

Forgetting to Remember:
Multidirectional Communities in
Caryl Phillips' *In the Falling Snow*
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Abstract: This article reads *In the Falling Snow* (2009) as an examination of Anglo-centric multicultural diaspora that incorporates new European migration. The reading is framed by Michael Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory, which allows for a rendering of English subjectivity that encounters and draws from multiple transcultural referents. Through the problematic figure of Keith, Caryl Phillips' novel explores the competing spheres of influence, migratory and otherwise, that lead to contemporary articulations of Englishness. Furthermore, the article posits that *In the Falling Snow* recasts familiar diasporic tropes and expands the limits of cultural memory in critically unfamiliar and even vitally post-racial ways. The narrative achieves this in part by including Eastern European migrants, whose experiences of England are circumscribed by a narrow view of Englishness. The novel therefore indexes England's vexed contemporary relationship with multiculturalism while simultaneously foregrounding the deeply rooted interconnectivity between the country and its migrant communities. By reading the novel through the lens of multidirectional memory, the article identifies a multidirectional narrative consciousness that allows for complex renderings of iterations of Englishness.

Keywords: *In the Falling Snow*, cosmopolitanism, Englishness, migration, multidirectional memory

Not remembering is indeed the beginning of madness, individually and collectively.

Caryl Phillips, "Resident Alien"

In her recent article on ways of belonging and the post-racial in Caryl Phillips' *In the Falling Snow* (2009), Petra Tournay-Theodotou posits that the novel "offers a representation and commentary on the more hopeful possibilities located within black and mixed-race British identity politics" through its rendering of multiple generations of Afro-Caribbean men (60). The novel uses this cross-generational focus to place the Afro-Caribbean community within a racial, historical, and socio-political context. She argues that alongside instances of racial discrimination and feelings of unbelonging, a hesitant and interconnected post-racial belonging begins to emerge. Although the post-racial elements of the novel are not without their own contradictions, they are explored through Phillips' black British protagonist Keith and his interactions with two Eastern European migrants. My own reading of the novel charts the same hopeful possibilities located within the cross-community exchange that Tournay-Theodotou identifies. However, I believe that Keith's failure to accommodate and pass on intergenerational knowledge between himself, his aging father, and his mixed-race British-born son indicates that Phillips' novel is breaking from the generational and positing cross-cultural relationships as holding the key to accommodating multi-ethnic belonging in contemporary English society.

In the Falling Snow focuses on Afro-Caribbean and European migration and how these communities interact with each other and with iterations of Englishness. For much of the novel Keith is complicit in the kind of state-sponsored multiculturalism that poorly manages community relations and refuses to admit the quotidian realities of contemporary English life. Keith, the son of two post-war Caribbean migrants, exemplifies the silences and absences that "not remembering" can create, particularly in his troubled position as the head of the local council's newly amalgamated Department of Race Equality, Disability & Women's Affairs. His personal life, marked by strained relationships and lack of communication with his father, ex-wife, and mixed-race son, is at

odds with the kind of community-based transcultural communication that his work requires. As Keith's professional and personal life begins to unravel, he finds himself drawn into relationships with two young women: Yvette, a mixed-race employee with whom he has a devastating affair, and Danuta, a Polish migrant worker for whom he develops a distracting sexual obsession. The novel's recursive narrative swings back and forth between the present day and incidents in Keith's childhood with his parents and step-parents, his courtship of his white English wife, Annabelle, and the events which eventually lead to the breakdown of his marriage and enforced absence from work. The narrative culminates in the death of his father Earl and Keith's tentative reconciliation with his family, although the extent of that reconciliation remains ambiguous. Much of the novel is preoccupied with Keith's attempts to come to terms with the new challenges faced by increased ethnic diversity in contemporary English communities. In examining his interactions with the younger generations (both the younger women he attempts to seduce and his own son), this article will explore how Keith's failure to understand and accommodate how mixed communities negotiate their shared spaces functions as a critique of English multicultural policy's failure to adapt in the face of increasing ethnic diversity and competing community concerns.

This article seeks to highlight the mirrored experiences and memories of different migrant groups in Phillips' novel, particularly contemporary Eastern European migrants and the Windrush generation of Afro-Caribbean migrants. I will discuss these issues in relation to the histories of migrant experience mapped across the generations through the lives of Keith, his father, Earl, and his son, Laurie. I will also explore the narrative's engagement with newer forms of migration, represented by the Eastern Europeans Danuta and Rolf. Placing these narrative mappings within a context of Englishness, multiculturalism, and forms of memory opens up a reading of the text that expands on the critical interrogation of representations of new and, as Tournay-Theodotou argues, "possibly 'post-racial' ways of belonging" (52). In Keith, Phillips has constructed "a character of as yet inexplicable complexity" whose interactions across racial, cultural, and social boundaries are both conflicted and at times

disingenuous (Collier 381). As Gordon Collier argues in his definitive study of the novel, the narrative is one of “revelation and concealment; an architecture of circular returning and departure, and a vista of the past and its legacy as one of broken relationships yet covert loyalties” (395). In revealing these broken relationships and covert loyalties through flashbacks and a non-linear narrative structure, Phillips warns the reader of the danger of not remembering and of how memory cannot be trusted to resolve familial wounds or articulate racial and cultural belonging.

Abigail Ward argues in her perceptive reading of *In the Falling Snow* that it “thinks ‘transnationally’ about identity for black diasporan subjects” (297). Ward highlights the “lasting relationship” between black Britain and the United States through the novel’s engagement with African American music and its “intertextual relationship with works by Richard Wright” (297). However, in this essay I propose that the transnational contexts of *In the Falling Snow* are not only limited to the peripatetic connections of the black diaspora but also foreground conceptual links to Europe through the trajectories of both the black English and Eastern European characters in the novel. As is well known, Phillips’ concern with the “Atlantic triangle”¹ of the African diaspora and its implications for ideas of home and identity for the migrant has long been a familiar theme in his fiction. This article will chart the novel’s expansion of Phillips’ engagement with particularly European modes of post-racial belonging. The novel contemplates the political changes in the European Union that have empowered more Eastern European migrants to live and work in the United Kingdom.² In particular, Phillips’ narrative inclusion of the Eastern European migrants Danuta and Rolf and their interactions with Keith gestures toward a newly emergent view of Englishness which moves away from the polarisation of race to a distrust of migrant groups irrespective of skin colour. In including these narratives, the novel reconstitutes the position of the “outsider” as located within a wider set of subterranean shifts.

It is pertinent here to establish the importance of viewing the novel and its narrative focus with regard to England and Englishness rather than Britain and Britishness. Writing on the theme of Englishness,

John McLeod argues that “the common slippage between Englishness and Britishness seems increasingly unsafe at the turn of a new century” (3). As “Englishness is increasingly approached through a second-generation diaspora sensibility” (McLeod 4), authors such as Phillips address their construction of belonging from within a particularly English frame. McLeod posits that, for Phillips as well as others, “the revision of Englishness becomes a subversive, empowering and perhaps even democratising act” (6). James Procter also warns against the “repeated slippage . . . between ‘English’ and ‘British’” when discussing black British texts, arguing that “the need to account for such slippages becomes increasingly important” in a post-devolution context (2). Indeed, it is difficult, when discussing *In the Falling Snow*, Phillips’ first novel confined entirely to England’s terra firma, to avoid such slippage. The distinction I will draw in this article will be between “black British” as an ethnic and canonical category, and the specificity of particularly English locales within the narrative itself. Phillips’ revision of Englishness to include multiple iterations of community and cross-cultural exchange from migrant communities allows for a construction of Englishness that celebrates transnational influence within, rather than external to, English belonging.

Étienne Balibar’s work on European transnational citizenship can be of use to expand this theoretical stance across the European trajectories of the narrative. Balibar, considering the possible formation of a European transnational citizenship, argues that “what is at stake here is the definition of the *modes of inclusion and exclusion* in the European sphere” (3; emphasis in original). He characterises Europe as historically “multiple” and “always home to tensions between numerous religious, cultural, linguistic, and political affiliations, numerous readings of history, numerous modes of relations with the rest of the world” (5). In this view, Balibar recasts the old continent as able to accommodate and reflect its multi-ethnic communities. By advocating for a transnational citizenship informed by cosmopolitan discourse and facilitated by the EU, he revises the place of race within formulations of the European. It is this revision and the resulting recognition of European transnational memory upon the diasporic subject that this essay will highlight.

In his work on trauma, Michael Rothberg argues that “the displacement that takes place [in memory] functions as much to open up lines of communication with the past as to close them up” (12). For Rothberg, the amnesiac qualities of memory can be restorative as well as rupturing. In his attempt to “rethink the conceptualization of collective memory in multicultural and transnational contexts” (21), Rothberg links the experiences of disparate minority migrant groups—specifically Holocaust memory with the memory of decolonisation struggles—to formulate a multidirectionality that lays the foundation for further connections between cosmopolitan minority groups. *In the Falling Snow*’s conceptual intersection of Afro-Caribbean belonging and European migration demonstrates Rothberg’s intersection of Holocaust memory with colonial memory. This intersection in turn allows for an exploration of how individual experiences of trauma and prejudice are shared between racial and cultural “outsiders” and become part of their shared narrative.

Referencing Phillips’ earlier novel *The Nature of Blood* (1997), Rothberg argues that the author often “bear[s] witness to the difficult task of breaking out of taken-for-granted frameworks of historical and cultural understanding” (172). Applying Rothberg’s theory to *In the Falling Snow* uncovers an evolutionary link between Phillips’ portrayal of the novel’s Eastern European migrant characters and his Jewish characters in *The Nature of Blood*. The black diasporic selfhood in Phillips’ work implicates not only a connection across British and African histories but also hypothesises a conceptual movement toward a particularly European sense of belonging. Rothberg posits that the interaction of historical memories between different members of a single society “illustrates the productive, intercultural dynamic that [he] calls multidirectional memory” (3) and uses Phillips’ novels to demonstrate the cultural interpolations of multidirectional communities. Rothberg suggests that “the conception of competitive memory is a notion of the public sphere as a pre-given, limited space. . . . In contrast, pursuing memory’s multidirectionality encourages . . . [groups to] actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others: both the subjects and space of the public are open to continual reconstruction”

(5). The multidirectional focus of *In the Falling Snow* refuses closed, limited interpretations of what it means to participate in an “English” way of life. Rather than migrant communities looking only to their discrete immigrant heritage or subscribing to a “whitewashed”³ version of becoming English, multidirectional thinking enables a vibrant, circuitous pathway through the competing influences on the cultural identity of the citizenry.⁴

Rothberg rejects “the conception of competitive memory [as] the notion that the boundaries of memory parallel the boundaries of group identity” and reminds us that “the borders of memory and identity are jagged” (5). Yet memory, however fluid, is never complete: Phillips’ depiction of successive black English generations is marked by their silences and absences, rather than by a continual ebb and flow of interaction and articulation. Subsequently, Phillips’ use of a recursive narrative form and of “mirroring memories” takes on Rothberg’s “supple logic” of the multidirectional as a reformulation of contemporary English multiculturalism. This allows the form of the novel to articulate what its flawed characters cannot: fascinatingly, while the novel seeks multidirectionality, the characters often do not. The relationships that Keith strives to maintain are stymied by failed communication and understanding across cultural lines. The use of the novel’s structure to suggest a multidirectionality that is simultaneously not lived through the narrative allows Phillips to highlight the need for such a lived reality. Ironically, Phillips stresses the need for responsible remembering—contemporary history as a contested multidirectional narration that requires perpetual witness—by depicting his major characters struggling to pay adequate attention to the lives and histories of others.

In twenty-first century England, “the respect for diversity has become conditional on a new duty to integrate at the level of shared values” (McGhee 3), and Phillips’ novel shows how the demonisation of alternative loyalties applies not only to outcast racial or religious identities but also to select white Europeans (i.e., migrant workers) who threaten narrow and exclusionary notions of Englishness. *In the Falling Snow* contends with the vexed policy of multiculturalism by exposing the mirroring between older Commonwealth and newer Eastern European

experiences of otherness and reimagines the English multicultural landscape in the wider context of racial re-inscription. This re-inscription does not yet signal an end to hegemony and hierarchy based on residual notions of race but instead splices old racisms with a new antipathy for white foreigners. The text does not, however, deliver a wholly bleak rendering of contemporary life; in his characters' individual acts of conversation and connection Phillips also gestures toward an (imperfect) post-racial conception of society. Using Rothberg's model of multidirectional memory to frame Phillips' text uncovers the deeply rooted interconnectivity between England and its migrant communities.

Despite his position within the state and cultural structure, Keith is disconnected from the wider community and finds engaging with racial questions in his everyday personal interactions difficult. When his ex-wife, Annabelle, raises concerns that she "might be losing him [their son Laurie] around the black-white thing" (Phillips, *Falling Snow* 118), he is incapable of allaying her fears and taking control of their family situation. He also fails to understand her concern that Laurie's immersion in "black" culture will lead him to reject his "whiteness" and therefore reject her. Both parents lack the multidirectional tools to be able to deny the reification of race and acknowledge their son's multiple racial belonging. Keith is unable to reassure Annabelle that their teenage son is not falling prey to inner-city racial pressures, and the scene concludes with Annabelle searching alone for a missing Laurie, eventually finding him before Keith can come to her aid. Keith attempts to assert his parental authority by reassuring Annabelle that he is on his way to see them both. His ex-wife, who cuts their conversation short in her relief at locating Laurie, rejects this offer. Keith is left alone, holding the telephone receiver: "The line goes dead, but he continues to hold the mobile to his ear. As long as he holds this pose there is still some communication between himself and Annabelle and their son. He just has to hold the pose" (120). This is a revealing moment, as Keith's effort to maintain a dialogue with his family is depicted in the performative, quasi-comical fashion of holding his "pose" as the line of communication "goes dead." The scene also captures the general failure of communication between characters and exposes the narrative's lack of

meaningful contact and contestation. Keith, who has been displaced from the family home because of his infidelity, has consequently shut down the dialogue with his wife and child. The silences in the novel are vast; the telephonic silence between Keith and Annabelle extends figuratively to encompass not only themselves but also the intergenerational family unit of father, son, and grandson.

Keith's relationship with his father, Earl, illustrates the disruption of a linear genealogy of black Britishness and reorients Keith in an English, rather than an exclusively black British, frame. Earl's battle with mental illness leads him to leave his young son in the care of his white English ex-wife, Brenda. When Keith returns to his father upon Earl's release from hospital, their relationship does not appear to improve. After Keith moves south for university, the two men maintain a physical and emotional distance. Despite this rupture between them, when Keith travels to see his father following the latter's heart attack, a dying Earl finally opens up about his early experiences of migrant life. He recounts how, on the death of their parents, his sister encourages him to seek opportunity abroad, and as a result, he travels to England, becoming an émigré of the Windrush generation. Upon his arrival in post-war England, he is surprised by both the poverty and the hostility that he encounters:

[W]hatever question they care to test you on you have England under control, but the truth is most of these people don't know a blasted thing about themselves so every question pointing at you but if you want to shame them you just turn it round and ask them about themselves and their own history and you soon going see how quickly they stop talking. Mark you, the one thing they all know is they don't care much for the foreigner and that is you, man, that is always you, but don't call them prejudice because that will vex them. . . . What you must do is play the stranger because it make them feel better. (Phillips, *Falling Snow* 270–71)

Clearly, Earl's subsequent battle with mental illness is a result of his having internalised the wish to "play the stranger" that he believes white

English society expects of him. His early disappointment at the racism he and his friends encounter (and, crucially, the death of his friend at the hands of a racist gang) leads him to dissociate from Englishness. Earl assumes his son must feel alienated as well, believing that despite everything Keith has accomplished, he can never be more than a foreigner in his own homeland. But Keith and his generation are no longer interlopers in the cultural life of England; they are the ones who manage it, as Keith's work at the local authority exemplifies. Therefore, Keith has connections and relationships that take him beyond Earl's horizon of understanding. Although finally being allowed access to Earl's memories is empowering to Keith, it crucially does not, ultimately, bind the two men together in a collective memory but instead unravels their common ties by accentuating the differences between their lived experiences.

This genealogical rupture is again illustrated by a scene in which Earl drops his son off with Brenda after a rare visit and leaves again through a snowstorm. Keith watches as Earl "gingerly picked his way down the path in search of some form of transportation that might convey the snow-furred pilgrim back to wherever he lived. As he walked, his father left behind a single set of footprints, and he remembered lingering by the doorstep and watching closely as the falling snow steadily erased all evidence of his father's presence" (321). As his father's "single set of footprints" is erased by the northern snowfall, Keith is left without protector or progenitor; his genealogical ties to the "imaginary homeland" (219) of the West Indies are figuratively erased. This conceptual erasure of the evidence of his father allows Keith to develop an English identity that includes his racial heritage but also the privileges of Englishness. At the same time, the erased footprints serve as a warning "that familial warmth, coherence, and shared experience are the only way for the Caribbean immigrant legacy to withstand the social 'cold' of England, to celebrate the country's small miracles" (Collier 403). In problematising Keith's experience of cross-generational communication, Phillips highlights the contemporary difficulties of belonging for migrants and their children. Keith navigates both cross-generational and transcultural positions in the text in his relationships with Annabelle, Earl, Laurie, Danuta, and Rolf. These relationships

show that his points of belonging orient not only westward to the Caribbean but also eastward to mainland Europe.

Keith's engagement with black British belonging is further problematised by his relationship with his son, Laurie. Keith and Laurie are estranged, not only because of Keith's infidelity and the subsequent breakup of the family unit but also through their differing attitudes toward feelings of belonging. Keith's troubled relationship with both Laurie and Earl highlights a separation between the generations of black British men. Bénédicte Ledent argues convincingly that the novel is engaged in "examining the lives and the degrees of belonging" of Earl, Keith, and Laurie (164), identifying through their relationships the cross-generational scope of the novel. Ledent examines the complex "gaps" that are a central concern in Phillips' novel and perceptively warns against viewing these gaps as "unbridgeable" (165). If not unbridgeable, the gaps that Ledent highlights in the novel arguably disrupt an exclusively genealogical narrative of Keith as "second-generation." Keith has benefitted in his personal and professional life from the rise of multicultural social policy in England, but parallel to his ascendancy within English political and class structures comes his struggle to reconstitute his relationship with his son. As I have discussed, Laurie rejects his father in the wake of his parents' acrimonious marital separation. Despite Keith's awareness of and work to rectify his disconnection from his father's migrant experience, he fails to identify the corresponding disconnection between himself and Laurie. Rather than accepting their differing interpretations of Englishness as indicative of a multidirectional construction of identity, Keith engages in a combative relationship with his son, as he frequently expresses frustration at Laurie's perceived indifference toward his Caribbean heritage. A crucial scene between the pair occurs when the two men ascend the London Eye. This symbol of millennial London prompts Keith to deliver an impromptu history lecture, cut short as he realises that it is "a veiled attempt to persuade Laurie that this is his city too. And then it occurs to him that it's possible that his son already knows this, and that there is no reason for him to acquaint Laurie *with what he already possesses*" (Phillips, *Falling Snow* 163; emphasis added).

This critical narrative moment highlights Keith's bewilderment at the experiential differences between his own conception of homeliness and that of his mixed-race son. Laurie possesses London as "home," while Keith still echoes the displacement that is a legacy of his own father's distrust of England. At the same time, Laurie's bewilderment at Keith's attempts to locate him as an outsider in a community in which he feels at home further exposes the rift in his relationship with his father, and they fail to build common ground on which to connect. However, the location of this moment of stifled dialogue above the city on the London Eye is an example of the narrative accomplishing what Phillips' flawed protagonist cannot: the ability to overcome the divergences which Ledent identifies. Unlike Ledent, I read the narrative's conceptual "bridges" (of which the London Eye, allowing an expansive view of the Thames, is one) as tentative instances of communication which suggest an ability to build multidirectional identities. After all, Keith and Laurie are looking out over one of the most transnational communities in the world. Their position over the city functions as a counterpoint to Keith's struggle to engage with the entangled cultural nature of contemporary English life and is at the core of the novel's multidirectionality.

Significantly, the silences and disconnections that characterise Keith's relationship with his black British genealogy also mark the other key axis of the narrative: Keith's encounters with Eastern European migrants. Phillips locates Keith in a position of complicity with the othering of white European migrant workers, who, it becomes clear as the novel progresses, are the newest migrant group to be disillusioned and rejected by England. In placing Keith within a problematic relationship to the Eastern Europeans he encounters, Phillips highlights the tensions between successive migrant groups. Tournay-Theodotou argues that Keith's "relationship with Danuta, a cultural other . . . is based entirely on the economies of trade" and that "Keith's racial identification seems to play no role" (56). Keith repeatedly subjects Danuta to his self-serving, sexualised gaze as he attempts to manipulate her into meeting with him. He becomes proprietary toward her—when she starts to leave, he thinks, "you've just had a free conversation class. Perhaps you

can skip work tonight and keep me company” (Phillips, *Falling Snow* 76). As well as displaying a casual misogyny, Keith’s attitude towards Danuta is apathetic; she is little more than a distraction, someone he can display power over due to her social inferiority. As Tournay-Theodotou explains, “in this meeting the primacy of ethnicity or race as a social stigmatizer has been replaced by class, and cultural status with poverty and cultural otherness, as the new social determinants” (56). However, rather than acquiescing to Keith’s marginalising behaviour, Danuta rejects his exploitative advances. She becomes a more complex character by being equally manipulative of her own precarious situation. After living briefly with her fellow migrant worker, Rolf, she steals from him and disappears. In the England of *In the Falling Snow*, relationships are complex and conflicting.

Exposing this complexity, Rolf complains to Keith:

[W]hy should the English police care what one foreigner does to another foreigner? . . . I will tell you the truth, English attitudes disappoint me. Do you know what it is like to stand in a shop with money in your pocket and discover that nobody wants to serve you? Telling you with their eyes before you are even asking for anything. Do you know what this is like or how it feels? The man points to his head. Can you imagine this? (Phillips, *Falling Snow* 210)

The irony of Rolf’s insistent yet ineffectual appeal to Keith, who here symbolises the “secure” citizen, is that Keith, in his position as a minority figure, should be able to empathise with Rolf’s position. However, Keith does not acknowledge the positionality that might open a historical connection between the two men. Despite the memories and echoes of racism that pepper Phillips’ narrative, Keith refuses to recognise the similarities between himself and these recent migrants. Rolf and Danuta both regard Keith as firmly rooted in Englishness, which allows him to exert power over them. Their relationships expose the inherent difficulties in building a transnational European worldview by placing Keith in opposition to Eastern European economic migrants.

From his position within local governance, Keith reinforces narrow ideals of Englishness. On seeing Danuta and Rolf leaving their language college without sufficient clothing for the rain, he comments that

[s]omebody should tell these foreigners that it is always raining in England, and that they should buy an umbrella before they even think about a travel pass, or cheap jeans, or a copy of *Time Out*. After all, an umbrella is a key part of the English uniform. . . . And then he sees her [Danuta] talking to a tall blond boy who is Germanic in appearance, but he could also be from anywhere in Scandinavia, or from one of the former Soviet countries. (90–91)

Keith's casual remarks such as "these foreigners" and "he could also be from anywhere" echo the old racist taunts used against Commonwealth migrants. His language places the Europeans in the same position of outsiders that his own father's generation experienced, but he does not recognise this parallel or the prejudice implicit in his statements. The extent of Keith's incapacity to engage in acts of multidirectional memory becomes clear in his relationship with Danuta. Accordingly, his implication in the cultural hegemony of England as English-born is articulated through these interactions; despite Danuta and Rolf's "whiteness" they are shown to have more in common with Commonwealth migrant groups than other, wealthier Europeans, and Keith's apparent inability to recognise this prevents him from facilitating transcultural understanding.

Despite Keith's problematic relationship to the Eastern Europeans, Phillips uses the narrative form of the novel to reposition Danuta and Rolf not as foreigners but as part of a multidirectional constituency by setting up a parallel between the experiences of current European labour migrants and of post-war Commonwealth migrants. In other words, through the novel's formal narrative, Phillips seeks to expose what Keith fails to see. The novel illustrates the deprivations of English life experienced by migrants and recounted by both Rolf and Earl, and their initial impressions of the metropole are similar, despite being decades apart. Rolf's account comes first: "But then I get a room. A

room with a divan, and I wash, cook, eat in this one room, but this is not civilised even if it is how the English do it. Then I must get a second job as a cleaner to pay for the stinking room” (Phillips, *Falling Snow* 209). Earl’s description of his first night in England, although chronologically first, comes later in the narrative and echoes (or foresees) Rolf’s disillusionment: “I follow him into the attic room and wait while he scratch round for the light switch. Having turn on the bulb the man fall down on a single bed and point to a mattress in the corner and tell me I must sleep there and be grateful I have a roof in England. . . . I surprised to find my friend living like this” (292–93). Both men are shocked by the realities of English domesticity, which had been regarded as modern and relatively opulent in their home countries. While Earl is disillusioned and surprised, Rolf expresses a more succinct outrage at the living conditions he is expected to adapt to and even be grateful for. Phillips utilizes this mirroring of characters’ experiences across the decades (relayed in deliberate chronological disorder) to great effect. The lack of chronology in the text focuses attention on how cultural memories echo each other but also go unheard. The reader is drawn first to the contemporary moment of distrust of economic migrants travelling from the EU. Only after the subsequent parallel with Earl’s experience can a reader arrive at a multidirectional consciousness, an acknowledgement that the two cultural experiences are linked. Not only is the narrative constantly revisiting, reimagining, and entangling its characters’ various pasts, but in doing so it is forging multidirectional links between migrant communities through its own act of determined remembering.

Phillips uses this same mirroring device to explore the issue of white English prejudice and hostility toward migrant groups perceived as invasive. Near the beginning of the novel, Bruce, a documentary filmmaker who prides himself on his “Old Labour” politics, states: “[T]he asylum-seekers, and those migrants from the subcontinent who come here to marry their cousins, they have every right to be here no matter how hard some of us may find it to accept them. But this cheap Eastern European labour in the wake of EU expansion, well to Old Labour men like myself this just doesn’t seem fair” (50–51). The casual racism

inherent in Bruce's eulogising of multicultural migration ironically advocates multidirectionality by displaying the failure of multiculturalism to embed non-racialised values. He rejects those migrating to England for better wages and a better standard of living (the implication being that they threaten "English" jobs and wages) while simultaneously accepting Commonwealth migration. This veneer of acceptance is tempered by an objectification of Commonwealth migrants, reducing them to an incestuous, backward race that must be tolerated if not embraced. In this way *In the Falling Snow* explores England's failure to "belong equally to all its citizens" (Kymlicka 65). The "cheap Eastern European labour" that Bruce decries is only the latest in a long chain of post-war migrants to England who experience the detrimental stratifications of English society, so that as each wave of migration arrives in England, dominant discourses shift to include the older migrants and exclude the new.

This attitude is mirrored later in the novel, although again not in chronological order. When Keith's white English stepmother, Brenda, meets him for the first time as a child, she blithely tells him that "if he [Earl] doesn't hurry up the Pakis will have all the jobs" and then goes on to warn him that at his new school "I imagine they'll be laying it on thick with you . . . but I won't have name-calling" (Phillips, *Falling Snow* 222). The similarity between Brenda's and Bruce's comments is striking; they are both privileging and accepting one longstanding immigrant group while rejecting another intrusive, unfamiliar group. These textual moments also mirror Keith's interactions with Danuta and Rolf. Keith's hesitancy to connect his own sense of precarious belonging with that of the Eastern Europeans he encounters suggests that he privileges the position of established minorities over newly arrived migrants. In addition to these two moments of explicit mirroring, there are other, subtler mirrorings in the text: for example, Keith's problematic romantic relationships with Yvette and Danuta. He actively pursues Yvette, his junior colleague. After he ends their romantic liaison, she exposes his workplace indiscretion and he is suspended from his job. Yet it does not take long for him to begin to fixate on pursuing a seemingly unrequited attraction to Danuta. As in his relationship with Yvette, he attempts

to exploit a position of power (as cultural insider) over Danuta and is thwarted in these attempts when she repeatedly rejects him. Yvette, after filing a formal sexual harassment complaint, is “offered a pay raise and promotion” (250). This inability to assert his power over either Yvette or Danuta evidences the ongoing precariousness of attempts to perpetuate migrant hierarchies in a stratified English society.

Keith’s inability to forge multidirectional connections with those around him is finally illustrated in the novel’s ambiguous ending. He is present in his former family home for the revelation of Laurie’s girlfriend’s unplanned pregnancy, but this moment of (re)generation does not develop as Laurie assures his father that he and Chantelle will “get it sorted” (327). The regeneration is instead a moment between Keith and Annabelle, in which she insists that he stay overnight in their former home. Taking control of the situation, Annabelle tells him, “[j]ust give me the tray and go to sleep, alright? . . . We can talk about everything else in the morning” (330). Her words echo what Keith has just said to his son, that “[w]e can talk later, or tomorrow” (328). This perpetual delay is intensified as the morning never arrives and the narrative ends as Keith “lies back on the pillow and . . . hears her footsteps as she begins to walk slowly up the stairs” (330). Keith, who has spent most of the novel lamenting the breakdown of his relationships with Annabelle and Laurie, nevertheless resists this happy ending: he resolves to return to his flat, but his actions belie this as he reclines on his former marital bed. However, in his failure to communicate fully with either his son or his wife, in delaying discussion until a narrative “tomorrow” which never arrives, Keith continues to stymie the possibilities for connectivity between himself and his loved ones. In spite (or perhaps because) of this suspension of communication between the couple, Phillips opens up a hopeful moment in the narrative which foresees reconciliation between the two and in turn gestures toward an opportunity for national reconciliation. Despite Keith’s continued reservations, the potential for individual contact establishes the novel’s multidirectional project. This ambiguous ending sounds a note of hope, as the novel offers what Keith fails to see. In these final scenes, Phillips produces a vibrant, circuitous route through which multidirectional links can be forged.

Reading *In the Falling Snow* through Rothberg's multidirectional lens focuses particular attention on the novel's transnational European trajectories, which in turn enables a conceptual revision of Englishness and the position of the outsider. Phillips' narrative problematizes national discourses predicated on nativity by both highlighting and contesting the primacy of race in current exclusionary practices. Through its exploration of the complex routes of community and memory in contemporary English life, the novel suggests a still embryonic sense of multidirectional belonging across racial and cultural boundaries. Although characters often fail to communicate with each other, in charting their attempts at overcoming cultural exclusion, Phillips' novel creates an inclusionary and multi-faceted narrative space.

Notes

- 1 The notion of the "triangulation" of the black Atlantic derives from Gilroy's examination of "transcultural reconceptualization" (17) in *The Black Atlantic: Double Consciousness and Modernity*.
- 2 This landscape has changed again following the UK's decision to leave the European Union in June 2016. The status of many EU migrants living and working in the UK is now in question.
- 3 Paul's polemical *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* asserts that the English government institutionalised racism and pressured immigrants into a sub-citizenship that did not allow them to fully integrate into English society in the years following the Second World War.
- 4 Chow argues in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that multiculturalism is "fraught with unresolved tensions" relating to racism and class discrimination (134). In spite of this I argue that multiculturalism remains a vital conduit for the discussion and expression of difference and belonging in the modern nation-state, in part due to these very tensions.

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