



Diaspora and Essence: A Reading of Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* and Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*

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Abstract: The question of migration continues to animate discussions globally. The world is currently faced with a migration crisis caused by the several armed conflicts and the socio-economic and political conditions of many regions of the world. The numerous drownings of African migrants off the coast of Italy is an example of the idea that people migrate to search better living conditions. Migration, however, is nothing new as humans have always moved for different reasons. These movements have influenced many writers who have focused their literary energies to the circumstances of migrants in their new locations. This has produced a vast migration literature. Within the postcolonial context, these movements have generally been from the erstwhile colonies to the colonial metropolis. Guided by their colonial education (which amongst other things created the image of an idyllic land and also that they were members of the colonial states) and propelled by the dire economic and political conditions of their home countries, these migrants moved to these places convinced that they would find better opportunities for themselves. For those who migrated to England, they expected hospitality influenced by the colonialists presenting the British as paragon of propriety. The reality they encountered while there contradicted all their expectations. These experiences of the migrants within the postcolonial context have resulted in a flurry of literature that addresses these questions. This paper is interested in such literature, focusing on Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* and Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*.

Keywords: migration crisis, colonial education, journeying, *The Final Passage*.

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INTRODUCTION

The search for a better life has long been a major preoccupation for humans. This has increased migration to the diaspora, where migrants hope to acquire an essence of life, by ameliorating themselves and their families. In spite the diverse challenges involved with migration, migrants increasingly travel with optimism for a promising life.

In this light, migration of the Caribbean to Britain and or other countries like the United States

of America and Canada is a historical fact that has shaped and continues to impact the lives of Afro Caribbean migrants. The period after the Second World War, registered massive migration of West Indians to Britain and attracted writers as Phillips and Levy, whose writings are inspired by this relocation of people? For most of the migrants, they were journeying to a second mother and believed in her warmth and embrace, as seen through the Empire Windrush. Louis Bennett describes the huge

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displacement of West Indians to Britain in the post-1945 era as “Colonisation in reverse” [1]. The colonial encounter pushed the Caribbeans to this belief given their relationship with the colonial masters. Britain (like America), became their dream destination where they hoped to search for meaningful existence. This paper therefore examines the immigrant experiences of the characters in relation to their pursuit of essence.

The discussion is within the Postcolonial context, which helps to enlighten the notion of Caribbean migration that characterises the contemporary society. Besides, this contextualisation is also explained by the paper’s involvement in countries with a colonial and migrant history. In fact, as Bill Ashcroft *et al.*, in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* opine, Postcolonial theory:

Involves discussions about experiences of different kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. (2)

Evidently, the fact that this paper discusses issues related to migration and diaspora, explains the postcolonial discourse herein. The engagement of Phillips and Levy in the different experiences cited above, facilitate an evaluation of the characters’ search for essence in the diaspora.

Fantatising the Mother Country

The colonial encounter besides annexing vast regions of the world also promoted a discourse of the superiority of the coloniser. This was done through the school and the church which together promoted an image of a superlative Britain which undertook colonisation in order to raise the colonised to their level of civilisation. The colonised were therefore led to consider themselves and culture as inferior while looking to Britain for a way of life and culture. It therefore seemed only natural when faced with the problems of their home countries, that Britain (and later the USA) became their logical destination. Britain which had been cast as the “mother country” was appealing to these children of empire who expected acceptance and nurturance. Confirming this, Blossom Ngum observes that:

One of the hallmarks of British colonisation was the institution of a colonial system of education wherein the colonised were taught amongst other things, that England was the bastion of human civilisation. England in the textbook of Empire was a warm and

welcoming land of freedom. Besides, the fact of presenting England as the Mother Country created an illusion in the minds of the colonised that they were part of England. (64-65)

Thus, this beautiful image of Britain which they represented, captured the minds of the colonised, and later urged them to develop that interest to journey there.

Phillips describes this in *The Final Passage*, through characters such as Leila, Michael, Mrs Frank, and Alphonse. Set in the period after the Second World War, the novel captures the mass migration of West Indians to Britain, where the ship symbolises the *SS Empire Windrush* that transported hundreds of migrants. This was made possible by the Nationality Act of 1948 that gave West Indians the legal right to enter Britain and increased mass migration until 1971, with the institution of the Immigration Act, which stopped giving the immigrants a permanent legal status. Throwing more light on this, Enoch Powell notes that; *The British Nationality Act, 1948, removed the status of ‘subject of the king’ as the basis of British Nationality, and substituted for allegiance to the Crown the concept of a number ... [of] separate citizenships combined together by statute. The British Nationality Act, 1948, thus brought about an immense constitutional revolution [...] since the fact of allegiance to the Crown was the uniting element of the whole Empire ... (qtd in Hansen 67)*

As observed, the Nationality Act gave a new status to former British colonies including the Caribbean, as they were offered a permanent legal position to relocate to Britain. It equally unified the migrants through their required allegiance to the British Crown. Phillips’ novel reflects this context.

At the opening of the novel, the passengers at the sea shore expose their longing for the Mother Country by their very presence. Owing to their loyalty and admiration of Britain, they are motivated by the desire to answer British call for help, given the need to help restore the country after the war. Behind this, they equally hoped to savour the richness of this metropolis, and improve their own living standards. While consoling Leila who is worried if Michael will show up for the journey or not, the lady in a light blue cardigan tells her that “I shouldn’t worry if I was you. He bound to show up. He can’t forget a thing like going to England. [...] I tell you how he going feel. He going feel like a fool and there don’t be no man yet born who can deal with feeling like a damn fool” (4). Her statement reflects the high expectations of some Caribbean who live with the dream of going to England, their Mother Country. This explains why contrary to Leila, She is

¹ (Bennett, Louise 1)

certain that Michael will not miss such an opportunity, except he is a coward. The fact that Michael finally arrives reveals the extent to which colonialism has transformed the perceptions of the former colonised into believing that the societies of the colonisers are much more like heaven and worth relocating to.

Besides, Michael's marriage to Leila is questionable due to his behaviour towards her, together with his grandmother's advice about the journey. From the comments of the villagers who attend the wedding, they think that the couple does not match because of Leila's lighter skin, and Michael's poor background. For them, Leila is a little "too high" for him. This therefore calls for questioning whether the marriage is not based on false hopes, with Michael hoping to reap from Leila who is not only hard working, but has a hybrid identity which may bring him fortune. This is because he does not show signs of sincere love for Leila, yet follows her to England for his own selfish interest. Thus, advised by his grandmother, he is willing to leave her alone in Jamaica and follow Leila to where he hopes to gain a meaningful life so as to improve on the life of the old woman. From his discussion with his friend Bradeth, he hopes to obtain a big job, a car, a house, and a bit of power under his belt. He regrets the fact that his country simply raises several people who cultivate cane, using archaic, strenuous ways that include weeding, planting, and cutting (77). Bradeth's intention to travel later on, also illustrates the euphoria that characterises some of the West Indians. Like the other migrants, Alphonse's journey to Britain, also reflects the manner in which he struggles to put meaning into his life.

It is worth mentioning that the relocation of Michael and Leila reflects Phillips' parents who like the characters, had joined the other immigrants on board the ship to Britain in the Windrush Generation or immediate post-World War II era. Like the characters who hope to find a better life for their son Calvin, the author's parents embarked on that journey with similar intentions. Phillips confirms this in an interview granted to Kay Saunders. He states the arrival of his parents on *SS Empire Windrush* in the first generation arrivals. Phillips here is inspired not only by the experiences of his parents, but also West Indian migration in the post war era.

Through Leila's mother, Phillips also exposes the migrants' search for health facilities as a motivation for their journeying to the diaspora. This explained by the availability of its sophisticated technology and advanced treatment procedures over the Motherland. Thus, believing in the power of

British hospitals to cure her of her illness, Mrs Frank strongly believes that Britain is the final destination where she will be completely healed and freed from the pains she endures. This may be one of the reasons why she leaves without taking enough time to tell Leila of her intention to depart. All she hopes for, is restoration of her health, which serves as an impediment to her search for an essence of life.

For Leila, her decision to relocate to Britain is inspired by several factors, which represent properties that will enable her search for an essence of life. First, she desires to reconnect with her sick mother, while hoping to meet her in a proper or ameliorated shape as far as her health is concerned. In addition, she yearns for a better future for her son Calvin. Moreover, she hopes Michael will find a job since it is a land of greater opportunities, and become more responsible compared to his lazy life back in the Caribbean island. Assessing these dreams of Leila, the common factor seems to be the search for essence through migration and exploration of opportunities in Britain. The colonisers had made the colonised people to believe in their "superior" culture, with a beautiful and sophisticated society.

Still in the vein of culture, their colonial past has influenced some of the characters to journey to Britain in search of education for self-amelioration. In *The Final Passage*, Arthur travels to America in pursuit of education, while leaving behind Leila (his fiancé). Though he intends to return after his studies, his admiration and happiness are mentioned. Prior to his departure, he excitedly describes it to Leila as a "Land of milk and honey! Land of plenty! [...]. 'You know they can only say that if there's somewhere like us you know, somewhere like here. [...] What I mean is that for there to be a land of plenty, there has to be a land of nothing, right?" (58). It shows his awareness of the disparity between America and the West Indies, although he still believes that his return will contribute in transforming his homeland.

To conclude, Phillips uses Beverley's husband to represent the image of the diaspora (represented here through America), to most West Indians. He has lived in America for three years, where he went "to carve out a new life for them both" (29-30). This presupposes his search for meaning in a world in which he believes will enable him to accomplish his dream. It is the means through which he will give proper care to his family by living up to his responsibilities as a husband and father to his son.

Levy in *Fruit of the Lemon* equally brings out the characters' excitement for the Mother Country,

through characters such as Faith's parents, Donald, Constance, Coral though with various motivational factors. In this work, influence of the British colonial system of education in Caribbean schools, as well as the behaviour of others who have been there propel the characters to migrate.

We shall begin by discussing the protagonist's parents, Mildred and Wade Jackson. Starting with Mildred, her sister Coral makes us to understand her childhood dream, which has always been to move to Britain. She became so engrossed that she overlooked any "negative" comments or information about the said metropolis, and considered all these negative energy, aimed at dissuading her. According to Coral, Mildred's decision to travel out was in order "to see all those places she'd learned about, Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Palace (6). This dream made her to become lazy as she spent all her time admiring herself in the mirror and dreaming of Trafalgar Circus (183). So, the colonial education she received at school, nursed her dream such that she had to use the least opportunity to fulfil it.

Similarly, the reception of the British colonial system of education by Wade Jackson (Mildred's husband) and his brother, ignite the enchantment for the Mother Country and dream to journey there. As realised from their childhood education, these two were taught how to sing "God save the King", as well as names of Kings and Queens of England, while reciting the wives of Henry VIII "divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded and survived. They also learned the Past Tense, Past Imperfect and speak with the King's English" (283). Ironically, British colonial education neglected Jamaican history and culture, but compelled the colonised to memorise British names and places.

Confirming this, Brathwaite in *History of the Voice* emphasises the impact of colonial education on the Caribbean population. He observes its neglect of the language and culture of the colonised society, through the colonisers' imposition of an imperial language. For him, the implementation of colonial education in the colonised society was "of no relevance to themselves ... The people educated in this system came to know more ... about English Kings and Queens than they do about ... our own national heroes, our own slave rebels ... We are more excited by ... Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood, than we are about Nanny of the Maroons" [2]

² The Maroons were a group of African slaves that successfully rebelled against the masters and resided in portions of their countries like mountains that could not be easily accessed by the white slave masters. They established societies ruled by themselves, and a

(263). Such is the impact of the British system of education in the West Indies.

Therefore, colonial education is partly responsible for the decision of Mildred, Wade Jackson, and Donald to migrate to Britain, so as to live the reality which they had been made to believe in. More importantly, this is made obvious through Faith who makes us to understand that; *At school Mum learnt about England, the Mother Country. Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, Buckingham Palace. She learnt the names of all the cities - London, Manchester and Birmingham - and had to know by heart what each of the cities produced. Sheffield for steel, Newcastle for ships, Nottingham for lace. Her teacher taught her all about snow, how it was white and cold [...]. (6).*

All these efforts were not significant given that the culture and history of the West Indians were marginalised over the imperial culture of the colonisers. Rather, it increased in the colonised, the yearning to travel to Britain and see those places and things which colonialism had embedded in their minds. Like Brathwaite, Levy seems to suggest here that teaching about snow which the people could not even identify as a local aspect of their culture, reveals how the British built the country through their colonial eyes.

As earlier indicated, the role of some characters who have been to the diaspora equally has an impact on the characters' travel intentions. Constance is a typical example in Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*. Speaking to Mildred, she mentions beautiful stories about British Universities whose libraries are stocked with books from the floor to the ceiling. She also tells her of beautiful cold fires, frost, and how her teacher had danced with Hitler before the war. These, coupled with Mildred's admiration of the wives of ex-soldiers of the Royal Air Force, increase her burning sensation of the Mother Country. "She loved the way they dressed and curled their hair and she loved to listen to the women speak. She would go down to the department store and listen to them talking in their English accents. She loved those women [...]. She was mad. She would practice walking like them and trying to curl-up her hair like them" (249). This explains her rejection of the advice of the woman whom her father, William, brings to discourage her from embarking on the journey. She does not care about the cold, fog, snow,

majority of them lived in Jamaica in a place called Maroon town as labeled by fellow Jamaicans. Nanny of the Maroons is one of the greatest Jamaican freedom fighters, whose importance has attracted a writer like Edward Kamau Brathwaite. An example in Brathwaite's *Wars of Respect: Nanny*.

unfriendliness and bombarded environments destroyed by the war. She would rather go there and find out for herself than listen to stories which fall short of the image her colonial experience has created in her mind.

Finally, although Coral's passion for journeying to America is unlike her sister's (Mildred's), it however, exposes the importance of searching for essence by exploring the better opportunities in this metropolis. It is there that she and her husband hope to give their children a promising future and also attain an essence of life. In the following section, we shall discuss how the characters in the novels quest for essence in the diaspora, and if this is fulfilled.

Searching for Meaning in an Ambivalent World

Having discussed the aspirations and anticipation of the characters for journeying to the "Mother Country", this section illustrates their quest for meaning, given the challenges they encounter in the diaspora. Contrary to the belief that the diaspora is their source of quest for meaning, they rather face the negative impact of colonialism through varied forms of racism (in housing, employment, and socialisation), as well as other realities such as anguish, alienation, fear and anxiety, etc. In spite of these predicaments, the immigrants still pursue their purpose in life. This article uses an integrated methodology in discussing the difficulties that impede the characters' search for essence, and how they grapple with these issues.

In *The Final Passage*, Phillips presents some challenges of the characters as opposed to their expectations at departure from the homeland, and how they seek to resolve them. This enables our examination of their ability to find that purpose they sought for in the dreamland. Our discussion includes few characters like Leila, Mrs Frank (her mother), Alphonse, and Earl.

Having discussed Leila's intentions for relocating to Britain, her dream becomes sour the very moment she arrives there. First, her temporal stay at Earl's house makes life meaningless for her as she sleeps with her son Calvin in the bathroom, while Michael sleeps with Earl on the bed. Learning that this is where her mother lives, these set her wondering if such is the life she will face in the country. She does not seem to understand why and how her mother has been coping there. In order to reverse the situation, she tries to get another house for her family, although she endures racism from white landowners seen through statements such as "No coloureds, No vacancies, No children" (117). The diction here is indicative of the existence of racism against blacks in Britain. More so, while some of the

white landowners use children as a pretext not to rent out their houses to blacks, others simply turn down these requests immediately they spot blacks at their door steps. This is illustrated where a white landlady sees Leila, Michael, and Earl approaching her door, and quickly addresses them;

Hello. I expect you've come about the rooms, but I'm afraid I can't make any decision until I've talked with my husband, and he's not here at the moment, and anyway the rooms are occupied at the present time. It was the future that we were thinking of, so if it's now that you're thinking of moving in somewhere then I'm awfully sorry but we just can't help you at this particular moment (118).

By using her husband as a pretext and denying the availability of rooms whereas she is searching for tenants, this is enough justification of the racism that looms in the "Mother Country" in the immediate Post war era. Such a practice makes life difficult for immigrants and sets them wondering who they are or why they even came there in the first place. Obviously, it wipes out their dream of Britain as a place that will enable them to attain an essence of life, since Blacks are denied not only opportunities but even essentials.

Besides, the fact that she is tricked into obtaining a dilapidated house in a miserable location further echoes the presence of racism in the "Mother Country". In the 1950s, hardly any people born in the Caribbean lived in council houses ... With long waiting list for council housing, criteria that included time resident in a borough excluded people of colour [3]. Private landlords and estate agents often refused to let accommodation to people of colour, but owners of discrepant properties could be more willing [4]. However, determined to transform the life of her family, she single-handedly cleans up the mess in the newly rented house and makes it fit for human living to the dismay of Michael who had earlier rained insults on her for bringing him to such a filthy place in England. This determination shows her willingness to survive.

Her anguish is further revealed when she meets her mother on her sick bed at the hospital. She feels more dejected since she had expected to see her look stronger. This presupposes that life in the diaspora does not entirely offer solutions to their

³ Elizabeth Burney. "Housing on Trial: A Study of Immigrants and Local Government", London, 1967. 233

⁴ Report of the Committee on Housing in Greater London (the Milner Holland Report), Cmd. 2605, London, 1965, p. 189. For local examples, see 'Property Pressures on the Coloured Tenant: Conditions in North Kensington', The Times, 29 May 1959.

problems. Her tears and imagination of the unknown increase her fears and misery, which heighten upon the death of her mother that destroys her hope of reconnecting with Mrs Frank. It makes her suffer from psychosis as she mistakenly holds another black woman with the hope that she is her mother, to the pity of the woman and other onlookers.

Her alienation is aggravated by Michael's desertion of her and Calvin, while she is pregnant with their second child. First, she worries of Michael's reference to their son as "it" or "that", rather using his name. Sadly, his desertion pushes Leila to transfer her love for him to Calvin. Instead of leaving the baby in his cot, she brings him into her bed to sleep with him. This consoles her to an extent and makes her forget about Michael's drunkenness and late nights. Her disconnection from her close friend Mary, which results from her displacement of her anger from Michael's white lady to Mary, worsens her mental situation. As the narrator notes; "Mary's voice alone, not even her presence, would always worry her, and what now followed will be in Leila's mind as strained as an artificial as their first meetings were honest and spontaneous" (153). Finally, Leila's decision to return to the Caribbean, justifies her failure in the quest for essence in Britain. Instead to be a source of relief for her, it has rather exacerbated her pain, with two children abandoned in her care.

Like Leila, her mother's pursuit of a purpose in Britain is questionable. Contrary to her hope to find a solution to her health problems, she ends up death, after she has endured so much pain and suffering. Besides, the fact that she is buried with another in the same grave, whereas she had earlier told Leila that Britain is not her home, portrays the difficulties involved in searching for meaning there. Hence, living abroad does not entirely end the worries of the migrants, as Mrs Frank had earlier believed.

Alphonse's life in Britain is another remarkable one that requires questioning. Having resided in Britain for some time, he hopes to raise sufficient money so as to improve on himself and family. Unfortunately, the accident he has destroys his hope for a better life. Although he receives compensation from the company, it is nothing compared to the damage this has caused him. He ends up returning to the Caribbean with nothing and practically lives at the mercy of his fellow friends and family back home. This suggests that life in the diaspora also has its own challenges like elsewhere. It is not a bed of roses as most often believed.

To conclude, Earl's life confirms the hegemonic practices on Blacks in Britain. Though his hard work raises him to a landlord in the "Mother Country" and gives some degree of hope to his fellow blacks who can have a place to live in, the racism he still endures shows his inability to successfully seek an essence of life there. The restriction on his number of lodgers is an impediment to his success as a landlord in the metropolis. It simply controls his growth to ensure that he cannot compare with white landlords. A closer look at the characters endorses Maier's assertion that;

The British Nationality Act of 1948 opened the doors of the metropolis for the citizens of the Empire. However, in England, the new arrivals were given a cold reception. They found out that England was not the country they had expected to find and had been taught to love. They soon discovered that England had turned them into the other, isolated and excluded by the majority white population. In spite of speaking English and holding a British passport, the immigrants were not recognised as British because they were black (134).

The colour of the immigrants automatically set them as the other while the whites are the "Self" by their judgement. Thus, speaking the language of the "colonisers" and having their passport is not enough for them to have equal treatment as whites. By implication, the black man's search for essence in the diaspora is a far-fetched dream.

Levy's characters in *Fruit of the Lemon*, also encounter several predicaments which jeopardise their quest for essence in the diaspora.

Faith's parents (Mildred and Wade Jackson), who have been so passionate about travelling to England, fall in the net of racism, which leaves them frustrated as they ponder on their identities and the future of their children especially Faith. Contrary to their flowery image of Britain, they survive life from one council house to the other. At first, this is their only hope given the difficulties involved living with Donald in a single bedroom. Unfortunately, life in the estates is also frustrating especially at the beginning when Wade is separated from his wife and children. Living with nine others in a single room distant away from his family is frustrating and not what they had imagined would be. The housing situation in post-Second World War Britain has prompted James Procter to state that; "It was around housing that the national panic surrounding black immigration tended to accumulate and stage itself in this period. Housing was, more than any aspect of life in the early post war period, subject to a 'colour bar'. [...] displayed in the windows of shops..." "Rooms to let. Sorry, No Dogs and No Coloureds" (22).

However, guided by patience and hard work, Faith's parents were able to secure a house for themselves; and this marked a remarkable growth as far as their pursuit of a purposeful life is concerned. According to Faith, "Mum and Dad bought the house in Crouch End with money they had saved in a post office account. 'No more handouts for us. We make our own way now'. And when Mildred and Wade closed the door of their house for the first time, they both hung their heads and shut their eyes in prayer, 'We finally arrive home', they said" (11). However, this success seems incomplete without an assured future for their children, in a racist white society. This hinders Faith's parents from returning to their homeland, given their fears and desire to watch Faith effectively settle down. It further explains their reason for "collecting boxes" every day, and announcing their going back home, but never implementing it.

Faith's life and experiences happen to be the major concern of her parents. Having endured racism, they do not wish this with their children. However, these children, otherwise called Second Generation still suffer rejection and unbelonging in one way or another. After she obtains a job for Olivia, her tutor, instead of congratulating, tells her that this is only made possible because of her ethnicity. Similarly, she finds difficulties becoming a dresser because of her black identity. According to Lorraine's account to Faith, she overheard some Managers speaking of their uncertainty for white actors to let black dressers put clothes on them (71). Her birth, education, and upbringing in Britain, are insufficient for her to take up such a job she yearns for. Her mother's justification that now is better with the existence of laws as opposed to when they arrived is also worth noting. Yet, its irony lies in the non-implementation of the laws.

Faith realises the need to fight against racism and obtain the job of a dresser at the BBC. Responding to the white jury who use her slow walking pace as a pretext to refusing her the offer, she frustratingly retorts by denying the allegation and going further to them; "Someone told me that you don't like to have black people dressing. Is that right? Because you have no other black people in the department..." (108). Her sincerity and boldness urges them to give her the job as a means to defend themselves. Ruth, otherwise, calls it tokenism; "It's just to shut you up. It's tokenism. It's what they do. How many other black people are working there? So they just employ you and then they can say, yes, we have a black person" (140). Although Ruth names this "tokenism", Faith is happy to have stood up for herself and gained the job. However, this is not enough given that her dream is not fully realised.

She can only be permitted to dress children and not adult celebrities.

Again, Yemi's experiences call for questioning of the immigrants' search for meaning in Britain. This xenophobic violence leads to the destruction of her bookshop by white hoodlums. They not only spray her shop with red paint, but leave her bleeding furiously on her head. By inscribing the word "NF", this suggests "No Foreigner", and therefore serves as a warning to other blacks. She is not supposed to establish a business of that sort in their land or to excel in it. Both the police and Simon's relation of the incident to acts of racism, further substantiates the reality that Blacks in the "Mother Country" encounter. Faith feels so traumatised by the event, such that she suffers from a mental disorder called neurosis.

This mental breakdown urges her parents to convince her to visit Aunty Coral in Jamaica, with hope that she can recollect herself and thoughts. The incident hints her consciousness of her black identity which she has often tried to suppress. Unlike initially when she had the problem of "Colour Blindness", she becomes fully aware of who she actually is. This is demonstrated through her feelings for the black poet at the cabaret, where she goes with Marion's dad, Marion, and Mick. Seated in the room, "I became nervous waiting for the poet to start. 'Please be good, please'. The poet became my dad, my brother; he was the unknown black faces in our photo album [...]. He was every black man - ever" (92). She is much aware of who she is as a bastard child of the empire.

This paper shows that the quest for essence characterises human life. In most postcolonial societies like the Caribbean, a cross-section of the black population believes that this can be achieved by journeying to the diaspora, notably Britain (the Mother Country), and/America. This inspiration stems from their colonial education, and admiration of British culture and identity represented during colonialism. The image, developed in the excitement and longing to journey there, with high hopes of putting meaning into their lives by exploiting the various job opportunities. On the contrary, they undergo an existential crisis through racism and rejection, which jeopardises their efforts towards attaining an essence of life, and there by questions their own black identity. As opposed to their initial thoughts at departure from the homeland, they come to terms with the fact that life is a continuous struggle and search for meaning, whether at home or in the diaspora. Thus, there is nothing as obtaining a fulfilled life in the diaspora, since humans by nature are inquisitive, unsatisfied, and fragmented in one way or the other. If going to

Britain or America is for such a purpose, then this Afro-Caribbean population or Blacks in general, should have a rethink. Human Life, irrespective of one's location, is filled with a void which disrupts the successful search for a purpose in life. Hence, although the choices and responsibilities of the migrants constitute their quest for essence, this seems complex given that their existence in the diaspora is obstructed by certain racist attitudes and psychological realities, which mar their vision of essence.

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