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Playing Home: The Boy in the Mirror as Sportswriter

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Abstract: Surprisingly few accounts have directly focused on the impact of sport on Caryl Phillips' work or even his own writings on the meanings of sport. In this essay I seek to rectify this imbalance. I examine Phillips' significant contributions to understanding sport, particularly his screenplay *Playing Away* and his essays on football, and trace the importance of sport to his own sense of belonging. I argue that, despite the neglect of his sportswriting by most critics, such excursions onto the playing fields are far from marginal to his intellectual and literary formation. I suggest that reclaiming Phillips as a "sportswriter" reveals how sport is central to his understandings of (national) belonging, (racial and class) identification, and (social) rejection and provides a useful analytical lens through which to better understand his reflections on diaspora and "home." In this regard, I draw out comparisons between Phillips and that other great Caribbean "man of letters," C. L. R. James for whom sport, and in particular cricket, provided a window onto the world. I conclude by arguing that Phillips be understood as a critical sportswriter who increases our understanding of the cultural politics of play and sport and thus expands and exceeds the genre of sportswriting.

Keywords: Caryl Phillips, sport, racism, sportswriter, belonging, home

The question. The problem question for those of us who have grown up in societies which define themselves by excluding others. Usually us. A coded question. Are you one of us? Are you one of ours? Where are you from? Where are you *really*

> from? And now, here on a plane flying to Africa, the same clumsy question. Does he mean, who am I? Does he mean, do I belong? Why does this man not understand the complexity of his question? I make the familiar flustered attempt to answer *the* question. He listens, and then spoils it all. 'So, my friend, you are going home to Africa. To Ghana.' I say nothing. *No, I am not going home*.
>
> Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound* 98 (emphasis added)

> It follows that the term 'post-colonial' is not merely descriptive of 'this' society rather than 'that', or of 'then' and 'now'. It re-reads 'colonisation' as part of an essentially transnational and transcultural 'global' process—and it produces a decentred, diasporic or 'global' rewriting of earlier, nation-centred imperial grand narratives. Its theoretical value therefore lies precisely in its refusal of this 'here' and 'there', 'then' and 'now', 'home' and 'abroad' perspective.
>
> Stuart Hall, "When Was the 'Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit" 247

> So the West, however violently and neurotically it seeks to preserve its powers and position, its centrality, is paradoxically destined to be deluded by its apparent global presence. In travelling elsewhere its languages return in other forms, following other rhythms, bearing other desires. They cannot go home again. They are home.
>
> Iain Chambers, *Signs of Silence, Lines of Listening* 57

I. Introduction

In November 2011, Caryl Phillips was interviewed by journalist Razia Iqbal for the BBC World News television program *Talking Books*. Speaking of his experiences growing up in Leeds and his deep attachment to the city, Phillips remarked:

> I grew up in a town where one was aware of the fact you were different, that was obvious, you dealt with being called names

> at school. But I had a real sense of unity and bonding with that city which survives to this day. It was largely cultivated around a real passion for Leeds United and a sense that no matter what else was going wrong in your life there were forty-five thousand of you in that stadium and we always won and that was who we were. So I was able to overlook a lot of the difficulties that were to do with race. (Phillips, "Class Prejudice")

Much has been written on the significant periods that shaped Phillips' work, such as his migration to Britain in the late 1950s, his upbringing in a working-class area of Leeds and subsequent education at Oxford University, and his move to the United States. However, surprisingly few accounts have directly focused on the impact of sport on Phillips' thought and work or his own writings on sport. This omission from the academic commentary on Phillips' oeuvre is notable not least because he has repeatedly talked of sport's importance to his sense of self and his identification with Leeds in particular. Sport, it seems, constitutes a problematic object of interrogation for many of Phillips' literary critics; it is as if his engagement with sport reflects some sort of quixotic but ultimately marginal and unrelated diversion from his more serious writings on diasporic belonging, migration, and identity.

Sport produces a curious contradiction when it comes to racial discourse: within the popular imagination, sport is often seen as a space of transcendence, where what counts is the color of your jersey rather than that of your skin. At the same time, sport is too frequently a site for unapologetic forms of anti-black racism and violence, especially so during the years when Phillips stood on the Elland Road terraces cheering on Leeds United Football Club. Given this situation, how does the black (British) subject resolve this (racial) contradiction of being abused and marked as an outsider even when it is "your" team that is playing at home and "your" fans who are enacting the abuse? That is to say, how might one solve the conundrum of wanting to belong to a place that all too often rejects you, of forging an identity that can only be fractured, of reconciling the yearning for acceptance with the ever-present pain and fear of rejection, or what Edward Said evocatively

refers to, in a slightly different context, as "the crippling sorrow of estrangement" (*Reflections* 173)?

In this article I discuss Phillips' writings on sport, particularly his screenplay *Playing Away* and his essays on Leeds United Football Club, and the importance of sport to his understanding of the interrelationship between race and class and, by extension, his development as a writer. I argue that, despite the neglect of his sports-related writings by most critics—including his imaginative depiction of the boxer Randolph Turpin in *Foreigners* and his anthology on tennis, *The Right Set*—such excursions onto the playing fields are far from marginal to his intellectual and literary formation. Such work is in fact central to Phillips' understandings of belonging, identification, and rejection; of the entanglements of race, class, and gender; and, crucially, of diaspora and "home," themes that saturate much of his fictional and non-fictional work.[1] In this regard, we might draw out comparisons between Phillips and that other great Caribbean "man of letters," C. L. R. James, for whom sport, in particular cricket, provided a window onto the world, a way of not only understanding politics but doing politics. In developing this argument as an intervention into and contribution to the extant literature on Phillips, I contend that, amongst the various ways in which he can be understood, we should also think of Phillips as a "sportswriter"—not in the traditional sense of the word, which tends to invoke a narrow journalistic concern with reportage and match summation, but more broadly as someone who understands the intimate connections between sports and questions of power, the joy and pain of passionate identification through fandom, and the cultural politics made possible through creative play.

Phillips once remarked that James' majestic *Beyond a Boundary* was significant, in large part, because the text rose above genre in order to explore the complexities of cricket in the colonial Caribbean ("C.L.R. James" 167). James, Phillips writes, "had an extraordinary ability to write about sport in a way that linked it to other avenues of life concretely and provocatively. In this way he promoted not only our understanding of the game but also our understanding of the culture" (168). Reworking Rudyard Kipling's line on Englishness, James encapsulates Phillips'

point in his well-known dictum: "What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?" (xxvii). Phillips' summation of James' approach to sport can be applied to his own work on the subject, which also rises above and reconfigures the boundaries of sportswriting as a genre. This article argues in favor of reading Phillips as a sportswriter and at the same time suggests that we need to better appreciate how his method and approach deconstruct and reconfigure the very idea of what a "sportswriter" should and can be.

Like James, Phillips is more than just a fan of sports; he is a writer whose approach dissolves the usual categories of sportswriting—sociological, historical, journalistic, and so on—to produce a new way of thinking about sports in the moment of the post/colonial. In so doing, Phillips illuminates the fraught fault lines of national belonging and racial identity and asks what it might mean to transcend the seemingly immutable lines of racial difference in order to redraw if not deconstruct the boundary between the stranger and the native, the traveler and the resident, the outsider and the insider. Take, for example, Phillips' creative recounting of Turpin's troubled life in a chapter in *Foreigners* entitled "Made in Wales." The chapter is hard to define, being part imaginative narrative, part investigative journalism, part sociological enquiry, and part historical remembrance. The effect, however, is a powerful recounting of the boxing brilliance and personal tragedy that befell Turpin and his family and a form of writing that exceeds conventional definitional boundaries of "sportswriting" in order to produce a complex portrait of a figure both temporarily lauded as a national champion yet rendered a "foreigner" by the twin exclusionary forces of British racism and class inequality. As Phillips notes, "[i]n England issues of race and class frequently operate hand in hand, and had Randolph Turpin lived it seems clear to me that he would undoubtedly have 'suffered' as much for his class as for his race" (*Foreigners* 144).

Phillips' writings on sports reveal a constant imperative to name racism where it resides, acknowledge the messy entanglements of race and class, and highlight the submerged discourses of exclusion so often overlooked by sports commentators. Similarly, Phillips avoids dismissing sport as either meaningless play or amoral barbarism as so many writers, literary

theorists, and cultural critics are prone to do.[2] Phillips is able to produce nuanced readings of the sports event and the football crowd because of his location in but not fully of the Leeds United faithful—it is an embedded positionality from which to unpack the boundary-making processes of identity formation. In contrast, then, to writers such as George Plimpton, Joyce Carol Oates, and Norman Mailer, whose insightful and varied writings on sports retain a problematic outsider's anthropological gaze over their sporting objects, Phillips' insights stem instead from a critical insider's perspective shaped by a reflexive lived experience of sporting cultures. To paraphrase James, we might ask: What do they know of Phillips' work who only his non-sport fictional writing they know? Taking sports seriously, both as a subject of Phillips' work and an object of scholarly inquiry, might help us better understand our own complex attachments to (and the shifting and contested meanings of) that imaginative place called "home."

II. Away from Home

In Phillips' first screenplay, which became the 1986 film *Playing Away*, a group of black cricketers travel from Brixton, London, for a friendly away game of cricket against a Norfolk village team. The film, directed by Horace Ové, portrays two distinct, and eventually warring, cultural worlds. One is black Caribbean, urban, and expressive, while the other is genteel, rural, and unmistakably white English. The Brixton team, named "The Conquistadors," leave on a warm, sunny morning from the Brixton Recreation Centre, eventually arriving at picturesque Sneddington village. They are greeted by the sounds of a brass band and an assortment of villagers including the local vicar, a few boy scouts, and a woman named Marjorie (played by Helen Lindsay), the organizer of Sneddington's "Third World Aid Week." Marjorie informs the Conquistadors that the game has been arranged as a "fitting climax to our Third World Week" (Phillips, *Playing Away* 29). After the perfunctory introductions and a tea party reception on the vicar's lawn, a number of tensions emerge between and within both teams. The local village eleven, made up of the vicar, the local police bobby, and the publican, among others, is rife with class antagonisms, as the captain of

the Sneddington team, Derek (Nicholas Farrell), attempts and fails to control the aggressive behaviour of the younger, working-class villagers (played by Neil Morrisey and Ross Kemp).

The Conquistadors, captained by "Willie Boy" (Norman Beaton), are also beset with generational tensions. The younger players are more interested in spending time with the local white women than actually playing cricket. The older West Indians are wracked with anxiety over the question of whether to return "home" and perceive their time in England as an over-extended sojourn that will soon come to an end, although the film leaves open the question as to whether any such return is likely. Before the game, Willie Boy gives his side a short team talk:

> I don't have no big speech or team talk or nothing to give. Everybody have their own ideas about what we doing here and whether we should be here and all the rest. But now we here we might as well play. And I mean play. I don't have no time to make joke with these people. A cricket field don't be no place to separate the good from the bad; it's us and them. No gentleman shit out there. We play, we win, and we gone. But most of all we win, you hear? (57)

When the game finally gets underway, and after a series of disputed umpiring decisions go in favour of the team from Brixton, the underlying conflicts surface. After one confrontation, some of the younger Sneddington players leave the pitch; the game turns farcical as the village team finishes the game with only a handful of players. The travelling Conquistadors eventually win the game, and after an unconvincing few words of congratulations on how well the weekend has gone by Marjorie, the teams disappear back into their respective, seemingly incompatible, worlds. The film ends as the Conquistadors' mini-bus returns home to south London through the dark, rainy streets of SW9. As the mini-bus passes under a railway bridge, covered with the words "We're Backing Brixton," the film closes.

In *Playing Away*, Phillips uses cricket as both a metaphor for and regulator of human experiences (Ledent, *Caryl* 15) to trace the broad contours of racial politics in 1980s Britain. Cricket has, somewhat

paradoxically, come to represent both a middle-class-inflected and nostalgic notion of a lost colonial Englishness as well as a sport that historically helped frame a sense of post-independence West Indian nationhood. Cricket is thus a contested signifier of England's post/colonial melancholia (Gilroy) and allows Phillips to stage the confrontation between black and white British people in a rather direct, if symbolic, way. Tensions over the right to be accepted and treated on equal terms permeate the narrative. Yet the film's arguably pessimistic[3] ending provides no easy solutions or comforting narrative closure to the racial and class antagonisms lying just beneath the civil veneer of English cricket; sport's supposedly redemptive qualities cannot overcome the gap between black and white experiences in Britain.[4] What Dave Gunning calls the "contingent moments of communication across the boundaries drawn by exclusive conceptions of belonging" (*Race* 149) that appear in novels like *The Nature of Blood* here seem to be few and far between.

However, *Playing Away*, which Phillips describes as "a comedy with a dark undertone" (qtd. in Wilkins 129), is not completely devoid of optimism. John McLeod, for example, suggests that the film offers a glimpse of a (future) multicultural accommodation beyond the seemingly fixed categories of "black" and "white." According to McLeod, in drawing out intra-communal tensions and their generational, classed, and gendered fissures, Phillips shrinks the gap between both teams and ultimately shows the similarities they share because of their internal divisions:

> Phillips's emphasis on the equivalent diversity of each side underscores a sense of each as exogamous rather than endogamous, cloaked in a confection of unity that actually disguises the complex relations at play for both. The problems which inflect each side—matters of class, gender and generation, primarily—do not belong exclusively to any one group. This is one of the ways in which Phillips seeks to dismantle a perception of the communities represented by each team as markedly different and suggest instead their concert rather than conflict. (1797–98)[5]

Whilst James' powerful account of the meanings of cricket across the English-speaking Caribbean during the early- to mid-twentieth century remains an important point of reference for thinking about the cultural politics of sport, *Playing Away* marks a shift from the colonial "periphery" to the post/colonial "centre" and therefore addresses a new set of questions. What is the significance of sport in relation to the cultural politics of race and black identity, and what is actually at stake for Willie Boy, and others like him, in that desperate need and desire to win? Willie Boy's comment that "[e]verybody have their own ideas about what we doing here and whether we should be here and all the rest. But now we here we might as well play" can be understood as more than a statement about the game about to be played. It is also a commentary on the existential crisis of migration, the doubts produced when the migrant first settles and wonders whether the pain of relocation (which inevitably produces a certain dislocation) was indeed worth it. Willie Boy does not seek to dismiss these concerns—indeed, we sense that he probably shares them. Instead, as captain, he argues that the only rightful course of action is to play. To make good of a bad situation. And if the West Indian community are indeed to stay, then they might as well play hard and win.

Here sport assumes a wider political significance as a form of cultural politics. Sport, in this instance cricket, provides a space for the production of identities through sporting performance and the reworking of social relations. For migrant groups in particular, sport enables them to make claims for equality and forces the majoritarian to recognise the newly arrived, not as inherently different but as complexly interrelated. As Adlai Murdoch notes in his close reading of *Playing Away*, as "displaced Caribbean subjects" the Conquistadors are "now at home in the world" (323). Murdoch suggests that, as a result, "a differential Caribbeanness has arguably been forged, a purpose-driven form whose specificities of content and contestation are grounded in the Caribbean experience, while adapting to the tensions and teleologies of the metropolitan condition" (323). Phillips' writing reveals sport's embodied potentiality to create conditions of mutual recognition and new identity formation, or to signal those identities still in formation, wherein claims to who is

really playing "at home" come into question. As I argue below, sport has also been significant in shaping Phillips' own identity as a writer and public intellectual.

III. The Boy in the Mirror

In "Leeds United, Life and Me," the final essay in the section headed "Britain" in *A New World Order*, Phillips writes of his father's disappointment in learning that the five-year-old Caryl Phillips had little interest in cricket. As *Playing Away* shows, this was the game with which Caribbean migrants of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s identified most strongly, the sport that enabled Caribbean men (in particular, those living in Britain) to sustain a sense of cultural connection to "back home." Cricket clubs like the Leeds Caribbean Cricket Club, founded in 1948, ten years before the Phillips family arrived in the city, served as a "home away from home" for the early migrants. Such clubs were more than just places to play cricket. They provided a necessary cultural resource that helped to placate the pains of ontological displacement produced by migratory transition. They also offered Caribbean migrants a way to deal with the emotional turbulence of migration through the creation of relatively autonomous black spaces (Carrington, "Sport"; "Cricket"). And yet the young Phillips rejects cricket in favour of football and chooses Leeds United. Phillips recalls: "I was 'Leeds', and with this firm declaration of faith the cultural gap between my parents and myself opened still further, a gap that has never been truly closed" ("Leeds United" 298).

Being a Leeds United fan in the 1960s and 1970s meant coming to terms with both the joy of victory and the pain of near-victory and defeat, a feeling so deep that "even now the thought of what might have been sends me spinning into despair" (299). Yet beyond the highs and lows of following Don Revie's team during this period, the unavoidable racism of the time meant Phillips could never simply and without reflection follow his footballing heroes in the all-white Leeds kit. The very same white working-class fans who embraced Phillips whenever Leeds scored a goal, thus dissolving the allegedly immutable barriers of race, would in the next moment "shout 'nigger' and 'coon' should the

opposing team have the temerity to field a player of the darker hue" (299). Phillips recalls a particular match when he and his brother were subjected to racial abuse and missiles thrown in their direction simply because a black player on the opposing team had scored against Leeds. Despite years of "unquestioning loyalty" (299), Phillips comes to the "sad conclusion" (299–300) that he can no longer avoid the painful irony of the situation and stops going to Elland Road. He describes these experiences of watching his beloved team play as a "trauma" (300). After a period in the footballing wilderness, during which he even flirts with the idea of supporting Queens Park Rangers shortly after he leaves Leeds for London—a moment he describes as "a dreadful, and somewhat embarrassing, illness" (300)—Phillips is pulled back to his first love. Despite now living in the US, and maybe even because he has decamped to the other side of the Atlantic, it is sport and his support of Leeds United that enable Phillips to maintain and hold onto a connection with his "home city," just as cricket did for his father decades before.

Phillips notes that his father once came to see a game, offering a chance to maintain and nurture the father-son bond. The younger Phillips seems to yearn for a connection through football. Despite a brief, flickering sign of interest in the game after a decisive Leeds victory, we sense the pain felt by the son, caused by his father's ultimate reluctance to identify with the sport of the British masses (as opposed to the sport of the creoles and the colonized): "That's it, dad. You're getting it. But he never did. To this day he still listens to cricket on the radio" (301). It is remarkable how many of the themes that structure Phillips' novels are reproduced in this account:[6] estrangement from the world of the father, followed by the realization that the new object of desire does not return his love; the attempt to move beyond the pain of rejection; and an accommodation of sorts, albeit one framed by a certain ambivalence and distance.

It is also striking that, despite such powerful accounts, few critics acknowledge the importance of sports to Phillips' developing worldview and sense of self. Invariably, sport is relegated to a different sphere, the supposed least important and significant parts of his non-fiction writing. Such work is at best noted in passing but usually ignored

altogether. I suggest that we cannot fully understand Phillips, the relationship between his biography and his prodigious output, and his constant reflection on the meanings and significance of home, without considering the impact of those often cold days and rainy evenings on the terraces of Elland Road. Indeed, even as late as the early 2000s, Phillips claims that he accepts or declines invitations to give lectures in England at literary festivals and other cultural events according to the Leeds United fixture list. Adds Phillips: "[T]o this day the situation remains the same" (300). No other cultural form or institution produces as powerful a set of representations, emotions, and identifications with his childhood and attachments to his adopted city than football. Toward the end of "Leeds United, Life and Me," Phillips lists a series of key memories of important friendships and familial stories that are tied together by football: "Leeds United reminds me of who I am" (301). He recounts the first time he stood on the terraces chanting "We are Leeds" (301). We might read this as a ceremonial occasion, a sporting rite of passage and the moment when the young Phillips is given his Loiner citizenship. Phillips concludes by speaking poignantly back to himself: "And I say to that child today, 'And you will always be Leeds, for they are a mirror in which you will see reflected the complexity that is your life'" (301).

The "complexity" of Phillips' life, and by extension his understanding of how race and class mediates and disrupts a sense of belonging and home, and therefore of his work in general, is shaped precisely by this working-class-inflected desire to find a space among the collective. That sense of belonging is crucially and somewhat cruelly enabled by sport's ability to momentarily transcend racial divisions—"We are Leeds"—and at the same moment denied by the psychological trauma of a sports racism that brands the young Phillips' black skin as incommensurate with the white jersey of Leeds United. The boy in the mirror is able to make sense of the world around him and therefore himself. He is better prepared for the confusing inequities of a racialized society not through the printed word of novelists or the acoustic rhythms of music (the traditional routes into literary being for many writers) but the affective passions of football.

James titles Part One of *Beyond a Boundary* “A Window to the World.” In the opening chapter, “The Window,” James recounts how, as a “small boy of six” (3), standing on a chair, he could look from his house and see out onto the recreation ground of Tunapuna, Trinidad. From that vantage point, the young James had a window not only onto the wider vista but, crucially, onto the field of cricket. Later James talks back to his younger self:

> I look back at the little eccentric and would like to have listened to him, nod affirmatively and pat him on the shoulder. A British intellectual long before I was ten, already an alien in my own environment among my own people, even my own family. Somehow from around me I had selected and fastened on to the things that made me whole. As will soon appear, to that little boy I owe a debt of gratitude. (18)

In his essay “The Boy at the Window,” Jim Murray suggests that James’ recollection of his earliest memories of watching cricket provides a way of understanding James’ emerging political outlook and literary method. Through cricket, James forms a bond with a wider collective, a community of which he is both a part and an observer. The window onto the cricket field, then, grants James a way of thinking through the complex antagonisms of a colonial society, the relationship between the crowd and the players, and both the individual and wider social forces structuring Caribbean life, including cricket. James later acknowledges that cricket plunged him into politics long before he was aware of it. He notes: “When I did turn to politics I did not have much to learn” (James 65).

Similarly, we might usefully return to the boy looking into the mirror of Leeds United Football Club as a foundational and formative moment in the development of Phillips’ own sense of self. The mirror account that Phillips invokes—“And you will always be Leeds, for they are a mirror in which you will see reflected the complexity that is your life”—is arguably, in psychoanalytical terms, a more complex metaphor than James’ window. Though we must be mindful not to over-read any particular self-narrated autobiographical moment, Phillips’ use of

the mirror metaphor provides a generative way of thinking about the continuing significance of Leeds United in his life and, by extension, his writings. The boy recognizes himself in the mirror and in so doing becomes aware of his own subjectivity. In this instance, however, "the mirror" is Leeds United Football Club. The idealized version of Phillips is also his idealized vision of Leeds United—a Leeds that is white (they are, after all, also nicknamed "The Whites"). In the essay "United We Stand?" Phillips remarks, "In all the years that I watched Don Revie's wonderboys, I don't remember ever once seeing another black face on the terraces of Elland Road," and yet, returning to the BBC interview, Phillips is able to "overlook" some of the uglier aspects of Leeds United precisely because "Leeds" operates in the realm of the imaginary.

This process of identity formation, of coming to recognize our subjectivity through the Other and encountering the gap between the idealized version of ourselves and who we are, is, of course, one of Frantz Fanon's provocative starting points for his psychoanalytically driven account of colonial racism in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Reworking Jacques Lacan, Fanon suggests that the real Other for the white man is not Woman, but the black man, before adding: "And conversely. Only for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable. For the black man, as we have shown, historical and economic realities come into the picture" (124). If the colonial world is figured as a white world, then the future is white: "The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white" (Fanon 178). Yet, as a potential counter-discourse, Fanon does not retreat into some mythical reclamation of a romanticized black African history. Instead, and seeking to avoid an ahistorical, essentialized account of identity, Fanon refuses to be fixed by a pre-social model of psychoanalysis that would otherwise condemn blackness to being forever marked as inferior and irredeemably Other. Thus, ultimately, "there is no Negro mission; there is no white burden" (178). Crucially, as Fanon argues in the closing pages of *Black Skin, White Masks*, black agency is not only possible but necessary. In a series of powerful lines and declarative statements, Fanon announces:

> There is no white world, there is no white ethic, any more than there is a white intelligence. . . . I am not a prisoner of history. . . . In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it. . . . I do not have the right to allow myself to be mired in what the past has determined. I am not the slave of the Slavery that dehumanized my ancestors. (179)

The so-called objective and material categories of racial classification are revealed as phantom: "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man" (180). The mirror phase of subject formation does not determine racial identities; we are not condemned to play out a racial Manichean future. Recognizing the whiteness of the world that the black subject confronts, the ideal whiteness of the image that is reflected back becomes not the end point but merely the starting point for a critical enquiry into the logics and effects of racism and the complex identities produced as a result. Fanon's humanistic conclusion is emphatic: "It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world" (181).

It is precisely the mapping of the "historical and economic realities" that mediate the black experience and therefore black identity in the new world, and Fanon's humanistic drive to make good on Europe's self-professed tropes of social equality, universal rights, and human freedom that animates Phillips' writings. The boy in the mirror sets out to make himself anew, not by the denial of his location and the distorting effects of white racism but by acknowledging these troubled origins in the formation but not determination of his identity and future. Phillips asserts his agency, engages a dialectical struggle, and breaks from the history of his father's Caribbean cultural world when he chooses football over cricket. Similarly, just as Fanon, following Aimé Césaire, seeks to rescue humanism's promise of freedom and equality from the false rhetoric of European bourgeois intellectuals, so Phillips reclaims Leeds United (and, arguably, sport in general) and makes it into something more progressive and inclusive. Phillips challenges "Leeds United," and

by extension the city of Leeds and more broadly England, to live up to its self-proclaimed virtues of tolerance, liberty, fair play, and equality by turning the mirror back upon those collective identities in his writing and forcing all of us to confront and acknowledge the true conditions and reality of anti-black racism in Britain.

IV. Playing Home

Phillips is rightfully considered one of the most astute observers of the complex and often contradictory conditions of existence and survival that mark the experiences of New World blacks within the African diaspora. Wendy Waters, for example, notes that Phillips understands diaspora "as constituted not by the binary of home and away, but by complicated connections and histories that do not at first glance seem to be linked" (112). It is for this reason, she suggests, that characters in Phillips's novels tend to be in a state or condition of exile even when at home (111). Similarly, Timothy Bewes argues that the notions of diaspora and homelessness "are not merely contextual or thematic elements of Phillips's work; they are present in the immediacy and the materiality of his texts—in the actuality of ventriloquy and cliché—which, after all, is nothing other than the material embodiment of a condition of permanent exile from the intimacy of language" (71).

However, Phillips' work does more than just illuminate the complex ontological dilemmas produced by migrancy and the attempts by people to give meaning to their lives in conditions not always of their own choosing. It also seeks to provide imaginative tools to remodel the fixtures of the metropole's house. In the process, it reworks the very idea of "home." The encounter between native and newcomer, resident and migrant, reshapes not only their relationships (and therefore their identities) but also the terrain upon which both stand and to which both lay claim. The repeated refrain in the introduction to Phillips' A *New World Order*, "I recognize the place, I feel at home here, but I don't belong. I am of, and not of, this place" (1, 2, 3, 4), comes close to being his literary motif.[7] In thinking about place, Doreen Massey reminds us that social relations always have a spatial form and a spatial content, and thus "place" is produced through those very social relations interacting

at particular locations. The singularity of any individual place (or city) "is formed in part out of the specificity of the interactions which occur at that location (nowhere else does this precise mixture occur) and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location (their partly happenstance juxtaposition) will in turn produce new social effects" (168).

Phillips' diasporic approach to writing about both place and social relations avoids fetishizing "travel," "movement," and "homelessness" as desirable in and of themselves. As Avtar Brah notes, "the multi-placedness of home in the diasporic imaginary does not mean that diasporan subjectivity is 'rootless'" (197). Celebratory accounts of the "time-space compression," for example, that is claimed to define our late modern age, need to be tempered by the realization that, for many people, place, locality, and home are encountered as rather mundane aspects of everyday existence and things that people feel comfortable with rather than try to escape from. The strength of Phillips' work lies in his ability to map the common, almost banal, forms of extant racism, fractured hopes, and desire for intimacy, across space and through time without collapsing the specificity of those distinct geographical registers and temporal moments into a homogenized global postmodernity or romanticizing "the local" as a fixed state. Phillips' desire to cultivate a "plural notion of home" ("High Anxiety" 304) is therefore directly connected to his interest in writing about those who feel alienated or abandoned by societies they call "home." As he suggests, the word home is a "near cousin" to the words belonging and forgetting (307). Phillips' remembering of Leeds and his claims to place and home should not be mistaken as apolitical or romantic wistfulness. We might instead draw on bell hooks to understand Phillips as wrestling with the politicization of memory (and therefore of forgetting) in a way that avoids nostalgia—"that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act" (hooks 147)—in favor of what she terms a "remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present" (147).

This raises the question of the "politics" of Phillips' writing. Bewes suggests that, in his fictional work at least, Phillips' style of writing "is cumulative, and arises in part precisely from this refusal of the author

to signpost his intentions or to offer moral or political judgments, even implicit ones, on his characters" (62–63). Others such as Dave Gunning (*Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature*) suggest that Phillips' fictional work is deeply political even if such emancipatory politics is understated, often articulated through complex, non-linear narratives that not only move from one geographical location to another but shift through time as well.[8] With the resurgence of far-right political parties in Europe and the revival of anti-immigrant and xenophobic political discourses in both the United Kingdom and US—key factors behind Britain's "Brexit" vote to leave the European Union and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election victory—Phillips' steadfast refusal to cast the migrant as an unknowable stranger continues to give his writing a political edge and contemporary urgency. As Phillips' literary contemporary Hanif Kureshi noted following the electoral success of anti-migrant political parties in the 2014 European Parliament elections,

> [t]he immigrant has become a contemporary passion in Europe, the vacant point around which ideals clash. Easily available as a token, existing everywhere and nowhere, he is talked about constantly. But in the current public conversation, this figure has not only migrated from one country to another, he has migrated from reality to the collective imagination where he has been transformed into a terrible fiction.

Both Phillips' reclamation of "outsiders" like black migrant sports heroes and poorly remembered black athletes and his insistence that sports be read in conjunction with wider socio-political conditions can be understood as a way of disrupting dominant monocultural and xenophobic nationalistic discourses. Phillips sees sport as vitally important because it provides a modality through which outsiders can find a space for themselves and make claims for recognition and therefore inclusion. Sport is a site where encounters between insiders and outsiders take place and, importantly, the meanings of the games themselves are altered as well. In the introduction to his 1999 edited anthology *The Right Set: The Faber Book of Tennis*, for example, Phillips

discusses how various "outsiders" have transformed the game of tennis, noting that

> [t]he twentieth century has witnessed a remarkable growth in the popularity of tennis, but alongside this growth the game has had to accommodate the 'outsider', whether one wishes to define 'outsider' in terms of class, race, gender or nationality. As the century draws to a close, the 'barbarians' have not only begun to gather inside the gates, but some of these gates and at least one grand-slam stadium have been named after them. (xi)[9]

Similarly, in *Foreigners*, sport, and in this instance boxing, allows for the putative outsider (Turpin) to gain recognition, fame, and acceptance, even if that form of inclusion is profoundly ambivalent, temporary, and, in the end, only achieved at great emotional cost and personal sacrifice, as shown by Turpin's tragic suicide. It is worth noting that the chapter focusing on Turpin, "Made in Wales," is the middle chapter of the text's three extended essays, coming after "Doctor Johnson's Watch" (based on Francis Barber) and before "Northern Lights" (based on David Oluwale). Sport is thus centred both figuratively and literally within Phillips' reflections on nation, class, race, and belonging. In discussing the reasons for his interest in Turpin's story, Phillips observes:

> You weren't allowed to fight for the British title, even if like Turpin you were born in Britain and a British citizen, by virtue of the colour of your skin, you were excluded from being a British champion, so I was interested in the way in which he had to navigate and negotiate race, but I was also interested in the fact that the class aspect of his story seemed to me to be a very familiar story if you looked at most boxers of the period, so I tried to talk about race and class in that story and that's something which interests me with sportsmen anyway" (qtd. in Sesay 18).

"Made in Wales" is a powerful example of what Susan Yearwood calls "the experimental, rhetorical tradition in Phillips' work" (22). She asks,

"[I]s this an essay on Turpin's life or an attempt to fictionalize reality, to suggest rather than create memoir for the writer's own aims?" (24). "Made in Wales" moves seamlessly between an historical overview of black boxers in Britain, to an account of Turpin's fight and surprise defeat of Sugar Ray Robinson, to a biography of Turpin's life outside of the ring that appears partly fictionalized and partly based on archival research and Phillips' own interviews with Turpin's friends and family members. The result is a powerful and beautifully narrated new form of writing about sports that, as noted earlier, rises above and reconfigures the expected boundaries of sports writing as a genre. It is simultaneously memoir and reportage, history and sociology, fictional and factual, and somehow, in the end, more than these parts as well, a new kind of sportswriting.

I claim, then, that through a reading of sports we can better understand the subterranean tropes of freedom and identity that structure the impressive terrain of Phillips' oeuvre. Indeed, Phillips explicitly notes: "As for the people on the pitch, or the people participating, sport is political" (qtd. in Clingman 117). Phillips ends *A New World Order* by recounting a moment when, in a stadium to watch the England men's football team play in a World Cup game, he suddenly and unexpectedly found himself singing "God Save the Queen" with gusto. "For a moment," Phillips reflects, "the cloud of ambivalence was lifted. I belonged" ("High Anxiety" 308). Thus Phillips engages one of his central ideas, "the transformative possibilities of the sporting spectacle" (McLeod 1794), to expand and open up previously exclusionary spaces to more inclusive and diverse local and national imaginaries. As McLeod observes, "the new intimacies afforded by sporting celebrations are rendered here transgressive, not just of the political boundaries that are breached, but also in those close encounters which bring bodies together without necessarily denying divergences of standpoint within the crowd" (1794).

Of course, such "transgressions" are often limited. Just as the young Phillips learned to be skeptical of the durability of the euphoric post-goal embrace of his fellow white Loiners in the stands of Elland Road, so too does the older Phillips resist the urge to let himself believe that his

passport of inclusion to the three lion national imaginary is unequivocally his. Phillips cannot fully escape from what he terms the high anxiety of belonging because, as he notes while reworking a sporting metaphor, the rules for inclusion can quickly change: "The goalposts will be removed" ("High Anxiety" 308). Vigilance and anxiety, not comfort and security, are the conditions of being for those marked as Other to the dominant (English) codes of national belonging. And yet Phillips suggests that in the new world order nobody will feel fully at home ("Introduction" 5); thus the migrant experience (whether recently arrived or still struggling for recognition decades after their arrival) becomes not marginal but central. The Caribbean migrant is no longer exterior to the national body politic. There is a radical decentering under the conditions of the post/colonial. As Phillips notes, "these days we are all unmoored. Our identities fluid. Belonging is a contested state. Home is a place riddled with vexing questions" ("Introduction" 6).

The tectonic movements of culture often reconfigure our identities in ways not immediately obvious to the contemporaneous eye. Sport, and football in particular, signal something important about such deep shifts taking place beneath the surface. The migration of African sports talent as athletic labor is a dominant feature of sporting modernity, reshaping not just the sports landscape but wider city and national imaginaries as well. More so than in the ossified British institutions of State, formal politics, law, media, finance, and the citadels of elite reproduction called Russell Group Universities (especially of the Oxbridge variety), it is on the football fields that England's national myths and meanings are being produced anew. As Phillips observes, the "quietest, but perhaps the most profound, change in English football in the past decade has been the thorough integration of African footballers into the upper echelons of the game" ("Do You Come Here Often?"). Across much of Europe, players such as Ghana's Michael Essien and André Ayew, the Ivory Coast's Didier Drogba and Yaya Touré, and Nigeria's John Obi Mikel and Odion Ighalo have not only been making their careers but remaking and refashioning the identities of the cities (and citizens) of Europe. Of course, this takes place alongside monkey chants and bananas cowardly thrown from the terraces toward the pitch, while

the white sportsmedia complex fails to unpack such moments, thereby revealing their own complicity through silence. Football authorities respond with paltry fines against the perpetrators and perfunctory, now almost ritualistic, anti-racist announcements when finally embarrassed into doing so by black players and anti-racist campaigners. But an irreversible shift has and is taking place. Through force of will, sacrifice, and courage, the migrants, outsiders, foreigners, and former colonial subjects have opened up a space at the center despite the political and intellectual efforts of conservative forces across Europe. African bodies which once provided the unfree labor power upon and from which European wealth was extracted are now changing the body politic of the same post-imperial countries.

The previously knowable and putatively secure European "we" now signifies a less exclusive identity because the referent has shifted. The riposte to the anti-immigrant nationalist right that "we are here because you were there" requires modification. That colonial line of ontological distinction between the "we" and the "you," the "us" and the "them," no longer holds. It was always imaginary, but now, in the twenty-first-century Western metropole at least, it has almost disappeared. Of course, new lines are emerging around and through the internal demarcations of white ethnicity, producing new (Central and Eastern European) migrant folk devils. And the dominant British version of white supremacy cannot yet give up on the familiar forms of anti-black and anti-brown racism. The "race problem" is now framed as a "Trojan horse" situation in which the enemy is supposedly within our schools, classrooms, and other public institutions and can only be confronted by a more robust reassertion of "British values."[10] But that very term admits defeat. The "Greeks" are already inside the city; Troy cannot return to what it once imagined it was.

In this moment the world moves back toward the migrant, and the sharp line of ontological distinction between "home" and "away" begins to blur, such that home becomes something else, something different from what it was before, something both familiar and strange. Beating them at their own game produces a different resonance when the beating takes place *at home*. We might postulate that it is no longer a

matter of "playing at home" (which separates the "playing" action from the place "home"), but rather of *playing home*. Playing home signifies a reworking of home. The phrase's linguistic dissonance reminds us that "away" and "home" are not quite binary opposites after all, despite what the sporting lexicon suggests. Grammatically speaking, "playing away" works in a way that "playing home" does not. The requirement to add a preposition—playing *at* home—keeps the human action and the location separate. Home becomes a fixed geographic entity in this moment, secondary to the thing that is being done there and denies the fact that, as Massey notes, social interactions reconfigure relations between people as well as the place within which those encounters take place. Playing home disrupts. The cacophony falls hard on the ear and tongue. Like Phillips' work in general, playing home calls into question the easy invocation of "home and away" as a mutually exclusive binary. Adlai Murdoch argues that "the presence of Caribbean diasporic groups on the metropolitan mainland works to subvert cultural and demographic notions of inviolability and singularity," and thus "the idea of fixed, permanent and separate communities" is replaced with an open-ended, more flexible form of identification which calls into question static notions of home as isolated permanence (35). To play and to be at play thus becomes something important; the ludic, after all, is central to human creativity and therefore of social and cultural change more generally (Huizinga). Playing home signals, in the end, how the very playing, the sporting encounter, occurs not just in that place but to that place. Home is played with and forever changed, and with it our identities and sense of belonging.

V. Conclusion

In the extract of the BBC interview that starts this article, Phillips locates sport—and in particular his complicated attachment to Leeds United Football Club—as a significant place where he felt a sense of belonging to a larger collective, one that provided a temporary refuge from British racism. His ability "to overlook a lot of the difficulties that were to do with race" should not be read as a denial of racism. This is not a naïve liberal belief in the melting-pot version of racial tolerance

and diversity, nor the conservative myopia of a post-racial present. Phillips has spoken explicitly about the racism he has experienced in sporting arenas. His work demonstrates an attempt to name racism as extant whilst looking towards the horizon, a possible future moment, when the troubled and troubling story of race will be a historical marker rather than a living reality. Phillips' comment is as much a moral as a political statement and recalls James' adroit observation in *Beyond a Boundary*: "There was racialism in cricket, there is racialism in cricket, there will always be racialism in cricket. But there ought not to be" (58). Sport helps Phillips understand how people live, survive, and reproduce themselves even amidst the trauma produced by racialized forms of exclusion, violence, and migration, be it compelled, coerced, or forced. Sport is a cultural form through which people learn to deal with the constant pain of near-defeat, failure, and partial victories. It provides a model for what is possible in terms of creating moments free from the stultifying effects of racism. As McLeod notes, "the weighty significance of that innocuous supportive 'we' has remained with him [Phillips] and shaped his understanding of the possibilities of sport (for players and spectators alike) for opening dissident spaces of alternative collectivities where ingrained social divisiveness just for a moment meets its match" (1793).

Though Bewes claims that "shame" is a constant, almost ubiquitous theme in Phillips' work (or at least his fictional work),[11] his sports writing, especially his accounts of Leeds United, contains a strong sense of attachment bordering on pride, almost defiantly so at times. It is somehow fitting that Leeds United was the English team widely regarded as having some of the most racist and violent fans during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s and one of the first English teams to recruit a black African player, Albert Johanneson, followed later by Elland Road heroes like Ghanaian Tony Yeboah and South African Lucas Radebe. The current sons of Africa are playing for (and even captaining) Leeds United, cheered on by their diasporic cousins, amidst the sea of white shirts and faces of Leeds. This is an irony not lost on Phillips. In an essay for *The Guardian* celebrating Radebe's retirement from professional football, Phillips reflects:

> I attended my first Leeds game as a five-year-old back in 1963. I revelled in the triumphs of the Sixties and Seventies while learning how to endure the racism and hostility of the period. But, in the end, the verbal and, at times, physical abuse eventually proved too much and I spent 10 years boycotting Elland Road. . . . The arrival of Radebe at Elland Road finally brought to the club a man who combined world-class footballing excellence with the dignity and authority to combat racism, both for Leeds and for South Africa. In these difficult, transitional times for the game, I salute him as representing everything that is good about football. ("Do You Come Here Often?")

Phillips is no Afropessimist or sporting nihilist. He resists the temptation to write sport off as war minus the shooting, as a space that can only reproduce forms of exclusion and shore up populist notions of racial alterity. Phillips wants to hold on to and claim those moments of transcendence that the sports crowd creates. While others fixate solely on the xenophobic and racist proclivities of the football crowd, Phillips' focus is elsewhere, or more precisely on multiple moments at once. Phillips recalls an encounter in a crowd when a white spectator embraced him shortly after hurling racist abuse toward the pitch: "I remember the moment when we were high-five'ing each other and hugging each other, and if he doesn't remember it, then I guess part of my job as a writer is to find a way to remind him that he rose up above that barrier for a minute" (qtd. in Clingman 117). This critically reflexive approach seeks to better understand the politics and potential of sport; it blurs, cuts across, and remakes traditional genres of writing and enables Phillips to produce a new and creative form of sportswriting.

In the brief introduction to the *Playing Away* screenplay, Phillips notes that once he decided that cricket would be the meeting point between the West Indians, black Britons, and white Britons, he only had one more decision to make: "Which one of the teams would play away? It was easy. The team that had been playing away the longest" (x). Today, after years of rhizomatic patterns of migration and dispersal,

that decision is no longer so easy. The "away" team has ceased to think of themselves as visitors and the "home" team is no longer so sure of the genealogy of its line-up, either. It was bad enough that the Conquistadors, recalling the "colonial adventures" of the Spanish and Portuguese, were somehow able to beat "the English" on England's village greens,[12] but something far more significant has happened since then. In the intervening decades, as Phillips' writings powerfully reveal, and beyond the superficial markers of racial alterity, both sides look increasingly alike, their entangled colonial routes manifest in the hyphened identities of the present. Who plays for the "away side" and the "home side" is no longer clear-cut. In playing away for so long, both sides can now lay claim to be playing home.

Notes

1 One reason for this neglect may be that Phillips' recent writings on sport have tended to be found in his non-fiction work which, as Ward notes (192), has received less critical attention.

2 For a discussion of this point, see Carrington and Andrews 4.

3 On the question of pessimism within Phillips's work see Ledent's "'Look Liberty in the Face.'"

4 See also Gunning's analysis of the film, in which he notes: "Class distinctions ultimately destroy the white side, but the experience of racism and exclusion unites the black team. Community may be reinforced through sport, the film suggests, but only when it already exists: the Brixton team come to recognize their shared experience with one another, but in a way that necessarily excludes the opposing team" ("Race" 133).

5 McLeod concedes, however, that this "progressive" model of multiculturalism is ultimately presented by Phillips as "more envisaged than achieved" (1795).

6 On this point, see Ward. Discussing Phillips' work on belonging and Leeds United, she notes:

> Like the difficult representation of slavery in Phillips's novels, in which he refuses to reduce the complexity of this past to a simple, manichean, politics of accusation and innocence, his depiction of legacies of this past, such as belonging and identity for non-white Britons, is also complicated. Leeds United may remind Phillips of who he is but . . . this reminder is arguably of his difference; it is not an easy affiliation with the white football fans. (197)

7 Phillips is not, of course, the only writer to reflect on the troubled and shifting meanings of home (and the related notion of exile). It is, as Woods notes, a

persistent and perhaps dominant theme of much contemporary literature. Woods, somewhat surprisingly, discuses a range of authors from V. S. Naipaul to Aleksandar Hemon but entirely ignores Phillips' writing.

8 A difference here might usefully be drawn between Phillips' fictional and non-fictional writings; the latter are more readily understood as conventionally political. Ledent notes that, "[w]ritten in a graceful and accurate language free from the academic jargon that he does not hesitate to brand whenever he meets it, Phillips's non-fiction constitutes an interesting complement to his occasionally understated novels, providing them with a more radical and political subtext, but also containing oblique comments on his own conception of art" (*Caryl* 8–9).

9 For a critical review of *The Right Set* that bemoans the decline of the amateur tennis player and defends a rather nostalgic notion of tennis before the advent of hyper-professionalization, see Said's "John McEnroe Plus Anyone."

10 In the summer of 2014, a so-called "Trojan Horse" debate emerged in the UK after an anonymous letter was made public alleging that Muslim groups were infiltrating schools' governing bodies in Birmingham. A subsequent government inspection of a number of schools found that in some an Islamic and socially conservative ethos was being promoted but that there was little evidence of "Islamic extremism" taking over the schools, as had been alleged (Easton). In response, Michael Gove, then Education Secretary, announced a plan to force all schools to promote "British values."

11 Bewes clarifies this point by discussing not just the themes that Phillips writes about but *how* he writes. Bewes notes that he is thinking about shame as a material entity in Phillips' work, "not, primarily, in the ubiquity of its appearance *in* the texts, but in two closely related, apparently superficial elements which proliferate inseparably from them: ventriloquy and cliché" (61; emphasis in original).

12 McLeod suggests that the name of the team perhaps signifies a "colonization in reverse" (1796), something that became a widespread concern in England from the 1950s onwards, including cities like Leeds. For a further discussion on (re) colonizing the metropole, see Murdoch.

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