

Transcending Fear in Rosa Guy's *The Friends*: A Girl's Postcolonial Self-recognition

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ローザ・ギイの *The Friends* にみる不安の超克
— 少女のポストコロニアル的自己認識 —

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要約

カリブ系アメリカ人作家ローザ・ギイの *The Friends* (1973) において、トリニダード島からニューヨークに移民してきた14歳の少女フィリシア・キャシーは、故郷を喪失した (displaced) 子どもとしての辛い経験を一人称で物語る。

フィリシアの不安は、異文化アメリカ社会への不適応の問題や、「高級」レストラン経営によりアメリカン・ドリームを追い求める父親カルヴィンとの葛藤に起因する。本稿では、ポストコロニアリズムの「故郷喪失」(displacement) 理論の枠組みを用いて、主人公の不安に焦点をあててテキスト分析を行う。

彼女の不安は、アフリカ系クラスメートのイーディス・ジャクソンとの関係に表象される。フィリシアは、いじめられる自分を庇い、助けてくれるイーディスに心暖かなものを感じつつも、「ボロ着をまとった汚い子」である彼女を内心侮蔑する。それは、父親カルヴィンの上昇志向や貧者を「ボロ着の汚いやつ」呼ばわりする態度を、フィリシアが無意識の内に真似てしまった結果である。彼女は、当初、この自己矛盾に気づかず、混乱し不安に苛まれる。

彼女を救済するのは、病死した母親ラモーナの幽霊である。母なる島の美しい自然や人間関係から切断されたラモーナは、「二重の植民化」(帝国の経済・文化的支配、家父長的夫の支配) による苦みのすえ病死する。母の幽霊に導かれて初めて父の「高級」レストランを訪れたフィリシアは、それが貧しい労働者向けの大衆食堂にすぎず、彼女の自己矛盾の源であったことに気づく。

父親は、作品設定の60年代の経済活動を通じたアメリカニズム、ホミ・バーバの言う「グローバル・コスモポリタリズム」を体現していると考えられる。その一方で、フィリシアは、米国内で「植民化」された貧しいイーディスと相互の差異を認めあう関係を築く。すなわち、バーバ言うところの「ヴェナキュラー・コスモポリタリズム」に根ざした友情を結び、カルヴィンの過ちを乗り越えようとする。

Key words: fear, transcendence, Mother-daughter story, Postcolonial, displacement

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Introduction

Caribbean American Rosa Guy's *The Friends*, published in 1973, is an autobiographical young adult novel narrated by a fourteen-year-old Trinidadian immigrant girl, Phyllisia Cathay. It is the first volume in the series followed by *Ruby* in 1978 and *Edith Jackson* in 1979. *The Friends* depicts Phyllisia and her African-American classmate, Edith Jackson, focusing on their problems in the process of their growth. The protagonist, Phyllisia, undergoes the typically painful experiences of displaced children: bullying at school due to her racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, and her difficulty in adapting to her new environment in New York. In my textual analysis of the novel, I focus on the protagonist's fear that comes from her adaptation to unfamiliar American society and her incessant conflict with her father as he pursues his American dream.

In her discussion of displaced people including refugees and immigrants in the latter half of the twentieth century, sociologist Angelika Bammer defines "displacement" as follows: "The separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture. . ." (*Displacements* xi). She further includes the following people among displaced people, "[people] displaced *within* their native culture by process of external or internal colonization" (xi). In this paper, I discuss *The Friends* within the theoretical framework of displacement, focusing on the relationship between Phyllisia and her mother, Ramona, who dies of illness after enduring much hardship as an immigrant. In the analysis of their relationship, I find it especially useful to use a feminist approach.

Phyllisia's Fear

Let us examine what Phyllisia suffers and what kind of fear she feels in actuality in New York, the place to which she has migrated. In the opening scene, she narrates in detail how she is bullied at her new school. One student lies in ambush after school, and calls her "monkey," jeering at her Trinidadian accent. Additionally, a white classroom teacher, Miss Lass, manipulates her students to turn their hatred away from her and focus it on Phyllisia, leaving the classroom in a state of collapse. Let us take a look at one example.

Miss Lass asks the class if anyone knows on which continent Egypt is located, but nobody dares to answer her question. Phyllisia also keeps silent for fear of being conspicuous. But when she is finally called by name, she states the exact location on the

African continent, just like a model student. Her attitude causes jealousy among some students, one of who competes with Phyllisia by giving a wrong answer. Miss Lass sarcastically responds to him, "If some of you would follow Phyllisia's example and study your books then perhaps the intelligence rate in this room might zoom up to zero" (7-8). Phyllisia feels fear at these words: "*Miss Lass was afraid!* She was afraid and she was using *me* to keep the hatred of the children away from her. I was the natural choice because I was a stranger and because I was proud. . . . I felt a dozen needles sticking in my stomach" (8). Thus, Miss Lass's strategy of deliberately targeting Phyllisia achieves success, and it gives an African-American student, Beula, and her followers an excuse to attack Phyllisia after school. They hit her hand pretending to be playing a hitting game, and blame for her acting like a good girl and bragging about her intelligence. As Phyllisia goes back home crying and bleeding on her face, she feels even more isolated when no adults on the way home pay attention to her.

Her home, however, does not provide her with a warm place because she leads an uncomfortable family life as an "ugly daughter" surrounded by her sickly but beautiful mother, Ramona, her tall and handsome father, Calvin, and her older sister, Ruby, who is loved for her beauty by her father. He speaks of Phyllisia in front of his guests, "The trouble with [Phyllisia], though, is she's ugly. Yes, man, even if you take away that fat eyes and swollen nose, she still ugly" (23-24). Hurt by his words, she increasingly comes to have a deep inferiority complex regarding her appearance.

However, as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the cause of Phyllisia's isolation and unhappiness is not the matter of her appearance but something deeper than that. It is shown in Calvin's boasting of his successful restaurant management and his dream of expanding his business. When he says, "I'm a big man now and I'm going to get bigger. . ." (30), Ramona wonders whether "it is Calvin that is like New York or New York that is like Calvin" (29). He is so much identified with New York City in the pursuit of his American dream. In other words, he despises people whom he calls "ragamuffin," dislikes his "ugly daughter," and dotes on the lovely ones in his family.

Phyllisia's Self-contradiction

On the one hand, Phyllisia hates such a father as this. On the other, she has swirling contradictory feelings about her father's sense of values because she herself conceives a similar one to survive in a different culture. It is typically shown in her relationship with Edith, who is a destitute African-American classmate.

In the opening scene of the novel, Edith appears as a girl wearing slovenly clothes and with big holes in her stockings. Phyllisia apparently dislikes her in her narration. Edith comes from a motherless family in Harlem, with four siblings including two little ones.

Their widowed father is overwhelmed by this situation and shortly disappears, leaving his children behind. Then, Edith's elder brother who has become the breadwinner in the family is shot to death by the police, and she drops out of school to work at a factory. Shortly after this, a social worker comes to know this situation and puts Edith and her little sisters in an orphanage. This way Phyllisia narrates how Edith's situation worsens.

Edith is no doubt one of those whom Calvin calls "ragamuffins." In other words, she is among those who are "displaced *within* their culture by process of external or internal colonization" (Bammer xi). He actually expels Edith when she visits his daughter at home, saying: "I ask what in the hell is this little ragamuffin doing in my house. . . . The one thing I know is I don't want people looking that way in this house. They don't go with the furniture" (106-8).

Despite all this, Edith is always a dedicated friend to Phyllisia. On one occasion, she rushes to the scene of the bullying, and drives away the bullies in a determined manner. On another, she takes the side of Phyllisia who is being mocked for her Trinidadian accent, and says, "I think you talk pretty" (35). Furthermore, she does not hesitate to declare, "That girl Phyllisia is my friend. My best friend" (38). While Phyllisia dislikes Edith's shabby appearance, she cannot help being moved by her warm friendship. She narrates her contradictory feelings as follows:

This unexpected compliment gave me a rush of pleasure. I felt suddenly warm and friendly toward Edith. But then I looked down and saw her run-over shoes, saw the gaping holes in her stockings, and in annoyance I thought *if* someone *had* to like me, why couldn't it be Marian, or someone like Ruby's silk-stockinged friend. (35)

However, as the story unfolds, Phyllisia's self-contradictory emotions about Edith are not simply accidental, but rather reflect the self-contradiction that is inherent in her own identity and her family as well.

Ramona's "Wound"

The contradiction in Phyllisia's family is clearly represented in Mother Ramona's wound. It is a scar from a cancer operation, and at the same time a psychological wound inflicted by her conflicted relationship with her husband who is obsessed with his American dream. Out of despair at her husband's and other people's praise of her beauty, she rips her dress down to the waist with one pull and shows the scar, saying:

"It is a trick! This thing beauty they talk about. Believe me, it is a low trick put out by God self."

"Calvin, [people] must take their lesson from us. . . . This lesson—of how life twists us so that we put worthless values in worthless things. . ." (90)

She gets mental nourishment from beautiful nature, open and friendly human relationships in Trinidad, but in reality she lives in an apartment in New York surrounded by gorgeous furniture while illness gnaws away at her body. On the one hand, she grieves at the state of Calvin who gradually loses humanity due to his obsession with becoming a “big man” in his restaurant business. On the other, her heart aches to hear Phyllisia call poor people in Harlem “ragamuffin” imitating her father. It is clear to anyone that Ramona, who once was healthy enough to run up the hill in her home island, is now approaching her end. As is shown in her disease-stricken body, she is completely overwhelmed by despair and a sense that she has lost not only her health but also other valuable things.

Literary critic Caroline Rody maintains that, compared to African-American women writers’ literature including that of Toni Morrison, “[Caribbean women writers’] literature tends to reflect a deeper sense of dispossession, even homelessness, and historylessness as well” (*The Daughter’s Return* 110). According to Rody, the sense of “historylessness” is related to the changing Trinidadian identity in terms of the trope of the Mother. First, during the European colonial period, the Mother was recognized as the “mother country” identified with the colonizing country. Second, after their independence, this trope was replaced with that of “Mother Africa,” reclaiming a pre-colonial origin. Third, after the 1970s, the Caribbean “mother island” took the place of Mother Africa. Rody argues that the changing trope of Caribbean Mother left a deep “wound” and confusion in their collective memory (108–12).

Accordingly, we can find two meanings in Ramona’s wound. First, the wound is the metaphor for the damage to and loss of their native values and culture, as the Caribbean mother island is economically ruled or culturally exploited by the colonizing power. Second, if we read the novel from the feminist perspective called “double colonization,” the “wound” represents the suffering of women who are ruled by patriarchal men, besides their suffering under the rule of the colonizing power.

Probably due to the cathexis between mother and daughter, Ramona’s sense of loss or deprivation is unconsciously reflected in Phyllisia’s sense of isolation and loss of home island. Let us take a look at one example. Ruby tells Edith that in Trinidad the Cathay sisters used to walk barefooted after school for fear of scuffing their shoes. Phyllisia gets furious at Ruby’s disclosure of their poverty in the past: “‘You’ll be saying that we were dirty, nasty little orphan brats with no one to look after us.’ I was shouting down at Ruby, but my words were directed at Edith” (105). Despite her happy memories of living in beautiful Trinidad, Phyllisia, who is riding an upward current in New York, cannot claim with pride that Trinidad is her mother island. But still she cannot find her place in New York, feeling a deepening sense of isolation. In this sense, Phyllisia is no doubt one of the displaced as defined by Bammer.

Ramona is shocked to see Calvin drive Edith out of the house calling her “ragamuffin” and Phyllisia be satisfied with his treatment of her friend. Ramona feels that she is responsible for Phyllisia’s behavior because their way of thinking as parents has affected their children. So, making a parody of the Bible, Ramona leaves her daughter a message before her death, “Children, by all means, by whatever means, change your parents so that the lives of all of us... must be more bearable on this earth” (111).

Ramona’s Ghost

After Ramona’s death, the family relationships deteriorate and become chaotic. Phyllisia cannot grieve over her mother’s death, nor eat anything, and suffers from nightmares so that Calvin resorts to violence in order to look after his daughter. To give an example, he uses a method called “operation foodstrap”: a threatening method of making her eat with an unbuckled belt in his hand. This violent method works out somehow and she begins to eat, shedding tears for her mother’s death. But in response to this, her hatred for and fear of Calvin increase.

During the period of confusion for the family, the deceased Ramona often appears in Phyllisia’s dream or haunts her as a whispering voice. It seems that her returning as a ghost has something to do with the mission she has given her daughter before her death: “Change your parents.” As long as Phyllisia does not recognize her mistake of despising and refusing her poor friend, Edith, she cannot carry out her mission of changing Calvin, and the mother-daughter relationship remains distorted. Ramona’s ghost comes back to restore the good mother-daughter relationship.

The mention of a mother-daughter ghost story in modern American literature reminds us of Morrison’s *Beloved*, published in 1989. In this novel, Beloved who was killed by her own mother, Sethe, while they were running away from their slave owner, returns as a ghost after the Emancipation Proclamation. She first haunts her mother’s house and then appears as a young woman inflicting pain upon her mother. Rody calls this type of ghost a “magic black daughter” (*The Daughter’s Return* 10, 58), who has come back through time to recover the distorted or severed relationship between mother and daughter as well as the unrecorded history of slavery.

Whereas *Beloved* returns to remind her mother of the miserable past in the days of slavery, Ramona returns as a whispering voice to correct her past mistakes. Phyllisia hears Mother’s rich, deep voice, softened by the French Creole of Trinidad, say, “I spent my youth as a fool spends money...” (116). Through her dialogue with this voice, Phyllisia explores her way to recover herself among the confused family. However, she is not convinced how her self-recovery is connected with confirming her friendship with Edith, or the mission of changing her father.

Calvin's Restaurant

It is also Ramona who helps Phyllisia resolve the confusion in the family. Concerned about her daughter, Ramona appears in the dream of her husband's friend, Mr. Charles, who then takes Phyllisia to Calvin's restaurant for the first time. The "big restaurant" her father supposedly owns is actually a cheap one for men in the working class. She sees along the counter rough-looking men with grimy clothes, sweating and gulping down food. Behind the counter is Calvin, who takes orders wearing a polo shirt not a black suit and shouts orders to cooks in the kitchen. She finally learns that Calvin has been making money off the poor people he calls "ragamuffin." She feels great shame at the thought that he has been lying.

At this moment Ramona's voice haunts her, whispering, "Why are you dying of shame, Phyllisia?" (170). After talking with the voice all night, Phyllisia wonders to herself if Calvin really was lying, if he really said he owned a big restaurant. Then she realizes that he has never said he actually owned a big one, though he has said he would like to become a big man someday. She asks herself why she has believed that way.

I had seen things the way I *wanted* to be. . . . I had wanted to be the daughter of the owner of a big restaurant. Perhaps it was because the kids in school had been so hard on me. I didn't know. But I had wanted to be rich, to live in luxury, so that I could feel superior to them—to people like Edith. . . . *I was the fraud.*" (173)

This self-recognition is something like a revelation that awakens her to what she should do. "I had to go to Edith. If I understood anything now, it was that I *was* almost sixteen and I had never accepted any responsibility. I had even blamed Calvin for *my* treatment of Edith. But I was the one who had made her suffer. She was *my* friend" (174).

After this revelation, Phyllisia accomplishes remarkable growth. First, she visits Edith in her apartment, consoles her and encourages her to overcome the hardships she faces. Then, she promises to regularly visit Edith at the orphanage, strengthening the bonds of their friendship. Second, Phyllisia starts to speak to Calvin in her own voice.

"Mother said that I was like you, and now I know what she meant. . . . I promised my friend that I would come to see her every week while she is in the orphanage. . . . You hated her and called her a ragamuffin. You chased her out of the house. . . . I let you chase her out of the house and I was glad because I really believed that I was better than she. . . . I am the only one she has in the world to come to see her. She's my friend. I love her." (182-3)

At this point, Phyllisia has already overcome her fear of Calvin, and recognizes her own growth because of the honest voice in which she is speaking. Her growth is reflected in

her father's countenance: he looks at his daughter dubiously. Phyllisia is sure he is starting to see her differently. "His entire face underwent a change and I knew that for the first time he was regarding me as a person, apart from himself" (184).

Two Types of Cosmopolitanism

Now let us consider the connection among Phyllisia's triangular agendas: changing Calvin, her self-recovery, and her friendship with Edith. As already stated, Calvin is identified with New York because he is obsessed with his American dream. He dreams of succeeding in the restaurant business, expanding and multiplying his restaurant, and becoming a "big man." At home he provokes a desire for further wealth by gorgeously furnishing his apartment, and checks up on his daughters' friendships forbidding Phyllisia to associate with Edith.

Reading the novel in its social context of the 1960s, we can see that Calvin is deeply immersed in the ideology of Americanism that was pervasive through economic activity. Social economist Saeki Keishi argues that the United States promoted Americanism that aimed to realize democracy through economic activity after World War II. At that time, "the social structure that made democracy visible was 'mass society' where people are supposed to equally pursue and enjoy economic richness" (*Americanism no shuen* 112). In other words, Americanism during this period aimed to gain "material democracy" (Saeki's coinage, 117): "people buy similar things, use similar things, lead similar lives, have similar knowledge and information" (114).

Industrious immigrant Calvin internalizes the American values so much that he loses his humanity, hurts his wife, and almost breaks off his daughter's friendship. Additionally, he would have sent his daughters back home and cut the familial bond, acting against Trinidadian traditional values, if Phyllisia had not spoken out in her own voice. Toward the end of the novel, Calvin begins to recognize the importance of the familial tie.

Saeki maintains that Americanism crossly related with economic activity has developed into globalism or hyper-Americanism in the process of its standardization (284–5). Interestingly, literary critic Homi Bhabha calls this globalism "global-cosmopolitanism" that is based on the ideas of global development promoting competition of free-market forces and neo-liberal governance. This type of cosmopolitanism admits multicultural and multinational people as long as they economically benefit society, but it excludes refugees and the poor (*The Location of Culture* xiv). He also maintains that under the influence of this type of cosmopolitanism, waves of immigrants swarmed into the United States carrying their American dreams. Calvin is no doubt one of those immigrants.

In place of this cosmopolitanism, Bhabha proposes an alternative one, "vernacular-cosmopolitanism," which possibly prevents the harmful effects of Americanism. It is

likened to the world of a migrant boarding house that multicultural and multinational minorities inhabit.

Its claims to freedom and equality are marked by a “right to difference in equality,” rather than a diversity founded on a “dual economy.”... A right to difference-in-equality can be articulated from the perspective of both national minorities and global migrants. (xvii)

To put it the other way around, both internally “colonized” people like Edith and immigrants like Phyllisia equally have the right to be different. They respect their ethnic and cultural differences and still can be equal.

Conclusion

Guy’s *The Friends* is set in the 1960s, when the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. was at its peak, and was published in the 1970s when the movement influenced the women’s movement and activism of minority groups including Native Americans and Japanese Americans. In such a social context, Guy found the necessity to write the novel in which the Trinidadian protagonist tackles her hardships. As she says in her essay, when she was growing up there was no book, no guideline to carry those children over the division among Americans who had different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (“The Human Spirit” 130).

Although the novel depicts Phyllisia’s fear as being partly caused by her conflict with Calvin, as Lucille H. Gregory argues, Guy does not portray him as a stereotypical “problem parent” (“Children of the Diaspora” 282), but rather a victim of “global-cosmopolitanism.” Thus, when Phyllisia admits that she has made the same mistake copying her father, she starts to cherish her friendship with Edith. By confirming their friendship going beyond ethnicity and social class, they acquire a right to difference-in-equality, overcoming the bad effect of Americanism. Thereby, Phyllisia is relieved from the trap of the self-contradiction, and lets Calvin break the spell of Americanism, and finally overcomes the fear that has possessed her.

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