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## Three Ways of Looking at Illegal Immigration

Clandestine Existence in Novels by Salman Rushdie,  
Christopher Hope and Caryl Phillips

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LARS ECKSTEIN

**Three Ways of Looking at Illegal Immigration:  
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Pa' una ciudad del norte  
Yo me fui a trabajar  
Mi vida la dejé  
Entre Ceuta y Gibraltar  
Soy una raya en el mar  
Fantasma en la ciudad  
Mi vida va prohibida  
Dice la autoridad

Manu Chao, "Clandestino"

**1. Introduction**

For a week or so in the late summer of 2005, the issue of 'illegal' migration to Europe made a brief and unlikely entry into Europe's prime time news coverage when hundreds of West Africans forced their way into the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla on the Moroccan main land. It was less the fates of those Africans who either bled to death or were shot during the attempt, I would argue, that initially captured the attention of the European public; after all, clandestine immigration<sup>1</sup> into Europe is an everyday affair and border causalities hardly ever make the news. Rather, it must have been the emblematic quality of the television images of the nightly actions themselves, delivered by surveillance cameras, which stuck. The long-standing metaphor of the "Fortress Europe" besieged by an unfathomable mass of the desperate and poor suddenly gained a quite literal quality; the three meter razor-wired fences separating Europe from Africa visualised Europe's fortification walls, and the innumerable African migrants armed with self-built ladders credibly represented an alien assaulting force, in a scenario reminiscent of medieval warfare.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms 'clandestine' immigration and 'clandestines' being aware of the fact that they are often considered to be politically 'incorrect,' as they seem to encourage associations such as 'criminal' or 'shady.' I prefer them, though, since firstly, they have made their way into a popular counter-discourse, and secondly, since speaking about 'illegal' existence and 'illegal immigrants' is perhaps even more contested, particularly considering the anti-globalisation movement.

After a few days, when these images lost their appeal and the refugees were removed from the Spanish enclaves, they accordingly disappeared again from Western TV screens; little or no interest has been taken so far in the lives of those few who arrived early enough to be let in, or in the lives of the overwhelming majority who were refused entry and ended up in Moroccan detention camps or the Moroccan desert.<sup>2</sup>

This short spell of medial visibility of clandestine migrants in Ceuta and Melilla, and the kind of media coverage they received, is revealing regarding the more general treatment of so-called illegal immigration in Europe. It highlighted the dilemma of Western liberals who on the one hand widely express sympathy, but on the other hand seem equally unwilling to share Europe's privileges too freely with the world's poor. There is an ensuing sense of discomfort surrounding the topic, which expresses itself in the obvious unwillingness of the media to probe deeply into individual fates, and which results in an euphemistic political rhetoric where the 'human' factor is played down and migrants are seldom thought about in more than abstract figures and economical data. But also the migrants themselves tend to shun any public attention in order not to reveal themselves either to immigration officers or to their relatives at home, from whom any sense of failure must be concealed. Most clandestines, therefore, not only cannot, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1994) terms, but deliberately do not speak even when given the opportunity. The clandestine predicament presents a curious doubling: To be clandestine means to exist, in an ontological sense, as someone who lives and moves in an increasingly globalised world;<sup>3</sup> but at the same time, it means not to exist, in an epistemological sense, as this existence is largely written out of public discourses. Clandestines do not speak themselves, and when they feature in Western debates, they do so rarely as individual human beings, even in spectacular cases such as the Melilla and Ceuta affair of 2005. Rather, they remain disembodied, abstract spectres whose presence in the West is moreover increasingly conflated with the threat of terrorism after the attacks on New York, Madrid and London.

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<sup>2</sup> Ironically and tragically, the vast media interest, together with the sheer numbers of African refugees, forced Spanish prime minister Zapatero after two days of 'siege' to change the common immigration practices of Spain (which so far received most immigrants and gave them work permits) from one day to the next, leaving hundreds of West Africans stranded in the Moroccan desert between a Europe that suddenly refused them and their home countries to which they usually cannot return. Most asylum seekers dump their passports before entering Europe in order to avoid eligibility for 'resettlement agreements.' More importantly, West African refugees are mostly young and able men singled out by their extended families to help provide for them from Europe. They are invested with much of the families' savings to cover the cost of the journey, which makes failure and a return impossible.

<sup>3</sup> Recent home office estimates claim that a population of up to 570,000 live 'illegally' in Britain alone (BBC News 2005). Most clandestines enter with tourist visas, forged visas, or real visas obtained from corrupt officers in their home countries. It is the much smaller, but increasing percentage of those crossing the British border without valid documentation, however, which I am interested in in this paper. This group does not comprise the world's poorest of the poor, either, as is often suggested, even though the major reason for mass immigration into Europe is to be seen in the growing economical differences between North and South. Travelling to Europe is costly, and professional trafficking is an ever growing market (for more detailed and largely 'neutral' information on this ideologically charged subject, see Marie 2004).



Such predicaments of clandestine existence, I wish to argue in the following, pose a particular challenge to postcolonial writing. In well-established postcolonial fashion, literature which tackles the theme of ‘illegal’ migration directs the attention of Western readers to the marginal (or even invisible) existences they rather prefer to be oblivious of; the postcolonial writer, however, hardly writes *from* the margins in this case. In giving voice to a group of people who chose to remain silent themselves, the writer takes a mediating position marked by discursive power rather than powerlessness, and is thus located somewhere in the diffuse realm between the territorial anxieties expressed in European media and institutional politics, and the clandestine practices of those who insist to carve out private spaces in Europe despite them. This peculiar position, I think, involves, first, an aesthetic, and second, an ethical challenge. Aesthetically, fictional mediations of clandestine experiences will have to find ways to give expression to the simulacrous doubling of both existence and absence which characterises stories of ‘illegal’ migration. Writing about the fate of those who live between us ‘visible but unseen’ calls for narrative modes that somehow reflect the crass discrepancy of discursive power between observers (including the postcolonial writer) and the observed. Literature may draw on a repertoire of generic models in this context which more or less intensely reflect the revealing, alienating or distorting power of representation. The following discussion will highlight only three variants – magic realism, satire and realism. At the same time, the aesthetic possibilities of dramatising clandestine predicaments have to be negotiated in conjunction with their ethical implications. As advocates for those unwilling and unable to speak for themselves, postcolonial writers face the challenge of finding an adequate and resonating voice that somehow ‘does justice’ to the (often brutal) experiences of clandestine migrants. The more intense the aesthetic fictional mediation, the more prominently an authorial presence will emerge from the text, which in turn may be held accountable for ‘misrepresentations.’ Such challenges have been taken up very differently by three specific writers and novels, namely Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Christopher Hope’s *Darkest England* (1996) and Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore* (2003). In the following I will take a closer look at their particular aesthetic modes and political approaches to clandestine existence by comparatively focussing on plot elements shared by all texts – the crossing of the British border, ‘police contact,’ the experience of the detention centre – before briefly addressing the changing role of postcolonial studies in a globalised world of mass migrations.

## 2. Salman Rushdie and the Magic Realist Mode

Salman Rushdie famously opens his *Satanic Verses* with what he called a “drastic act of immigration” (French 1988, 43). Gibreel Farishta, an Indian Muslim who made a career as an actor of Hindu divinities, and Saladin Chamcha, an anglophile Indian radio and TV actor with a British education and wife, tumble from an Air India jumbo jet blown up by Muslim fundamentalists precisely 29.002 feet above Dover beach. Gibreel and Saladin’s ensuing fall from the sky is a spectacular one; by the

force of tunes they commence to sing (a silly popular song in Gibreel's case, whereas Saladin contends with an 18th century carol by James Thomson), their flapping arms acquire the power of wings which enable them to sail down safely into the surf of Britain's shores. But their fall also causes a miraculous metamorphosis; Saladin henceforth starts to develop Satanic outward features such as horns, cloven feet, and a nauseous breath (which before the fall troubled Gibreel), while Gibreel develops an angelic halo (and a seductively sweet breath), as well as an empathic gift.

Rushdie, here, presents us with a clear-cut case of magic realism, at least in Stephen Slemon's definition of the term:<sup>4</sup>

The term "magic realism" is an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy. In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the "other," a situation which creates disjunction within each separate discursive system, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences. (Slemon 1995, 409)

This may be illustrated, briefly, by just one passage rendering Gibreel and Saladin's miraculous fall: "Let's face it," the novel's narrator holds,

it was impossible for them to have heard one another, much less conversed and also competed thus in song. Accelerating towards the planet, atmosphere roaring around them, how could they sing? But let's face this, too: they did. (6)

It is impossible to bring the two heroes' fall in line with our rational world knowledge; but it is equally impossible to relegate the tale to the realm of pure fantasy, as the narrator explicitly vouches for the actuality and factuality of the events: The abyss between fact and fiction, instead, remains unresolved, and is only bridged by the power of narration.

Yet in how far does this particular aesthetic technique relate to questions of ('illegal') migration which, according to Rushdie, lie at the novel's heart ("If *The Satanic Verses* is anything, it is a migrant's-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture, metamorphosis")?<sup>5</sup> The key to a rela-

<sup>4</sup> The most comprehensive collection of essays debating the term is Zamora and Faris 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Rushdie 1992, 394. Rushdie's contextual foregrounding of the migrant's perspective in *The Satanic Verses* is of course part of his response to what has come to be known as the "Rushdie Affair" including the riots and book burnings among Muslim communities in Britain, India, Pakistan and the Near East, Khomeini's fatwa, and the ensuing vigorous debate among both Eastern and Western intellectuals revolving around free speech, secularism, blasphemy and Islam (see for instance Reinfandt 1997, MacDonough 1993, Pipes 1990, Cohn-Sherbok 1990, Sardar and Davies 1990, Ruthven 1990, or Webster 1990). The reception of the novel has in fact become so inextricably entwined with its notorious cultural reception that it seems almost impossible, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak holds in her discussion of the Rushdie Affair, to read "*The Satanic Verses* as if nothing has happened since late 1988" (Spivak 1993, 219). Nevertheless, in order to better understand Rushdie's aesthetical and political employment of a magic realist approach to the trope of (illegal) migrancy in *The Satanic Verses*, I will initially bracket both the "Mahound" and "Ayesha" sequences of the novel, as well as the Rushdie Affair.

tionship between clandestine existence and a magic realist approach, I think, is to be found in the original ideology of the Latin American branch of magic realist writing. While Rushdie associates Gibreel and Saladin's fall and mutation with a number of pretexts, among them the myth of Icarus (5), Kafka's "Metamorphosis"<sup>6</sup> and, of course, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, his largest debt, I would argue, is to Latin American novelists. An acknowledgement of this debt is to be seen in the character Rosa Diamond, an 88-year-old lady onto whose private beach Gibreel and Saladin are washed up after their fall, and who gives them shelter in her house. Loosely evoking stories by Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez or Alejo Carpentier, the narrated memories of Rosa's own youth in the Argentinian Pampa involve an unresolved tale of love, betrayal and murder into which Gibreel becomes uncannily entangled through his new empathic powers. The seemingly unmotivated Rosa Diamond episode thus deliberately links *The Satanic Verses* with the literary traditions of the Americas and their particular negotiation of the marvellous and the real.

Writers such as Jacques Stephen Alexis (1956) and Alejo Carpentier (1995 [1949]) have insisted early on that the marvellous in Latin American storytelling is different in quality from European modes of the fantastic, gothic or surreal. Alexis insists that Haitian magic realism is firmly rooted in a syncretistic blending of Western narrative with the folklore and myths which are still a firm part of the communities in the Americas. Similarly, Carpentier expresses the conviction that what he calls "lo real maravilloso americano" does not necessarily subvert the conventionally real (as in the European models), but rather amplifies a reality which, in the history and geography of the Americas, is already full of the grotesquely improbable. This particular magic realist mode, then, carries a transcultural political momentum as a hybrid mode challenging Western logocentrism with indigenous symbolism and myth, and as a mode hyperbolically dramatising the human realities of societies which grew out of the absurdities of colonial violence and desire.

In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie maps this ideological potential onto the uneasy relationship between Europe and the Orient. If Gabriel García Márquez provokingly proposes in his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* that "if they believe in the Bible [...] I don't see why they should not believe it from me" (277), Rushdie takes this statement further by choosing firm parts of everyday mythology shared in both Christian and Islamic communities, the Archangel and Satan, to pervade the 'reality' of his fiction. More importantly, however, Rushdie, like his Columbian precursor, employs the magic realist mode in order to hyperbolically express and reveal the absurdity of existing cultural practices as he perceives them. The target of Rushdie's critique, here, is Britain's border panic and her attitude toward immigrants that are culturally and physically 'other.'

This transpires when a squad of fifty-seven uniformed constables turns up at Rosa Diamond's doorstep after an anonymous call reporting a "suspicious person on the beach" (139): While Saladin is immediately identified by the policemen as an

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<sup>6</sup> Saladin is referred to as an "insect" (162) after his mutation, and his (shortened) last name "Chamcha" is just a small phonetic step from "Samsa."

“illegal” and later as a “fucking Packy Billy” (163) (the proof showing “at his temples, [...] two new, goaty, unarguable horns” 141), they mistake Gibreel with his new stunning halo for “Mrs. Diamond’s old friend” and a “gentleman” (142). It becomes obvious that Gibreel and Saladin’s metamorphosis upon entering British ground interrelates closely with the desires of their new hosts; and while Gibreel embodies British fantasies of xenophilia, Saladin’s appearance literally adapts to grotesque xenophobic fantasies. The more Saladin is tortured and abused during his ensuing transport to a detention centre, the more his metamorphosis into a devilish animal proceeds – an enormous phallus starts to protrude, his body hair grows out of control, and he shits “pellets” which his torturers force him to eat – all the while the officers treat his mutation “as if it were the most banal and familiar matter they could imagine” (158). In the hospital wing of the detention centre, Saladin has to eventually realise that his fate is far from unique; he is surrounded by all sorts of monstrous fellow inmates, among them “a woman [...] who is now mostly water-buffalo,” “businessmen from Nigeria who have grown sturdy tails,” or a “group of holidaymakers from Senegal who were doing no more than changing planes when they were turned into slippery snakes” (168).

At this stage it is clear that like García Marquez, Carpentier and others, Rushdie employs the fantastic first and foremost as an expressive amplification of a post-colonial reality; he departs from what I have termed the “predicament of clandestine existence” with its drastically uneven distribution of discursive power, and merely radicalises existing xenophobic fantasies by translating them into the conventions of realist narration. As a former male model from Bombay, now turned into a “manticore,” half man, half tiger, explains to Saladin at the centre: “They describe us [...] That’s all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct” (168). The strong implication of this statement is, of course, that “they” refers to the English public, whose deformative discursive power is starkly dramatised through the magic realist mode.

Things may be slightly more complex than that, however, as the question regarding who this “they” is in the manticore’s statement is – deliberately, I think – ambiguous. In a weaker implication, “they” may as well refer to the magic realist novelists, and, of course, Rushdie himself, in a meta-fictional commentary on the power of narrative to freely distort the real in worlds of fiction. *The Satanic Verses* in fact encourages this interpretation, since Rushdie repeatedly toys with his own role as an “omnipresen[t] and -poten[t]” (10) creator, and an authorial *jouissance* of fabulation – commonly ignored by his harshest critics – lies the heart of the novel. In this way, however, *The Satanic Verses* emphasises an aspect of the magic realist mode which may, perhaps, be called ethically dubious. As Jean-Pierre Durix remarks in passing, magic realism is not entirely free of a ‘primitivist’ flavour, as a popular genre that has become dominated by upper class writers with a universal Western education who are no longer truly in touch with the folk communities and myths they evoke (Durix 1998, 115). Now, it would be too simplistic to explicitly charge Rushdie with an estrangement from his theme by class and education (particularly since Saladin, if anything, is an ‘involuntary’ clandestine rather than economic or political refugee).

It remains a fact, however, that the highly allusive and hyperbolic rendering of migrancy, and particularly the playful yoking together of religious myth with the mundane was, to put it mildly, not well received among the largest part of the British Muslim immigrant communities. The main reason for the radical rejection of Rushdie's novel certainly does not reside in the magic realist approach *per se*, of course, but rather in a disregard of religious sensitivities and a lack of taste particularly with regard to the "Mahound" sequences of the book; nevertheless the Rushdie Affair also raises ethical questions regarding the relationship between the postcolonial writer, the choice of subject matter and aesthetic technique, and an ideal audience. An allusive and formally daring novel like *The Satanic Verses* was perhaps never primarily intended to circulate among the "visible but unseen" immigrant communities of Bedford and London in which it was later burnt, but implicitly demands an educated readership well read in both Eastern and Western secular as well as religious letters. *The Satanic Verses* is a daring masterpiece from the point of view of the secure Western academic context in which this paper is written, particularly with regard to its magic realist approach to clandestine existence. But it also reveals how unpredictable – if powerful – any interaction between fiction and the real world may become.

### 3. Christopher Hope and the Satirical Mode

If Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta's act of immigration into Britain is a rather extravagant one, the hero of Christopher Hope's novel *Darkest England*, David Mungo Booi, is luckier than Rushdie's clandestines: His aircraft from Cape Town securely lands him at Heathrow. Booi's trouble, however, starts when the only legal document he can produce at customs is a parchment issued by Queen Victoria, known among the bushmen as "Old Auntie with Diamonds in Her Hair" (3) or "the old She-Elephant" (31), vouching the protection of the crown to his forefathers. David Mungo Booi, in fact, is on a mission. As the only one among his tribe<sup>7</sup> in the South African Karoo able to read and write (as a boy, an English farmer taught him the catechism of the English explores "Baines, Baker, Bruce, Burton, Grant, Kingsley, Livingstone, Speke and Stanley" 7), he has been singled out among his fellows to travel to England and ask the Queen for military support against the exploitation by Boorish farmers, while additionally exploring the "likelihood of a possible settlement in England, and the opportunities for commercial exploitation, if such settlement took place" (15).

As Horst Trossbach has demonstrated in his excellent and encompassing study of Christopher Hope's satirical novels, *Darkest England* rejuvenates a literary tradition that has its roots in the 18th century with Joseph Addison (1711), Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721) and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World* (1762). In these models, the authors perform as editors who have come across purportedly 'authentic' documents relating an outsider's perspective on European manners and cus-

<sup>7</sup> Booi thinks of himself as a member of the San bushmen, probably of the "/Xam people" (xix) who, however, as the author persona Christopher Hope remarks in his foreword, are long extinct.

toms (an Iroquois chief in Addison, Persian travellers in Montesquieu, a Chinese intellectual in Goldsmith), and which uncover the contingency of the political system and social conventions they encounter (see Trossbach 2005, 215-9). In the same vein, Hope furnishes his novel with a narrative frame in which the writer ‘Christopher Hope’ is given a parcel of documents by a family of Karoo nomads during the South African elections of 1995 (who in turn received it from an English UN volunteer who lived with Booi in England). The documents are of course no other than David Mungo Booi’s travelogue exploring “darkest England”; providing the bulk of the novel, they ironically expose the oddities of all parts of contemporary British life ranging from teenage violence to sexual habits to parliamentary culture and the monarchy.

The satirical effect of *Darkest England* is achieved by two basic narrative strategies with may be described best by taking recourse to Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of *heteroglossia*. Hope makes maximal use of what Bakhtin terms “double voiced discourse” (Bakhtin 2000) in a twofold way: Firstly, and thereby taking the creative scope of the 18th-century models much further, the narrated discourse of *Darkest England* persistently alludes to a number of pretexts, namely those which formed David Mungo Booi’s education. Raised by the English Karoo farmer Smith (who christened him in homage to the great explorers David Livingstone and Mungo Park), Booi clearly takes recourse to the stories he grew up with in his youth. As editor Hope purports, Booi’s manuscripts reveal that “*he had read Livingstone’s Missionary Travels and Stanley’s In Darkest Africa as well as the journals of his namesake, Mungo Park, and even Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*” (xix, italics in the original). Imitating these models in style and content, but especially in their Eurocentric attitude – now turned an Afrocentric one that judges English culture strictly within the horizon of a bushman cosmology – the written word in *Darkest England* is continually put in a mocking dialogue with texts of the English explorers.<sup>8</sup> The English are thus effortlessly subjected to the rhetoric of their very own colonial tradition in an hilarious move of ‘writing back’ which questions the legitimacy of British notions of cultural exclusiveness and superiority.

Secondly, the satirical thrust of *Darkest England* relies on an intratextual ideological tension between the narratorial and an (implied) authorial voice. David Mungo Booi is constructed as an *ingénu* who persistently misjudges the intentions of those who surround him, and it is in the double voiced discourse uniting Booi’s literal interpretations and the refracted, informed authorial meaning that the satire unfolds, trapping the reader between a playfully humorous rendering of the hero’s naïveté and a stinging critique of British cultural practices. David Mungo Booi’s welcome to Britain is a case in point: When unable to produce a passport after Queen Victoria’s letter did not impress the officers, he and a black political refugee (styled Humpty-Bloody-Dumpty by the officials) are guided by police escort, which Booi

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<sup>8</sup> Many scenes from the texts Hope explicitly marks in the foreword – Mungo Park’s *Travels*, Livingstone’s *Missionary Travels*, Stanley’s *In Darkest Africa* and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* – not only provide central plot elements, but are often literally quoted (cf. Trossbach 2005, 225-40).

takes to be an “official welcoming party” (32), to a detention centre, which he mistakes for the “Royal Guest-house” (33). Invariably, the humorous thrust resulting from Booi’s narratorial interpretations clashes with the seriousness of an ironically refracted discourse. Refugee Humpty-Bloody-Dumpty’s suicide in a detention cell provides perhaps the most drastic example of this. Booi records:

I awoke in the morning to see upon the wall a shadow of something swinging, very like the great pendulum of the clock in the Dutch Reformed church at Abraham’s grave. As my eyes grew accustomed to the dawn light, I saw that Humpty-Bloody-Dumpty had hanged himself from the top bunk by his belt, and swung to and fro beneath the very eyes of the Queen of England [her portrait graces the wall of the cell]. And I felt sad for my own people. The Children of the Sun who flocked to England in the hope of better things. Was this how we responded to native hospitality? To the tolerance of our hosts? [...] If this was the way we behaved when accommodated at Her Majesty’s Pleasure, one had to ask whether we deserved the privilege. (43)

Booi’s outrage at the ingratitude of his fellow inmate is again based on his naïveté. He mistakes Humpty-Bloody-Dumpty’s breakdown for a mere fit of impatience to see the Queen, and his death as a waste like that of “foolish buck [that] runs madly into the road and is killed by a passing farmer in his truck” instead of waiting for the “little poisoned arrow that will sooth it to death” (42-3). The supreme irony in this passage is, of course, that in this way, Booi’s conclusions about his fellow “Children of the Sun” uncannily result in the very rhetoric complaining about the spurious ingratitude of ‘illegal’ migrants in the face of a ‘fair’ and ‘tolerant’ treatment, which not only characterises British pub conversations, but also government statements.<sup>9</sup>

This discursive twisting of a plot element that is otherwise to be read as utterly tragic – the suicide of a disillusioned political refugee in detention – hyperbolically dramatises, not unlike Rushdie’s magic realist approach, the latent inhumanity in British discourses on clandestine immigration. For Hope, in fact, a satirical outlook on the world is the only way to come to terms with the grotesque and often brutal tribalisms characterising our time; as he put it in an interview: “Laughter is the only way to counteract pain” (Hope in McMahon 2002). Yet the aim of Hope’s satirical approach is of course less a cathartic effect than the uncomfortable recognition of the absurdity and contingency of cultural practices among his Western readership in an aesthetic move which successfully unites humour with a biting political commentary.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. for instance the 1998 home office white paper *Fairer – Faster – Firmer: A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum*, which – de facto – virtually rules out chances of receiving political asylum in Britain by speeding up trials to the effect that political prosecution can no longer be properly documented. Chapter 11 “Enforcement and Removals” opens as following: “Enforcement of the Immigration Rules is a key part of a fair and firm system. In fairness to those who have followed the rules and to deter others who might consider abusing the system, we must be able to identify and deal appropriately with those in the UK without authority. There will always be some people who, despite having exhausted the appeals machinery, still refuse to leave voluntarily. [...] The Government is determined to stamp out the blatant and often cynical abuse that clogs up the system with hopeless cases and unnecessary appeals.”

Perhaps even more so than in Rushdie's case, however, this approach has a problematic ethical undercurrent. Hope's pervasive and nuanced satire of British cultural practices on the one hand comes at the price of a rather stereotypical treatment of the immigrants' fate on the other. For the satire to work throughout the novel, there are hardly any chances of character development with regard to the clandestine hero David Mungo Booi, whose role as *ingénu* must by all means be kept up. Moreover, the novel is forced to continually employ Booi's cultural 'otherness' as a stark foil against which British customs are exposed. Thus, Hope's descriptions of the detention centre, for instance, tackle racist abuse (read by Booi as prime examples of English humour), but also comically play out cultural clichés, for example when Booi refuses the grey porridge he is served in favour of the delicious ant's eggs abounding in the prison's garden. *Darkest England* has been accused, on these grounds, to perpetuate a colonial tradition in which "the male white author still manipulates the uncomprehending native" (Roos 2000, 96) for his own ends (see also Wachinger 2001). Personally, I would side with Horst Trossbach on this issue, who argues that such criticism underestimates the readers' capability to acknowledge the requirements and limitations of a satirical persona as opposed to those of a conventional fictional protagonist (Trossbach 2005, 241-4). As long as Booi's otherness is employed in a functional way strictly within his role as a prism through which the "darkest" aspects of British life are revealed, it complies with a satirical ethos which, for Hope, debunks *all* vanities and social norms disregarding of which party on which side of the globe.<sup>10</sup> But it is also true that precisely because of the conventions of satire, some doubt remains, at the end of the day, whether the carnivalist laughter of *Darkest England*, which so effectively subverts the British view of 'illegal' immigration, is a laughter not merely in favour of, but also at the cost of, the clandestine migrant.

#### 4. Caryl Phillips and the Tragic Realist Mode

If Christopher Hope and, to a lesser extent, Salman Rushdie willingly sacrifice aspects of psychological complexity and depth with regard to their clandestine heroes in favour of an expressive dramatisation of the grotesqueness of clandestine existence, the complexity and integrity of his characters is precisely what lies at the heart of Caryl Phillips's fiction. In his novel *A Distant Shore*, he stages the unlikely friendship between a 30-year-old West African refugee and an English lady, a former music teacher in her mid-fifties, in the North English town of Weston. Solomon

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<sup>10</sup> "Der Roman setzt der Wirklichkeit keine Norm entgegen; es geht darum, seine englische Leserschaft in ihrer kulturellen Gewissheit zu verunsichern, ihre gesellschaftliche Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit zu unterminieren" (Trossbach 2005, 227). Hope thus complies with more recent conceptions of the satirical genre which denies the older notion that satire necessarily relies on fixed alternative norms, be they revolutionary or conservative. Admittedly, however, Hope may go a bit over the top at times: One may indeed question his characterisation of Booi, for instance, when he furnishes him with a permanent semi-erection, thus exploiting rather populist stereotypes of the African's virility to a rather cheap effect.



and Dorothy are both outsiders in their community. Solomon is a “man burdened with a hidden history” (300); actually christened Gabriel, he fought as “Major Hawk” in the tribal wars of an unnamed West African country during which he had to witness the slaughtering of his entire family. He ambushes a good friend in order to afford to pay the traffickers for a trip to Europe, which turns out to become an odyssey which he barely survives. Once in Britain, he is detained and put on trial for the alleged sexual abuse of an underage girl who gave him food and shelter; and even though he is acquitted and granted asylum, the media coverage makes him notorious, which leads him to changing his name to Solomon and eventually, after a spell of haunting the streets of London, to move to far-away Weston. Dorothy, in turn, has been let down by men too often and struggles with her early retirement; utterly lonely, she gradually loses touch with reality and indulges in deluding fantasies about the people surrounding her.

Solomon and Dorothy’s encounter is a hesitant one which has to surmount barriers of race, class and gender, yet it leads to a fragile, but honest friendship enabled by the mutual acknowledgement of their marginality. It is also short-lived, however, as it brutally ends with Solomon’s death at the hands of local skinheads and leaves Dorothy in a state bordering on insanity. In fact, Solomon’s death is implicated early on in the novel, and the narrative strands of *A Distant Shore* are informed throughout by a sense of doom, very much reminiscent of the inevitable pull towards catastrophe in Greek tragedy. The overall tone of the novel is bleak, and is only countered by the aborted promise of mutual affection across social conventions and boundaries. Thus, the novel implies that, unlike the stories of those hundreds who shared his clandestine predicament, Solomon’s story survives precisely because he manages to reach out and connect: “This is a woman to whom I might tell my story. If I do not share my story, then I have only this one year to my life. I am a one-year-old man who walks with heavy steps” (300).

The story of Solomon’s life before his arrival in Weston unfolds in a narrative mode which, with the exception of an involved first person account of Solomon’s role as “Major Hawk” in the brutalising civil war, mostly adheres to a restrained third person account written in the present tense. The emotionally detached and rather factual mode of narration employed to render Solomon’s clandestine immigration has not gone unchallenged in the reception of the novel. Natasha Walter, for instance, holds in a review for the *Guardian*:

[Solomon] brushes with death a number of times on his journey to England, which embraces all the well-known points of such voyages – a ride trussed up in a lorry, plus being smuggled on to an aeroplane, plus a dangerous boat trip to Europe, plus a train ride through southern Europe, plus an attempt on the trains near Sangatte, plus another boat ride across the Channel. The odd thing is that these devastating experiences often seem exemplary rather than particular, as if the scenes had been built up from newspaper reports rather than from the singularity of this character, this journey, this individual life. (Walter 2003)

I would argue, however, that firstly the exemplary or even allegorical nature of Solomon’s experience is deliberately crafted in Phillips’s novel, and secondly, that

this does not, as Wagner argues, rule out the affective impact of Solomon's individual journey and story, but rather enhances it.

The odyssey from West Africa to Britain which Solomon embarks upon follows, despite the fact that it seems to add up to an improbable list of passages and places, a rather typical and representative route of 'illegal' migration (cf. Marie 2004). But Walter's comment on the fact that Phillips's narrative reads as if it "had been built up from newspaper reports" is a valid perception nevertheless. Grounding his stories in thoroughly and comprehensively researched material is one of the central characteristics of Phillips's narrative technique, which in turn furnishes his individual characters and stories with an intertextual foundation that relates them to a larger cultural discourse. This allows Phillips to both narrate an individual fate in a distinct narrative mood and voice which challenges his readers' empathy, but at the same time to give this particular story a larger historical resonance.<sup>11</sup> Solomon's life, as Bénédicte Ledent has pointed out, is told with realist precision but at the same time gains an allegorical quality that allows for a reading of him as a representative of all clandestine immigrants, just as Dorothy may be read as an allegory of an England finding it difficult "to come to terms with ageing and 'decrepitude' (208)" (Ledent 2004, 157).

But Phillips's technique of building a polyphonic resonance behind his individual voices is important for another reason. Other than Hope or Rushdie, who take full fictional licence to create deliberately 'fabulated' personae, Phillips has repeatedly insisted that for him, fictional characters have to gain a distinctly human, quasi-autonomous quality and integrity. In a poetological concept he took over from his friend and mentor James Baldwin (see Bell 1991, 595), he achieves this by trying to establish an imaginary dialogue with his characters: "Unless I hear [a character] speak, I don't have a novel, I don't have a character because it will be my voice in [his or] her body" (Eckstein 2001, 38; see also Jaggi 1994, 26, or Yelin 1998, 52-3). This impulse to "hide behind the characters" (Yelin 1998, 80) is not a mere topos of realist narration, but an ethical move to portray human life and the intense suffering it may involve as 'truthfully' as possible. To this end, he firmly places his novel in available documentary evidence,<sup>12</sup> which in the case of *A Distant Shore* involves first hand experiences and voices he collected in war-torn Liberia, but particularly also in the notorious French refugee camp near Sangatte (see Phillips 2001 and 2003b). While thus allowing allegorical readings, Phillips's approach to clandestine

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<sup>11</sup> I have demonstrated elsewhere how this technique pervades his preceding novels *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993) and *The Nature of Blood* (1996). Particularly in *Cambridge*, the confrontation of the novel's protagonists Emily Cartwright, a planter's daughter, and the slave Cambridge are rendered in first person accounts with are to a large extent skilfully composed of fragments of earlier travel writing to the Caribbean and slave narratives. By means of this intertextual technique, Phillips not only stages a dialogic confrontation between two conflicting fictional voices, but also between two entire discursive formations, aiming at a renegotiation, and eventually a "democratisation" of our contemporary cultural memory (see Eckstein 2006, 63-116).

<sup>12</sup> As Laurent Jenny comments: "Literary truth, like historical truth can be constituted only in a multiplicity of texts and writings – in intertextuality. [...] To constitute an event is to juxtapose all possible forms, to work out an exhaustive catalogue" (1982, 60-1).

existence also results in an idiosyncratic narrative which places special emphasis on the complexity and depth of a particular experience.

Any sequence relating Solomon/Gabriel's odyssey to Britain culminating in a hazardous passage across the channel clasped on to the railings of a ferry boat could be used to illustrate this. I will select a brief section rendering Solomon/Gabriel's detention in a Britain prison, since it provides a stark contrast to both Rushdie's magic realist and particularly Hope's satirical evocation of the detention centre. Just as Humpty-Bloody-Dumpty in Hope's novel, a fellow inmate also dies in *A Distant Shore*, in this case from being declined medical treatment. This death, of course, is related without recourse to satire or the marvellous, but adheres to a 'tragic' realist mode:

'Please,' whispers Said. 'My brother and my children. You must tell them.'

Gabriel takes his friend's hand and squeezes hard.

'Said, you must continue to allow hope and grow.'

'Please, you must tell them.'

And then Said's eyes fall shut. Gabriel leaps to his feet, scattering the mop to the far side of the cell.

'Mr Collins, it is Said. Please, we need a doctor.' (80)

Taken out of context, this may sound a bit like a piece of 'sentimental' realism – but it is part of a much more complex narratorial take on reality. *A Distant Shore* shifts between various types of narrative discourse, ranging between past and present tense, between first and third person, and between Solomon/Gabriel and Dorothy as focalisers. The multiple tones and perspectives create an incomprehensive and fractured image of reality which is not, as in a Dickensian type of realism, held together by an informed and guiding authorial presence. It is entirely left to the reader to uncover Dorothy's first person accounts as a self-deluding product of loneliness by setting it against other narrative takes; equally, it is left to the reader to come to terms with the contradictory accounts of "Major Hawk", "Gabriel" and "Solomon" and conceive of a life that allows for a progress from rebel army leader to destitute refugee to well-mannered caretaker of a British suburban housing estate. The pathos of the passage quoted above thus hardly allows for a sentimental reading, just as there is little cathartic resolution in the novel's persistent pull towards its tragic close. Representing just one fragment of discourse in a kaleidoscope of perspectives, it is to be read, in fact, as the evocation of one of Gabriel's memories he plans to share with Dorothy, while the employment of the present tense and the distant, detached view of Gabriel himself point to the careful phrasing of a traumatic experience which is vivid in the speaker's mind, but requires an emotional distancing to become 'speakable.' In a much more sombre way and perhaps less drastically than Rushdie and Hope, Phillips thus also expressively dramatises the doubling of presence and absence characterising the clandestine predicament. *A Distant Shore* holds up a realist mirror to English society, but, to use a Byronic image, it is a broken mirror which provides little sense of unity or moral guidance. The novel leaves it to the reader to search the gaps and fissures of the text, to explore its silences underneath the sometimes awkward words, and to come to terms with the contradictions of clandestine being.

## 5. Coda: Globalisation and the Future of Postcolonial Studies

Having focussed in this paper on predominantly aesthetic choices concerning the expressive evocation of a recent global phenomenon, I wish to conclude with a more political note concerning the state of affairs in so-called postcolonial studies which, as far as I can see, mostly remain comfortably rooted in the notion that today's questions of inequality, unfair distribution of wealth and discursive power, questions of agency and violence, are still mostly rooted in *international* relations. These relations are usually seen as those between former colonising nations such as Britain and the former colonised, or increasingly also between neo-colonial powers such as the US and economically or militarily dependent nations. I do not wish to claim that such post- or neocolonial relationships between nation states have ceased to be of concern. But it is important to see that in the age of globalised modernity, the agency in global power games has increasingly shifted away from nation states toward the main players on a deregulated world market. Rather than with *international* phenomena, we are dealing with *transnational* phenomena, then, when we talk about the increasing poverty on the southern hemisphere, about the lure of metropolises, and about the global movements of legal as well as clandestine migrants. The power of nation states facing such transnational phenomena is indeed fairly limited, and particularly so outside of the West; the agency is firmly in the hands of global capital and transnational framing organisations such as the World Bank or the World Trade Organisation. These new global power relations have certainly evolved from colonial and neo-colonial precursors, and they are dependent on the influence of some major nation states; still, the old centre-periphery model no longer holds. The imperial power itself has become a decentred and much more elusive one which is located in the Pentagon as well as on the Caribbean offshore tax paradise, in the British home office as well as in the headquarters of a Congo mining company, for instance. The academic discipline of postcolonial studies will, I think, have to engage more intimately with this decentred situation than it has so far, and develop new critical paradigms in order not to lose touch with today's postcolonial problems.

If this paper has not performed this task, it has attempted to illustrate instead how postcolonial writers have already taken up the challenge of representing the effects of a globalised, decentred modernity on the postcolonial individual, and how they both aesthetically and ethically try to come to terms with a particular phenomenon that will undoubtedly grow to be one of the major challenges to the European Union in the 21st century. Whether by means of magic realist, satirical or realist modes of narration which more or less intimately dramatise the individual predicament of clandestine immigrants, and which more or less avidly attack Europe's deliberate ignorance or xenophobic reactions toward their fates, these novels invariably provide an important counter-discourse to official politics. As its major response to the Ceuta and Melilla affair in 2005, the Spanish government decided to raise the razor-wired fences around their enclaves from three meters to six; indeed, literature may help us to understand that strengthening the fortification walls of fortress Europe

will do very little to protect her riches from those desperate enough to gamble their lives for a fair share.

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