read and walks off, leaving Bertram alone, once again. This solitude is compounded by his visit to Jackson, when Bertram is essentially told that his friend will not help him start a business on the island. Sitting at a bar, Bertram realizes "how detached from the atmosphere he was feeling" and that "he was not in the frame of mind to deal with conversations that would inevitably revolve around shared memories he would rather forget" (p. 116). Overwhelmed by this oblivion of memory, Bertram turns and sees a "mongrel-faced man," whose toes were "chafed and unsightly, weblike through years of walking barefoot" (p. 116). Faced with the image of a perpetual migrant, Bertram is confronted with a potentially dismal future: the never-ending journey of the homeless.

What eases Bertram's despair is his second visit to Patsy. As he stands at the gate again, Patsy laughs and asks, "Bertram, you seem lost. You looking for something?" (p. 140). In the conversation that follows, Patsy pokes fun at Bertram's big plans, specifically the "black man's business that bound to make you come a millionaire in a few weeks at most" (p. 141). Her humor arises out of an astute awareness of the dynamics structuring Caribbean society. Patsy presents the Caribbean as a transhistorical and transmodern space: "Nothing in this place ever truly falls into the past. It's all here in the present for we too small a country for the past" (p. 142). Bertram, however, seeks another and perhaps correlated type of knowledge—information about the relationship between Jackson and Patsy. Upon realizing that Patsy had not been intimate with

Jackson during the twenty years of his exile, Bertram is relieved: “A constant torment had been his recurrent visions of Jackson passing his rough hands across her body, then entering her with the sensitivity of an uncoiled piston” (p. 142). Patsy’s body is the site of competition and conquest, the biopolitical territory on which Bertram imagines a masculine power struggle would be played out.

Patsy’s body nevertheless performs a different function from the one Bertram imagines. As Bertram turns to leave, Patsy asks him where he will be going. This question unmasks Bertram’s insecurities and highlights the reality of his migrant condition: “Bertram looked at her, wishing she had not asked him such a direct question for he had no place to go. But he was desperate that he should not appear either lost or rootless on his own island” (p. 145). Bertram now stands emotionally naked before Patsy. What follows is Patsy’s naturalistic seduction and healing of Bertram: “With a single lick Patsy made her lips sensual” (p. 146). The discussion of that night’s official and public celebration of national independence is paired with a proposal by Patsy. When Bertram asserts that the island’s independence motivated his return, Patsy replies, “You want to lie down with me?” (p. 146). The promise of a heterosexual union literally awakens Bertram’s masculinity. No longer impotent or emasculated, Bertram “felt a stirring in his groin and against his will his penis leapt tall” (p. 146). The physicality of this reawakening of heterosexual desire has a will of its own, and is therefore able to counteract the numerous obstacles of colonialism, globalization, and exploitation that the narrative has held accountable for the perversion of sexuality. For this reason, Bertram’s sexual passion is framed as against his will, an innate natural drive that subverts the social influences that contextually stifled desire.

Bertram and Patsy’s “private celebration” of independence is privileged over that of the public demonstrations. While the official celebrations are depicted as vacuous and illusory, this sexual engagement accomplishes or consecrates another type of freedom.<sup>47</sup> The physical freedom of sexual intercourse presents biopolitics as another strategy of resistance within a new world order. Bertram’s isolated migrant subject is finally rooted through the “countless intrusions” into Patsy’s body (p. 147). Via this hypermasculine

47. Phillips’s narrative, with the shift from the public independence celebrations to the private sexual celebration in Patsy’s home, appears to initially follow through Gilroy’s delineation of a shift from public to private freedom: “I suggest that, however important the relatively narrow understanding centred on political rights has been, it leaves vast areas of thinking about freedom and the desire to be seen to be free, untouched.” It is interesting to note that Gilroy also implies a shift from the abstract political ideals of freedom to a formulation of freedom in terms of visual representation and the physicality of the body and its functions. Gilroy, “After the Love Has Gone,” 67.

performance of virility, “all his structural and emotional strength was drained away as if her soft female hand had wrenched out the plug of his masculinity” (p. 147). Sex with Patsy coincides with the nation’s celebration of independence, and Bertram is now localized and rerooted to the Caribbean through the vessel of Patsy’s body—but what exactly is this figurative “plug”? On the one hand, sex has enabled Bertram to assert his masculinity via ejaculation, a masculinity that was stopped up by the conditions of migrancy and globalization. And yet, this moment also entails emasculation, if the plug is read as representative of masculinity. The image of the plug could reference the anus and its exposure, because the plug has been wrenched out by Patsy. With the anus signifying the wounded site of imperialistic domination that only heterosexuality can heal, Bertram becomes dangerously vulnerable. Heterosexual masculinity could be compromised by isolating sex as a form of healing the masculine subject, a reading that might reveal the limits of a biopolitical strategy of resistance.

While sex with Patsy is ambivalently presented as a response to the future of globalization and its penetration of the Caribbean, the product of the union between Bertram and Patsy also remains elusive and possibly problematic. There are several hints in the text that Patsy’s teenage son, Livingstone, is actually the outcome of her early love affair with Bertram. Curious about Patsy’s fidelity to him during his exile, Bertram inquires after her marital status and whether she has had any children. Even though Patsy says “maybe it’s best we don’t talk about it,” Bertram unwittingly presses on: “Well, what happened to the child and who is the father?” (p. 144). Patsy indirectly names Bertram as the father by focusing on the time frame of her motherhood: “I was four months a lover and nineteen years a mother, that does sound fair to you?” (p. 144). By claiming “you don’t need to go to England to find out” about solitude and suffering, Patsy challenges Bertram’s supposed migrant knowledge, asserting that the same perspective could be obtained by a settled subject (p. 144). Despite these allusions to the fruit of their short love affair, Bertram remains either in the dark or in denial about the parentage of Livingstone.

Bertram’s encounters with his “could-be” son point to the problematics of defining the national project of independence in terms of heterosexuality. Rather than a “colonial product,” Livingstone represents the influence of the U.S. culture industry on the Caribbean.<sup>48</sup> In the course of the novel, Livingstone wears a Chicago Bears T-shirt and “a large but obviously cheap, Japanese watch” (p. 101). Even his body is marked by the

48. Phillips, interview with Saunders, 50.

global market: “His hair was relaxed and sheened in the manner of prominent black American entertainers” (p. 101).<sup>49</sup> While this could serve as an indication of the possibility for Pan-African solidarity via the commercialization of African American culture, this avenue is closed by Livingstone’s devaluation of Caribbean culture by comparison. Due to Bertram’s foreignness, Livingstone hopes that Bertram is an overseas delegate and wants him to “get me a job where you come from” (p. 102). When asked why he wants to leave the Caribbean, Livingstone answers, “I think I prefer America . . . New York Yankees, Washington Redskins, Michael Jackson, you can’t want more than that. The West Indies is a dead space” (p. 103).

The Caribbean is dead because its cultural production cannot match the globalism of U.S. sports and music: it is “too small in size and too small in the head. I want to move on and up” (p. 103). Livingstone’s dreams of upward mobility translate into access to U.S. cultural products. The U.S. market consequently instills a desire to consume American cultural products, whether marginal or mainstream, identifying them as superior to alternate cultural production from other cultures, including the Caribbean. Livingstone’s obsession with African American culture and U.S. sports are revealed to be unproductive entries into the public sphere. These cultural products, tainted by commodification, only “solicit identification” and cannot form avenues toward Pan-African solidarity.<sup>50</sup> Livingstone also represents the continued exportation and exploitation of Caribbean labor, reenacting Bertram’s cycle of migration and exile. Livingstone works at the Royal Hotel, a place where the U.S. dollar is used as currency, and the narrative indicates that the economy of tourism limits the range of employment available to the Caribbean population. The narrative does not provide any hope regarding Livingstone’s future, and as a result calls into question the effectiveness of heterosexual masculinity as way to mitigate the effects of colonialism and globalization. The representation of Livingstone as the dead end of Bertram’s seed recalls Gilroy’s critique of “creativity of gendered self-cultivation.”<sup>51</sup> Livingstone is unlikely to cultivate connections between the West Indies and the black Atlantic via a Pan-African community because he seeks to initiate himself into exile in the United States, designating the Caribbean to remain a dead space.

49. The coordinates of Livingstone’s body are shaped by his identification with other “exemplary bodies” that are trafficked by the U.S. global imaginary. Gilroy notes that certain specific black male bodies, such as those of “Mike Tyson and Michael Jordan,” become “instantiations of community” but does not acknowledge how the representation of these bodies might play out within the Pan-African public sphere, outside of the African American context. Gilroy, “After the Love Has Gone,” 59.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

Even though the climax of Bertram's homecoming takes place in the moment he reinitiates his sexual relationship with Patsy, the novel's ending points to a lack of closure.<sup>52</sup> The final images of Bertram within *A State of Independence* emphasize the pervasive sense of homelessness and isolation that haunts him. Following sex, Patsy asks him to clarify his intentions, specifically whether he plans on returning to England. Bertram admits that he has "nothing to go back to," and yet he doesn't "feel at home back here either" (p. 152). Belonging in neither place, Bertram leaves Patsy to witness the public celebrations of independence going on in the city. The ceremony reflects Bertram's own misgivings about his future: "the police band started to play the new national anthem in G major like the old British one, but they struggled to find the notes to this new tune" (p. 154). The text remains ambivalent about the possibility for cultural production in the Caribbean as well as the development of an autonomous Caribbean nation, post-independence. The presence of "a woman leader popularly known as the Iron Woman of the Caribbean," calling to mind the historical figure of Margaret Thatcher, indicates that the colonial structure has not been altogether dismantled. On the other hand, the very same evening of independence brings to the island the "first cable television pictures, live and direct from the United States" (p. 158). The telegraph poles being threaded for this cable transmission reveal that the influence of the American market promises to become even more far-reaching. In this transmodern Caribbean context, Bertram becomes nostalgic about his dead brother, Dominic, who has "crept from all corners of his mind and occupied the center" (p. 156). While Bertram refuses to engage this ghost from the past, "promising him that a dialogue would be reestablished once he had found himself," it is evident that he is consumed by longing for that brotherly and homosocial relationship (p. 156). This nostalgia could be considered alongside a longing for the closed masculine society Dominic represented, as a nostalgia for the resistant masculine subject.<sup>53</sup>

*A State of Independence* evaluates the effectiveness of biopolitics as a strategy and, ultimately, the limits of a biopolitical response to globalization's workings. Within the novel, the routes of migrancy, contextualization, and commodification cannot produce

52. While Patteson interprets the ending of *A State of Independence* as suggesting that it is "unlikely that [Bertram] will stay on in the island for any length of time," I would argue that the ending does not seek to resolve Bertram's indecision and ambivalence. Patteson, *Caribbean Passages*, 140.

53. In effect, the narrative evinces a nostalgia for the 1960s black nationalist movement via Bertram's longing for his childhood relationship with Dominic. Paul Gilroy's attempt to value biopolitics as a challenge to commodification in "After the Love Has Gone" also betrays a similar nostalgia. Ultimately, Gilroy longs for the clarity and passion of 1960s cultural production, locating biopolitics as a lesser form. The problematic aspect of biopolitics relates to the restricted performance of sexuality, which "marks that racial community exclusively as a space of heterosexual activity and confirms the abandonment of any politics aside from the ongoing creativity of gendered self-cultivation" (62).

connections between culture and identity. The Caribbean as body and commodity has suffered historical violence within the systems of slavery and the market. Since the narrative foregrounds Bertram's journey home as a return to the body, sexuality emerges as the only space for the reformulation of belonging and home. The ultimate, or last, home outside of culture, which has been corrupted by colonialism and globalization, is the body. The limits of this formulation are hinted at by the closing of the novel; there is an absence of complete redemption for Bertram. The biopolitical solution is temporary, if not flawed, because of its own relationship to the global market. The new world order astounds and confuses Bertram, producing in him feelings of unfamiliarity and an unrecognizable new state of being. The result is a crisis in the male subject as a figure of power, namely because there is no space for rerooting in this transatlantic order. The cynical tone of *A State of Independence* and its ambivalent depiction of Bertram's homecoming critically narrativizes migrancy and biopolitics as new states within the global order.

Phillips's most recent writing represents the limits of *A State of Independence's* formulation of this persona. In processing the frustrated and emasculated migrant male subject represented by Bertram via the "rewriting of the same story," Phillips concludes this subject's development in *The Atlantic Sound* and *A New World Order* by actually assuming the position he created—that of a politically inactive and detached observer. Daryl Pickney reads the text of *The Atlantic Sound* as an ending to a specific thematic trend in Phillips's writing: "*The Atlantic Sound* is a long and bitter farewell to England. He's off. He's gone. He's New World now. The Metropolis, the source, has moved. The mother country is outpost now."<sup>54</sup> Caryl Phillips's recent return to fiction, *A Distant Shore*, contradicts Pickney's prediction since it is actually set in Britain and focuses on the lives of an Englishwoman and an African immigrant, neither of whom are from the New World. Rather than understanding the thematic thread of Phillips's writing in terms of shifting geographies, this most recent novel continues to identify the limits of biopolitics as a solution to the migrant male condition. One reviewer notes that while "most novels are built around relationships between characters," *A Distant Shore* "is largely built around the lack of a relationship between the two main characters."<sup>55</sup> In this narrative, where "very little happens" between the main characters such that their affections "barely coalesce into friendship," the theorization of biopolitics has in many ways reached its conclusion.<sup>56</sup> Significantly, the migrant character, Solomon, is unable

54. Pickney, *Out There*, 157.

55. Rebecca Sodergren, "Displacements and Divides," *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, October 26, 2003, 6.

56. Rand Richards Cooper, "There's No Place That's Home," *New York Times*, October 19, 2003, S7, C1, 12.

to connect with the settled female body and later is murdered by a racist gang. Even a biopolitical strategy of reconnection to a homeland in the present global context emerges as an impossibility in *A Distant Shore*. The recyclical writing of the migrant male story has led Caryl Phillips to explore the limits of biopolitics and to ultimately conclude with an epitaph for the migrant male that may very well read “There’s No Place That’s Home.”<sup>57</sup>

**ELENA  
MACHADO  
SÁEZ**

57. Ibid.