Slavery and Diasporic Identity in Two Counter Travel Narratives:

Caryl Phillips’s *The Atlantic Sound* and

Ekow Eshun’s *Black Gold of the Sun*
“‘It was never mine to repudiate…on the instance when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realized, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever, …and the man who bought it bought nothing.’ ‘Bought nothing?’ and he ‘Bought nothing. Because … He created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name, not to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth…’”

William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (1942)
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Introduction

From the eighteenth century up to the present the travel narrative has been an instrument of imperial expansion. Rulers of the West would put the “expertise” of travelers and their writings “directly to ‘functional colonial use’” (Said, qtd. in Ropero 52). As Percy Adams puts it, “as propaganda for international trade and for colonization, travel accounts had no equal” (qtd. in Ropero 52). Justin Edwards similarly argues that “travel writing allowed Europeans to conceive of areas outside of Europe as being under their control, as an extension of land through ownership” (1). Travel writers were “actively involved in the expansion or maintenance of empire … and dependent upon the support of the institutions of imperialism in order to facilitate their writers’ travels” (Ivison, qtd. in Edwards 1). Yet despite being inextricably linked with colonial expansion, the genre has also been used as an instrument of cultural criticism, “particularly in the hands of … ‘post-colonial’ authors” (Ropero 51). María Lourdes López Ropero explains that this transformation took place especially after World War II, a period in which the notion of the “decentering of Western culture and a feeling of guilt over Europe’s colonial past” took hold (53). Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan call

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1 According to Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, colonialism is “the conquest and direct control of other people’s land [and] is a particular phase in the history of imperialism, which is now best understood as the globalization of the capitalist mode of production, its penetration of previously non-capitalist regions of the world, and destruction of pre- or non-capitalist forms of social organization” (2).

2 Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman argue that the term post-colonial is problematic because “the West had not relinquished control [to a large extent] … “[M]any of the attitudes, the strategies and even … much of the room for manoeuvre of the colonial period remain in place” (3).
travel narratives that “[shake] the reader’s complacency through the ‘unmapping’ of ‘mapped’ world views” (Ropero 54) counter travel narratives (50). The “unmapping” they engage in consists of “dismantl[ing] the Eurocentric views that gave rise to the genre” during the time of colonialism (Ropero 54).

In this thesis I will discuss two postcolonial counter travelogues that, indeed, “unmap” “mapped” world views: Caryl Phillips’s *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) and Ekow Eshun’s *Black Gold of the Sun* (2005). Being black and British, Phillips and Eshun dismantle “Eurocentric views.” Ropero argues that the counter travelogue characteristically combines cultural critique with the “personal urge to solve [an] inner conflict” (51). Indeed, *The Atlantic Sound* and *Black Gold of the Sun* chart a psychological as well as a physical journey, in which the physical journey functions to support the psychological one. As Joan Miller Powell points out, “the physical journey becomes a psychic movement to confront [one’s] confusions” (103). Phillips’s and Eshun’s “Black Atlantic” identity conflicts and confusions spring directly from the postcolonial condition they inhabit (Gilroy ix).

Both writers counter travel writers who either “ignore or distort colonialism,”³ suffering, according to Robert Fletcher, from “‘imperialist amnesia’” (423).⁴ Phillips’s and Eshun’s works on the other hand directly address colonialism, focusing their “cultural critique” on the history of slavery. Colin Thubron characterizes the counter travel writer as one with “an awakened social consciousness” (qtd. in Ropero 53). With

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³ As an example, Robert Fletcher mentions *The Best American Travel Writing* (2003), a collection of articles; he points out that of the thirteen pieces that “discuss travel in areas formerly colonized by European powers”, “only five mention colonialism in any aspect, and most of these references are offhand and superficial” (429).

⁴ Robert Fletcher echoes Renato Rosaldo’s term “imperialist nostalgia”, which Rosaldo used to “refer to Western longing in the imagination for what the imperialists had destroyed in the previous era” (Bruner 300). Fletcher adjusts it to relate it to travel writing.
this awakened social consciousness, Phillips and Eshun try to set the distorted history of slavery and colonialism right by narrating the legacies of slavery and the effects of this history on their lives today. Phillips and Eshun show that the history of slavery is not a thing of the past; rather, it is a history that lives a perennial aftermath. Even though their objectives in writing the travel narratives are pre-dominantly personal, they come to recognize that the history of slavery is at the root of their identity struggle.

Causing the dispersal of Africans across the Atlantic World, the transatlantic slave trade is, as Eshun points out in *Black Gold of the Sun*, “impossible to forget if you are born in Britain” (147). The history of slavery continues to affect the lives of subsequent generations, sometimes fostering a sense of exile. As Edward Said has pointed out, exile is “a discontinuous state of being” and “its unsettling force [continues to erupt] anew” (140, 149). “[E]xiles are always eccentrics who *feel* their difference … as a kind of orphanhood” (Said 144). According to Olu Oguibe, what brings about this sense of exile is that the descendants of slaves are “caught between a past that is largely lost, and a present that refuse[s] to be owned” (97). Oguibe explains this is “the greatest curse of the African diaspora: this unhinging from the past, this unknowing which results in a ceaseless, yet futile, effort to return, to seek for markers of origin, to know” (97).

Phillips and Eshun explore and reflect on the history of slavery by making use of the genre of the travelogue. Oguibe argues that this is exactly what the descendants of slaves must do: “[T]o truly connect with [their] source, [they] must begin [their] search in and around the present, within [themselves] and the specifics of [their] immediate locale and moment” (99). Phillips and Eshun travel to Ghana to try to work through the personal and collective trauma of dislocation and exile. At the least, they hope to find something
to discharge the restlessness that has taken root in their minds and bodies. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy Miller argue that “the desire for return always arises from a need to redress an injustice, one often inflicted upon an entire group of people caused by displacement or dispossession, the loss of home and of family autonomy, the conditions of expulsion, colonization, and migration” (7). Phillips and Eshun try to redress the injustice that is the transatlantic slave trade by going on a journey to Ghana and writing a travel narrative. In the process of working through the history of slavery, both writers criticize and counter the distorted histories of colonialism and imperialism, and the “imperialist amnesia” it has produced (Fletcher 423).

Phillips and Eshun show that the history of slavery and the diasporic identities that have been formed in its aftermath are conflicted and riddled by contradictions. The journey to Ghana, and, even more importantly, writing their counter travel narratives, are part of the process of self-discovery and reclamation of the past; it is in the writing process that the authors, to some extent, come to terms with themselves and work through the trauma of their ancestors’ history of enslavement. Both on the level of the journey itself and on the level of writing their narratives, Phillips and Eshun find a resolution for their alienation by accepting a migrant, fluid identity.
Chapter 1 – Caryl Phillips’s *The Atlantic Sound*

Home and identity are central themes in Caryl Phillips’s fiction as well as in his two travelogues *The Atlantic Sound* and *The European Tribe* (1987). As Phillips points out, “I don’t think you need to be a rocket scientist to spot that I’m interested in the notion of ‘home’” (qtd. in Ledent 198). In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips juxtaposes many of his own experiences with stories of historical figures. Interestingly, *The Atlantic Sound* explores all three continents of the Middle Passage, but in a reverse order. Phillips starts his journey in Guadeloupe, not far from his native island St. Kitts, from where he travels to England on a cargo ship. He then tells the story of Ghanaian businessman John Ocansey in Liverpool, alongside his own experiences in that city. Subsequently, he travels to Ghana to explore pan-Africanism and tells the story of Philip Quaque. The next chapter sees Phillips in Charleston, South Carolina, where he tells the story of the white Judge Waring. Phillips ends his journey in the Israeli desert where he meets “African Americans who have decided to live in the Negev desert …, returning to the land of their biblical ancestors” (Ward 192).

His journey counters two silences that turn out to be related; the “forgotten” slavery past as well as the silence in his childhood about his Caribbean roots. Phillips counters the “imperialist amnesia” of previous travel writers, which is “a tendency on the part of ‘agents of postcolonialism’ to either ignore the history of colonial dominion in
their accounts or to present a sanitized version of colonialism from which evidence of exploitation, persecution, subjugation and genocide has been effectively effaced” (Fletcher 423). Furthermore, breaking the silence of the transatlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage is important for Phillips on a personal level. In a recent interview with Alan Rice, Phillips says the slavery past is a “very important aspect of [his] identity as a person of African origin”; he explains that “there’s an umbilical cord from my own life to this world of the Middle Passage on both sides of the Atlantic” (Rice, “Manillas” 366).

The transatlantic slave trade caused the dispersal of his ancestors - most of whom were African or of African descent – across the New World. His birth in St. Kitts and subsequent migration to England are at the heart of his feelings of non-belonging. In England, he was faced with racism and, moreover, with a family who “did not talk about back home” (Schatteman 48). The silence about “back home” concerned his family’s history in St. Kitts, and possibly also his ancestors’ slavery past. To unravel the strands from which to construct his identity, Phillips has to counteract these silences.

In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips tries to come to terms with his sense of alienation by accepting the fluidity of identity and constructing a transnational identity for himself. This transnational identity is partly constructed by the elimination of “the Other” within himself. While Phillips dismantles the notion of a whole or fixed identity, ironically he, at the same time, is inclined to define himself against those he sees as “Other”. He projects “the Other within himself” onto the tourists. This “othering” of certain people he encounters such as African American tourists contradicts the transnational identity Phillips emphasizes in the hope of resolving his identity struggle.
Home and Identity

According to William Safran, the main features of diaspora are “a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship” (qtd. in Clifford 305). Even though, according to James Clifford, “African American/Caribbean British ‘cultures’ only show some of William Safran’s features of diaspora” (306), Phillips is, in fact, very much a diasporic writer. Being of African descent, born in St. Kitts, raised in Great Britain and currently living in the United States, Phillips is diasporic in the sense of being and feeling scattered, or dispersed. The first aspect of Safran’s definition of diaspora, “‘expatriate minority communities’ … that are dispersed from an original ‘center’ to at least two ‘peripheral’ places” applies here (Clifford 304). Benedicte Ledent argues that the diaspora is “a fully integrated element of [Phillip’s] world vision, [and] thus a catalyst for his complex approach to what home can be” (200).

Phillips addresses the challenges that the diaspora forces him to face in his multiple works and interviews. In the preface to A New World Order Phillips writes about Britain: “I recognize the place, I feel at home here, but I don’t belong. I am of, and not of this place. History dealt me four cards; an ambiguous hand” (4). Stuart Hall argues that “[o]ne thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs” (Questions 19). This is definitely the case for Phillips. Phillip’s sense of up-rootedness is articulated throughout The Atlantic Sound. His identity struggle causes Phillips to feel “surprisingly at home” in an in-between place such as the café for derelicts he accidentally comes
across in Liverpool (AS 102). Although he is not really homeless as the derelicts are, he identifies with their sense of up-rootedness.

Phillips’s preoccupation with home and identity can be traced back to his childhood in England. Phillips has said that he has “no happy memories” of his childhood; indeed, he has called it “massively dysfunctional and traumatic” (qtd. in Schatteman 47). Although Phillips was confronted with racism early in his childhood, surprisingly it is not racism directed at him that becomes the catalyst for his work; rather, it is the experience with racism of a Pakistani boy Ali in his class that causes “something inside of [to change]” (“Colour” 13). In his essay “Colour me English”, Phillips explains the difference between him and Ali: “Ali did have some essential place of identity to which he could, should he wish to, turn as an alternative to the perceived hostility of British life” (19). Presumably, Phillips regards Pakistan as Ali’s ultimate source of identity. Phillips argues he himself lacks such a “place of identity” (“Colour” 19); despite his restlessness and feelings of up-rootedness, England is his only home since he has no other place to return to. Going back to St. Kitts was not an option for his parents because they “were of the pioneer generation [and] anxious to root themselves in England and consequently did not talk about back home” (Schatteman 49). As a result, Phillips is lost and does not know where to turn.

This preoccupation with home and identity continues to haunt him in his adult life. As an adolescent, Phillips becomes inspired by and identifies with African-American identity in the United States, an influential counter-identity that black British society
lacked. As Renee Schatteman points out, “the importance of [Phillips’s] identification with African American identity issues in the absence of a well-articulated black British identity cannot be overestimated” (49). The rise of a self-conscious African American identity in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement was an inspiration for Phillips (Schatteman 49). Britain lacked “a well-articulated black British identity” and Phillips’s “frustration at [the] under-representation of minority voices” became the incentive for his work (Schatteman 49). His identification with African American identity inspired him to use his writing to help construct a black British identity. In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips articulates the strong sense of up-rootedness that he feels is inherent in being both black and British.

When Phillips is on the plane to Ghana, a Ghanaian man asks him “*the* question”: “‘Where are you from?’” (*AS* 125). This question in particular reinforces Phillips’s sense of homelessness and lack of identity:

*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? … Does he mean, who am I? Does he mean, do I belong? … (*AS* 124-25)

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5 According to Ron Eyerman, an African American identity was forged out of the collective trauma of slavery in the decades after the Civil War and slavery came to be its “point of origin” (1, 16). Black intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey proclaimed a black identity, even though they had not experienced slavery themselves (Eyerman 2). They suffered “cultural trauma”, a traumatic event that is experienced indirectly and collectively (Eyerman 14). The representation of this identity became essential in reconstituting the collective identity, “as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric” (Eyerman 4). At the same time, this representation has been problematic for African Americans: “Black Americans have fought for the right to be seen and heard as equals in social conditions which sought to deny this” (13). Their “self-imposed” identity formation was constituted as what Michael Foucault would call a “counter-memory” because it emerged “in relation and response to the dominant culture” (Eyerman 14, 17).
As Phillips demonstrates, this is a very problematic question for immigrants and people in the diaspora. Phillips is jealous of the African man, to whom he refers as being “whole” and “of one place” \((AS\ 126)\). Said explains that “exiles look at non-exiles with resentment. They belong in their surroundings … whereas an exile is always out of place” \((Said\ 143)\). The notion of home as one single place and identity as being fixed is persistent, even in today’s globalizing world, at least it is for the African man. The African man on the plane, to borrow Iain Chambers’ words, “imagines” himself “to be whole, to be complete, to have a full identity and certainly not to be open and fragmented”, in contrast with Phillips \((25)\). The question merely reinforces Phillips’ perpetual feelings of non-belonging. One of the ways Phillips deals with feelings of non-belonging is by including historical figures in his narrative.

**Historical figures**

Phillips’s narrative of his journey alternates between his own experiences and historical storytelling. By “blurring the borders between fiction and non-fiction,” *The Atlantic Sound* deconstructs the “‘dominant narrative of a unified, homogeneous nation’” \((Williams,\ qtd.\ in\ Ledent\ 206)\). Alternating between fiction\(^7\) and non-fiction is the main framework from which his fragmented style further unfolds. Even though his own travel experiences “interweave” with his fiction \((Ledent\ 204)\), the alternations are too abrupt for a fluent transition. Furthermore, the shifting narrative strategies Phillips adopts express fragmentation, from a first-person narration for his own experiences \((AS\ 3)\) to a third-

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\(^6\) Ironically, however, Phillips also “defines” himself by “excluding others” in *The Atlantic Sound*, an idea I will develop later.

\(^7\) Here the historical storytelling is referred to as fiction. Of course these people and stories are non-fictional, but Phillips has used his imagination to shape and fill these stories. This is especially true for the story of John Ocansey.
person narration of the historical stories (AS 23) to “‘objective’ recounting of the history of the founding of Liverpool” (Powell 102). For example, “Leaving Home” starts with an omniscient voice in italics: “The African has dispatched money to the white man. And now his heart is heavy with grief” (AS 23). This voice returns throughout the chapter in between the lines, repeating the lines on page 23 in bits and pieces (AS 39-40, 80, 93). In addition to shifting narrative perspectives, the repetition of the omniscient voice causes fragmentation; as Powell argues, “repetition stifles – indeed, breaks – linearity” (102).

The travel narrative is an especially suitable genre to tell and imagine historical stories about the silenced history of slavery because of the genre’s flexibility. Travel writing is a hybrid genre that “straddles categories and disciplines” (Holland and Huggan 8). “It [borrows] freely from … history, social science, journalism, autobiography, or fiction” (Ropero 55). Travel writing is a “pliable and receptive” genre that allows writers to combine facts with fiction: “Travel writing is best seen … as a ‘mediation between fact and fiction’, referring to actual people, places and events as the writer encounters them, but freely interspersing these with stories” (Holland and Huggan 91, and Fussell, qtd. in Holland and Huggan 9). Phillips, then, stretches the genre’s flexibility far enough to incorporate a large part of imaginative historical narration in his narrative. Reclaiming the silenced and forgotten history of slavery requires an act of imagination on the part of Phillips. As Toni Morrison points out in her essay “The Site of Memory”, “[t]he act of imagination is bound up with memory”:

You know they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. “Floods” is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering
where it used to be. All water has perfect memory and is it forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were … and a rush of imagination is our flooding. (119)

The bare memory and history of slavery alone – that is, without imagination – is fragmented and full of gaps. It simply does not suffice. Morrison explains writers “remember” by using their “imagination” (119). Phillips uses three historical figures as a framework to “remember” and “imagine” the transatlantic slave trade.

More specifically, Phillips explores the various aspects of his own identity through historical figures. He juxtaposes stories of the past from Liverpool, Ghana and Charleston, South Carolina, with his own travel experiences. Phillips tries to recover the slavery past by narrating stories of people that have not made it into the historical record. _The Atlantic Sound_ tells the stories of John Ocansey, Philip Quaque and Judge Waring. In doing so, Phillips does not only recover the slavery past, but also revises the historical record by adding stories of minor historical figures. As Schatteman points out, “[Phillips] is always seeking out the stories of people who have been displaced and are misunderstood and who do not have the security of belonging to a particular history” (52). The lives of the three minor historical figures whose stories he tells speak to his own life of displacement. Like, Phillips, these three men are “caught up in the effects of slavery” (Powell 100); therefore, he can identify with them. By telling their stories Phillips tries to make sense of his own displacement.

Phillips devotes one third of his entire travelogue to Liverpool, Britain’s main slave port, in “Leaving Home”. The first story, about John Ocansey, counters the silence about Liverpool’s slavery past. Phillips describes Liverpool as a place “where [the history
of slavery] is so physically present, yet so glaringly absent from people’s consciousness” (AS 117). As Ledent points out, a story like Ocansey’s “counteract[s] the amnesia [of the slavery past] that characterizes the Eurocentric and Afrocentric agendas” (206). “Leaving Home” includes Ocansey’s journey to and in Liverpool. Ocansey was a nineteenth-century businessman from Ghana who traveled to Liverpool to reclaim money that belonged to his father’s palm-oil business. Phillips re-imagines Ocansey’s long and lonesome journey on the ship and gives a detailed account of his experiences in Liverpool and the trial concerning his father’s claim. At first sight, the story seems unrelated to slavery, since Ocansey arrived in Liverpool 1881, long after slavery had been officially abolished in England. However, by including Ocansey, Phillips shows that Liverpool’s economic exploitation of Africa did not cease after the abolition of slavery: “The same Liverpudlian companies who, before the abolition, had been active in the buying and selling of human beings now exploited their experience and contacts in order that they might continue to trade in West Africa, albeit in a different type of local product” (AS 25). Moreover, palm oil had been introduced in Europe in the early sixteenth century precisely because of the slave trade (AS 24). In other words, without the transatlantic slave trade there would have been no international trade in palm oil, neither during nor after the trade in human beings.

Travel still has a pre-dominantly European focus; according to Edwards, many postcolonial critics overlook the fact that “the world was ‘mapped’ by non-European peoples as well, and that many of these people also left behind travel accounts” (2). “Leaving Home” counters “‘European(ized) travel’” by tracing Ocansey’s departure from his home, his travels by ship and his exploration of a new place (Edwards 2). Phillips
imagines Ocansey’s fascination for the places he encounters along the way: “At Tenerife, John … was amazed to discover that the houses and the public buildings, indeed the very streets themselves, were of a quality that he had never before seen” (AS 36). In Liverpool, Ocansey “particularly enjoy[s] the exhilarating activity attendant upon the arrival and the departure of the ocean-going vessel” (AS 62). By including the travels of a Ghanaian to Europe, Phillips departs from the conventions of the genre.

The story of John Ocansey is a good example of how Phillips tries to turn around preconceived mindsets. It “[disrupts] the imperialist imperatives of the traditional travel narrative by inverting the subject/object position, by inscribing the right of the Other to be a traveller” (Powell 93). On the one hand, the travel account points to the racism present in nineteenth-century Liverpool: Ocansey is called “blackey” upon arrival and a young girl at a new friend’s house asks John “to send her a small black boy so that the boy might carry her books to school for her” (AS 49, 64). On the other hand, Ocansey’s story casts a light on the “complex nature of Liverpool life” when he encounters poor beggar children: “Not even in the poorest village of his native Africa would a child behave in such an uncouth manner” (AS 50, 65). Ocansey’s story destabilizes the preconceived notions of a culturally and economically prosperous Liverpool versus an uncultivated, poor Africa.

The destabilization of these preconceived mindsets is reinforced by the narrative strategy of focalization. Phillips deploys the narrative strategy of internal focalization; even though John Ocansey’s story is told in the third person, it is focalized through Ocansey and thus reveals his inner world and experiences. For example, Ocansey
recognizes that the white Liverpudlian carriage driver sees in him the African slave, to whom he thinks he owes an apology:

“My grandfather, he was in the Africa trade. Terrible thing”, he said, “the way people was treated” … “But you’ll find that things have changed, you know. Folks round here don’t look for difference.” John simply stared at this man, who stared back at John as though urging his passenger to absolve him of past sins.

(AS 52)

The driver sees Ocansey as an “other”. However, he leaves John “puzzled” because he does not at all identify with African slaves (AS 53). As Simon Clarke points out, otherness is the result of projection: “The white person makes the black person in the image of their projections, literally forcing identity into another” (524). Clarke quotes Frantz Fanon who articulates this theory of projection: “[T]he white man has woven me out of a thousand details … I was battered down with tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships …” (524). Ocansey is, for his part, “battered down” with the history of slavery by the Liverpudlian carriage driver. The internal focalization reinforces the destabilization of a sense of otherness.

The second chapter, “Homeward Bound”, tells Philip Quaque’s life story. While Phillips used internal focalization to reproduce Ocansey’s consciousness, Phillips draws upon Quaque’s letters to England; though these letters convey some of his feelings, for the most part “Homeward Bound” is a matter-of-fact account of Quaque’s life story. Quaque leaves Ghana at age thirteen to receive a religious education in England. Phillips points out that “[i]t was not uncommon for English religious organizations to identify African ‘prodigies’ and arrange for their education in England, the understanding being
that they would eventually return to the African coast to help ‘civilize’ the natives” (*AS* 176); Quaque was such a “prodigy”. He returns indefinitely to Cape Coast Castle “as a missionary to his own people” at the age of twenty-four (*AS* 176); however, this return turns out to be a major disappointment. Quaque “‘discovered’ that he could no longer communicate with the people amongst whom he was born” (*AS* 180). Even though Quaque’s time among the English did not – according to the latter - make him English, he was not considered to be African by the Africans. According to Chambers, “language is a means of cultural construction in which our very selves and sense are constituted” (22).


Besides representing shared feelings of non-belonging, Quaque represents the far-stretching and multiple effects of slavery. Quaque did not just work as a missionary in Cape Coast Castle, but also as a chaplain for the “British merchants who were engaged in the slave trade” (*AS* 176). Quaque’s story shows that the transatlantic slave trade was an international system in which not only Europeans and Americans, but also Africans were involved on various levels: “Ghanaians were not only [black diasporics’] brothers and sisters, but also their oppressors” (Bruner 296). Indirectly, Quaque was complicit in the transatlantic slave trade. He lived “literally … above the dungeons in which were held thousands of his fellow Africans awaiting transportation to the Americas” (*AS* 176).
Phillips points out, “[i]t is remarkable to consider that although he lived and worked through the height of the slave trade, the first rumblings of the anti-slavery movement, and the eventual abolition of the trade, nowhere does he make reference to his feelings about his ‘brothers and sisters’ in the dungeons beneath his feet” (AS 179). Because his letters were addressed to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), Quaque understandably focused mainly on religious matters in his letters. However, it is through the letters of Quaque that Phillips casts a light on that fact that Africans were also part of this operational system that, to some extent, normalized the trade in human cargo. By including Quaque’s story, Phillips unravels some of the complexities of the history of slavery.

The complexities of the slavery past are further unraveled in the chapter “Home”, which tells the story of the white Judge Waring of Charleston, South Carolina. Judge Waring had the “status in the city as a respected man of great influence and importance” (AS 240). Initially his status changed when he divorced his first wife, a “southern belle who knew her place,” and married Elizabeth, a divorced northerner “who would brook no nonsense from anybody” (AS 242). However, “Judge Waring’s new marriage marked the end of his life in Charleston society as he had known it before” (AS 242). Elizabeth became the fresh breeze in Judge Waring’s life. He was “always a decent man”, but Elizabeth “read to him. She converted him [to fight for equal rights for blacks]” (AS 243).

On the threshold of the Civil Rights Movement, Waring changed some “discriminatory practices in his courtroom”, such as ending the color-coded juror lists and introducing mandatory integrated seating (AS 245-246). At a lunch in New York, Waring declares that “[m]y people have one outstanding fault, the terrible fault of prejudice … That’s not
the conception that we should show to the world” (AS 247). His alienation from his hometown reached a climax when he “decided to change the system and let anybody vote” (AS 225). Even though Waring was a “Charlestonean and the city, with all her traditions, was deeply ingrained in his blood” (AS 251), “that particular legal decision caused more problems for him than the second marriage ever did” (AS 225). Phillips can recognize himself in the alienation Waring suffers in his hometown. Judge Waring symbolizes that white people were, like Phillips is still today, “caught up in the effects of slavery” (Powell 100).

Phillips extends the displacement caused by slavery to a white person such as Judge Waring. Waring’s legal decisions cause him to become a “pariah” in his own home and he decides “he had no choice but to leave. It was simply too burdensome to be among those who openly hated you in a place you called ‘home’” (AS 225). He moved to the North and even though “New York was not home” (AS 263), Charleston was a place to which Judge Waring and his second wife ceased to belong. Waring’s life of exile relates to Phillips’s own life. Abigail Ward argues that Phillips differentiates between “home” and “belonging” when he writes that he is “of, and not of this place” (Phillips, qtd. in Ward 194). As Ward points out, Phillips implies that “while somewhere may be ‘home’, it can still be a place where one does not fully belong” (194). Judge Waring’s story represents this difference between “home” and “belonging”. Waring became an alien in his hometown and this relates to Phillip’s own feelings of alienation. One has to belong in a place in order to be able to call a place “home”. By extending displacement to a white person such as Waring, Phillips shows that the history of slavery and its legacies are shared by white and black people. Schatteman argues that “Phillips refused to invest in
notions of racial solidarity and a number of his works demonstrate his interest in examining the way that history has affected white people as well as black” (52). In *The Atlantic Sound*, Judge Waring demonstrates this interest.

Moreover, Phillips imagines the lives of Ocansey, Quaque and Waring as a way to represent himself. One of the genres to which the travel narrative is heavily indebted is the autobiography. Louise Yelin argues that *The Atlantic Sound* is only one part of Phillips’s complete autobiography and that he has written many works that, over the years, have, together, constituted what Leigh Gilmore has called a “serial autobiography” (qtd. in Yelin 58). Yelin further argues that his serial autobiography is “a discontinuous narrative of self-fashioning” (58). Yelin underscores Phillips’s pre-occupation with the self by arguing that an autobiographical element runs through all of his works. According to Yelin, Phillips often turns “inside-out” what Philippe Lejeune calls “autobiography in the third person” by “represent[ing] himself by writing about others” (59). I would argue this is indeed the case for the historical figures in *The Atlantic Sound*; these figures come to represent Phillips. Phillips learnt to identify himself with others earlier in life and explains that “in seeing [myself], as if in a mirror, in [other black writers such as James Baldwin], [I] found a way of negotiating [my] situation as a young black Briton” (qtd. in Yelin 65). In *The Atlantic Sound*, the historical figures function as a way to “negotiate” his “situation” and represent his transnational self.

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8 Yelin explains Lejeune’s “autobiography in the third person” as a third person who writes about the self (65).
Transnational identity

According to Paul Gilroy, the idea of a national identity forces a “double-consciousness” on a person who is black and American or British (1). As Gilroy explains, W.E.B. Du Bois coined the term “double-consciousness” in 1903 to explain the way black Americans looked at themselves. According to Du Bois, black Americans cannot see themselves apart from the labels white people put on them (9). According to Gilroy, double-consciousness is connected to the notion of national identity. Gilroy argues it is important to move beyond national and nationalistic perspectives precisely because these perspectives see black people “as an illegitimate intrusion into a vision of authentic British national life that, prior to their arrival, was as stable and peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated” (7). In addition, the notion of a “black British” identity disregards the collective history of the Middle Passage, which centers in the Atlantic Ocean. Instead Gilroy proposes an identity and culture that transcend national boundaries and calls this the “black Atlantic,” a transnational identity and culture that connect identities and people of the African diaspora (15). In the process of writing The Atlantic Sound, Phillips works up from Gilroy’s notion of a transnational identity.

As I have pointed out earlier, Phillips travels to all three continents of the Middle Passage. Structuring his journey around the Middle Passage lays the foundation for a transnational history of slavery. Former slave trading and slave holding nations all have their own, often conflicted and contradictory, story of the slavery past, but the history of slavery transcends national boundaries. Phillips points to the dissonance of the slavery past in “Homeward Bound” when disarming the conflict between the Ghanaian Dr. Ben

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9 W.E.B. Du Bois’s concept of double-consciousness will be developed in detail in connection to Ekow Eshun’s Black Gold of the Sun in chapter 2.
Abdallah and the African American Dr. Lee about the history of slavery. Abdallah says: “Do you think we need to be reminded of slavery? We know” (AS 149). Dr. Lee, on the other hand, disagrees and argues “the African doesn’t really understand the slave trade … [it] causes him embarrassment” (AS 153). Phillips’s transcontinental journey attempts to resolve these contradictions in national histories and national memories. By including America, Europe and Africa in the history of slavery, he deconstructs the idea of a national history of slavery.

The voyage on a cargo ship, which travels from Guadeloupe via various other ports to England, is discussed in the prologue, titled “Atlantic Crossing”. Phillips lists the reasons for choosing to travel by cargo ship with a sense of irony: “(a) it is cheap; (b) you have nothing else to do; and (c) perverse curiosity” (AS 17). Phillips deliberately leaves out the true reason. When someone asks him if he has ever been on a ship before, he explains “I have ‘sort of’ been on a ship before, … I do not want to explain to him that forty years ago my parents travelled by ship from the Caribbean to England with me, their four-month-old son, as hand luggage” (AS 4). Phillips obviously retraces the voyage he took with his parents from their native island St. Kitts. He would not have been able to retrace his parents’ voyage on, for example, a cruise ship, which aims to entertain and “cater for [one’s] immediate needs” (AS 6). Joan Miller Powell points out that the ship is “a reprise of one of Phillips’s earliest experiences, literally generating his black-British condition” (101). His choice of a cargo ship allows him to experience the process his parents went through more closely.

Furthermore, Phillips’s choice to start his travel narrative by a voyage on a cargo ship counters modern-day fast travel. Holland and Huggan argue that the speed of
modern means of transportation “[robs] travel-writers of the leisure time they need. Speed is antithetical to the physical and verbal meandering of conventional travel writing” (23). The cargo ship slows down the “Atlantic Crossing” and offers Phillips the time that is needed for travel writing. Phillip’s writing style in his description of the voyage reenacts the slowness. To illustrate “that a day at sea on a freighter ship is a long day”, Phillips gives an elaborate account of these long days on the voyage: “[A]s I witness the sun rising on the vast unresponsive expanse of sea and sky, the bleak sight only serves to remind me that there is no prospect of land for days, that there is only the prospect of another day” (AS 8, 16). The voyage on the cargo ship offers time for reflection that is necessary for the transition to the journey of the Middle Passage and the history of slavery. Aesthetically and psychologically, the voyage gives Phillips time for mental preparation.

Embarking on the voyage marks the first stage of finding what Gilroy calls the “routes” of his non-fixed or migrant self (Hall, “Questions” 4). The cargo ship, on the one hand, recalls the Middle Passage; slave ships were the means of transport for the human cargo of enslaved Africans during the transatlantic slave trade. The voyage on the cargo ship represents the beginning of recovering the slavery past. On the other hand, the ship represents a fluid identity. As Gilroy argues, “the image of ships in motion across [the Atlantic Ocean is] a central organizing symbol [of the Middle Passage] because … they were the mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected” (Gilroy 4, 16). The “mobile” cargo ship is a metaphor for the non-fixed identity (Gilroy 4). Chambers similarly introduces the metaphor of the “raft” to represent a self that is “always on the move” (7).
Phillips’s parents belonged to the “Windrush generation” (Saez 19), the first generation of African-Caribbean people who migrated to England after the Second World War. This post-World War II migration was stimulated to fill shortages in the labor market after the war. After a few days on the voyage, “depression washes over [Phillips]” and he repeatedly seems to hide away in “splendid isolation” (AS 16). Elena Machado Saez argues that Phillips’s reflection of isolation on the cargo ship demystifies the notion of a “traveling community”: “Phillips continually asserts the impossibility of a traveling community, a shared experience that could … lead to the development of any kind of migrant kinship” (19-20). Feelings of solitude are undoubtedly inherent in life on a freighter ship; it is only by retracing his parents’ voyage that Phillips realizes just how his parents must have felt: “I now know how [my mother] and all the other emigrants felt as they crossed the Atlantic; they felt lonely” (AS 20). Assuming that his parents indeed felt lonely complicates the term “Windrush generation”; being part of the “same” generation suggests the idea that the migrants were a sociable group of people, or, at least, knew each other. By explicating the isolation on the cargo ship, Phillips argues against the fixedness of a name such as the Windrush generation. It is here that Phillips slowly introduces the idea of a fluid identity that is central in The Atlantic Sound.

Indeed, the title of the travelogue, The Atlantic Sound, strongly reflects the crossing of national and racial boundaries. For one thing, the sea carries the history of the Middle Passage and its ominous sounds, and cyclical tidal movements are a recurring reminder of this painful history. Phillips refers to the sea several times throughout the travelogue, when he is in Ghana for example: “I sit and look out at the rough Atlantic breaking over the rocks and then surging up the beach” (AS 174). Phillips echoes the
recurrence of the tidal movements by repeated references to the Atlantic Ocean. It is as if the “sound” of the Atlantic repeatedly knocks at his door, forcing him to reckon with the history of slavery. Ward argues that Phillips, like Gilroy, “employs the ocean as a ‘means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory’” (Gilroy, qtd. in Ward 209). Ward points out, however, that Phillips’s title *The Atlantic Sound* has “lost the racial specificity” of Gilroy’s title *The Black Atlantic* (209). Indeed, *The Atlantic Sound* aims to make the history of slavery a history of black as well as white people, as becomes clear in the story of Judge Waring, which significantly concludes the book. Apart from its dissociation from the racial binary, the title calls attention to “the notion of diasporan identities as shifting and ever changing” (Ward 210). In *A New World Order*, Phillips writes: “Whenever I … gaze out at the Atlantic Ocean, I know exactly where I come from. … And on a clear day, I can peer into the distance and see where I will ultimately reside” (qtd. in Ward 210). To Phillips, the middle of the ocean is his “home”. His home or identity are not connected to one specific place or to one nation; his diasporic history forces a transnational or Atlantic identity upon him, which is reflected in the title.

The narrative is divided into five sections: “Atlantic Crossing”, “Leaving Home”, “Homeward Bound”, “Home” and “Exodus.” As Powell points out, these titles “reveal Phillips’s well-known thematic interest in displacement and the ambiguities of home and belonging” (99). Moreover, these titles evoke, according to Saez, “a circular negotiation of belonging and identity” (19). This seemingly vicious circle suggests that Phillips is a perpetual wanderer, forever crossing the Atlantic, leaving home to go home, to eventually depart again. His childhood encounter with the Pakistani Ali who did have a place of
identity to turn to already raised Phillips’s awareness that he lacked such a place of identity himself. Rather, the titles suggest that his diasporic or scattered self demands another dimension, because a place of identity or a “home” does not apply: “Home is, rather, a fictitious place to which [Phillips] returns only to find [him]self in ‘exodus’” (Powell 99). Hall argues that identities “undergo constant transformation”; the chapter titles then construct that recurrent “transformation” of the self and construct a fluid identity, forever in motion (394).

The narrative strategies show his rejection of linearity and explain his determination to construct a transnational self. Phillips deploys a distinctively fragmented style, which is characterized by “splicing together stories from different times and spaces”, a form “he invented for himself” (Schatteman 50). He explains:

Something happens during the process where the linear structure seems to break down. It’s almost like I’ve crafted this wonderful ceramic fruit bowl, and I’m two pages from the end of the book just doing the final glazing, and I deliberately drop it, and it shatters, and then I have to start again. (Phillips, qtd. in Schatteman 50)

Phillips describes fragmentation as something that happens beyond his control; he simply has to “drop” the “ceramic bowl” and alter the linear structure. Even if he attempts to write a linear narrative, he ultimately fails in the end. This can be linked to his determination to construct a transnational identity; life in the diaspora, or his feelings of non-belonging, force him to construct a fluid identity. Even hybridity - or multiple identities – are rather unsatisfactory for Phillips because a hybrid identity is still made up of fixed, hyphenated identities. Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* will not do either because it still
contains the word “black”. The forces of the diaspora are ruthless; therefore Phillips rejects any form of fixedness.

**Otherness**

“Otherness” is also a central theme in *The Atlantic Sound*. Phillips is eager to demystify the notion of the “other” to do justice to his fluid self. This can be seen in historical stories such as Ocansey’s as well as in his descriptions of people he encounters who are engaged in “othering”. Clarke argues that cultural identities thrive on the notion of the “other”: “The notion of cultural identity becomes much stronger and firmer when we define our ‘selves’ in relation to a cultural Other” (511). Clarke points to the dangers of cultural identities when he argues that cultural difference is merely a disguised form of racism (518), for both cultural difference and racism are guilty of excluding others. Therefore, cultural identities in his view should not be thought of simply only in positive terms as cultural diversity. Like racism, cultural identities are, according to Clarke, by definition emotionally engaged (510). Sara Ahmed elaborates on this emotional engagement in her article “Collective Feelings”. She explains that “emotions play a crucial role in the surfacing of individual and collective bodies” and argues that emotions are not a private matter (Ahmed 25). Rather, she argues, these emotions are “about the intimate relationship between selves, objects and others” (Ahmed 28).

By constructing a transnational cultural identity, Phillips is also emotionally engaged. Whereas Phillips “[cedes] stage to his characters and [refrains] from authorial commentary” in the historical stories (Schatteman 46), he does not refrain from judgment
on his personal journey. While critics have critiqued *The Atlantic Sound* for its mode of “detachment, skepticism and excessive intellectual engagement” (Ropero 60), his criticism shows he is not as detached about the subject as may appear at first sight. In the interview with Alan Rice, Phillips claims he was able to focus more strongly on “the practical elements of the Middle Passage” in *The Atlantic Sound* because he had “already written about [the emotional aspects] in fiction” (Rice, “Manillas” 364). While this is undoubtedly the case for certain aspects of the narrative, it should not be overlooked that post-colonial travel writers are “subject-oriented [and] their need to travel and record their experiences often [stem] from a personal urge to solve some inner conflict” (Ropero 51). Phillips may have dealt with his emotions about the history of slavery and his identity struggle in his earlier work, yet his choice of the genre of the travel narrative refutes his claim that *The Atlantic Sound* is largely detached from emotions. He is, indeed, trying to “solve [the] inner conflict” of who he is and where he belongs. And that is, by definition, emotional.

The emotional engagement of “otherness” becomes clear in Phillip’s encounter with his black Liverpudlian guide Stephen. Stephen ironically blames the Jewish population for everything that goes wrong in the lives of the black population: “The Jews are our worst enemy … They were involved in the slave trade. They used us back then, and they’re still using us now” (*AS* 102). While British society excludes a black person like Stephen, Stephen in turn blames the Jews – a cultural “other” - for excluding him as a black person. Stephen projects onto the Jews precisely what has been projected onto him: an “other” to blame. Said explains the obliviousness of the exiled person as follows:

> It is in the drawing of lives around you and your compatriots that the least
attractive aspects of being in exile emerge: an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you. (141) Stephen mimics the Other who holds “a passionate hostility to outsiders” by being hostile himself. “Othering” is a circular process where there is always an Other to blame for one’s life being hard or difficult. Phillips seems to be particularly aware of the dangers of “emotive” cultural identities in his reaction to Stephen: “I told Stephen that I thought his analysis was at best simplistic, at worst offensive” (AS 102). Phillips’s reaction reflects an awareness of the dangers of “othering.” In fact, Phillips criticizes Stephen for his “dangerous” and “ironic” judgment of the Jews and concludes: “I grew increasingly worried that I had perhaps chosen the wrong person to act as my guide during my time in Liverpool” (AS 102). Here Phillips implies his awareness that “the notion of the Other,” or “us” versus “them,” is “at the heart of racism(s), hatred and exclusion” (Clarke 511).

Ahmed explains how this process of othering is brought about: “The ‘It hurts’ becomes, ‘You hurt me’, which might become, ‘You are hurtful’, or even ‘I hate you’. [These responses] temporarily [fix] an other” (30). Throughout the narrative, Phillips tries to dismantle the “temporary fixation of others,” precisely because he has grown up in a society which did “fix others,” or, as he puts it, “[defined itself] by excluding others” (AS 124). Also, his focus on “unfixing” others underlies the transnational “unfixed” identity he is constructing in The Atlantic Sound. Phillip’s guide in Ghana, Mansour, also eliminates others. Mansour excludes African Americans when he discusses the diasporics’ return: “‘Many talk about ‘family’, said Mansour, ‘without realizing that in Africa the family is not your colour, or your nation, but your tribe’” (AS 152). While the
transatlantic slave trade erroneously “‘unified’ [Africans] across their differences” (Hall 396). Mansour excludes the African Americans from being part of any tribe in Africa. As Phillips points out, “[a]s far as Mansour is concerned, all Africans overseas are simply a different tribe” (AS 152).

The Pan-Africanists\textsuperscript{10} Phillips encounters as well as the Panafest that is organized for the tourists also eliminate others in order to define themselves. Phillips’s encounter with the Ghanaian Pan-Africanist Dr. Ben Abdallah is a good example. When Phillips and Abdallah discuss the deteriorated slave forts, Abdallah argues that the renovation is the responsibility of the people in the diaspora: “‘It is your history. … For us, they do not mean the same thing as they do for you people’” (AS 149). Phillips’s critique hits the mark: “So much for Pan-Africanism, I thought. ‘You people?’” (AS 149). Although Pan-Africanism is founded on solidarity, Abdallah falls short as a Pan-Africanist because he differentiates between Africans and African Americans. His comments reflect a rather unwelcome homecoming for black people in the diaspora. Moreover, Abdallah denies that there is a shared history or responsibility regarding slavery when he argues that diasporic Africans – and not Ghanaians - are responsible for renovating the slave forts in Ghana: “These [slave forts] are holocaust sites for those in the diaspora, but none of you are doing anything about these places” (AS 149).

What Ahmed writes about global nomads and other collectives also applies to Pan-Africanists such as Abdallah and Pan-Africanism in general. Discussing the cost of

\textsuperscript{10} As Phillips explains, Pan-Africanism is a social movement that thrives on “Pan-Africanist ‘beliefs’ … that those of Africa and those of African origin ‘overseas’ somehow constituted a family – albeit a family with a broken history – … The idea was seized upon with a particular enthusiasm by those ‘overseas’ who, upon arriving in the Americas, were suddenly distressed to discover that they were black – or to put it more accurately, they were not white. There was engendered in their souls a romantic yearning to return ‘home’ to a family and a place where they could be free from the stigma of race” (AS 142).
engaging in a collective identity, she argues that “global nomads require ‘others’ to stay put in order to be differentiated from the locals, and to be ‘like each other’” (Ahmed 38). Similarly, Pan-Africanists define themselves against others or outsiders. When Phillips is visiting the “Thru the Door of No Return” ceremony at the Panafest in Ghana, he discovers that the Panafest, too, thrives on what Ahmed calls “the fixing of others,” in this case whites (38). Phillips is critical of this reverse racism: “Just in case the white people in the audience are not feeling alienated enough [the Jamaican poet who addresses the tourists] states “‘the fact’ that this is not a place for white people. The blonde woman flushes red and slowly leads her confused Ghanaian husband and even more confused son away from the scene” (AS 220, 221). A sense of exclusion is projected onto white people here. Evidently, Pan-Africanist collective identity requires the creation of others who do not belong. As Ward puts it, “identity in Ghana is predicated on exclusions; the white woman is made to feel uncomfortable, just as black people have been made to feel unwelcome in Britain” (207). Phillips, being black British, identifies with the exclusion of the white woman during Panafest and strongly criticizes it.

**The tourist in Phillips**

As a diasporic, Phillips is painfully aware and critical of “societies which define themselves by excluding others” (AS 124). Yet, Phillips is also guilty of “othering” himself. He convincingly constructs a transnational identity for himself, but partially does so by eliminating others. Phillips claims to be an outsider, a traveller, who shares nothing with the tourists who have “the painfully malnourished look of people who have discovered a cause that will save them from their own oblivion” (AS 169). Here, Phillips
clearly sets himself off against these tourists. Hall argues that identities are constructed through their “relation to the Other”:

Identities are constructed through, not outside difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the “positive” meaning of any term – and thus its “identity” – can be constructed (Derrida, 1981; Laclau, 1990; Butler 1993). … [I]dentities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render “outside,” abjected. (Hall, *Questions* 4-5) ¹¹

Although there is a difference between defining oneself in relation to the Other as opposed to defining oneself by excluding others, similarities can be found. Phillips similarly defines himself through “the relation to what [he] is not.” It is inherent in the concept of identity; he needs the “other” to make sense of his self. It can even be argued that he is criticizing part of himself by projecting it onto the Other.

If we take into account theories on tourism, the argument about Phillips’s criticism can be further developed. On the one hand, Phillips does differ from a “regular” tourist in the sense that he is “homeless”: “[U]nlike the vagabond, who has little choice but to reconcile himself to the state of homelessness, the tourist has a home” (Hall 30). Phillips is more like the vagabond, because “[w]herever the vagabond goes, he is a stranger; he can never be ‘the native’, the ‘settled one’, one with ‘roots in the soil’” (Hall 28). Hall’s description of the vagabond connects to Phillips and his sense of uprootedness. On the other hand, Phillips is also very much like a tourist even though he

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¹¹ Stuart Hall gives four metaphors – the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player - for the postmodern strategy of identity building, which is, as he points out, “moved by the horror of being bound and fixed” (“Questions” 26).
claims to be very different from “them”, the Pan-African tourists. Phillips sets himself up as a “traveler” rather than a “tourist”, a strategy in which “real” travelers generally denigrate tourists. Tourists are seen, according to Jonathan Culler, as “the lowest of the low” (1). Although the tourist is looking for the authentic (Culler 4), according to Daniel Boorstin, he “seldom likes the authentic (to him often unintelligible) product of a foreign culture” (qtd. in Culler 1). However, Culler argues, the tourist is actually precisely looking for the authentic (4). As Paul Fussell points out, the “ferocious denigration of tourists is in part an attempt to convince oneself that one is not a tourist. The desire to distinguish between tourists and real travelers is a part of tourism – integral to it rather than outside it or beyond it” (qtd. in Culler 3). According to this theory, Phillips only reveals himself to be part of the tourist industry by criticizing black diasporic tourists.

Upon his arrival in Ghana, Phillips acknowledges that he is from the West traveling in the Third World: “I know what will greet me the moment I leave the hotel. Third world travel imposes patterns upon one’s life” (AS 133). And indeed, he is the rich white Westerner when he “[orders] a Coca-Cola from one of the small army of waiters,” criticizing them as doing “little more” “than brush flies and mosquitoes from their faces” (AS 174). However, he seems to be rather unaware of the similarities between him and the “tourist,” which suggests that he is a travel writer who to some extent suffers from imperialist amnesia himself. Phillips decries the “Western influence,” but at times he fails to recognize that this influence “includes [his] own presence as a tourist” (Fletcher 424). Indeed, he is like the white man from the West who is rather dissatisfied with the Ghanaian guide he hires: “The clapped-out green Mercedes is not what I would call
‘roadworthy’, but I deem it best to say nothing about my fears, or the eighty dollars a day that the car is costing me” (AS 130).

Phillips specifically criticizes diasporic tourists for believing a return to the homeland is possible and expecting “the continent to solve whatever psychological problems they possess” (AS 215). He goes on to argue: “Do [the people of the diaspora] not understand? Africa cannot make anybody feel whole. Africa is not a psychiatrist” (AS 216). However, like the African-American tourists, Phillips is a dispossessed person who does not belong anywhere and who tries to make himself less fragmented by journeying to Ghana. Importantly, Phillips already knew return was not self-evident when he was growing up in Britain: “Some … [retreated] into a strangely essentialist black identity and they began to speak of Africa as ‘home’, but I knew that we were not going anywhere and that we would have to wrestle Britain to make their story fit our lives” (Phillips, “Colour” 18). Nonetheless, his feelings of up-rootedness and non-belonging inspire him to go to Ghana to explore the notions of home and identity. Merely “wrestling Britain” obviously did not suffice. His decision to travel to Ghana, therefore, already renders him somewhat guilty of what he accuses the tourists of, “idealizing Africa” (Schatteman 52). Although it is true that there is a difference between the sentimental African American who wears a “black Panafest [T-shirt]” and the critical writer Phillips, they both “return” to Ghana to find something there (AS 169). The incentive for coming to Ghana springs from a similar restlessness, even though they have different ways of dealing with it in Ghana.

Phillips also “others” his Ghanaian guide, Mansour. Phillips does not understand Mansour when he asks for Phillips’s help to go to the United States: “I want to live in
America. I just need somebody to write me a letter” (AS 137). Phillips bluntly expresses his agitation: “I was angry with him” (AS 138). Arguably, Phillips feels as if Mansour is using Phillips for his own benefit. Phillips fails to understand what life is like for Mansour, who argues that “[t]he only way up in Ghana is out” (AS 197). Anthropologist Edward Bruner argues that “local people [such as Mansour] may benefit from … contacts with tourists [such as Phillips] besides the financial remuneration. They may receive presents, and some have become pen pals or gone abroad with tourists” (291). Phillips feels offended by Mansour’s request for help to “go abroad” and fails to see Mansour’s “position of enunciation” (Hall, “Diaspora” 392). Hall points out that “we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always ‘in context’, positioned” (“Diaspora” 392). Initially, Phillips, however, refuses to recognize Mansour’s “positioning.”

In retrospect, however, Phillips reflects critically on himself: “Perhaps it was wrong of me to be angry with Mansour for dreaming of life beyond Ghana. Perhaps it was wrong that I should be in any way judging this man who had not had the opportunities that I had” (AS 139). Perhaps that is why he decides to dedicate an entire part of the chapter “Homeward Bound” to Mansour’s life story (AS 186-198). Even so, by deploying third-person narration, Phillips fails to “position” himself in Mansour’s place entirely. His feelings are only superficially conveyed in sentences like “[t]hese were particularly bleak and poverty-stricken times for Mansour” (AS 194). Towards the end, Phillips finally understands the source of his anger of Mansour: According to Phillips, Mansour unnecessarily “presents” himself as a “third-world’ victim” in Ghana, a “democratic country” with a “diversified economy” (AS 198). He argues Mansour should
make his life happen in Ghana. According to Mansour, however, Phillips is the rich westerner who is the gateway out of Ghana: Mansour in turn also fails to understand Phillips.

In the epilogue “Exodus”, Phillips visits religious African Americans who have returned “home” to Israel and see themselves as “the true children of Israel” (AS 269). He is highly skeptical of their version of Pan-Africanism when he first comes across their pamphlets: “The truth is, I have no idea of what to make of these Black Hebrews. … Their world is packaged and presented as though it were a celestial compound of heaven here on earth. … Are they serious? Have [they] truly found their ‘home’?” (AS 212, 213). But he is sufficiently interested to learn more about “these Black Hebrews”. His deliberately seeking out the Black Hebrews can be read as an attempt to understand the need to return to what these African Americans perceive to be their country of origin. Ironically, it turns out, that the Black Hebrews are, as they were in the United States, in a place “that does not recognize them”; the Israeli government gave them “what was originally an absorption camp for Moroccan immigrants” (AS 270, 271). There the Black Hebrews find themselves, once again, in what Said calls that “perilous territory of not-belonging” (140). Even though Phillips tries to understand why they returned to Israel, he fails to do so in the end. His response to the Black Hebrew minister’s proposal to go to the “Palace of Culture” is rather sarcastic: “What culture? The minister is frustrated. Do I not understand? Their group identity is forged in biblically inspired belief. And further reinforced by their shared diasporan history” (AS 275). Through sarcasm, Phillips, once again, sets himself off against “others” in order to define himself.
Phillips works towards a fluid or migrant identity in *The Atlantic Sound*. The voyage on a cargo ship to Europe as well as the title and chapter titles reflect his search for a fluid identity. Phillips’s diasporic life, the narrative strategies and his criticism of people who exclude others underscore Phillips’s embrace of a fluid identity. Phillips can identify with the historical figures who are as “caught up in the effects of slavery” as he is and who are, like Phillips, struggling with the fixedness of identities they encounter in their societies (Powell 100). Quaque’s and Waring’s sense of non-belonging and Judge Waring’s exile speak to Phillips’s own life. Waring’s story particularly shows that white people too can be affected by the legacies of slavery. The travels of the Ghanaian Ocansey, finally, counteract the imperialist amnesia that is present in Liverpool. Ocansey’s story also turns the genre’s conventions inside out; travel is not solely a Western prerogative.

Whereas Phillips solves his identity problem by constructing a fluid identity, he does so partly by “othering”, for example, Pan-Africanists. He clearly sets himself off against “people of the diaspora who dress the part, have their hair done, buy beads, and fill their spiritual ‘fuel tank’ in preparation for the return journey to ‘Babylon’” (*AS* 215). While defining oneself in relation to others is inherent in identity construction, Phillips takes it to the point of excluding others. This “othering” undermines his aim to include everyone in the history of slavery. Furthermore, theories on tourism suggest that travelers and tourists are quite similar indeed; both strive, in vain, for authenticity.

Daryl Pickney even argues this travelogue is the end of Phillips’s journey of self-discovery: “*The Atlantic Sound* is a long and bitter farewell to England. He’s off. He’s gone. He’s New World now” (qtd. in Saez 38). Though Phillips succeeds in constructing
a fluid identity, it goes too far to say that *The Atlantic Sound* is the “end” of his “journey of self-discovery”. Even though Phillips does “return” himself, he knows that he is not anywhere to stay, neither in Ghana nor in any other place. Phillips reconciles himself to the impossibility of return: “Remember. There were no round-trip tickets in your part of the ship. Exodus. It is futile to walk into the face of history” (*AS* 275). Symbolized by the Atlantic Ocean where he “will ultimately reside,” Phillips finds resolution in embracing a fluid identity (*AS* 210).
Eshun starts his travel narrative *Black Gold of the Sun* (2005) by mimicking Phillips. Like Phillips, Eshun is confronted with the same problematic question for those in the diaspora, posed, too, by a Ghanaian man on the plane: “’Where are you from?’ he said. ‘No, where are you really from?’” (*BGS* 1; see *AS* 124-125). It is a question unanswerable to those in the diaspora; in response, Eshun “gave him the usual line. ’My parents are from Ghana, but I was born in Britain’” (*BGS* 2). Eshun reflects on this rather unsatisfactory answer: “I thought of all the other ways I could have answered his question. Where are you from? I don’t know. That’s why I’m on this plane. That’s why I’m going home to Ghana. Because I have no home” (*BGS* 2). Like Phillips, Eshun is struggling with the concepts of home and identity. And like Phillips, who only felt at home among the homeless, Eshun likes the “in-between places …; the anonymous expanse of a council estate. Some place without an identity of its own where no one asks where you’re from” (*BGS* 30). Eshun’s and Phillips’s travel narratives counter imperialist amnesia by exposing the legacies of Europe’s colonial past as well as the transatlantic slave trade. The inability to answer the “where-are-you-from question” most aptly discloses the legacy of Europe’s slave trading history; black diasporics suffer a perennial feeling of non-belonging.

Even so, Eshun’s incentive to write this travel narrative springs from a far more primary urge than Phillips’s travel narrative; this is, among other things, reflected in Eshun’s straightforward writing style. For example, he explicitly mentions that he travels
to Ghana “to find out what [he] was made of” (*BGS* 3). In comparison, Phillips is less direct. An important difference is that Eshun’s parents are Ghanaians; he and his family are political exiles in Britain. For Phillips, on the other hand, the journey to Ghana is symbolic; he does not even know where exactly in Africa his ancestors are from. Eshun, was born in Britain but lived in Ghana for three years when he was a small boy. While Phillips is able to work up from Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, Eshun goes back to one of the first black intellectuals who articulated a black identity, W.E.B. Du Bois, to deal with the trauma of exile and its attendant identity problems. Especially Du Bois’s concept of double-consciousness speaks to Eshun. Du Bois unfolds this theory in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903):

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American World, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (9)

Du Bois experienced this peculiar sensation he named double-consciousness early in life. While playing a game of exchanging “gorgeous visiting-cards” as a child, a girl refused to accept his card (8). It is in the girl’s refusal that double-consciousness revealed itself to Du Bois: “Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from
the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil” (*Souls* 8).

In this chapter I will discuss *Black Gold of the Sun* within the framework of the concept of double-consciousness. Du Bois’s notion of double-consciousness speaks to Eshun on various levels; it has helped him understand his situation as a Black youngster in Britain yet also serves as his guide during his stay in Ghana. As Eshun puts it, “Du Bois’s words … had made sense for me growing up in Britain. They’d even given me a way to deal with the disorientation of returning to Ghana” (*BGS* 215). Du Bois’s notion of double-consciousness offers him insight into his own situation. Like Du Bois, Eshun is only able see himself through the eyes of others, albeit not only through the eyes of white people. The story of the African Jacobus Capitein is an example of a story that Eshun “needs” to look at himself. In this chapter I will discuss the story of Capitein, as well as other people and stories that help Eshun come to terms with himself. Eshun’s travel narrative is an account of his search for himself and his identity, as well as a way of working through his traumatic childhood. His sense of double-consciousness is an essential and inevitable part in his identity struggle; it is through his understanding of double-consciousness that he learns to cope with the contradictions that he finds in Ghana and, inevitably, within himself. While Phillips has solidly structured his narrative around the notion of a fluid identity, Eshun gradually develops this concept in the course of his stay in Ghana.
Double-consciousness and trauma theory

Eshun defines Du Bois’s concept of double-consciousness as “an awareness [of standing] inside and outside the white world at the same time” (BGS 214). Du Bois’s notion of double-consciousness has spoken to Eshun ever since he first came across the theory when he was eighteen. The specific moment in the schoolyard where Du Bois became aware of the “peculiar sensation” of being different in particular stays with Eshun: “Gradually understanding dawns. She is white, and [Du Bois] is the only black child at the school. For the first time in his life [Du Bois] has been judged by the colour of his skin. …[T]hat moment in the schoolyard was [Du Bois’s] coming of age. To be black in America meant always being a stranger – even in your home town” (BGS 214). Eshun identifies with Du Bois’s coming of age because he was also judged by the colour of his skin while growing up in Britain: “‘Wog’, ‘rubber lips’, ‘sambo’, ‘jungle bunny’ – the words drifted through the school like background radiation. … In school, on television, out in the street, they were completely commonplace” (BGS 70). Indeed, Eshun stands “inside and outside the white world at the same time” and being subjected to racism caused this duality.

One of the ways in which Eshun tries to deal with this duality is through music. Early in the narrative, he explains his connection to music: “Hearing ‘Planet Rock’ in London for the first time at thirteen was like finding an answer to the isolation of growing up in a white suburb. The force of the music, its conviction, its lyricism, spoke to me. It let me know I wasn’t alone” (BGS 13). Simon Frith argues that music does not only reflect people, rather “music produces [people]”. He argues music “creates and constructs an experience that we can only make sense of by taking on both a subjective and
collective identity” (qtd. in Hall, *Questions* 109). Arguably, this is what music represents to Eshun; while listening to music he no longer feels isolated because he has become part of a collective. Frith argues “music [is] the key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective” (qtd. in Hall, *Questions* 110). Eshun could make more sense of himself within that particular collective of music. Music became a way to cope with being black in a white world. Arguably, music is the antidote to Eshun’s sense of double-consciousness.

Hall discusses the significance of the white world in the life of black diasporics such as Eshun. Hall calls the white world the “European presence,” a world “about exclusion, imposition, and expropriation” (“Diaspora” 400). According to Hall, the European presence is very much a “constitutive element in [black diasporics’] own identities” (Hall, “Diaspora” 400). Hall finds evidence for this in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*: “The movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together by another self” (Fanon, qtd. in Hall 400). Here Fanon describes Du Bois’s experience of double-consciousness in his own words: “The glances of the other fixed me.” Eshun is also “fixed” by the white boys at his school who call him names and exclude him. He sees racism in Britain as a legacy of slavery; as Eshun puts it, “I feel the consequences of [slavery] every day in Britain” (*BGS* 141). His first name, Ekow, is also the source of name-calling during his childhood. As he explains,

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12 Hall uses the term “presence” to “rethink the positioning and repositioning of Caribbean cultural identities in relation to at least three ‘presences’, the African, European and New World presence.” “Presence” is a metaphor Hall borrows from Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor (“Diaspora” 398). Even though Eshun does not live in the the New World but in Britain, Hall’s argument about the “European presence” also applies to Eshun.
The Ghanaian pronunciation of [Ekow] is Eh-kor and that would be fine if I’d grown up [in Ghana] instead of London, where, to the ears of friends, Ehkor became Echo. Throughout my childhood I was pestered by schoolyard wags who thought it hilarious to call after me in descending volume: “Echo, echo, echo.” It was my first lesson in duality. *(BGS 3)*

Eshun describes Du Bois’s double-consciousness in spatial terms when he writes that “[w]ho you are is determined by *where* you are” *(BGS 3)*. Indeed, as Hall has pointed out, the white world is a “constitutive element of [the black diasporic’s] own identity” *(Hall, “Diaspora” 400)*. The white world has shaped Eshun into who he has become. The differences between him and the dominant white society go beyond skin colour; they creep into things such as his name and its pronunciation.

Another thing that complicates Eshun’s life is the fact that his father works for the Ghanaian High Commission. His father’s work as a diplomat is the reason for the family’s “toing and froing” between London and Ghana *(BGS 5)*. The coup of 1979, which “[everybody took] as a personal tragedy”, in particular has great effects on Eshun’s life: “As an employee of the previous regime, it was too dangerous for my father to return home. But staying meant the surrender of all his official ties with Ghana” *(BGS 77, 75)*. Eshun’s father has to leave his job and the family is forced to leave their home and their luxurious life in Queensbury. The move from Queensbury to Kingsbury, as Eshun puts it, was “only twenty minutes [on foot], but it seemed to me that we’d crossed a chasm” *(BGS 76)*. However, it was not only letting go of the luxurious lifestyle in Queensbury that causes Eshun to be “devoured by hurt” *(BGS 80)*, but also the fact that with the coup
the “temporary stopover” in Britain\textsuperscript{13} had turned into a permanent one (\textit{BGS 54}). Even though initially “the idea was to return home”, by now this was no longer possible (\textit{BGS 54}).

Eshun reveals how he, at the age of eleven, copes with the experience of the coup and the fact that by now their stay in England had become a political exile: “After I finished hanging up the washing I went up to my room. I sat against the wall, and bumped my head against it over and over. … The sensation wasn’t like pain. It was as if the wall were patting my head. Each time I hit it I felt as if everything might be all right” (\textit{BGS 79}). On other occasions, Eshun would “[contrive] small rebellions: … [O]n the days I was consigned to washing-up duty, I’d allow a wet plate to slip through my fingers and shatter on the floor tiles with a satisfying din. I was hollow” (\textit{BGS 79-80}). Eshun’s inability to cope with feelings caused by their political exile and the impossibility of return affect him greatly. Rooted primarily in feelings of non-belonging caused by racism in Britain, Eshun’s identity struggle is complicated and reinforced by the direct consequences of the coup of 1979, which makes a return to Ghana impossible: “Our dream of home had come to nothing” (\textit{BGS 80}). Eshun feels wounded by his life in the diaspora, but it is not until his late twenties that he links his childhood problems to the black diaspora. Then he says: “I needed to heal myself. Maybe by returning to Ghana I could become whole again” (\textit{BGS 5}). His response to racism and the coup is symptomatic of trauma. This becomes clear when Eshun talks about his adolescence: “During my late

\textsuperscript{13} Eshun and his family had undertaken this “stopover” in Britain in order “to sidestep the worst of the turmoil” in Ghana: “In 1974, General Ignatius Acheampong stared from the television screen announcing that he’d led the army in an overthrow of the government. My family made plans to leave the country. My father had secured another posting to the Ghana High Commission in London. The idea was that by spending his four-year term abroad we could sidestep the worst of the turmoil before returning to Ghana” (\textit{BGS 54}).
twenties I began to feel that I couldn’t live in London anymore. The bigotries of the city weighed down on me. … Lynch mobs chased me through my dreams. I fantasized about taking a machine gun to the streets” (BGS 4). Life in London had become unbearable for Eshun; his identity problems catch up with him in the form of violent nightmares.

These recurring nightmares can be read as a sign of a traumatic past. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event” (4-5). Caruth argues the traumatic event keeps resurfacing involuntarily, often, as is the case with Eshun, in the form of nightmares: “In my mid twenties, I began suffering from severe nightmares. I’d keep the radio turned on and blinds open to ward off the night, but at some point I’d falter and the dreams would come” (BGS 172). Eshun fights to stay awake; at one point the nightmares also force him to work overtime: “I turned up at the office on my days off. I came in over Christmas. I’d do anything so that I wouldn’t have to stay home by myself replaying the events of the previous night. The dreams persisted. They formed into a recognizable sequence of events” (BGS 173). Eshun consciously tries to represses his traumatic memory. Trauma scholars Onno van der Kolk and Bessel van der Hart distinguish between repression and dissociation. As they point out, “what is repressed is pushed downward, into the unconscious. The subject no longer has access to it” (qtd. in Bal ix). This is exactly what Eshun is trying to do by working obsessively. However, Eshun has repressed his traumatic memories to the extent where he does not repress the actual event as much as the nightmares. As he writes, “I could not remember my childhood. It was a surprisingly convincing lie. I even believed it myself” (BGS 124). Van der Kolk and van der Hart call
this the dissociation of memory: “[W]hen a subject does not remember a trauma, its
‘memory’ is contained in an alternate stream of consciousness, which may be
subconsciously or dominate consciousness, e.g. during traumatic reenactments” (Bal ix).
Eshun primarily tries to repress the nightmares. The nightmare, van der Kolk and van der
Hart would argue, is a reenactment of the traumatic event.

Another symptom of trauma is its unspeakability. Eshun remembers his childhood
but he “just couldn’t remember anything [he] wanted to talk about” (BGS 29). This is
exactly why his memories may be only partly traumatic; he remembers his childhood and
could form a coherent narrative about these memories but he chooses not to tell others or
himself the story about himself. Eshun calls this “the deadpanning of identity,” which can
also be read as a form of dissociation: “By shrugging off queries about where I’d grown
up or gone to school, I realized I could erase the past. Even the question that had dogged
me all through life became unimportant. ‘Where you from, man?’ ‘London.’ ‘Cool.’ ‘You
heard the new Public Enemy album?’” (BGS 125). Escaping the past, however, does not
help. His past comes back to haunt him, among other things, in the form of nightmares:
“Later I realized that by denying the past I risked making myself its prisoner. By then it
was too late, though. I was already trapped” (BGS 127). He actually needs to consciously
confront the past and talk about it with a “second person” (Bal x), so that he can form a
coherent narrative which can, to some extent, “heal him” (BGS 5). At the age of twenty,
his girlfriend Hannah offers to be his co-witness: “If I don’t understand, why don’t you
try talking to me? … I just want you to be yourself. Help me understand” (BGS 29). At
that time, however, Eshun is unable to talk about his past and feels as if he has no other
choice but to “turn away into solitude” (BGS 30).
Eshun continues to struggle with his traumatic memories: “Yet however much I denied [my memories], the memories of my childhood had not faded. They’d burrowed into my psyche. They’d come to control me” (*BGS* 127). According to trauma theory, healing can also take place through art: “If the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being ‘translated’ via art” (Kaplan 19). Talking about his past remains problematic but the process of writing *Black Gold of the Sun* is part of the process of working through his traumatic childhood. Going back to these memories helps him to reconstruct his own identity. The nightmares fade as soon as he finds out that he himself is the sniper who tries to kill him in his dreams: “The shame of my childhood was so severe I wanted to erase its memory. In my dreams I became the sniper, an emotionless killer determined to eradicate everything I secretly loathed about myself – my vulnerability, my pain, my childhood, I wanted to kill the past because it hurt too much” (*BGS* 175). This discovery is an important incentive for his journey to Ghana. Though the nightmares cease prior to his journey to Ghana, he needs to come to terms with himself or he will risk chasing himself for life during the day. He has no other choice but to come to terms with his “deadpanned identity,” by tracing it to its roots in the collective history of slavery (*BGS* 125)

**Ghana: A Place of Contradictions**

Like Phillips, Eshun includes historical figures in his travel narrative. Arguably, Eshun has more ground to cover in terms of his identity struggle than Phillips, which becomes evident through Eshun’s reliving of slave experiences. The visit to Elmina
Castle, in which Eshun imagines or even relives slavery, exemplifies this. As Eshun puts it, “I pictured what it was like for a slave to be herded into the courtyard after spending months in the dungeon” (BGS 108). According to Phillips, “it’s a very common way that writers work, to try to protect yourself from certain situations by imagining them and writing about them so that when – or, rather, if – it hits you in your life, then you have the coping mechanism to deal with it” (Rice, “Manillas” 365). Phillips argues that the experience of visiting the castle in *The Atlantic Sound* did not require him to imagine or revive the experiences of slaves again, because he had already developed a coping mechanism in his earlier novels on slavery. Eshun, who has yet to develop such a coping mechanism, relives the experiences of a slave in his narrative: “A Dutch ship is weighing anchor. You are brought into the light and made to strip naked. … [The Dutch captain] sticks his fingers in your mouth to check for loose teeth. You taste his sweat on your tongue. … You are branded on the shoulder. The smell of burnt skin is almost as hard to bear as the pain itself” (BGS 108-109). Reliving the slave experience helps Eshun to develop a coping mechanism for dealing with the slavery past; it is also here that he most strongly counters the silence of the slavery past. By imagining slave experiences, Eshun, like Morrison in her 1987 novel *Beloved*, fills the gaps in the official history of the slave trade, as there are hardly any accounts by enslaved Africans about their voyage to the New World. In her travel narrative *Lose Your Mother* (2007), which was initially to be included in this thesis, Saidiya Hartman similarly tries to imagine the experience of a female slave on a ship (136-153). Doing research on slavery in the United States, Hartman also points to the gap in history: “The account of commercial transactions was as near as I came to the enslaved” (17). Like Morrison and Hartman, Eshun is forced to
use the act of imagination to bridge this gap. By going to sights historically related to the slave trade and by imagining the lives of former slaves Eshun counters the imperialist amnesia over slavery.

Eshun also deploys the device of storytelling in his travel narrative, narrating the lives of people with whom he identifies. Yelin, who discusses the historical figures in Phillips’s earlier novels on slavery, argues that these historical figures function as “surrogate fathers or substitute selves, role models or roads not taken, cautionary images of the legacies of the Middle Passage or theorists or exemplars of eclectic configurations of race, nationality, and belonging” (64). This seems also the function of the well-known historical figures such as Richard Wright, Jacobus Capitein and, obviously, Du Bois, whom Eshun incorporates in Black Gold of the Sun. He anchors the historical figures within himself and these figures function very much as “substitute selves” (Yelin 64).

One of the first role models, a friend of Eshun’s grandfather, however, has not made it into the historical record. Eshun tells the story of the Ghanaian William Essuman-Gwira Sekyi quite early in the narrative (BGS 21-24). Eshun identifies with Sekyi who is also living between cultures after spending three years studying law in England, where, like Eshun, he was also subject to racism: “‘Where does a monkey get such nice clothes?’ … Do you eat people in your part of Africa, Mr Sackey?’” (BGS 22). However, where Eshun keeps struggling with his dual identity, back in Africa Sekyi found a way to combine both cultures; as Eshun puts it, “embracing Africa didn’t necessarily mean rejecting the west. At home Sekyi could be found with a cigar and a glass of wine listening to Wagner on his phonograph” (BGS 24). Even though he loathed England for its racism, he could take from the culture whatever he pleased because for
Sekyi “[i]dentify … was fluid not fixed” (*BGS* 24). In a review, Jessica Martell argues that, unlike Sekyi, Eshun “feels an anxiety about being from two places at once” (1). Eshun is unable to see identity as fluid or, as Martell puts it, Eshun “never seems comfortable weaving [both English and Ghanaian cultures] into a coherent, albeit hybrid, version of identity” (1).

Eshun also sees this kind of fluidity in his friend Kobby: “I can [Sekyi’s] shadow on men such as my grandfather and my cousin Kobby, both of whom understand Ghana to be a place of shifting possibilities” (*BGS* 24). When his cousin Kobby takes him out in Accra, Eshun is disappointed because Accra’s nightlife looks very much like nightlife in the West: “[T]he crowd greeted each track with a familiarity that said it belonged to each and every one of them. For a moment I couldn’t tell where I was” (*BGS* 13). The actual image of Accra is not at all like the “frozen” “mental picture” Eshun has of Ghana (*BGS* 16). Eshun is looking for the kind of authenticity tourists also look for: “One of the characteristics of modernity [that we find in tourism] is the belief that authenticity has been lost and exists only in the past, … or else in other regions or countries” (Culler 5). However, Eshun’s situation differs from that of a tourist because he obviously suffers from nostalgia for the time he lived in Ghana because his parents have kept the memory of Ghana alive while living in London. Kobby, however, does not at all feel “disturbed” by the westernization of Accra and seems to be “having a good time” (*BGS* 16, 17). While Kobby sees Ghana as “a place of shifting possibilities,” Eshun anxiously holds a fixed image of Ghana, perhaps because he is “[hunting] for a more stable sense of identity” (Martell 1). Eshun refuses to see Ghana as an ever-changing place. It is only later in the narrative that Eshun’s perspective begins to change.
The idea that Eshun uses other historical figures to make sense of his scattered self can be seen in the story he tells of Richard Wright’s life. Eshun intertwines Richard Wright’s life story with his own when he addresses racism and his nightmares. Wright’s inability to deal with “indignities of racism” led to a sense of up-rootedness, manifested in his moving a lot, that also informed Eshun’s decision of coming to Ghana. Eshun acknowledges that Wright’s life was more traumatic than his own life: When Wright was still a child, his family suddenly had to leave their Arkansas home when his uncle was lynched by white farmers who wanted to have his land. Eshun also questions the circumstances of Wright’s death and argues that racism “led to [his] spiritual exhaustion”: “[Had racism] ensnared him with the finality it did his Uncle Hoskins? … Stripped of hope after returning from Ghana, did his heart give out having endured all it could bear?” (BGS 175). Martell convincingly argues that Eshun “creates an imaginary monologue for [historical figures such as Wright] in an effort to invent a parallel quest, as though he does not want to be alone on his” (1). I would argue this is especially the case with Wright. Eshun bends the cause of Wright’s death to the one thing that has nearly “killed” him, Eshun, in Britain: racism.

Jacobus Capitein is another important historical figure in whom Eshun sees a substitute self. Eshun uses the story of Jacobus Capitein (c. 1717-1747) to gain another, more positive, way of looking at home and identity. Eshun comes across Capitein’s story when he is in Ghana. Capitein was kidnapped and enslaved at the age of eight and eventually ended up with the Dutch trader Jacobus van Goch, who took him to the Netherlands and treated him like an adopted son. Capitein lived in the Netherlands for fifteen years, which allowed Capitein to integrate well into Dutch society and culture. He
internalized the Dutch racial ideology and even wrote a dissertation in defense of slavery at the University of Leiden. The fifteen years Capitein spent in the Netherlands make Capitein different from a person like Sekyi, who only lived in Britain for three years. Capitein’s experiences are in some ways closer to Eshun’s diasporic life in-between cultures. Identifying with Capitein, he believes they share a sense of alienation and double-consciousness. Eshun uses Capitein’s story to make sense of his own shattered self.

Capitein returns to Ghana to work as a chaplain for the Dutch West India Company (WIC), being appointed by the Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam to do missionary work in Ghana after his dissertation had received public acclaim. Back in Ghana, however, he is at once too “white” for the local Africans and too “black” for the European traders on the coast: obviously he does not fit in. Eshun emphasizes the racism that he imagines Capitein must have endured in Ghana. Capitein is called a “‘filthy nigger’” by European traders at a dinner party. When Capitein leaves the table, Eshun narrates they “ostracized” him and “claimed he couldn’t take a joke” (*BGS* 115). Eshun continuously points to Capitein’s despair. In another letter to the church authorities in Netherlands, Capitein wrote that like his predecessors, he “[suffers] the hatred, contempt, ridicule and persecution of the depraved Christians here” (*BGS* 116). Eshun also argues that he may have committed suicide\(^\text{14}\): “At the castle there was no tombstone to mark his grave. Such indifference suggests that Capitein probably committed suicide” (*BGS* 117).

In her recent study of Capitein’s letters, Christine Levecq presents Capitein more positively as a strong cosmopolitan: “Nowhere in his autobiography does he gesture

\(^{14}\) Other biographers, such as the journalist Henri van der Zee, have also suggested this.
toward his race as the source of anything other than an opportunity to develop his career [in the Netherlands]” (Levecq 4). Eshun, however, emphasizes the racism or “the taunts of ‘blackamoor’” that Capitein had to endure, arguably because that allows him to indentify with Capitein: “The reaction to him in Holland must have been a disappointment. In his notes, Capitein writes that mothers hurried their children across the street as he approached. Strangers pointed. Young men deliberately jostled him as they passed” (BGS 111). Eshun’s insecurity about himself compels him to anchor Capitein within himself. He projects the racism he himself encountered onto Capitein. As Martell puts it, he sees “his own image in everyone that he reads” (2). Du Bois’s double-consciousness has become an integral part of himself; just as he was forced to look at himself through the eyes of the white society in Britain, he now extends this by looking at himself through the eyes of Jacobus Capitein.

This type of double-consciousness is also exemplified in Eshun’s pre-occupation with the original name of Capitein and Capitein’s childhood. Whereas other sources do not go into much detail about Capitein’s original name, Eshun is pre-occupied with it: “Capitein claimed he was unable to remember his real name or the village where he was born. Whether this is true or an act of willed forgetting is impossible to say” (BGS 110, 111). One page later, Eshun comes back to Capitein’s childhood: “Capitein continued to insist he had no memory of his early childhood” (BGS 112). Eshun finds it hard to believe that Capitein could not remember his childhood and his original name. He keeps wondering why Capitein “rejected his African past” (BGS 111-112); Eshun again projects the rejection of his own childhood onto Capitein. Eshun used to lie about his own childhood because he did not want to be reminded of racism and feelings of non-
belonging. Eshun wonders if Capitein has also “deadpanned” his African identity by claiming that he could not remember his childhood. Perhaps, however, matters were more complicated for Capitein than for Eshun.\textsuperscript{15}

Eshun actually imagines the questions Capitein would have asked himself: “As Holland slid out of sight, did Capitein imagine himself leaving home or returning to it? What did Africa hold for him? And what … would he discover about himself?” (BGS 113). These are exactly the questions Eshun is struggling with himself; again Eshun is creating an imaginary monologue. The virtual absence of his inner feelings in Capitein’s letters to the Netherlands leaves space for Eshun to imagine them and project his own. According to Martell, Eshun’s imaginings of the inner lives of historical figures “feels staged” (2). Martell argues that Eshun “has not considered how much he may be projecting his own concerns onto the lives of others” (2). The connection with Wright’s story may indeed be more forced than Capitein’s story. Overall I would argue, however, that Eshun has no other choice but to do so. Just as he sees himself through the eyes of others, he also can only see these others through the lens of his own inner conflict.

Levecq argues that Capitein was a cosmopolitan who could deal very well with his dual identity. Where Eshun continues to struggle, Capitein did seem capable of combining the two cultures. According to Levecq, Capitein’s letters reveal a “determination to understand his new social and cultural context, as well as, ultimately, a cosmopolitan flexibility completely at odds with the intellectual stiffness evinced in the

\textsuperscript{15} It is important to point out that the “willed forgetting” is not something that comes solely from within oneself. This is especially true in the case of slavery. As Hartman argues, “[s]lavery made your mother a myth, banished your father’s name, and exiled your siblings to the far corners of the earth. The slave was an orphan, according to Frederick Douglass, even when he knew his kin” (103). This would have been even stronger in the case of Capitein, who was only eight years old when he was brutally kidnapped and sold as a slave, away from his family and home village.
Leiden lecture” (146). Pointing to one of the letters in which Capitein acknowledges that his work and his plans in Ghana “are often subject to change” (159), Levecq argues that these words “[display] a pliability and flexibility that sound new” (159). In another letter, Capitein asks for advice on marriage between white Christian men and non-Christian African women, which, according to Levecq, captures Capitein’s “desire to try to really understand the perspective of others and an ability to think in terms of multicultural, multiracial communities” (160, 146). In Levecq’s account, Capitein is thus more like Sekyi and Kobby than Eshun initially desires to see. Like Sekyi and Kobby, Capitein “embraces his flexible identity” (Levecq 149). After reading and narrating the story of Capitein, Eshun slowly begins to accept the inevitability of change: Between leaving and coming back, you change. And because you don’t stay the same, neither does the place to which you return” (BGS 114). Where Eshun struggled with Sekyi’s fluid identity as well as the westernization of Ghana, he now slowly learns to deal with ever changing identities and places and becomes less fixed.

Eshun hopes to find answers in Ghana, but he is only left with more questions when he finds out that his ancestor was a slave trader: Joseph de Graft, “bartered the slaves he’d stored in the dungeons of Elmina castle, who were [then] taken to the Dutch plantations of the East Indies and worked until their death” (BGS 133). Capitein’s story - which is strategically placed right before this discovery - does not only help make sense of his identity conflict up until this discovery, but Capitein also becomes a way of dealing with his ancestor’s slavetrading history: Like Quaque in Phillips’s narrative, Capitein lived in Ghana at the time of the transatlantic slave trade. Eshun wonders if Capitein’s conscience didn’t haunt him back in Ghana: In Africa, Capitein “saw the reality of the
trade for the first time. … From his rooms, he’d have watched as they were made to strip
naked in the courtyard and marched through the Door of No Return. At what point did he
start to question his former certainties?” (*BGS* 117). At one point, Capitein, having run up
a debt, also became a slavetrader. As Eshun puts it, “[t]o escape his losses, [Capitein]
turned to the one truly profitable source of commerce on the Gold Coast. He began to buy
and sell slaves” (*BGS* 116). In other words, the transatlantic slave trade was an African
business as well as a European one and, moreover, it was a commonplace business. This
relates to Eshun’s ancestor: “The slave business would have offered no struggle of
conscience to [de Graft]. How could it when it was so commonplace?” (*BGS* 135).
Capitein’s story helps Eshun to deal with his family’s moral complicity, with which he is
confronted in Ghana: “What’s it like to discover your ancestor was a slave trader?
…[Y]ou tell yourself the easy things: it was a long time ago; it has no bearing on my life.
But these bring no comfort. The disgust is overpowering. … You wonder … whether the
responsibility for his actions runs through your blood. … You are full of shame” (*BGS*
134). The journey to Ghana does not release him of his burdens; it only complicates and
worsens them.

More importantly, the discovery about his ancestor brings back the sense of
double-consciousness that he felt in Britain: “I recognized the sensation. It was the same
one I’d had … when at seventeen a taxi drove past me with its light on for the first time;
and on the first occasion, at the age of twenty, a policeman stopped me in the street and
searched my pockets. Each time it seemed as if I’d stepped beyond a veil of idealism to
find the realpolitik of a cold world” (*BGS* 139). Eshun echoes Du Bois’s term “veil” to
describe not so much the way in which he was separated from the white world as a
separation of his own idealism from the reality of the world. Similarly, Eshun echoes the word “sensation” to describe the “peculiar sensation” that is double-consciousness in Britain. He is again confronted with a double-consciousness in Ghana, but now in the sense of the idea that he holds of the past and its reality: He is now both a victim and, through his family history complicit in the same crime. Du Bois’s words resonate here, too: “One ever feels his twoness …; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (8). It is the greatest contradiction that Eshun encounters in Ghana. All his life, he thought slavery was a story of “white brutality and African victimhood” (BGS 140). He is indeed a victim of racism in Britain and thus indirectly of slavery. However, the discovery of his great-grandfather’s involvement in the slave trade places him in a paradoxical position: “I spent my life paying the cost of Joseph’s profits. Slavery is impossible to forget if you are born in Britain. … I feel the consequences of Joseph’s actions every day in Britain. It was partly because of the pervasiveness of racism there that I’d come to Ghana – only to find my ancestor had collaborated in establishing its tenets” (141).

It is remarkable that Eshun had to travel all the way to Ghana to find out his ancestor was a slave trader. The silence in Ghana about slavery is paralleled by a similar silence within his family. According to Hartman, there is a lot of shame in Ghana about slave origins: “To revere your forbears was one thing; to speak openly of slave descent was a different matter altogether. … Slavery was the kind of matter spoken of only in whispers or behind closed doors” (71, 203). Even though the taboo on revealing someone’s origins primarily was to protect those of slave descent rather than the slaveholders, the taboo in Ghana about the subject of slavery did – and does - exist. This
in itself accounts for the fact that Eshun’s family never revealed their ancestor’s trading history. It is unlikely that Eshun’s family did not even know about Joseph’s slave trading; Hartman points out that it was especially the elite classes in the south (to which Eshun’s family belonged) who “exulted in the wealth of slave-trading ancestors, if only because it was less humiliating to have been a merchant than to have been a slave” (72). Moving to Britain, however, may have been an additional reason the family kept quiet about the subject; native-born British would have linked them with the history of enslavement. Arguably, his family felt it was less shameful in Britain to be thought of as slave descendant than as descendant of African slave traders. This is remarkable considering Britain’s own involvement in the slave trade.

**Gaining insight**

Although the discovery about his ancestor’s involvement in the slave trade is the greatest contradiction Eshun stumbles upon, it is not the only one. Throughout his journey, Eshun is confronted with all kinds of contradictions. He hopes to come to a place free of racism, but finds out that he is also subject to discrimination in Ghana. Upon arrival in Accra, he is repeatedly called “burenyi” on the street, which ironically means “white man” (*BGS* 27-28). This is a painful experience for Eshun who has just left Britain because he felt too much of a “black man” there. In Ghana, he expected to be “just another face in the crowd” rather than “the product of someone else’s prejudice” (*BGS* 5). He does not realize that in Ghana he is also the product of someone else’s prejudice. There he is seen as a wealthy westerner; he is white by class. As in Britain, in Ghana he is again forced to see himself through the eyes of someone else. Eshun points to the
ironies of this when he tells the story recorded by the Ghanaian historian C.C. Reindorff, about a meeting between King Frempung of the Akim people and a Danish merchant in 1742: “Until then [Frempung] had never seen a white man. … [T]he Dane explained that he was no animal. … [Frempung] ran a hand across the merchant’s chest and prodded a finger in his belly. … ‘You really are human,’ said the king. ‘But as white as the devil’” (BGS 105). The meeting between Frempung and the Dane represents race from the African perspective. As Eshun puts it, “the sight of Europeans was still enough to cause consternation among local people” (BGS 105).

Later in the narrative, Eshun dismantles the notion of race: “[R]ace itself is no more than myth. Beneath skin colour there is no intrinsic difference between the peoples of Africa or Asia or Europe. Far from being everything, ‘race’ is nothing. It is a fiction. … Yet its shadow does not fade” (BGS 203). Its shadow is not only cast on Eshun in Britain, even in Ghana he is perceived as different because he belongs to another class. The example of the Danish merchant exemplifies that the Africans also perceived white people as being profoundly different (BGS 105). This story, as well as Eshun’s being called burenyi, represents the African perspective on racial difference and class. Eshun uses these examples to reinforce the point he is making towards the end of the narrative, namely that race is “[a] lie contradicted by a drop of blood beneath a lens of a microscope” (BGS 203).

The contradictions are also present in the ironic conversation Eshun has with Ghanaian guides, who criticize black American tourists for “[acting] so high and proud as if we [the guides] were their servants and they were the real Africans” (BGS 40). Despite this criticism, however, they “still guide them. Maybe we make friends with them. Maybe
we get a visa to USA from them” (*BGS* 41). These words echo the situation between Phillips and his guide Mansour, as well as Phillips’s criticism of African Americans in *The Atlantic Sound*. Rice argues that “[s]uch cross-cultural misunderstanding clouds relations between Africans in the diaspora” (“Memorials” 3). According to Rice, tourism “brings wealth to hard-pressed economies, but at a significant cost in terms of cross-cultural empathy and understanding” (“Memorials” 3). There are different issues at stake between the African Americans and the Ghanaians. Eshun describes this situation: “Both groups saw in each other a reflection of their own dreams. Africa and America converged in the car park, each searching the other’s eyes for a glimpse of jungle or glittering skyscraper” (*BGS* 41).

All these contradictions, but the discovery about his ancestor in particular, complicate Eshun’s struggle with identity: “[I]f I was Joseph’s descendant did that make me tainted by his actions?” (*BGS* 147). The discovery about his ancestor, even though complicated, is also a turning point in the narrative. Eshun begins to argue the case for fluid or multiple identities: He learns that “there is no singularity to truth. … Cape Coast itself, …is hardly a town of singular truths. … Even in Africa everyone comes from somewhere else” (*BGS* 146, 148). In the beginning of the narrative, Eshun has difficulty with the instability and multiplicity of identities. This new insight comes to him after the discovery about his ancestor. At that particular point, Eshun is forced to rethink his former notions. He realizes that his ancestor was not just a slave trader, but also many other things: “He was a slave trader who sold Africans. He was a soldier who defended his town. A landowner and a patrician. None of these descriptions cancels the others out. They simply make for a disorderly whole” (*BGS* 146).
Observing that “full identity is fiction,” Chambers speaks of the migrant self, in which a sense of identity is not fixed in one place, one language or one tradition (1). Chambers’ notion of migrant identity may help us resolve the vexed issue of Eshun’s moral complicity in his ancestor’s actions. As Chambers argues, viewing oneself as a migrant “[allows] all definitions of self and the other” to exist and to enables one to “disarm the genealogical rhetoric of blood” (5). In this sense, Eshun can detach himself from his ancestor: By taking on a fluid identity, he can liberate himself from his ancestor’s slave trading history.16 Paradoxically, he gains this insight when he partially loses his vision because of a lump under his right eyelid: “Blindness showed me what my mind refused to accept” (BGS 147). Eshun perceives this as physically letting go of ambiguity: “My body was staging a protest at the dualities I’d found in Ghana. Enough of ambiguity, it said. Give it to me straight” (BGS 147). While double-consciousness has helped him throughout his life, it is not until he physically lets go of this twoness that he gains another perspective. At the same time he seems to hold on to Du Bois’s concept of double-consciousness. Du Bois himself called double-consciousness “a gift” and Eshun also seems to transform double-consciousness into a more positive double vision (“Souls” 9): “[W]e see life through two eyes. We see possibility as well as prejudice. We see the miscegenation of things – black crossing over with white; wrong ameliorated by right” (BGS 148).

16 It should be taken into account that Eshun also feels that he has already “spent [his] life paying the cost of Joseph’s profits” (BGS 147). In that sense, suffering racism in Britain has already redeemed him of his ancestor’s deeds. This fact does not, however, annul his sense of moral complicity.
Towards the end of the travel narrative, then, Eshun accepts the fluidity of identity. He learns to accept that, like himself, “Ghana was made up of multiple histories” (*BGS* 198). A little further Eshun resumes this train of thought: “All I could do … was accept that at different times I’d be naive, excited, angry or behave like an idiot. None of those elements defined who I was any more than a self-important bank manager or Joseph de Graft represented the whole of Ghana” (*BGS* 190, 198). At first sight, this is a hopeful resolution as it signals a constructive transformation. The move towards a more flexible sense of place and identity is a more constructive way of looking at one’s past and one’s life. By allowing himself to be more than one thing, Eshun is giving himself more space. Embracing a fluid identity can help Eshun to release him from his sense of up-rootedness and it can help him deal with the bigotries in London.

However, this apparently hopeful resolution is complicated by other resolutions Eshun equally resigns himself to. Midway in the narrative, Eshun concludes that “[f]inding a sense of belonging might involve no greater mystery than allowing yourself to accept a place … . Being Ghanaian … could also be an act of voluntarism. If you made the effort you could even discover a home among strangers” (*BGS* 153). This is a rather simplified way of looking at home and belonging for someone as caught up in it as Eshun. I would argue that a place also has to accept you, which is neither the case in Ghana where he is seen as *burenyi*, nor in Britain where he is still subject to racism. This becomes evident in the despair of the East-European immigrant Anzia Yezierska, who migrated to New York in the early twentieth century. In one of her short stories, she despondently cries out: “I want America to want me!” (2071). Whereas Yezierska is
eager to accept America, America is less eager to accept her. Similarly, whereas Eshun can allow himself to accept Ghana, the Ghanese do not accept him.

The contradictions Eshun finds in Ghana force him to resign himself to other resolutions than simply allowing himself to accept Ghana. Towards the end of the travel narrative, Eshun tells the historical story of the Caribs. On the Carribean island of Grenada, the Caribs feared enslavement by the French forces and “instead of chains the Caribs chose to die free” and jumped off the cliff (BGS 210). This is reminiscent of Beloved, where Sethe’s choice to kill her children in order to prevent them from being enslaved is equally powerful. Both the Caribs and Sethe are taking ownership of their own or their children’s lives. This can be read as claiming agency. This is also how Eshun interprets the story of the Caribs when he argues that this is “a story of victory” (210). Eshun’s idea of victory can be understood in terms of taking ownership of oneself: “We [black people] sang among the rocks. We chose a leap into freedom rather than a life in chains” (BGS 210).

At the same time, this story complicates the notion of a fluid identity that Eshun embraces. The story of the Caribs is not only a powerful story; it is, like Beloved, equally a story of self-destruction. One can also argue that the perpetrators force the enslaved to slit their children’s throats, to jump off the cliff. Despite showing signs of unyielding strength through ownership, the enslaved choose to destroy themselves, because the alternative is unacceptable. Eshun sees himself in the story of the Caribs, who ensured “their memory lived on beyond them” (BGS 210). Eshun argues that “we faced the denial of our humanity every day in the west. Our answer was the inalienable fact of our aliveness. … We chose a leap into freedom rather than a life in chains” (BGS 210). Life
in Britain forces him paradoxically to see hope in the Caribs’ story of victory through self-destruction. The fact that he can compare his own situation with that of the Caribs in itself complicates Eshun’s resolution.

Eshun’s retelling of Du Bois’s short story “The Comet” exemplifies an ambiguity that remains characteristic of Eshun’s narrative (BGS 222, 223). “The Comet” tells an apocalyptic story that takes place in the city of New York. A black man, Jim Davis, and a rich white girl are the city’s only survivors after a comet hits the city. Both become dependent upon one another and move closer together in the course of the story. The white girl comes to realize Davis’s humanity and their equality: “[H]ow foolish our human distinctions seem – now” (Du Bois, “Comet” 8). Davis “was not human yesterday”, but “death” as the “leveler” and “reveler” makes him human (Du Bois, “Comet” 8-9). The disaster forces the white woman to see in Davis “her Brother Humanity incarnate”: “They saw each other face to face – eye to eye. … It was a thought divine, splendid” (Du Bois, “Comet” 9). As a result, both are re-united with their loved ones. Even though the white woman will undoubtedly look different at black people from now on, on a larger scale nothing really changes. When people learn that only two people survived in New York city, they immediately start talking badly of Jim: “‘A nigger? Where is he? Let’s lynch the damned –’” (Du Bois, “Comet” 11). Arguably, this is a strategy to set the white girl’s newly gained insight off against the general discrimination of black people. Eshun summarizes the story as follows: “To survive, [the characters] have to see through the other’s eyes” (BGS 222). The characters look at themselves from the perspective of the Other, as a hopeful resolution. At the same time, however, the story is also a science fiction story; in this sense it represents an escape from reality or even a utopia. Finding
solace in a science fiction story such as “The Comet” may signal hope and possibility, but it signals escaping reality too. Paradoxically, Eshun holds on to a destructive, yet real story like that of the Caribs as well as a hopeful story such as “the Comet”. The contradiction of holding on to a destructive reality as well as a hopeful myth undermines the idea of a hopeful resolution to his identity conflict.

Writing a travel narrative is a constructive and helpful way for Eshun to come to terms with his traumatic childhood. By going on the journey to Ghana, he is coming to terms with the sniper of his dreams. Writing a travel narrative has allowed him to incorporate various genres in *Black Gold of the Sun*, particularly some aspects of the memoir. Eshun repeatedly returns to Du Bois’s theory of double-consciousness, which continues to help him through his life. He incorporates the stories of Richard Wright and Jacobus Capitein because he recognizes himself in these stories. Capitein in particular links Eshun to his ancestor’s slave trading history. The discovery about his ancestor’s history signals a turning point in the narrative. From here Eshun’s view of identity is transformed from a fixed sense of self towards a more fluid sense of identity. Eshun’s ability to embrace a more fluid sense of self is, at first sight, a hopeful resolution. A fluid identity to some extent undoes family ties, which helps him to cope with his ancestor’s slave trading past. Signs of a hopeful and constructive resolution to his identity conflict are undermined, however, by Eshun’s identification with the self-destructive history of the Caribs as well as with a mythical story such as Du Bois’s “The Comet”. Eshun wants to free himself of his past by coming to Ghana. In Ghana, he realizes that this is not
possible: “I was … afraid that going back would mean reliving the past in all its detail. I wanted to be free. Yet perhaps freedom meant acknowledging what had happened, then understanding it didn’t have to determine my life” (BGS 226). In Ghana, Eshun learns about himself and he faces himself; in embracing a fluid identity he is able to some extent to come to terms with the past and confront the present.
Conclusions

_The Atlantic Sound_ and _Black Gold of the Sun_ revive and reimagine the forgotten history of slavery. Soshana Felman has argued that “bearing literary witness” can create “a new form of _narrative as testimony_ not merely to record, but to rethink and, in the acts of its rethinking, in effect _transform history_” (95; italics in original). Indeed, Phillips’s and Eshun’s narratives are examples of literary works in which the history of slavery is transformed. Phillips in particular includes the voices of those who have not made it into the historical record. He “transforms history” while integrating that particular history into the present at the same time. While Eshun also tries to transform history, he also “rethinks” history, and in the process discovers the fluidity of identity. The silence of the slavery past as well as Phillips’s and Eshun’s diasporic identities require this type of rethinking and transformation. As a result, both writers counter the idea of a fixed past, which nonetheless holds power over the present.

The authors illuminate the presence and power of the slavery past in their lives by continuously shifting between the slavery past and the present. _The Atlantic Sound_ and _Black Gold of the Sun_ construct a collective history and memory in relation to the writers’ own lives. According to Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory is “self-centered and above all interested in similarity and identity. It is essentially non-transcultural” (qtd. in Erll 10). _Black Gold of the Sun_ and _The Atlantic Sound_, however, in fact imagine a black Atlantic, transcultural collectivity; they reconstruct a collective memory – from an individual incentive - that is very much transnational. Travel narratives like these show
that individual and collective histories and identities, like memories, can “travel” alongside one another (Erll 12).

Phillips and Eshun are postcolonial agents who counter the forgotten history and memory of slavery. At the same time they remain part of the western world, a world which allows them to undertake this journey and write this travel narrative. This is similar for Hartman, who repeatedly uses the term “stateless” in her travel narrative to refer to her identity. Harvey Neptune argues that “[t]he very movement endorsed in Lose Your Mother … rests upon the author’s access to the sanctions of a powerful state” (6). Hartman may feel stateless but she is using the powers of the “state” to undertake her journey.

Travel narratives are a helpful way for the writers to deal with their black diasporic identity. The genre draws on many other genres, allowing the author to tackle their identity problems from various corners. Phillips and Eshun strategically and effectively use the travel narrative, traditionally an instrument of imperialism, as the means to counter imperialist amnesia by focusing on and illuminating the history of colonization and enslavement of Africans. The Atlantic Sound constructs a transnational identity out of the collective memory and history of slavery. Countering imperialist amnesia by carefully tracing the business of the transatlantic slave trade and its international connections, The Atlantic Sound constructs a transnational identity out of the collective memory and history of slavery (423).

The Atlantic Sound and Black Gold of the Sun are not only counter travel narratives but also post-slavery narratives: They discuss not so much the slave experience as the haunting presence of slavery in their lives today. Phillips’s and Eshun’s diasporic
identities have one common past: the history of slavery. The dispersal of Africans across the Atlantic world as a result of the slave trade has caused black diasporics such as Phillips and Eshun to feel rootless forever. In The Atlantic Sound and Black Gold of the Sun, the authors deal with the history of slavery and the impact it still has on their lives and identities.

Fiction is a particularly helpful way to deal with identity issues and the history of colonization and enslavement. According to Morrison, in slave narratives written by Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and others, there was “no mention” of their “interior life” (“Site” 110). Arguing that “memories and recollections” alone are not enough because they do not give total “access” to the interior lives of slaves, she concludes: “Only the act of imagination can help me” (Morrison, “Site” 111). Imagination is also the means by which Phillips and Eshun try to recover the history of slavery in general. There is so much silence and forgetfulness in terms of the history of slavery that “the act of imagination” has become the principal tool to “fill in the blanks” in history (Morrison, “Site” 113). Eshun counters imperialist amnesia by reliving the slave experience. Here Eshun is forced to rely heavily on his imagination in order to “fill in the blanks” of the slavery past.

What is altogether moving in both narratives is the fact that both writers are forced to “fill in the blanks” of the slave trade and relate it to their own lives. Their diasporic identity problems leave them with hardly any other choice than to undertake this journey. Simone Weil has argued that “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (qtd. in Hirsch and Miller 3). Phillips and Eshun show the need for some – if not all - human souls to move from “roots” to the
more modern “routes” (Hall, “Questions” 4). These “routes,” as Hirsch and Miller put it, “emphasize the ways in which every form of rootedness and dwelling already presupposes travel [and] cultural exchange” (3). Eshun and Phillips are precisely searching for ways to let go of their “roots” and move on to embrace the “routes” of their past as well as their present; they accept the fluidity of identity. For both Phillips and Eshun there is no straightforward solution, but they have discovered ways to come to terms with the history of slavery and their life in the diaspora. Courageously transforming the painful and collective past of slavery, as well as artfully shaping conditions in which a fluid identity comes into being are, as Hirsch and Miller point out, exactly what diasporic writing is: It is “about creating conditions that make dwelling possible” (13).


