

Navigating *Terragraphica*: An Exploration of the Locations of Identity
Construction in the Transatlantic Fiction of Ama Ata Aidoo, Paule
Marshall and Caryl Phillips.

By

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Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree of
Master of Arts
At
Stellenbosch University

Department of English
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences



Supervisor: Dr. Mathilda Slabbert

December 2012

The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

Declaration

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Abstract

Seeking to navigate and explore diasporic identity, as reflected in and by transatlantic narrative spaces, this thesis looks to three very different novels birthed out of the Atlantic context (at different points of the Atlantic triangle and at different moments in history): *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint* (1977) by Ama Ata Aidoo, *The Chosen Place*, *The Timeless People* (1969) by Paule Marshall and *Crossing the River* (1993) by Caryl Phillips. Recognising the weight of *location* – cultural, geographic, temporal – on the literary construction of transatlantic identity, this thesis traces the way in which Aidoo, Marshall and Phillips use fictional texts as tools for grappling with ideas of home and belonging in a world of displacement, fracture and (ex)change.

Uncovering the impact of roots, as well as routes (*rupta via*) on the realisation of identity for the diasporic subject, this study reveals and wrestles with various narrative portrayals of the diasporic condition (a profoundly *human* condition). *Our Sister Killjoy* presents identity as inherently imbricated with nationalism and pan-Africanism, whereas *The Chosen Place* presents identity as tidalectic, caught in the interstices between western and African subjectivities. In *Crossing the River* on the other hand, diasporic identification is constructed as transnational, fractal and perpetually in-process.

This study argues that in the absence of an established sense of terra firma the respective authors actively construct *home* through narrative, resulting in what Erica L. Johnson has described as *terragraphica*. In this way, each novel is perceived and explored as a particular *terragraphica* as well as a fictional *lieux de mémoire* (to borrow Pierre Nora's conception of "sites of memory"). Using the memories of transatlantic characters as (broken) windows through which to view history, as well as filters through which the present can be understood (or refracted), are techniques that Aidoo, Marshall and Phillips employ (although, Aidoo's use of memory is less obvious). Tapping into various sites of memory in the lives of the fictional characters, the novels themselves become mediums of remembering, not as a means of storing facts about the past, but for the ambivalent purpose of understanding the impact of the past on the present.

Opsomming

In 'n poging om diasporiese identiteit te karteer en te ondersoek, betrek hierdie verhandeling drie uiteenlopende romans wat in die Atlantiese konteks, naamlik vanuit die verskillende hoeke van die Atlantiese driehoek en verskillende geskiedkundige Atlantiese momente, ontstaan het. Die drie romans sluit in: *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint* (1977) deur Ama Ata Aidoo, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969) deur Paule Marshall en *Crossing the River* (1993) deur Caryl Phillips. Deur die belangrikheid van *plek* – kultureel, geografies en temporeel – in die literêre konstruksie van transatlantiese identiteit, te beklemtoon, spoor hierdie verhandeling die manier waarop Aidoo, Marshall en Phillips fiktiewe tekste aanwend na om sin te maak van idees oor tuiste en geborgenheid in 'n wêreld van verdringing, skeuring en (ver)wisseling.

Deur die impak van die oorsprong op, asook die weg (*rupta via*) na, die verwesenliking van identiteit vir die diasporiese subjek te toon, onthul en worstel hierdie tesis met verskeie narratiewe uitbeeldings van die diasporiese toestand ('n toestand eie aan die *mens*). *Our Sister Killjoy* stel identiteit as inherent vermeng met nasionalisme en pan-Afrikanisme voor, terwyl *The Chosen Place* identiteit as tidalekties uitbeeld – vasgevang tussen westerse en Afrika-subjektiviteite. In *Crossing the River* word diasporiese identifisering egter gekonstrueer as transnasionaal, fraktaal en ewigdurend in 'n proses van ontwikkeling.

Hierdie studie voer verder aan dat die onderskeie skrywers *tuiste* aktief deur narratief konstrueer in die afwesigheid van 'n gevestigde bewustheid van terra firma, of onbekende land of plek. Die gevolg is 'n voortvloeiing van wat deur Erica L. Johnson beskryf word as *terragraphica*. Vervolgens word elk van die romans gesien en verken as 'n spesifieke *terragraphica* asook 'n fiktiewe *lieux de mémoire*, gegrond in Pierre Nora se konsep "sites of memory". Die benutting van transatlantiese karakters se herinneringe as (gebreekte) vensters waardeur die geskiedenis bespeur kan word en filters waardeur die hede verstaan (of gerefrakteer) kan word, is die tegnieke wat Aidoo, Marshall en Phillips aanwend – alhoewel Aidoo se gebruik van geheue minder ooglopend is. Deur verskeie terreine van geheue in die lewens van die fiktiewe karakters te betrek, ontwikkel die romans tot

mediums van onthou, nie in die sin van feite van die verlede wat gestoor word nie, maar met die dubbelsinnige doel om die impak van die verlede op die hede te verstaan.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to my wonderful Supervisor, Dr Mathilda Slabbert, for her inspiring and invaluable contribution to this thesis. She has been a source of continual encouragement and enthusiasm, keeping me motivated, challenged and excited to continue researching and writing.

I would like to thank Dr Grace Musila and Lynda Spencer who were kind enough to read some of my work and provide immensely helpful feedback, and to Jan-Hendrik Swanepoel for translating my abstract into Afrikaans. My thanks are also extended to other staff members and fellow students whose contribution at the MA proposal discussion meeting proved most insightful.

The Stellenbosch English department (and its inspiring and dedicated staff) has provided me with a wonderful and challenging work environment and I am very grateful to have had the privilege of completing an MA at this University.

My utmost gratitude is extended to my absolutely amazing family, friends and boyfriend whose support, encouragement and prayers have spurred me on and helped me keep perspective.

I am also greatly indebted to the National Research Foundation for their generous financial contribution to my studies in general and this MA in particular.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Identity is formed at the interface between the rituals of putting down roots and the rhythms of estrangement, in the constant passage from the spatial to the temporal, from geography to memory.

Mbembe, "On the Power of the False" 638

You were transported in a wooden vessel across a broad expanse of water to a place which rendered your tongue silent. Look. Listen. Learn. And as you began to speak, you remembered fragments of a former life. Shards of memory. Careful. Some will draw blood. You dressed your memory in the new words of this new country. Remember. There were no round-trip tickets in your part of the ship. Exodus. It is futile to walk into the face of history.

Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound* 275

While the all too familiar colonial travel narrative has historically inscribed the movement of African peoples across the Atlantic as the *transport* and *transference* of objects of utility from the proverbial "heart of darkness" to the West and other centres of western economic power, the postcolonial (transatlantic) novel does something profoundly different.¹ In a monumental shift of perspective, the postcolonial narrative sees those self-same people, not as objects, but as subjects who are indelibly *transformed* by the journey and destination(s). The dispersal of African people across the Atlantic world – initially the direct result of the Atlantic slave trade – has led to the proliferation of a vast palimpsest of historical, scholarly and fictional texts exploring the impact of diaspora on those directly swept up within its powerful currents of geographic displacement, and on the multiple places irrevocably altered by the ebb and flow of people across their borders.

In his article "Aesthetics, Politics, Identity: Diasporic Problematisations", Couze Venn (2010) points out that in order to transcribe, make and remake identities in the context of plural belongings and at the "level of the lived" (322), one must turn to signifying art forms such as

¹ When thinking of colonial travel narratives (to mention very few), the names of Henry Morton Stanley, John Newton, Ryder Haggard and Joseph Conrad come to mind. The latter's seminal text, *Heart of Darkness* (1902), provides the phrase to which I refer in the opening sentence of this thesis.

the postcolonial novel (as this project seeks to do) and various other visual and audio-visual artworks. More than aesthetic performance, “art is the incision in the real which allows something unexpected to emerge or erupt, and lets us glimpse or guess at what lies beneath the surface of things” (Venn 322). In using fictional texts as tools with which to prise open the aporia that is the African diaspora, one is tempted to immediately sew the opening back up again for fear of becoming lost in the tapestry of conflicting memories, theories, perspectives and experiences. Homi K. Bhabha himself has foregrounded the universally obsessive question (as cited by Hallward): “‘how can we face the task of designating identities, specifying events, locating histories?’ (Bhabha, “Minority Manoeuvres” 433)” (35).

I also realise that in invoking and using terms such as “diaspora”, I am entering highly contested waters. In seeking to explore the *humanity* of those who have previously been nominally written out of history, it is my intention to look at the ways in which these people have come to identify themselves in a world of geographic and psychological displacement, loss and mobility. While older conceptions of “diaspora” are fairly prescriptive in laying out specific criteria for what qualifies as “diasporic” (usually forced movement, scattering and return), James Clifford (1997) points out that there is need for a more “polythetic definition” (249). He argues that the word “diaspora” is “loose in the world, for reasons having to do with decolonisation, increased migration, global communications, and transport – a whole range of phenomena that encourage multilocal attachments, dwelling, and travelling within and across nations” (249). For the purposes of this project then, and in trying to shy away from a definition that is too prescriptive, I use “diaspora” loosely to signify all of those who have moved or been moved from the continent of Africa to various other geographic locations within the Atlantic world.

In using the Atlantic paradigm as a unit of analysis, this oceanic expanse immediately becomes a discursive space of “interesting perspectives because it is crisscrossed and travelled in ways that speak of exchanges among the cultures that define its borders, or of modes in which the cultures of Europe, Africa and the Americas respond to one another, collide, or converge” (Oboe and Scacchi 2). These “interesting perspectives” traverse and trace the contours of *terra firma* and the spatial, temporal and psychological terrains to

which diasporic subjects attach and detach themselves and their sense of (imagined) identification. In coming to see the transatlantic novel not only as a carrier and reflection of such perspectives, but as an active participant in the creation of identity, memory, and *home*, I employ Erica L. Johnson's term, "*terragraphica*", as a descriptor. In this way, the fictional text becomes itself a landscape – a product of the memory of *terra firma* as well as the author's construction of something "extra-terrestrial" within which he/she may situate him/herself as well the text's characters: "the *terragraphica* underlying [the author's] artistry is also the product of their art – and their art forms the ground beneath our feet as readers who listen to the different languages, places, and writerly landscapes from which our authors speak" (Johnson 32). Being interested in the way in which shifting perspectives (historical, theoretical and ideological) indelibly shift and alter imagined identities, I turn to three fictional texts (three disparate *terragraphicas*) that offer conflicting subjectivities on the matter.

The texts I have chosen for analysis are: *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* (1977) by Ama Ata Aidoo, Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), and Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* (1993).² All three texts situate their narratives within the Atlantic paradigm, at different geographic points of the Atlantic triangle. *The Chosen Place* is written within one geographic space (a small Caribbean island), and while this archipelagic entity remains unattached and essentially free-floating within the Atlantic Ocean, both the island and its inhabitants epitomise creolity, unable to conceal the scars of exit and entry manufactured by the colonial enterprise. *Our Sister Killjoy*, while providing much in the way of diaspora history and its far reaching impact, takes place on a two-dimensional scale, moving between Africa and Europe, rather than various places and temporalities. The third and final text, Phillips's *Crossing the River*, presents a transnational narrative and an amalgam of stories and characters, traversing both time and space, touching the shores of Africa, England and America, as well as devoting an entire section to life aboard a slaving vessel.³

² From this point onwards, due to the length of their titles, I will be referring to Aidoo's novel as *Our Sister Killjoy*, and Marshall's novel as *The Chosen Place*.

³ Each text will be explored in a separate chapter, with each chapter elaborating on the reasons behind my choice of these specific narratives.

My methodological approach is primarily to conduct close analyses of the primary texts, tracing key thematic and stylistic points of convergence and divergence regarding the role of literary perspective in constructing transatlantic identities. I also explore existing views on diasporic identity, and map the various shifts in the “locations of the observers” (author, characters, critics) that effect and alter these views.

Despite the fact that it makes chronological sense to begin with Paule Marshall’s *The Chosen Place*, published in 1969, I use Aidoo’s text (1977) as my departure point and moment of entry into the literary Atlantic world. My reasoning behind this choice lies in the fact that *Our Sister Killjoy* begins in West Africa: the primary place of departure for African slaves sold into slavery and consequently dispersed across the Atlantic. It is this location that looms large in the imaginations, memories and fictional landscapes presented in the three novels, thus making Aidoo’s text the logical narrative to begin with. With regard to the perspectives and *terragraphicas* presented by the respective texts, there also seems to be a progression (or movement) in thought, from a nationalist conception of identification to a decidedly transnational one beginning with *Our Sister Killjoy* and ending with *Crossing the River*.

In Chapter Two I look at Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* as an archive of nationalist, feminist and Afrocentric concerns, exploring the way in which her autochthonous perception of diasporic identity posits that there can be no home for the diasporan outside the geographic coordinates of the African continent. While much analytical attention has been given to *Our Sister Killjoy* since its publication in 1977 – largely as a result of the political and feminist claims that Aidoo makes – I have chosen to look at this narrative in comparison to two other disparate works of transatlantic fiction, viewing it as a reflection of a particular perspective, rather than as a single polemical text.⁴

Chapter Three examines Paule Marshall’s *The Chosen Place* – an author and a novel that seem to have received minimal scholarly attention locally. Offering a window into

⁴ I do realise that Aidoo’s views, as expressed in *Our Sister Killjoy*, cannot be extrapolated across all of her work (although much of her later work reveals her continued commitment to pan-Africanism), but for the intents and purposes of this thesis, I choose to focus specifically on that which *Our Sister Killjoy* reveals about Aidoo’s (political, geographic, ideological) positioning at the time of her writing the text. I am also aware of her decidedly feminist sentiments which are briefly discussed in the Introduction (page 25), and elaborated on in Chapter Two.

transatlantic identity from the geographic location of the Caribbean, I use this text as a means of revealing the way in which identity for the Caribbean diasporic subject is caught in the confluence between the history (memory) of Africa as origin and Europe as “colonial motherland”. In contrast to the decidedly (geographically) *rooted* perception of identity offered by Aidoo, I show that there are various other *routes* through which a sense of home and belonging may be fostered, with particular reference to memory and creolity.

In Chapter Four, I explore Caryl Phillips’s postmodern novel *Crossing the River*. Phillips voices transnational, anti-essentialist and hybrid ideas concerning identity construction within the nuanced Atlantic paradigm and provides yet another perspective on what it is that constitutes one’s home or place of mooring. Offering no attachment to either a physical place or a temporal space, identity for the diasporan is presented as fluid, fractured and perpetually in-process. It is also my intention to show, not only the disparities between the texts and their contrasting perspectives of essentialist, anti-essentialist, national and transnational conceptions of identity, but the way in which the texts portray elements of a common *humanity* across the space of the Atlantic (whether intentionally or not). Having Phillips’s *Crossing the River* as a final chapter (before the conclusion) is thus carefully placed as it deals (overtly) with universal categories of loss, homelessness and disjunctive subjectivities in order to highlight the commonalities within human experience, rather than perpetuate destructive colonial and neo-colonial dichotomies between the “West” and “the rest”, of which the other texts are still painfully aware.

Working with novels glaringly incongruent on a number of conceptual, thematic and contextual levels, may seem to discourage effective comparison and coherency within a single project. However, it is these very points of disparity to which I turn in order to explore the creative and polemical power of literary perspective. Paul Gilroy (1993) writes:

Where the communities of interpretation, needs, and solidarity on which the cultures of the black Atlantic rest become an intellectual and political multiplicity, they assume a fractal form in which the relationship between similarity and difference becomes so complex that it may continually deceive the senses [...] *The perceived contours of these movements vary according to the precise location of the observer.* (122; my emphasis)

This project traces the effects of various positionalities (“the location[s] of the observer[s]”) on the literary perception of diasporic identity. I use the word “positionalities” in connection to physical, historical and ideological locations, with particular reference to the authors of the respective novels, their textual characters and their intended readerships. The three texts present perspectives either vested in the relationship of identity to a sense of (physical) rootedness, which naturally takes on a pointedly nationalistic agenda, and that of identity as a far more transnational, malleable and mobile process, “more appropriately approached via the homonym of routes” (Gilroy 19). Where a *rooted* conception of identity is adopted in the chosen texts, a teleology of return to origins is posited as the only positive means of retrieving an authentic sense of selfhood and *home* for the diasporic subject. However, where the impact of *routes* (from the Latin *rupta via* which translates as *broken road*) (Clingman 25) are considered as a far more transformative and powerful force, the emphasis shifts from one of return, to one of embracing a new hybrid (creole) existence.

James Clifford (1997), in connection with Gilroy’s writings on diaspora, suggests that diasporic identity comes to encompass and complicate multiple ways to “stay [...] *and be something else*” (252; emphasis in original), to retain elements of previous national and cultural affiliations from one’s original “home”, while coming to weave threads of new cultural, linguistic and contextual forms into a distinctly hybrid narrative of self and community. Adopting Bhabha’s conception of hybrid identity, that which is ambivalently birthed within a “third space of enunciation” (Ashcroft 118), serves to overcome the binary oppositions of “us” versus “them”, replacing these over-simplified dichotomies with the recognition that there exists a space of empowerment in which cultural differences may operate and co-mingle. With this in mind, the term “diaspora” is “not simply a signifier of transnationality and movement but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement” (Clifford 252).

When speaking of *identity*, I borrow Stuart Hall’s definition which accounts for the way in which this project seeks to explore the weight of perspective (as filtered through the fictional novel) on identity discovery and creation. Hall asserts that:

Cultural identities are points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. *Not an essence*

but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin' [...] identities are the names we give to the different ways we are *positioned by, and position ourselves within*, the narratives of the past. (131-132; my emphasis)

In this vein, one may even go so far as to say that identities are constructions of literary *articulation*. This word is useful in a transatlantic context as it highlights the inherent entanglements, paradoxes, and at times, impossibilities at the heart of the African diasporic condition. I say this because of the difficulty and plurality involved in articulating concepts or notions such as "home" and "belonging" within and across an Atlantic network imbued with definitional disparity (What is home? What is diaspora?); not to mention the complications involved in the acts of translation and interpretation. Finding the sutures between colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial ideologies (that one may slowly unpick these contested terms and sort through the aporetic remains) also proves problematic, as labels do not always account for the realities they claim to describe.

Articulation of identity through the written word is further complicated by the use of language. Even at communication's most basic level, interpretation is captive to at least two opinions or perspectives: that of the speaker/writer and that of the listener/reader (Webster). Mikhail Bakhtin (1975) provides some theoretical terminology for the unstable meaning of language, naming it *dialogic* – that which occurs in dialogue, a two-way or multiple process. I use Bakhtin's conception of language as a "centrifugal/dialogic" force, that which fragments meaning and offers plural possibilities, rather than viewing it as simply presenting fixed and impermeable ideas (41). Also drawing on Bakhtin's term, "heteroglossia" (in contending for the "many-voicedness" used in the postcolonial novel), I argue that the transatlantic novel is a harbinger of such contested and centrifugal meaning as a result of the language that the authors use and the way in which they use it (Webster 41).

Gilroy, in his text, *The Black Atlantic*, speaks of the difficulties (political, social, cultural) experienced by diasporic subjects whose coordinates of identification are rooted in a sense of "double consciousness" (or even multiple consciousnesses). With specific reference to what he terms the "black Atlantic", Gilroy sets out to dismantle theories of "ethnic particularism" and "cultural nationalism", arguing that "the reflexive cultures and

consciousness of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the ‘Indians’ they slaughtered, and the Asians they indentured were not, even in situations of the most extreme brutality, sealed off hermeneutically from each other” (2). Using the Atlantic as a single space of analysis, Gilroy posits that those who have been caught up in its historical and contemporary tide can no longer turn to essentialist models of ethnicity, race and nationalist “rootedness” in order to secure a sense of home or belonging.⁵ To paraphrase Gilroy and to turn to an explanation expressed by Venn (2010), diasporic identities or cultures are seen as “basically heterogeneous, polyglot, plural, relational, existential and in-process. Subjectivities are, if you will, metastable by reference to the material, spatial, discursive and psychological conditions that constitute them, which means any change in these conditions (for instance, due to displacement) produces mutations in subjectivity and identity that are often lived as ‘disorders of identity’ (Derrida 1998)” (321).

These ideas of fluid identities and subjectivities that are in constant flux, certainly spill over into the rhetoric of this project and prove invaluable in some regards. However, in taking a close look at the literature – fictive, theoretical and historical – one becomes aware that one cannot simply discard the nation as a reference to identification, just as one cannot reify the continent of Africa as “mythic origin” or “utopic destination”. While it is certainly easier to lean toward an anti-essentialist view of identity – that which is not bounded by the nation – particularly in an age of “globalisation”, it is also crucial to heed Kwadwo Osei-Nyame’s warning. Speaking of postcolonial writers such as Paul Gilroy and Kwame Anthony Appiah, whose brand of post-colonialism uses such stock phrases as: “multiculturalism”,

⁵ In *The Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, Michael Herzfeld proposes that the distinctive mark of essentialism (with reference to anthropology), “lies in its suppression of temporality: it assumes or attributes an unchanging, primordial ontology to what are the historically contingent products of human or other forms of agency” (188). “Anti-essentialist” and “essentialist” are words closely associated with postcolonial and postmodern literary criticism/cultural studies (and perhaps often too glibly and generally assigned). Essentialism, particularly as voiced from and within a postmodern oeuvre of criticism is largely equated with reductionist ideology and binarist thinking, perceiving cultural identity as nation-bound and invariably absolute – racially and ideologically (by this definition, Aducci’s conception of identity would be deemed essentialist). Anti-essentialism on the other hand, infers that identity is hybrid, perpetually in-process and not bound by geographical coordinates (transnational).

Arif Dirlik (2002) makes interesting comment on the use of these terms:

Essentialism is surely one of the most inflated words of contemporary cultural studies. It seems as though any admission of identity, including identity that may be necessary to any articulate form of collective political action, is open to charges of essentialism, so that it often is unclear whether the objection is to essentialism per se or to the politics, in which case essentialism serves as a straw target to discredit politics (110).

“globalisation”, “diaspora” and the “cosmopolitan”, Kwadwo asserts that, “instead of addressing the questions that necessitate the construction or evocation of the binary oppositional signifiers in the first place, they over-hastily plunge into arguments about the essentialist and homogenised nature of these markers of identity-formation” (74).⁶

Authors such as the Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo certainly adhere to a far more nationalist rhetoric, presenting diaspora as loss of identity. In *Our Sister Killjoy*, the speaker is particularly harsh in her appraisal of those African intellectuals who have chosen “self-exile” in Europe over remaining in their African countries of origin. This aspect of diaspora is presented in the text as “the academic pseudo-intellectual version [of slavery]” (6), with African “self-exiles” willingly subscribing to a new form of bondage to the old colonial enemy in the guise of western progress, modernity and universalization – “a reality that is more tangible than the massive slave forts standing along our beaches” (6). Aidoo presents a powerful polemic, one with much merit, but without compromise or room for alternate perspectives which are necessary when considering the highly nuanced experience of diaspora. The text also presents a distinctly pan-Africanist mode of thinking.

A difficulty posed by this exclusively autochthonous conception of identity is that for diasporic Africans – many residing abroad as a result of their ancestors having been actively transported as slaves to various Atlantic locations – the “African nation” remains a psychological space or at most, a mythological origin to which physical return is impossible. For the African self-exiles spoken of in *Our Sister Killjoy*, while return to *roots* may be

⁶ In his thought-provoking article entitled “Between Roots and Routes: Cosmopolitanism and the Claims of Locality” (2010), Simon Gikandi discusses the “inherent tension between the self-identity of postcolonial elites and the people they claim to represent” (29). Considering the fact that the authors of the three texts I have chosen for analysis would all fall under the category “postcolonial elite”, or “cosmopolitan”, given their education, transnational mobility and international recognition as writers, looking at a number of questions that Gikandi poses becomes important, particularly in conjunction with the impact of authorial location on identity construction (as represented by the fictional characters of which Aidoo, Marshall and Phillips write). Gikandi asks, “Do African refugees become cosmopolitan when they cross boundaries even when it is apparent that many of them are incapable of, or simply disinterested in, the intellectual and aesthetic stance that cosmopolitanism presupposes?” (31). He also points out that, “for one thing, postcolonial elites are, by virtue of their class, position or education, the major beneficiaries of the project of decolonisation [...] it is this claim to autonomy and independence that makes cosmopolitanism an important term for mediating the relationship between roots that are denied or repressed and the routes that are taken” (29).

possible, the Atlantic *routes* through which they have moved complicate a distinctly Africanist subjectivity.

I argue that diasporic identity cannot be defined solely by geographic origin (although it does play a vital role), just as time cannot be conflated with space. Achille Mbembe's research helps to clarify this as he suggests that the notion of time and its relation to memory and subjectivity should be reconceptualised in order to account for the fundamentally fractured environment (psychological and geographic) in which the diasporic subject lives – an environment impossible to essentialise and homogenise ("African Modes of Self-Writing" 272-273). Marshall's *The Chosen Place* and Phillips's *Crossing the River*, provide various modes of "reconceptualising" the role of memory and subjectivity in transatlantic identity formation, particularly as they offer a variety of routes (rather than simply geographic roots) as tools in the construction process.

Afropolitanism also seeks to find a sense of rapprochement and compromise in the realisation of an African diasporic identity. Recognising the subjectively adhesive power of local African geographies in the consciousness of diasporic subjects, Afropolitanism suggests that identity is at once informed by national boundaries *and* transcendental to them. Life for the diasporic African – the "Afropolitan" – is thus one of division, straddling multiple borders, languages, cultures, memories. Diaspora is therefore not envisioned as loss or an identity deficit (*Our Sister Killjoy's* refrain), but rather as a "cultural bonus" (Gikandi, "On Afropolitanism" 9-10).

Yogita Goyal, in her reading of what she constitutes as a "Black Atlantic Canon" offers a similar ideology through seeing the Atlantic novel as a vessel of both national realism and diasporic romance. He argues that one cannot simply dismiss the nation as a discursive symbol or a physical presence, just as one cannot place sole emphasis on its bounded realism for a true picture of identity construction. Rinaldo Walcott (2003) further affirms this stating that: "Recognising diaspora as both connection and disconnection provides a site for the articulation of desiring "the nation-thing" and simultaneously undermining and reworking it as something more" (117).

The visible outcomes of a sense of connection and disconnection to the diasporic subject's country/continent of origin are the "artistic syncretisms" exhibited in their new localities (the Caribbean, America and Europe). Michael Chapman identifies various examples of these fusions of culture in the form of the Harlem Renaissance, Picasso, African sculpture and Cubism (161). Music is another fundamental manifestation of the transference and resonance of African cultural identity, spoken of at length by Paul Gilroy. I would also argue that the transatlantic novel itself is an exhibition of artistic syncretism, with particular reference to the three chosen texts. While all written in English – a clear marker of the influence of the West – the novels highlight traces of African cultural residue and create new avenues for hybrid identity creation.

When considering the various "routes" to identity formation and the *places* (physical and psychological) from which one perceives its contours, one cannot ignore the imbrication of memory and identity. Seeking to explore this relationship further, a series of questions posed by Susanne Pichler (2011) prove useful:

What is it that diasporic identities remember, and what is it that they forget? Which are the themes that are perpetuated transhistorically and translocally? Is the past retained in the present 'memory' or 'history'? Can we assume that it is primarily traumatic experiences that diasporic identities (tend to) 'actively forget' to use Ramadanovic's term (Ramadanovic, 2001, p. 48) or are they imprinted in the characters' minds? (3)

In attempting to answer some of these questions, I turn to memory theory and the role of memory as a signifier and prerequisite to identity. Notable theorists in this regard are Maurice Halbwachs (1950) and Pierre Nora (1989), who both provide insight into the subtle disparity and yet indissoluble link between memory and history. In arguing for an analysis of literary texts from a memory perspective, rather than a purely historical one, both theorists comment on the fact that where memory allows for a continuity of consciousness and an integration of history into a particular culture, history in and of itself remains an external, linear and somewhat detached perspective, existing in the present as artefact rather than something alive and accessible. Nora (1989), as cited in Pichler's article, asserts that:

Memory is life [...] It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of the successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always

problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, in so far as it is affective and magical, only affects those facts that suit it [...] History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. (8-9)

In light of the above excerpt, a specific theoretical point of reference that proves useful is Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (or sites of memory), suggestive of the contemporary desire to access these flexible sites (material, functional, symbolic) in order to find a sense of personal and collective meaning within a particular context: "there must be a will to remember" (19). I also argue that the transatlantic novel, as *terragraphica*, is itself a "site of memory", a fictional will to remember, communicated as *rupta via* – a broken road that does not enable journeying (figurative and literal) "as the crow flies", but as the characters and fictional landscapes remember and (try to) forget.

Jennifer Terry (2010) asserts that in conjunction with Nora's thoughts, a more instructive approach may be found in the work of Jan Assmann, with particular focus on his distinction between communicative and cultural memory, determined through studies on ancient societies. Assmann's sense of cultural memory "allows for the crystallisation, the dormancy and the reimagining of the experience and site of the Middle Passage" (Terry 3). He states that:

Cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, it always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation. True, it is fixed in immovable figures of memory and stores of knowledge, but every contemporary context relates to these differently, sometimes by appropriation, sometimes by criticism, sometimes by preservation or by transformation. (Assmann 129-30)

The need to dip into these "stores of knowledge" and attach them to the contemporary ("it is the will that unifies historical memory and secures present-day content" (Bhabha "Dissemination" 160)), or rather weave them into the fabric of the contemporary novel is evident in all three novels (although manifest in different forms) as memory is used as a means of understanding diasporic identity in the past as well as the present. Accessing sites of memory outside of the western imperialist archive is also crucial to understanding past

events from the perspective of the “Other” whose version of the colonial/colonised narrative is glaringly divergent from that which is recorded in the history books.⁷

With regard to the fact that the (re)presentation of diasporic identity is largely a product of perception and context, (cultural) memory also plays an essential role in understanding why there exist such disparate ideas about identity and what it means for members of transatlantic dislocation. If history and its geo-political coordinates were the sole informants of a person’s or a people’s identity, then belonging and ideas about “home” would indeed be linear, temporal, and essentially (or theoretically) unproblematic constructions. However, the cultural memory of a people group, subject to experience and mobility and fracture, differs widely across transatlantic subjects, revealing that identity cannot simply be based on “some objectifiable past, the deposits of which it stores to be recuperated as sediments in [...] a culture, dug up like the archaeologist’s shards and put together again to form a clear vision of origins and evolutions (Gomille; Stierstorfer, 2003, p. 7)” (Pichler 2).

Diasporic identification can never simply be an unproblematic shift from one identity to another, as the liminal space in which the diasporic subject dwells – the interstitial space between colonial and postcolonial politics, African *roots* and transatlantic *routes* – represents a constant process of “engagement, contestation and appropriation [...] at the edges of the presumed monolithic, but never completely ‘beyond’” (Ashcroft et al. 130-131). In occupying this interstitial position, Bhabha asserts that the present can “no longer be envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past or future; our presence comes to be revealed in its ‘discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities’ [Bhabha 1994]” (Ashcroft et al. 131). Closely linked to the idea of transatlantic subjects occupying a liminal space in terms of identity politics, is the conception of “place” and its concomitant, “displacement”.

⁷ For a thought-provoking and in-depth discussion on the role that history plays in the formation of identity, see Hayden White’s “The Historical Event” (2008) in which he points out that, “recent discussion on the periphery of mainstream historical studies has revealed the extent to which ‘belonging to history’ (rather than being ‘outside of it’) or ‘having a history’ (rather than lacking one) are values attached to certain modern quests for group identity, indeed, to the very idea of what it means to be fully human” (3). (The article is published in *Differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 19.2 (2008): 9-34).

When considering the displacement of individuals and people groups (as a result of forced and voluntary migration), one becomes aware of the complex interaction between place, language, memory and identity formation. Interestingly, a sense of place may be “embedded in cultural history, in legend and language, without becoming a concept of contention and struggle until the profound discursive interference of colonialism” (Ascroft et al. 177). Not only does colonialism interrupt and shift a people’s sense of physical place, but by imposing new cultural and linguistic forms, creates a schism between that which is experienced by the colonised subject and the descriptions the colonial language provides.

For the diasporic subject, attaching the label “home” to a specific location becomes highly problematic, particularly considering the fact that if geographic origin is essentially *home*, then how does one come to *belong* in other locations? In conjunction with this difficulty, Bhabha (1994) poses other thought-provoking questions: “As the migrant and the refugee become ‘unhomely’ inhabitants of the contemporary world, how do we rethink collective, communal concepts like homeland, the people, cultural exile, national cultures, interpretive communities?” (271). Addressing these questions as a matter of literary perspective proves enlightening for a number of reasons. Rosemary Marangoly George, in her seminal text, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (1996), grapples with the way in which fictional texts (written in what she terms “global English”), dealing with the complexities of belonging, exile and immigration, are invested in and constructed by the multiple locations in which their narratives are embedded. Marangoly George begins her literary exploration with a prologue entitled “All fiction is homesickness” (1) and concludes with an epilogue entitled “All homesickness is fiction” (199), highlighting the imbrication of the will to create a sense of home through narrative, and conversely, to create narrative through the remembrance of home.

Extending the “politics of home”, to a “politics of location”, Erica L Johnson’s *Home, Maison, Casa* (2003) also proves especially useful in untangling the relationship between fiction and notions of home. She asserts that: “displacement enters into dialogue with the suddenly vexed category of home, and the literature of repatriated writers reflects this dilemma in authors’ imagery, allusions, and poetry, as well as in the stories they tell [...home becomes] a place from which to write” (21). Johnson goes on to say that for a writer who possesses no

true *terra firma*, there is a sense of threatened or unstable identity, but “by conceptualising for herself her relationship to not a single, essentialised homeland, but to different places in her literary construction of a place from which to write, a writer creates *terre* [earth] out of her experience of displacement” (27). Johnson thus adopts the term *terragraphica* to describe the ways in which a writer constructs a literary terrain (through memory of his/her geographical homeland of origin and his/her new dwelling place) in which a feeling of home can be established.

Interestingly, through her reading of Marguerite Duras’s *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), *L’Amant* (1984) and *L’Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1992), Johnson identifies two disparate (and yet contiguous) conceptions of home: that of being *à la maison* and that of being *chez soi* (30). While the literal translation of both expressions means to be “at home”, the first refers to an actual corporeal space or geographic point of reference, while the other refers to a more figurative conception of belonging: that which relies on an emotional or relational connection to place rather than a physical one. In this thesis, I will show how the respective authors narratively wrestle with the anomalies of what it means to be *à la maison* and/or *chez soi* in a world of plural and complex belongings.

Caryl Phillips, born in the West Indies (consequently having African ancestors), raised in England and now dwelling in North America, has much to say on the subject of home, considering himself as belonging not to any one of these specific localities, but to the Atlantic Ocean itself. In *A New World Order* (2001), a collection of essays written by Phillips, he records his unspoken thoughts during a conversation that takes place between himself and a hotel waiter in West Africa:

These days we are all unmoored. Our identities are fluid. Belonging is a contested state. Home is a place riddled with vexing questions [...] I want to tell Daniel that this boy has had to understand the Africa of his ancestry, the Caribbean of his birth, the Britain of his upbringing, and the United States where he now resides, as one harmonious entity. He has tried to write in the face of a late-twentieth century world that has sought to reduce identity to unpalatable clichés of nationality and race. (6)

For Phillips, home is not so much about being, as it is about becoming. His definition of diaspora is also not limited to those who have African “roots”, but extends to encompass all those who have experienced the weight of loss, displacement, disenfranchisement and a

sense of homelessness. This view is harshly juxtaposed by Aidoo however, who views autochthony as tantamount to belonging. She posits that instead of seeking to find a sense of home away from one's country of birth, if one is of African descent, one should return "home". In content and form, *Our Sister Killjoy* sets up and reinforces a binary distinction between the West and Africa, homogenising both problematic terminologies, and not allowing for a conception of a common humanity as Phillips does.

For Marshall on the other hand, home is a contested space suspended between western and African subjectivities. As an American citizen with Caribbean ancestry (and hence historical links to African origins) Marshall's identity and subjective stance as a writer are *routed/rooted* in various locations. Much of her writing wrestles specifically with the Caribbean diasporic identity and the effects of a weighty colonial past on its construction. With specific reference to *The Chosen Place*, identity for the Caribbean subject (who is caught in the liminal, interstitial space of creolity) is presented as either a stagnant (timeless) subscription to the past through performativity, or an honest engagement with history (personal and collective) through the *via rupta* of memory. The locations *from which* these three authors write (historical, political, geographic) therefore influence the places *of which* they write (their own *terragraphicas* and subjective proposals of what transatlantic identity looks like).

Chapter Three deals specifically with Caribbean Identity, but it is perhaps necessary to include, in this introductory chapter, a brief outline of the theoretical approach I employ. Stuart Hall argues that Caribbean identities pivot around or are framed by two axes or vectors which are simultaneously operative and relationally dialogic: "the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture" ("Cultural Identity" 226). While Caribbean people certainly share some form of communal connection to the past and are subject to its continuity, this shared past is in fact one of profound discontinuity: "the peoples dragged into slavery, transportation, colonisation, migration, came predominantly from Africa – and when that supply ended, it was temporarily refreshed by indentured labour from the Asian subcontinent" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 227). Not only have Caribbean peoples been subjected to the infiltration of western cultures through the colonial enterprise, but those brought from Africa, were also from different countries, tribal

communities, languages and cultures, disallowing the Caribbean identity to be anything less than hybrid and nuanced. At the same time however, these people share a commonality of present place and a sense of “imagined community” as the African continent (as origin) becomes what Edward Said terms “an imaginative geography and history” (*Orientalism* 55) and reference point for identification. Hall asserts that “this is the Africa we return to – but by another route: what Africa has become in the New World, what we have made of ‘Africa’: ‘Africa’ – as we re-tell it through memory, politics and desire” (“Cultural Identity” 232).

Taking the hybrid space of Caribbean identity into consideration, I turn to Aimé Césaire’s and Leopold Senghor’s metaphor of the “three presences” – *Presence Africaine*, *Presence Européenne* and *Presence Americain* – to account for the way in which Caribbean identities are (re)positioned and created within a multiplicity of conflicting cultural presences (Hall). Derrida’s *différance*, disturbing the break between the verbs, “to differ” and “to defer”, also proves useful in understanding Caribbean subjectivity and the way in which meaning – pertaining to a clear sense of identity, grounded and stable – “is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings” (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 229).

Leading on from these ideas, I also use Édouard Glissant’s conception of “rhizomatic identity” in coming to an understanding of Caribbean diasporic identity. Challenging the epistemology of a single, totalitarian root – that which is a geographic anchor for identity – Glissant proposes that the Afro-Caribbean identity can be accounted for through the metaphor of the rhizome. Envisioning identity as being embedded in a network or system of roots (geographical, historical, cultural) accounts for the multiple contributing factors in the making of a hybrid identity. The struggle against a “single [westernised] History [a single root] for the cross-fertilisation of histories means repossessing both a true sense of one’s time and identity: proposing in an unprecedented way a revaluation of power” (*Caribbean Discourse* 93). This becomes clearer in exploring the implications of what Glissant terms “relation identity” and “root identity” (*Poetics of Relation* 143-144). “Root identity” is essentially that which is “founded on a distant past in a vision, a myth [...], sanctified by the hidden violence of a filiation that follows strictly from this founding episode”, ratifying

claims to territory possession and entitlement, and thus perpetuating the discursive knowledge of “self and other” (143-144). “Relation identity” on the other hand is conscious of the chaotic and contradictory networks of relation and interaction among people, not subscribing to an “us versus them” dichotomy that favours the economically powerful over the “rest”, but taking into consideration the multiple and fluid exchanges among people.

Historically, this dichotomous thinking has also been liberally applied in the area of gender, with specific reference to the limited amount of narrative space afforded female characters in male-written texts, as well the opportunities available for women themselves to become writers. Taking into the consideration my focus on perspective as a fundamental element in the creation of identity, I deliberately chose to use female authors and a male author whose writing amplifies the voices of his female characters and does not privilege his male characters in any way. Without claiming a specifically feminist reading of any of the texts explored in this project, the female voice and location function as critical points of reflection. Access to history and ethnography – through literatures and fiction – has largely been provided by a white (western) male authorship, limiting alternate perspectives, particularly those of black authors, and even more so, black women writers. Placing women at the centre of textual representation refuses their relegation to a “matrix of marginality” that oppresses according to race, class, gender and culture, and “restores women’s centrality in cultural and self-definition” (Aegerter 236).

Looking at transatlantic identity and various conceptions of home and belonging, listening to the woman’s voice is of critical importance in exploring the complexity involved in finding a place in which to write/live/belong in the context of *displacement*, on both a geographical and psychological level. Aidoo, in *Our Sister Killjoy*, seeks to wholly invert the western colonial perspective in order to (re)present the African (female) identity, both as a means of counteracting colonial stereotypes and attempting to seal up the porous membrane of diaspora that allows for cultural permutation. While much of Aidoo’s polemical stance – exhibited through her fictional writing – may be labelled essentialist and Afrocentrist in the extreme, her striving to make the female voice heard through the written word is an important step in subverting dominant narratives and derogatory stereotypes. Marshall is also successful in her narrative exposure of the female literary voice through the

foregrounding of Merle Kinbona, the novel's Creole protagonist, and despite the fact that Phillips is a male author, *Crossing the River* offers a fusion of voices, equally weighted across racial and gender divides, blurring these boundaries and dismantling disparaging stereotypes and historically inscribed hierarchies.

Over the last few decades, many African “feminists” have tended to strive toward a definition of feminism that does not simply subscribe to the western feminist mode which cannot fully represent woman who fall “outside” the economic, political and cultural boundaries of the West. Although “feminism” as a general category seeks to be universal in its claims and applications, “such theories, which are written in the West and therefore bear the authority of the West, perpetuate the Self/Other divide whereby discourses of developing nations are considered ‘politically immature’ and ‘underdeveloped’” (Mekgwe 166). I now move on to discuss the work of one of the most significant African feminists, Ama Ata Aidoo, in exploring the way in which diasporic identity is constructed and perceived in *Our Sister Killjoy*.

Chapter Two:

Diaspora as Loss, Africa as Home

An enemy has thrown a huge boulder across our path. We have been scattered. We wander too far. We are in danger of getting completely lost. We must not allow this to happen.

Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy* 118

In navigating the literary space of various Atlantic fictions, in a quest to discover the fulcrums around which diasporic identity pivots, it is helpful to begin from the place at which much of the (forced) African diaspora began: West Africa. While the physical coordinates of this point of the Atlantic triangle loom large geographically, particularly in relation to the “West”, its presence as corporeal place translates into numerous sites of subjectivity in the form of memories, cultural practices and ideologies in the lives of those uprooted from its soil.⁸ Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint* (1977) offers just such a space of exit (and entry) tracing the transatlantic movement of the novel’s protagonist, Sissie, from Ghana to Europe and back again. Textually presenting neither a “pre-colonial idyll nor a post-colonial dystopia” (Goyal, “From Revolution to Arrested Decolonisation” 186), *Our Sister Killjoy* constructs a powerful polemic of national, pan-African and (African) feminist concerns, perceiving African diasporic identity as tainted and warped by the *routes* of self-exile and migration (forced and voluntary), and desperately in need of a return to *roots*:

Aidoo proposes the ethno-cultural imperative of knowing and affirming an African self through a poetics of a will-to-power, a strong survivalist ethic, and the urgent task of recovering an Africanist mode of knowledge and being [...] To the extent that a masculinist version of pan-Africanism has tended to overlook women’s presence (of mind) in the nationalist undertaking, Aidoo’s position as a woman enjoins her – and us – to complicate the nationalist address (Korang 1992 52-53). (Azodo and Wilentz xvi)

⁸ In Stuart Hall’s “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” (1992), he explains the historical and contemporary uses of “the West”, as a concept commonly seen in postcolonial discourse. He explains that the word “West” has come to encompass (predominantly since Enlightenment times) far more than a geographic point of reference, becoming a system of representation and a discursive construct. This highly nuanced and politically loaded word has established ideological, social and economic parameters between those countries deemed “modern”, “industrial” and “progressive” i.e. Europe and the United States of America, and those considered to be “under-developed”, “rural” and “backward” i.e. the continent of Africa. This conceptual division found particular expression in colonial times, with “the West” exercising power over “the Rest”, a legacy that continues to have ramifications today.

Attempting to separate the writing of Aidoo from her socio-political orientation, her literary scholarship and her African feminist agenda becomes a seemingly impossible task, as each one spills over into the other, making her writing simply an extension of herself (specifically referring to the time in which *Our Sister Killjoy* was written). With reference to the notion of *terragraphica*, this becomes an important point to raise i.e. that as *Our Sister Killjoy* functions as a vehicle and construction of Aidoo's perspective and positionalities (physical/historical/cultural), so too does it create a picture of home and identity for her as an African woman and for those to whom she addresses the novel.

Born in the central region of Ghana in 1942 (still named "The Gold Coast" at this time), Aidoo grew up under the thumb of colonialism. Despite Ghana's political independence from British imperial rule in 1957, the country continued to suffer under local governance (a succession of repressive and military regimes), with an economy heavily reliant on foreign trade (Marangoly George and Scott). This neo-colonial climate forms much of the backdrop to Aidoo's writing and is made poignantly apparent in *Our Sister Killjoy*:

And Ghana?
Ghana?
 Ghana?
 Just a
 Tiny piece of beautiful territory in
 Africa – had
 Greatness thrust upon her
 Once.
 But she had eyes that saw not –
 That was a long time ago...
 Now she picks tiny bits of
 Undigested food from the
 Offal of the industrial world...
 O Ghana (53).

Aidoo's extensive and internationally acclaimed literary career has its seeds within the opportunity afforded her by her father, who, in conjunction with his own anti-colonial sentiments, recognised the need for women's education believing it to be a telling index of the nation's progress. Aidoo comments: "looking back to my parentage, I think I came from a long line of fighters [...] I have always been interested in the destiny of our people [...] I am

one of those writers whose writings cannot move too far from their political involvement [James, “Ama Ata Aidoo”, 13-14]” (Goyal, “From Revolution to Arrested Decolonisation” 185). Attending Wesley Girl’s High School at Cape Coast, Aidoo went on to study for a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English at the University of Ghana in 1961, publishing her first major work in 1965: a play entitled *Dilemma of a Ghost*. Not only was (is) Aidoo interested in politics, but actively involved in fighting for the “destiny of [her] people”, participating in social and cultural activism (nationally and internationally) in addition to publishing fiction, poetry, and drama. Aidoo also served as Minister of Education in Ghana in 1982 and has taught African literature in universities across the United States, Ghana, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Kenya (Goyal).⁹

To understand the reason for Aidoo’s choice of literary perspective in *Our Sister Killjoy* – reflective of her own socio-political vantage point – one cannot overlook the complex historical context in which the text was written. *Our Sister Killjoy* was written in the beginning of the 1970s (although first published in 1977), a period of great excitement and interest in Africa, not only stimulating local political and scholarly momentum, but creating international awareness with regard to an African global destiny, visible in such cultural and political movements as the Black Arts Movement in the United States, the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and the rise of a distinct black British identity (Goyal).¹⁰ Aidoo was not only in dialogue with the above intellectual movements, but also intimately involved in African (and international) feminism, socialism and a distinctly pan-Africanist sentiment. It is within this matrix of postcolonial meditations – attempting to understand the dystopic landscape of decolonised Africa – that Aidoo textually explores the usable past, using her

⁹ Aidoo’s privileged background situates her among a minority of West African people who were/are able to afford education, particularly at a tertiary level. This “elite” location certainly informs the way in which she perceives the diasporic condition (as presented by *Our Sister Killjoy*), making her both acutely aware of the way in which education may help edify Ghana (those who choose “self-exile” in the novel thus receive vehement reproach) and perhaps somewhat disconnected from diaspora outside of its ramifications for an educated elite.

¹⁰ In Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o’s “Moving the Centre: Towards a Plurality of Cultures” (1998), he mentions how, from the onset of the 1960s, an era in which many African countries were celebrating their newly acquired independence, it was African authors who sought to move the “centre” to the “peripheries” long before the academy saw the need: “For if the struggle to shift the base from which to view the world from its narrow base in Europe to a multiplicity of centres was reflected in the new literatures from Asia, Africa and South America, it was not similarly reflected in the critical and academic institutions in the newly independent countries, or in Europe for the matter” (54).

literature as both a siren call to those seeking foreign shores and as a litmus test for those diasporic subjects looking for a sense of authentic identity.

With the rise of pan-Africanism and its earlier literary expression in the Negritude movement, the voices of many West African male scholars, authors and politicians increased in volume (in terms of audibility and numerical expansion). The voice of the West African female (in writing, scholarship and politics) however, was undeniably lacking, save for a number of Nigerian women writers, as well as Ama Ata Aidoo who, according to my research, was the only Ghanaian woman to publish decidedly feminist, polemical and political literary works at the time (1960s and 1970s) (her feminist concerns will be revisited later on in the chapter).¹¹ An indication of the lack of attention given to African women writers (and indeed the lack of African women writers in general) during the 1960s and 1970s is reflected in the noticeably gendered attendance of the “African Authors Writing In English” conference held at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda in 1962. While there were prominent authors from Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Britain, the West Indies and the USA, the only two women present at the conference were administration staff (Ngugi “A Kenyan at the Conference”).

In light of this male-dominated African literary world, the fact that Aidoo had already published *Dilemma of a Ghost* by 1965 and went on to publish another play (*Anowa* in 1970), numerous short stories and *Our Sister Killjoy* by 1977, is highly significant. I chose to use Aidoo in this project for this specific reason, drawing not only on her geographical and historical locations as a writer (and as an example of political and ideological developments), but also on her perspectives constructed from the vantage point of the African *woman* writer.

As an appropriation and textual adaptation of the travel narrative – an ancient mode of western literary expression – *Our Sister Killjoy* is most certainly not covert in its subversion of the colonial western gaze, replacing it instead with a *female* “black-eyed squint”. While “squint” may imply distorted vision, Paula Morgan (1999) helpfully asserts that: “the very

¹¹ Information gathered from “Woman Writing Africa: A Bibliography of Anglophone Women Writers”: A selection of titles proposed by Tony Simoes da Silva, University of Wollongong, Australia. <http://aflit.arts.uwa.edu.au/FEMECalireEN.html>.

distortion is meant as a corrective – to adjust the myopia of a colonial legacy [and to] replace a white-eyed (Eurocentric) perspective with a black-eyed (Afrocentric) perspective” (Morgan 193). Instead of mapping a journey from the “centre” to the “periphery”, as Edward Said describes in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), this text reverses the stereotypical direction as it does the colonial gaze and sees the protagonist venturing into a European “heart of darkness”.

Said codifies this satiric appropriation of the colonial narrative as “the voyage in” (“Resistance and Opposition” 260), a literary journey from the “periphery” to the “centre”. This voyage manifests itself as a conscious (and autonomous) effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West in order to transform and *displace* it, to (re)write the *places* previously left out of (or warped by) the western historical and literary archives. In *Our Sister Killjoy*, it is the protagonist’s subjective centrality in her “voyage in[to]” Europe that affirms the particular perspective of her “black-eyed squint” against those claims which consider the West to be “the great family of man[kind]” (Aidoo 121). John Hawley, in drawing on work done by Helen Tiffin (1988), includes the following in his introduction to *Writing the Nation: Self and Country in Post-Colonial Imagination* (1996), encompassing precisely what *Our Sister Killjoy* seeks to achieve:

Because post-colonial and colonial perspectives are necessarily informed by the imperial vision with which they are always in various ways and to varying degrees, implicated, such establishing or rehabilitation of an independent identity involves the radical interrogation and fracturing of these imposed European perspectives, and their ‘systematic’ [...] replacement by an alternative vision, or the attack on or erosion of the very notion of system and hegemonic control itself” (Tiffin 172). (Hawley xviii)

Aidoo’s narrative takes place in four episodes: “Into a Bad Dream”, “The Plums”, “From Our Sister Killjoy” and “A Love Letter”. “Into a Bad Dream” begins in Ghana, where the reader is introduced to Sissie, a young Ghanaian woman about to embark on a trip to Europe as part of a student exchange programme. Only sixteen pages long, this chapter provides a brief outline of Sissie’s pending departure and her arrival in Germany. Despite its brevity however, this first section leaves no qualms as to the politicised nature of Aidoo’s writing and her vehement distaste for neo-colonialism. “The Plums” is comprised of Sissie’s time spent in Frankfurt and while the exchange programme is mentioned, much of the narrative

focus rests on the friendship that develops between Sissie and a young German woman, Marija (allegorically reflective of the neo-colonial relationship between Africa and the West). Throughout this section, Sissie's present experiences are woven into and held up against a greater transhistorical background, encompassing the terrors of Nazi Germany, slavery and colonialism.

Section three, "From Our Sister Killjoy", reflects on Sissie's time spent in London, her shock at the poverty-stricken lives of African people living there, and her reaction to news of South African cardiologist Dr Christian Barnard's second successful heart transplant, in which the heart of a black man is (literally) placed within the chest of a dying white man. The final section, "A love Letter", outlines Sissie's political views (as an echo of Aidoo's) in a letter she writes to her African boyfriend, whom she has left behind in England. She writes this letter aboard an aeroplane bound for Ghana, and as the plane lands back on African soil, the wheels touching the ground symbolically punctuate the core of her polemic, "pleading that instead of forever gathering together and virtuously spouting such beautiful radical analyses of the situation at home, we should simply hurry back" (121).

Presenting *Our Sister Killjoy* as a restless typography of alternating poetic impressionism and expository prose, Aidoo not only adapts and challenges the "content of the Western scribal convention, [but] she dislocates its form as well" (Morgan 193). The text is delivered as a combination of third- and first-person narration and a (presumably female) choric commentary. Not only does the chorus function as a means of reflecting deep oratory traditions – presumed to be characteristic of African culture and history – but having the chorus as a female group serves "to remind us of the wisdom and insight of those commonly assumed to be far removed from modernity" (Aidoo 189). The "narrative split" between poetic and prosaic genres can be more or less mapped on to the narrative shifts between Sissie's voice and that of the chorus, and as the vertical columns of poetic commentary interrupt (intersect) the horizontal lines of prose, the ironic (or layered) intentions of Aidoo's rhetoric are made graphically clear (Rooney).¹²

¹² The idea of a "chorus" of voices speaking of or into the heart of the diasporic condition is a distinctive feature that binds the three texts used in this thesis together. Despite the different ways in which a choric commentary is manifested in the three novels, its use reveals the collective experience of diaspora and the desire of the respective authors to make these voices audible and communal.

Caroline Rooney (1991) reads the text as “spoken writing”, confirming a comment made by Aidoo in which she states: “‘we don’t always have to write for readers, we can write for listeners’ (Lautre 1972:24)” (Wilentz 82). The fact that Aidoo’s writing resembles a written version of African oral tradition is particularly interesting in terms of the way in which she seeks to appropriate “traditional” western literary modes and to locate meaning outside of these existing frameworks. Oral story-telling also functions as a means of inserting communal *memory* into what used to be a rather impermeable archive of western history (recorded in written form from a distinctly western vantage point). Oral tradition hinges on the fact that those telling the story want those listening to the story to *remember*. *Our Sister Killjoy* functions as exactly that: a call to autochthony through remembrance of Africa as *home*. With regard to the function of collective memory, and its bargaining power in the formation of individual and cultural identity, Maurice Halbwachs (as mentioned by Misztal) illustrates a link between “collective memory and social solidarity on a national scale by showing that shared stories define the nature and boundaries of entire societies to whom the stories belong” (52).

Michael Foucault’s (1997) conceptions of *counter-memory* and *counter-history* are helpful in understanding the role of Aidoo’s work in general and *Our Sister Killjoy* in particular. Placing the practices of remembering and forgetting in the context of power relations, these acts may be interrogated as heterogeneous sites of multiple perspectives and epistemic negotiations, “in which memories are formed or de-formed, maintained alive or killed” (Medina 10). With colonial discourse having dominated the literary world for a considerable amount of time, the power to remember and forget certain historical events was certainly theirs to wield, blotting out the memories and experiences (in the written word) of those ‘less powerful’. For those rendered voiceless and muted by hegemonic frameworks, it is engaging in and returning to epistemology, and remembering against the grain of history, that is crucial to the enunciation/articulation of identity. This uncovering of “subterranean” knowledge forms (this may take the form of a novel that seeks to give voice to an alternate perspective, previously subsumed within hegemonic discourse) is termed, by Foucault, an *insurrection of subjected knowledge*.

Our Sister Killjoy functions as *counter-memory* and *counter-history*, an insurrection that remembers and records African and diasporic African experience against the grain of the western historical archive, inserting a different perspective on what constitutes identity and belonging for the diasporan. The *insurrection of subjected knowledge* (as *counter-memory* and *counter-history*), “enables us to tap into the critical potential of demeaned and obstructed forms of power/knowledge by paying attention to the lives, experiences and discursive practices of those peoples who have lived their life in ‘darkness and silence’” (Medina 17).

Unlike the forced migration many of her ancestors would have experienced some generations before, Sissie’s transatlantic movement takes place aboard an aeroplane rather than a slave ship, and as a result of a student programme for which she is chosen, rather than a slave auction. However, this crossing of borders and interaction with people of different cultures – though taking place in a different form – also bears considerable weight in the creation and exploration of identity, not just for Sissie, but for the other diasporic subjects mentioned in the novel as well. The choric commentary states that: “It is a long way home from Europe. A cruel past, a funny present, a major desert or two, a sea, an ocean, several different languages apart, aeroplanes bridge the skies” (8). Chinese Professor and critic Haiping Yan (1999) comments on this separation:

Moving through “bridged” spaces and times of differences, Sissie’s body is to be spatialised into a site where multiple modes of human geography are inscribed and contested; her mind is to be temporalized into a moment in which multiple writings of human history interact and contradict. As Sissie’s body and mind mark such a spatial-temporal “borderland”, her journey becomes the locus for figurative mappings of the “borderland-inhabitants”, their trajectories that indicate how and where the boundaries of the modern world are being crossed and/or redrawn, and their dynamic multiplicity of existence and consciousness. (95)

From the outset, the question of identity in the narrative looms large. Pending her departure for Europe, Sissie is invited to a cocktail party at the German ambassador’s house. Confused as to the reasons behind the overt display of expensive décor and food, and the sense of ceremony, Sissie’s thoughts are voiced by the chorus: “who did they think she was?” (8). This misunderstanding of identity, a postcolonial gesture at reaching out towards the “other” without knowing (or trying to know) who that “other” is, reinforces Aidoo’s

notion that African people still remain trapped within a western psychological construct, if not a legal or political one. This “entrapment” is made all the more clear with the description of the only other Ghanaian at the cocktail party: “Then there was this African, a single man, her fellow countryman. She had no idea who he was and did not catch his proper name [...] Throughout the evening, they referred to him as Sammy, which was therefore, the only name she could ever associate with him in her mind” (8-9).

Being so fully submerged within a western mode of acting, speaking and interacting (even his name is a western construction), Sissie “had no idea who [Sammy] was” (8). The double meaning of this statement effectively sets the stage upon which Aidoo seeks to discern and define what it is that *should* constitute a truly African identity. Her message, with particular focus on African intellectuals residing abroad – self-exiles – is uncompromising in its assertion that an African identity cannot be fostered outside of the geographic space of Africa and should not be perceived through a Universalist lens. Taking a cultural nationalist position on exile and migration, Aidoo undeniably views diaspora as loss (Goyal). These views are made strikingly clear right from the outset of the novel, as Sissie reflects that:

What is frustrating, though, in arguing with a nigger who is a ‘moderate’ is that since the interests he is so busy defending are not even his own, he can regurgitate only what he has learnt from his bosses for you [...] The academic-pseudo-intellectual version is even more dangerous, who in the face of reality that is more tangible than the massive walls of the slave forts standing along our beaches, still talks of universal truth, universal art, universal literature and the Gross National Product [...] Without doubt, the experience is like what a lover of chess or any other mind-absorbing sport must feel who goes to a partner’s for a game, but discovers he has to play against the dog of the house instead of the master himself. (6)

Rather than a “dress rehearsal for a journey to paradise” (9) (as Sammy labels Sissie’s upcoming travels to Europe), Sissie enters “into a bad dream”, as the title of the section suggests. Proceeding the section title, the following ironic words are displayed over the next two pages: “Things are working out/ towards their dazzling conclusions...” (3-4). The juxtaposition of the onset of a bad dream – a nightmare – and the simultaneous movement of events in the direction of “dazzling conclusions” is somewhat jarring to say the least. This ironic (and cynical) voice sets the tone for the rest of the narrative which creates and sustains a constant tension between appearance and reality (reality as defined by the novel). Throughout the novel, Aidoo makes reference to the fact that a diasporic and post-

colonial existence promises only illusory and ephemeral freedom and the “illusion” of possessing an authentic hybrid identity is continually held in contrast to the corporeal place of Africa. For Aidoo, perceiving geographic roots as the only sense of *home* (only feeling *chez soi* when *à la maison*), informs the way she constructs identity, and I argue that while Sissie is in Europe, the only way she is able to hold onto an authentic sense of identity is through memories of home.

From the moment of Sissie’s arrival in Germany, certain events highlight the fact that she does not simply “blend into” the European surroundings or among the European people, as she is singled out on account of her colour (and her gender), coming to be seen as something of an exotic novelty throughout the text. The very first instance of this disjuncture takes place in the train station shortly after her arrival in Frankfurt. While soaking in the sights and sounds around her, Sissie overhears a woman telling a young girl (presumably her daughter) that Sissie is a “Schwarze Mädchen” (12). Yan points out that, “despite the fact that the modernist boundaries – which were once structurally impossible to cross – are being crossed by Sissie, this moment of crisis indicates that boundaries continue to exist and in effect are intensified in the very moments of being crossed” (101). With the woman’s comment harshly and instantly drawing her attention to a distinct disparity in colour, Sissie finds herself repulsively aware of the colour of all the European skins around her:

And it hit her. That all that crowd of people going and coming in all sorts of directions had the colour of the pickled pig parts that used to come from foreign places to the markets at home. Trotters, pig-tails, pig-ears. She looked and looked at so many of such skins together. And she wanted to vomit. (12)

Signifying on the travel writers’ complicity with the assumptions of social Darwinism (that within the “evolutionary hierarchy of species”, the black person is viewed as closest to the ape), Aidoo chooses the pig as a creature with which to compare the white person, “with all of the less-than-savoury connotations of this association” (Morgan 199). Aidoo sustains these images of animalisation throughout the text, notably in her descriptions of the teenagers on the exchange programme who gorge themselves on the copious amount of food prepared for them:

They stuffed themselves
Oh yes:
Darling teenage pigs from
Europe
Africa
Latin America
The Middle East. (33) ¹³

This image of consumption, of greedily feeding on a profusion of western ideology freely offered to those whose appetites for what their own countries can provide have diminished, is a recurring theme in the text. In a sense, to draw on and reapply a popular modern day colloquialism, it seems that Aidoo is essentially (and metaphorically) saying that: “you are what you eat”. As Sissie’s journey unfolds, her visceral disgust is not confined to the single moment in the train station in which she becomes aware of skin colour, but this disgust comes to encompass western food, customs, and practices, as well as such historical legacies of violence as Nazism, colonialism, and slavery. Sissie’s reaction to European food is as symbolic as it is literal. Initially taken in by the allure of exotic and abundant foods (particularly the succulent plums offered to Sissie by the German woman Marija), Sissie, unlike her fellow diasporic brother and sisters – African “self-exiles” – comes to consider European food as strange and unpalatable, the cause of sickness and a metaphor for the way in which the western world appeals to the appetites of its neo-colonial “children”, but is unable to fully satisfy their hunger:

There is a kind of loneliness overseas which is truly bad [...] It comes from the food from the store. The vegetables and fruits that never ever get rotten. The meat, the chicken. All of which have been filled with water so that they look bigger and give the sellers more money [...] just a taste of which got my blood protesting loudly through the rashes and hives it threw on my body. Now my skin, which you used to say was so soft and smooth is gone hard and rough like the shell of an aged tortoise. (119)

Aidoo explores the implications for those who feed off the ideology of the “colonial capital”, and presents many poignant and somewhat shocking images of Africa and her “elite” in this

¹³ Neel Ahuja, in his article, “Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World” (2009), discusses animalisation i.e. the “organised subjection of racialised groups through animal figures” (557). He draws on Enlightenment conceptions of “animals that relied on the same objectifying methods used to represent slaves and the poor” and argues that “there is an emerging transnational turn in species critique. Recent scholarship at the intersection of postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, and species studies acknowledges links between species, race, and transnational power structures that underlie the production of culture [... this] offers new tools for rethinking transnational circuits of power and identity” (556).

regard: “From all around the Third World,/ You hear the same story; Rulers/ Asleep to all things at/ All times – / Conscious only of/ Riches, which they gather in a / Coma – / Intravenously –/ So that/ You wouldn’t know they were/ Feeding if it was not for the/ Occasional/ Tell-tale trickle somewhere/ Around the mouth” (34). Describing Ghana as “pick[ing] tiny bits of/ Undigested food from the/ Offal of the industrial world” (53) and asserting that Africa has become a “cultural vulture”, eating “carrion all the way” (39), it is evident that Aidoo’s views of decolonised Africa are far from utopic and idealised. Painting such portentous images however, certainly serves to reinforce and lend credence to her incessant call for those who have acquired skills (academic or otherwise) abroad to return and help restore their home countries, towns and communities. Steeped in irony, the chorus challenges African people to look at what is happening back home, and to “hurry back”:

Meanwhile,
Look!

In the capitals,
Ex-convicts from European
Prisons drive the city buses, and
Black construction workers
Sweat under the tropical sun, making
Ice-skating rinks for
The Beautiful People...
While other Niggers sit
With vacant stares
Or
Busy, spitting their lungs out.

JUST LIKE THE GOOD OLD DAYS
BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

Except –
The present is
S-o-o-o much
Better!
For
In these glorious times when
Tubercular illiterates
Drag yams out of the earth with
Bleeding hands,
Champagne sipping
Ministers and commissioners

Sign away
Mineral and timber
Concessions, in exchange for
Yellow wheat which
The people can't eat. (56-57)

With the second section being entitled “The Plums”, one could greatly extend the discussion of Aidoo’s symbolic use of food in the text, but for the particular purposes of this study, I rather focus on a number of key moments in the second section that reveal memory as a *route* home and as a mode of literary identity construction. In order to do this, I first briefly discuss Sigmund Freud’s concept of the *unheimlich* as it proves especially useful in exploring the implications of Sissie’s time spent in Germany. In his work on “The Uncanny”, Freud draws on the German word for “homey” (*heimlich*) and its corollary, *unheimlich*. In relation to these terms, Barbara Johnson (1998) points out that “Freud exclaims over the fact that the German word for “homey” extends itself to turn into its opposite – that the meaning of *heimlich* moves with a kind of inevitability from cosy, comfortable, and familiar to hidden, secret, and strange, so that one meaning of *heimlich* is identical to its opposite, *unheimlich*” (76).

During her time in Germany, Sissie is befriended by Marija, who becomes particularly fond of her, inviting Sissie to her house regularly and delighting in feeding the “African Miss” (who is seen as a somewhat fetishized commodity) succulent plums from her garden and various other fruits, meats and pastries.¹⁴ The sensual imagery of the plums and Marija’s constant feeding of Sissie culminate in an actual, rather than simply symbolic sexual act, with Marija intimately touching and kissing Sissie in her “nuptial chamber” (64). Linking this to the concept of the *unheimlich* proves enlightening, as we come to see that Sissie cannot feel at home (*chez soi*) when in Europe, and that what appears homey, is precisely its opposite.

Marija’s house is described as, “A dainty new cottage [...] the last in a row of several dainty new cottages, beautifully covered up by their summer foliage” (37). This comfortable,

¹⁴ For more on racial fetishism, see Stuart Hall’s “The Spectacle of the Other” in Margaret Wetherell, Simeon Yates and Stephanie Taylor’s *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (2001) or Roy Ellen’s “Fetishism” (*Man* 23.2 (1988): 213-235).

unthreatening image is directly preceded by an eerie, ominous one, describing the way in which the German people seek to place a veneer over the past, afraid that what is truly there, will be revealed: “That’s why/ They wonder,/ They wonder if, should they/ Stop cultivating the little pine trees, would/ Something else,/ Sown there,/ Many many years ago,/ In/ Those Bavarian woods/ SPROUT?” (37). The pastoral, romantic setting of Germany — “an ancient ruined castle at the edge / of a Brooding pine forest, on the / Bank of a soft flowing river” (41) — is continually undermined as Sissie comes to view this place not as one of beauty, but rather as a landscape “littered with the ghosts of black and Jewish corpses” (Goyal 194). The naming of Marija’s husband and son, Big Adolf and Little Adolf respectively, also serves to render the past a living presence (present).

This juxtaposition of appearance and “reality” is further enhanced in the moments before Marija makes sexual advances on Sissie. Marija’s room is described by Sissie as having a “lower middleclass cosiness” (64), while at the same time it appears to be a “[d]eserted looking chamber with its funeral elegance” (63). Once again, what appears to be *heimlich* is simultaneously *unheimlich*. This moment is also significant in linking the concepts of home, memory and identity, as it is the unhomeliness of Marija’s room and physical touch that trigger, for Sissie, specific memories of Ghana, the only place in which she truly feels she belongs:

As one does from a bad dream, impulsively, Sissie shook herself free...[she] thought of home. To the time when she was a child in the village [...] Oo, to be wrapped up in mother’s cloth while it rained. Every time it rained. (64)

It is here that Sissie recognises the “bad dream” into which she has travelled, to which she has almost complicity succumbed, and is rudely awakened, reverting to memories of home (Ghana) in order to find a handle on her identity. The *unheimlich* space of Marija’s bedroom, an allegory for the whole of Europe, reinforces Sissie’s longing for a return home.

McWilliams (1999) suggests that, “Marija’s lesbian sexual advances awaken Sissie to the reality of her homelessness in Europe, the emptiness of Marija’s motherhood, and the tragedy of colonialism’s systemic imbalance of power relations as she thinks to herself” (342):

And now where was she? How did she get there? What strings, pulled by whom, drew her into the pinelands where not so long ago human beings stoked their own funeral pyres with other human beings, where now a young Aryan house wife kisses

a young black woman with such desperation, right in the middle of her nuptial chamber? (64)

Rather than adopting a Universalist or cosmopolitan conception of home and belonging (and consequently identity) which refuses to attach the label of home to a particular essence, Aidoo translates a consciousness of identity into territorial terms. Achille Mbembe (2002) discusses this perspective as one in which, “there is no identity without territoriality – the vivid consciousness of place [...] Territoriality in its clearest manifestation is to be found in the cult of locality – or, in other words, home, the small space and inherited estate where direct, proximate relationships are reinforced by membership and common genealogy” (266). It is most apparent that Aidoo’s sense of terra firma, pivotal to belonging, transposes itself into the *terragraphica* of *Our Sister Killjoy*.

While Sissie desires the soil of her own country beneath her feet, rather than the cold floor of Marija’s bedroom, she is also struck by the presence of a desperate and tangible loneliness within this *unheimlich* space. In the awkward moments shared by Sissie and Marija, Sissie sees Marija’s weeping not only as a symptom of personal loneliness but also as part of a larger political discourse – the “collective loss” (67):

She saw against the background of the thick smoke that was like a rain cloud over the chimneys of Europe,

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Forever falling like a tear out of a woman’s eye. (65)

It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that in this revelatory moment, Aidoo is exposing another possible route of identification for Sissie – the notion that common (female) experience begets a form of allegiance and solidarity (not to discount the on-going debate around such notions). However, the collective loss to which Sissie refers seems to extend

only as far as the borders of Europe, preventing a sense of rapprochement and understanding between the previously colonised and the “colonial mother” (Aidoo 85). Sissie cannot forget that Marija is not simply a lonely housewife who is attracted to her; instead, she is a “daughter of mankind’s/ Self-appointed most royal line, / The House of Aryan – / An heiress to some/ Legacy that would make you/ Bow/ Down/ Your head in/ Shame and/ Cry” (48). Sissie therefore concludes, as did Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1970), that “the white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness” (9).¹⁵

Where transatlantic authors such as Caryl Phillips reveal that feelings of loneliness, abandonment and displacement signify elements of a common humanity and thus threads of mutuality that bind disparate peoples across cultures and countries together, Aidoo complicates these human connections by insisting that historical and cultural *difference* outweighs common emotional experience.¹⁶ This may also be as a result of the way in which *Our Sister Killjoy* locates the past *as history*, rather than *as memory*. While we see that it is Sissie’s remembering that links her identity to the physical space of Ghana, the choric commentary’s relentless uprooting of the past presents it as unchangeable history: inflexible and impermeable to other perspectives. In this way, separatism and division (of race, culture, and gender) are the natural outcomes, rather than potential rapprochement and coalescence.

Locating Africa within its colonial history, Aidoo perceives the moment of decolonisation not as a distinctive break in the colonial venture and the ushering in of a revolutionary, utopic era of self-governance, but instead considers the African nation as a “site of arrested decolonisation” (Goyal 187), caught up in “a dance of the masquerades called

¹⁵ Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) is a psychoanalytic work dealing with the way in which black diasporic subjects come to imitate their white counterparts in the western “colonial motherland”, struggling to come to terms with a divided sense of self (see page 28 for an elaboration of the notions of “fatherland” and “motherland”).

¹⁶ It must be noted however that *Our Sister Killjoy* was written at a crucial point in Ghanaian history – not long after its newly acquired independence from colonial rule – where identification with an African nation was paramount to the realisation of an authentic (and autonomous) African identity. Since writing this novel, Aidoo has certainly remained true to her pan-African and African nationalist sentiments, but her later works of fiction, drama and poetry portray a slightly more nuanced outlook, focussing more on feminist concerns than overtly nationalistic polemical works. Thirteen years after *Our Sister Killjoy* was published, Aidoo makes the point in an interview (1990) that “things are not connected in a vacuum; that, indeed, the contexts of gender, race, and history are inextricably linked to a person’s – any person’s – identity” (Owusu, 359). I return to Aidoo’s observation in my discussion of her feminist agenda.

Independence" (Aidoo 95).¹⁷ Consequently, while Aidoo sees the nation as imperative to the formation of identity and the solidarity of a people, she chooses to shy away from the thinking which sees pre-colonial Africa as a problem-free society, tainted and warped only by colonial intervention, and finally redeemed by the success of decolonising nationalism (Goyal). Instead, she draws attention to the on-going exploitation of the Third World (from without and within), grappling with ways in which to create and sustain freedom within a decidedly neo-colonial (rather than postcolonial) paradigm. In her love letter, Sissie states that "the question is not just the past or the present, but which factors out of both the past and the present represent for it the most dynamic forces for the future" (116).¹⁸

With reference to the outcome of possessing national consciousness without national mobilisation, Fanon asserts that:

It so happens that the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps. National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallisation of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilisation of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been. (119)

It is this "fragile travesty" that the novel warns against, drawing attention to the dire conditions on the home front, and the diasporic population abroad who would rather escape (deliberately leave) this "empty shell" of Africa than return to assist in its

¹⁷ I realise that using phrases such as "the African nation" are problematic for a number of reasons, specifically in light of the fact that the continent of Africa can by no means be described as a single homogenous entity. As a result of Aidoo's Pan-African views however, the way in which she refers to Africa is often in this broad sense. See page 20 for further critique.

¹⁸ Considering the on-going neo-colonial exploitation of many African countries, it is evident that many of Aidoo's concerns voiced in *Our Sister Killjoy* are still valid today. An article written for the international online newspaper *Final Call* ("The exploitation of Africa's land and people", written by Ashahed M. Muhammad and Brian E. Muhammad in February 2009), highlights this. Quoting Nicole C. Lee, executive director of TransAfrica Forum, the article points out that, "As a continent, Africa is still enslaved because of its vast wealth. The mining and extraction of precious materials—oil, natural gas, coltan and cobalt—enrich corporations but cast a shadow of poverty throughout the continent. Whether in the Niger Delta or the Democratic Republic of Congo, the people experience lives of misery and receive very little benefit from the richness of their land. This is known as the "resource curse"—the paradoxical relationship so many Africans have to the richness of Africa." For an in depth discussion of these pressing issues, see Rob Nixon's text, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011).

restoration. In Sissie's words, "this self-exile seems to be only a younger version of the old bankruptcy" (121).

Aidoo reinforces her pan-African views and her distaste for the self-exilic lifestyle in the textual transition from section two to section three ("From Our Sister Killjoy") of the narrative, as Sissie moves from Germany to London. Aidoo's nationalistic rhetoric leaves little room for the "transnational" and shows great contempt for those who would willingly "transplant" themselves from African to European soil. When Sissie is in London, she learns of Dr Christian Barnard's second successful heart transplant, of how a "Dying White Man had received the heart of a coloured man who had collapsed on the beach and how the young coloured man had allegedly failed to respond to any efforts at resuscitation and therefore his heart had been removed from his chest" (95). The calculated capitalisation of "white man", and the leaving of "coloured man" in lower case, hints at Sissie's (and Aidoo's) proceeding sentiments on the continued inequality between races despite shifts in legislation and governance.

In direct contrast to Sissie's reception of the news of the transplant, Kunle, a fellow Ghanaian in London, not only describes the operation as "the most wonderful piece of news to have come his way in a very long time" (96), but he goes on to say that "he [is] sure it is the/ type of development that can/ solve the question of apartheid/ and rid us, 'African negroes/ and all other negroes' of the the/ Colour Problem. The whole of the/ Colour Problem"(96). Sissie is incredulous and outraged at this reasoning and the piercing irony of the situation. She "had to confess that she still had not come round to seeing Kunle's point: that cleaning out the Baas's chest of its rotten heart and plugging in a brand-new, palpitatingly warm kaffirheart, is the surest way to usher in the Kaffirmillennium" (101). Kunle's reasoning simply perpetuates Aidoo's refrain in the text: that of African self-exiles living in a haze of illusion, unable to conceive of their continued enslavement. In her discussion of the transplant, as narrated in *Our Sister Killjoy*, Yan points out that:

The question about whose life was torn out, uprooted, transplanted, and displaced into whose enterprises of "health and longevity" is never raised let alone explored, by Kunle. Yet his own humanity palpitating in the body of London, as Aidoo's narrative continues to dissect, seems to be precisely a component of such a heart that was torn out of its formerly colonised body and transplanted into certain

transracial and transnational enterprises that do not yield anything to cure the bleeding, open chest of the African continent. (115)

This image of exploitation and imbalance, leant emphasis by Aidoo's constant referral to African "warmth" and European "coldness", is further reinforced by the juxtaposition of "letters from home", including a letter from Kunle's mother, that follow on from Kunle's discussion of the heart transplant. The "letters from home" textually enact the loss, agony and heartbroken state of those left behind in Africa, and I argue that Aidoo has included them as remembrances of *home* (corporeal reality) in order to puncture the diasporan's present transatlantic illusion:

Kofi,
When are you coming?
[...]
Bragou,
There is nothing bad here
...except our family is
Drowning in debts.
Even the things which were always good
Have gone wrong with us this year.
[...]
But
Please
Kunle,
If only you were here.
Now
It is me,
Your Own Mother speaking. (104-105)

Ironically, when Kunle does return home to visit his family, he is tragically killed in a car accident. The chorus cynically remarks that "there had to be a / Car [in order to flaunt the fact that he had been overseas] – / Plain Transportation Necessity/ With just a little/ Prestige on the side" (107). The description of his death is both tragic and poignant as it serves to reinforce the idea of African lives being wasted in pursuit of western dreams. The illusory nature of his modern western lifestyle is ironically highlighted in the fact that Kunle's death is not recognised or covered by the policy he had taken out with a "very reliable insurance company: Foreign, English, with the original branch in London" (108). Again, Aidoo draws attention to the view that diasporic Africans never truly belong abroad and that they are merely playing the master's game – hurrying "to lose [their] identity quickly in order to join the great family of man" (121). For Sissie, Kunle not only represents

the self-exile who values the coloniser's world more than his own, but he also epitomises the "been-to" who is unable to shed his "exile's consciousness" (Wilentz 87), numbing him to the realities at home (Ghana) and to his "true" identity:

Kunle, like so many of us, wished he had had the courage to be a coward enough to stay forever in England. Though life 'home' had its compensations. The aura of having been overseas at all. Belonging to the elite, whatever that is. The sweet pain of getting a fairly big income which can never half support one's own style of living. (Aidoo 107)

Along with this example, the text presents the constant danger inherent in the "transplantation" of African hearts, bodies, minds, or souls. Yan goes on to say that "this multi-coloured masquerade for the life-mirage of a 'global village' characterised by its putatively postmodern, postcolonial, or postnational 'borderlessness' – physically or otherwise is not performed in London only, of course" (Yan 116). With regard to this, the chorus speaks of the:

Gambian ophthalmologist in Glasgow,
Philippino lung specialist in Boston
Brazilian cancer expert in '
Brooklyn or
Basle or
Nancy.
While at home,
Wherever that may be,
Limbs and senses rot
Leaving
Clean hearts to be
Transplanted into
White neighbour's breasts. (32)

It is thus evident that for Aidoo, physical location, as well as the imagined space in which one seeks to locate a sense of self, are of key importance in the construction (or disruption) of one's identity. Diaspora, in the text, is located ideologically alongside slavery, and so those who choose to leave the African continent are portrayed as actively choosing to remain enslaved to the West. In Sissie's love letter at the end of the novel, she reflects that

The story is as old as empires, oppressed multitudes from the provinces rush to the imperial seat because that is where they know all salvation comes from. But other imperial subjects in other times and places have discovered, for the slave, there is nothing at the centre, but worse slavery. (87-88)

If freedom is a *route* to authentic identity for the diasporic subject, then, from Aidoo's perspective, freedom is found only within the borders of the African nation, a nation in need of reform, both ideologically and socio-politically, a nation truly *postcolonial*. While one may in no way conclude that *Our Sister Killjoy* presents an authoritative and all-encompassing panoply of Aidoo's political beliefs, it is interesting to compare the text's construction of nationalism with other comments made by Aidoo. With the intricate link between nation and narration (Bhabha) it is important to consider the narrative techniques and intentions used in any text, particularly those that claim to have a political and polemical agenda. The choric commentary in *Our Sister Killjoy* infuses its poetic rhetoric with diasporic and historical occurrences taking place over centuries and across various national borders, while the narrative voice that relates specifically to Sissie, traces the way in which she moves through the present space in relation to this wider historical context. Goyal explains this as a narrative tussle between the two, with the chorus and Sissie embedding two distinct scenes of temporality: "a linear narrative of African nation-building that Sissie is committed to, and a longer temporal duration signalled by the chorus, where colonialism and its aftermath is one crisis among many, rather than the definitive rupture assumed by many theorists of development, the singular event that defines African destiny" (Goyal 203).

Considering Aidoo's (narrative and personal) commitment to nation-building, along with the resounding call of return (to the geographic "nation" of Africa) that the text reveals, it is no secret that Aidoo is an ardent advocate for pan-Africanism. This is clearly expressed by Aidoo herself in an interview in 1995:

Nationalism is such a powerful term for us (Africans) because of what we have been through as a people and are still going through. Over the last five hundred years, African people have been under all kinds of onslaught – physical, mental, emotional. It seems to me that whatever is left for us to recoup cannot be done unless we see ourselves as a people, as a nation. When I say African nationalism, I am also using the term to embrace the global African world [...] Maybe then the better term for me to use is Pan-Africanism. (Needham 71)

While Aidoo's pan-Africanist ideology is similar to that of Marcus Garvey's and other well-known pan-Africanists in that it ultimately seeks to gather those Africans who are dispersed across the world (as a result of forced or voluntary migration) in order to bring them all "home", her Afrocentric views differ from theirs on account of her perception of the African

continent, its past and its future. Firmly committed to realism, Sissie, like Aidoo, refuses to romanticise Africa: “I was groping for a way to tell [my African brothers in London] what was in my mind. Of life being relevantly lived. Of the intangible realities. Such stuff. Yet I didn’t want to get caught up in a lot of metaphysical crap. When an atmosphere is as inert as Africa today, the worst thing you can do to anybody is to sell him your dreams” (129). Aidoo, just as she refuses to idealise the past, so too does she confront the future as one fraught with uncertainty and potential disaster, using her text, not as a vessel of hybrid and transcendental possibilities, where all is resolved, but rather as a call for the awakening of a sense of shared nationality and African mobilisation.

This polemic certainly holds much weight, in a political, economic and social sense, but the image of Africa presented in the text – that which diasporic people are called to identify with – problematizes the pragmatism of initiating true (socio-political) change. The image presented is largely a homogenous entity, not accounting for the vast disparity and diversity among peoples and cultures within the continent. Aidoo’s place *from which* she writes (historically and politically pan-African) thus influences the place *of which* she writes. The homogenised Africa in *Our Sister Killjoy* – Aidoo’s *terragraphica* – thus becomes the Africa with which Aidoo seeks to influence the diasporic readers’ subjectivity and sense of identity, despite the fact that this image may not be a true reflection of the actual, internally discordant continent.

For Aidoo, the diasporic subject is not someone who has “crossed the river” and thus begun a new, hybrid existence. Instead, he/she is caught in the confluence, the in-between, vicariously living a western lifestyle while still having roots attached to Africa. This image, as Goyal discusses, contributes further to the novel’s “paradigm of arrested decolonisation, where transnational mobility signifies no progress, but a trap of history. In this way, the novel articulates a future that cannot yet be born. It cannot imagine progress because it is locked in a bitter dialogue with the past” (“From Revolution to Arrested Decolonisation” 200). Progress and modernity are also seen to be irrevocably imbricated with western ideology, and so looking to a western framework for national mobilisation, while attempting to embrace a postcolonial future, is not only presented as a farcical endeavour in the text, but one of further bondage to the colonial master. When Sissie’s boyfriend implores her not

to “freeze time [or to] lock it up in a capsule of tragic visions (113)”, she replies by saying, “Of course, I agree with you about letting time move. But, My Darling, we have got to give it something to carry. Time by itself means nothing, no matter how fast it moves. Unless we give it something to carry for us; something we value. Because it is such a precious vehicle, is time” (113).

In a critique and expansion of Aidoo’s diasporic perspective – what some may deem a rather parochial view of diaspora – historian, Arif Dirlik (1994), asserts that the question, “is not whether this global intelligentsia can (or should) return to national loyalties but whether, in recognition of its own class-position in global capitalism, it can generate a thoroughgoing criticism of its own ideology and formulate practices of resistance against the system of which it is a product (356)” (Hawley xiii). *Our Sister Killjoy* is undoubtedly an advocate for “resistance against the [colonial] system”, but in presenting return to Africa (and ultimate separation from the West) as the only means of achieving this end, the text offers little in the way of pragmatic and realistic resistance.

Offering a vastly different perspective to that expressed above, Afropolitanism provides a “new phenomenology of Africanness” (Gikandi 9), seeking a hermeneutics of redemption for the diasporan whose sense of identity lies ambiguously inside and outside of the African continent. Without disregarding the inherent (and multiple) difficulties that migration inevitably evinces, Afropolitanism does not ask for naivety in relation to the obvious fractal implications of transnationalism, but reflects a new attitude towards it. Instead of perceiving dispersal (of African people from Africa to other continents) as the initiator of a loss of identity, Afropolitanism chooses to perceive this movement as a means of acquiring a new consciousness, enhanced by other cultures, geographies and memories rather than diluted by them. Perceived through this lens, diaspora is not envisioned as enslavement, and “the hybridity of Africa and the cosmopolitanism of its subjects does not imply the negation of horizontal social relationships, local affiliations and the modes of knowledge that they generate” (Gikandi 10).

In further critiquing and seeking to uncover the polemic of *Our Sister Killjoy* (and its implications for diasporic identity construction), I find Achille Mbembe’s (2002) work most

useful, and draw on his article “African Modes of Self-Writing” in order to understand the various shifts in focus and agenda within African writing over time. He outlines two forms of historicist thinking that have underpinned African writings of the self, namely, *Afro-radicalism* and *Nativism*.¹⁹ I would like to argue that *Our Sister Killjoy* subscribes to elements of both narrative influences, presented as a politically polemical and nationalist work of fiction, calling for (physical and psychological) emancipation from neo-colonialism, as well as new definitions and ways in which to speak that are not derived from western constructs or influenced by western ideas of modernity and progress.

The danger of perpetuating unequivocal difference (between the “West” and the “Rest”) is that in the hopes of speaking in one’s own voice (creating a “new language” as Sissie puts it), one may simply reiterate the figure of the “native” and consequently (re)establish boundaries and borders between “us” and “them”. Identity then, as Aidoo actively constructs it within her narrative, is always geographically bound and posited *in relation to* an “other”, rather than being open to multiple influences and subject to hybridity. Mbembe argues that:

In the prose of nativism (as well as in some versions of the Marxist and nationalist narratives), *a quasi-equivalence is established between race and geography*. Cultural identity is derived from the relationship between the two terms, geography becoming a privileged site at which the (black) race’s institutions and power are supposed to be embodied. Pan-Africanism in particular defines the native and the citizen by identifying them with black people [...] Racial and territorial authenticity are conflated, and Africa becomes the land of black people. (256; my emphasis)

A difficulty posed by this exclusively autochthonous conception of identity is that for diasporic Africans – many residing abroad as a result of their ancestors having been actively transported as slaves to various Atlantic locations – the “African nation” remains a psychological space or at most, a mythological origin to which physical return is impossible. For the African self-exiles spoken of in *Our Sister Killjoy*, while return to *roots* may be

¹⁹ *Afro-radicalism*, an ideology presented as “democratic”, “radical” and “progressive”, “used Marxist and nationalist categories to develop an imaginaire of culture and politics in which a manipulation of the rhetoric of autonomy, resistance, and emancipation serves as the sole criterion for determining the legitimacy of an authentic African discourse” (Mbembe 240-241). *Nativism* on the other hand, arose as a response to the “native condition”, prompting the idea of “a unique African identity founded on membership of the black race” (Mbembe 241).

possible, the Atlantic *routes* through which they have moved complicate a distinctly Africanist subjectivity. Diasporic identity cannot be defined by geographic origin, just as time cannot be conflated with space. Mbembe suggests that: “Perhaps one step out of this quandary would be to reconceptualise the notion of time in its relation to memory and subjectivity. Because the time we live in is fundamentally fractured, the very project of an essentialist or sacrificial recovery of the self is, by definition, doomed. Only the disparate, and often intersecting practices through which Africans *stylise* their conduct and life can account for the thickness of which the African present is made” (272-273).

In the novel’s fourth section, “A Love Letter”, Sissie has left London and is en route to Ghana. On her way home, she writes to her boyfriend who has remained in England. Her letter includes personal thoughts on transatlantic identity, neo-colonialism and memories of conversations she has had with numerous diasporic “brother and sisters” during her travels. One of these conversations deals explicitly with the concepts of feeling *chez soi* and *à la maison*. Speaking to a well-qualified African doctor (a representative of countless other African self-exiles), the doctor rhetorically asks Sissie, “my sister, you don’t want me to go home only to be frustrated do you? How could someone like me go back? [...] my fame has spread to Russia and China [...] Sister, there are no facilities at home to provide someone like me with the congenial atmosphere in which to work” (128).

Disrupting the concept of “home” as being synonymous with origin, the doctor proposes a distinctly diasporic, postmodern definition of home – one of feeling *chez soi* without physically being *à la maison*. He says to Sissie: “after all, wherever one feels at home must be home. This earth belongs to us all. We can perch anywhere.” (129). To this transnational perspective, Sissie replies: “But we are not birds [...] our needs are more complicated than those of birds, aren’t they? Surely our bodies demand more than branches, air, and seeds” (129). Clearly, the implication is that Africans were designed to live in Africa, and if living abroad, they must return in order to redeem not only their own identity, but the identity and integrity of an entire continent. Sissie asks the pressing question, “why, after finishing their studies, [do] our brothers and sisters stay and stay and stay. After all, was it not the original idea that we should come to these alien parts, study what we can of what they know and then go back home?” (120). This is precisely the action Sissie takes, with her

polemical stance on the need to be *à la maison* in order to feel *chez soi*, finding ultimate expression in the physical locality of Ghana (as she perceives it from the window of the aeroplane): “She sat quietly in her seat and stared at the land unfolding before her. Dry land, trees, a swamp, more dry land, green, green, lots of green [...] she was back in Africa. And that felt like fresh honey on the tongue: a mixture of complete sweetness and smoky roughage. Below was home with its unavoidable warmth and even after these thousands of years, its uncertainties” (133).

Aidoo’s transatlantic perspective is also located in, or rather, is filtered through, a distinctly feminist lens. This has particular salience in light of what this project seeks to achieve through viewing literary perspective as pivotal to the way in which diasporic (or transatlantic) identity is constructed and perceived. Sissie’s “black-eyed squint” serves as a means of distorting and appropriating male-oriented and Eurocentric theories concerning exile and return, “synthesis[ing] feminist and *afrocentric* perspectives” (Wilentz 80). From this positioning, the question of identity is addressed and grappled with, reflected in the words of Sissie: “Sometimes when they are hotly debating the virtues of the African female, I ask myself: ‘But who am I? Where did I come from?’” (117). Clearly, for Aidoo, autochthony and identity are conflated and indissoluble, so much so, that the questions “Who am I?” and “Where did I come from?” are viewed as synonymous.

In male Afrocentric discourse, the answer to these questions would simply be that if you are an exile of African origin, then you are an African and must return to the place from which you came in order to lay claim to this identity. For the African woman exile however, while return to Africa is the action deemed necessary by Aidoo, the question of “Who am I” *as an African (diasporic) woman* is far more ambivalent and far less addressed in literary texts. Sally McWilliams, in a paper dedicated to an African feminist reading of Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) asserts that, “writers like Aidoo are striving to awaken their critical constituencies to the oppressive effects of the protectionism expressed by European white feminism and African patriarchy” (334). In her love letter, Sissie highlights what society (western and African) deems “conventional” and “right” concerning the role of (African) women, as well as expressing how she deviates away from these prescribed norms. She writes:

It seems as if all the softness and meekness you and all the brothers expect of me and all the sisters is that which is really western. Some kind of hashed-up Victorian notions, hm? [...]

They say that any female in my position would have thrown away everything to be with you, and remain with you: first her opinions, and then her own plans. But oh deliciously naïve me. What did I rather do but daily and loudly criticise you and your friends for wanting to stay forever in foreign places? (117)

As previously mentioned (see page 13), while Sissie is certainly an advocate for a distinctly feminist consciousness, she does not identify with women globally. Her feminism is distinctly African as we can see throughout the text with regard to her relationship with Marija and her interactions with other European women in London. While these moments of potential connection hint at female solidarity, they are wrought by stronger factors: “[the Welsh maid from East Putney] could have passed as a soul sister,/ But for her colour – and our history” (93). Colonial history dominates Aidoo’s conception of the western woman, so much so, that in the text, Aidoo seems to actively perpetuate the derogatory (patriarchal) stereotype of women, describing those European women who settled in various African countries as “dolls” (117), consumed by trivial affairs and wholly dependent on the men.

Seeking to find a suitably descriptive term for African feminist thought/action (that which cannot be subsumed within the generic (western) label of “feminism”), Obioma Nnaemeka (2003) presents “nego-feminism” as a possible alternative. Nego-feminism incorporates the ways in which the African woman’s experience differs from that which is described in western discourse, making room for the negotiation of new forms and ways of thinking about feminism. As Aidoo’s text demonstrates, and Nnaemeka’s article confirms, African women’s theorising often takes place in narrative forms – through stories and proverbs, through playing with language and through the communalisation of textual (and authorial) voices that do not adhere to the deeply personalised, Cartesian theorising of the West. Nnaemeka also advocates that in order to meaningfully explain the phenomenon of African feminism, one must pay close attention to contextual and environmental factors, realising the proactive (rather than reactive) nature of African feminism. A similar sentiment is held by Aidoo, who insists (through the character of Sissie) that in order for any change to be made and sustained within the African continent, one cannot be satisfied to exile oneself in the West (in both a geographical and psychological sense).

Through reading *Our Sister Killjoy*, one may deduce that Aidoo, like Nnaemeka, argues that feminist theory should be built on the indigenous, a term renowned Political Scientist and Sociologist Claude Ake examines in his thought on development and progress within Africa. Ake explains (as recorded in Nnaemeka's article) that in order to advance the development of the African continent, "we" must look at African societies *as they are*, rather than as they ought to be, or as they might become. He argues that sustainable development is only possible if "we" build on what is already there – the indigenous. Interestingly, what Ake means by "indigenous" is not (what is often perceived as) "traditional", that which is fossilised, timeless and essentialised. Instead, his idea of the indigenous refers to what it is that people consider important to their lives, what it is that provides an "authentic expression of themselves" (Nnaemeka 377). This idea certainly finds resonance within *Our Sister Killjoy*, as Aidoo calls for a return to Africa *as it is*. The fact that the one who returns in the text is a woman, the same woman who encourages her male counterparts abroad to do the same, suggests that Aidoo is committed to revealing the proactivity of African women in promoting change within their own societies. In this way, identity for the African women is inextricably bound up within the indigenous.

In order to authentically address the indigenous (to locate and immerse oneself within a local, geographic sense of identity), the method provided in *Our Sister Killjoy* is one of "unlearning" the colonial master's engrained ideology through transcending attempts at venerating the past as well as resisting the magnetic pull of western intellectual and cultural "modernity". Sissie comments in her love letter: "...Just like the big-time professors at home. Who, knowing what a back-breaking job it is to unlearn what the masters have taught, and that to learn anything new is even more difficult, spend little time between beers, advising us against 'putting back the clock, reversing history', wioh, wioh, wioh!!" (121). Transferring this call to "unlearn", from all African subjects, to the subaltern female, Gayatri Spivak asserts that:

This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonised. Thus, to question the unquestioned muting of the subaltern woman even within the anti-imperialist project of subaltern studies is not, as Jonathan Culler suggests, to 'produce difference by differing' or to 'appeal...to a sexual identity defined as essential and privilege experiences associated with that identity.'" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 296)

Aidoo also makes mention of the African “mother” throughout the novel and the suffering *she* has had to endure throughout history. Using Germany as an example of European imperialism in the text – bearing all the concomitant exploitative connotations – the gendered connection between an African “mother” and an abusive “fatherland” is not lost on the reader. In conjunction with Spivak’s call to “unlearn”, *Our Sister Killjoy* functions as a means of feminist conscientisation as well as a call to national loyalties, locating African identity (and specifically African female identity) within a particular (colonial) historical framework. Interestingly, Aidoo continues to see African identity in relation *to*, rather than in relationship *with* the “West”, seeking a sense of belonging and home outside of (neo)imperial boundaries – imagined or otherwise.

Sissie, in the form of an interior monologue in the narrative, also extends the local situation in Africa to a broader, diasporic one, recalling the pain of slavery, rape, poverty, service in colonial armies, and cultural alienation:

Of course she has suffered, the African mother [...] Just look at what’s been happening to her children over the last couple of hundred years...When she did not have to sell them to local magnates for salt, rampaging strangers kidnapped them to other places [...] Meanwhile, those who grew up around Mother woke up to forced labour and thinly-veiled slavery on colonial plantations...Later on, her sons were conscripted into imperial armies and went to die in foreign places [...] And now look at those for whom she’s been scrimping, saving and mortgaging her dignity in order to send them to school nearby, or abroad. Look at them returning with grandchildren whom she can’t communicate with, because they speak only English, French, Portuguese or even German, and she doesn’t. (123)

Having alluded to the idea that *Our Sister Killjoy* functions as a type of response to and an appropriation of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) (see page 5), it is interesting to contrast the textual space afforded African women in both texts. In *Heart of Darkness*, the only mention of a woman besides the fleeting encounters with Marlow’s aunt and Kurtz’s betrothed (who is only revealed at the end of the novel), is presented in the form of “Kurtz’s agitated African woman, the very symbol of frenzied passion: uncontrollable, powerless, inaudible, and certainly functionally inarticulate” (Busia 87). In considering the representation and active muting of African women in colonial texts, the following extract taken from Abena Busia’s “Silencing Sycorax: On African Colonial Discourse and the

Unvoiced Female" (1989) seems necessary to include here with reference to the African woman in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

The African woman is conjured up out of a void, a fissure or space out of which there can be for her no coherent or comprehensible language: not because it cannot be uttered, but because, as Conrad makes quite clear, her language either cannot be heard or cannot be understood – and it is this singular factor which has had bearing on the representation of black women in imperial discourse. What makes this silencing all the more emphatic is that this is precisely a work which emphasizes the telling of a story, by the man Marlow, in which the central character, Kurtz, is singled out for the power of his voice as his instrument of control. (87)

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Sissie is "singled out for the power of [her] voice" – inverting and undermining the colonial stereotype, textually placing the previously inarticulate African woman in a space of bold articulation. This is practically illustrated in the text where Sissie speaks out at an African students' union meeting in London where she recalls to her beloved in her letter that: "I got up to attack everybody, pleading that instead of forever gathering together and virtuously sprouting such beautiful radical analyses of the situation at home, we should simply hurry back?" (121). Although she records feeling ridiculous at first, admonishing a group of mostly (if not entirely) male intellectuals who "nearly ate [her] up" (121), she speaks her mind none-the-less, without apologising for it.

When considering the role of the African woman's voice in literary texts (particularly post-colonial texts) it seems almost impossible to discuss the subject without at least some mention of Spivak's question: "Can the Subaltern Speak?"²⁰ In asking this question, Spivak demonstrates her concern for the processes whereby postcolonial studies ironically reinscribe, co-opt, and rehearse neo-colonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure. Ashcroft et al. (2000) point out that Spivak's work suggests that "no act of dissent or resistance occurs on behalf of an essential subaltern subject entirely separate from the dominant discourse that provides language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks" (201). Even though Spivak

²⁰ This is not to say, however, that Spivak is/was the only one to speak of the "subaltern". From 1982, within the discourse of Subaltern Studies, Ranajit Guha published a series of essays on the topic, responding to Gramsci's use of the term "subaltern". Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" was in turn, a response to, and a critique of, Guha's writings (see Guha, Ranajit and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Eds. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

focuses mainly on the position of the Indian female, her thoughts have great relevance to African women as well. Considering the tools available for resistance and articulation in the postcolonial world (still coloured at some intrinsic level by imperial and patriarchal conventions), the female African writer has an especially difficult task in authentically (re)presenting the female African self.

Aidoo is certainly someone who takes this particular task seriously, striving (through her literary works as well as her political involvement) to clear a space in which African women can speak. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Aidoo began lending the African woman a voice (through plays, novels and short stories) long before Spivak's essay on the Subaltern (1988) or other seminal African feminist texts such as Tsitisi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1984). At the "Women in Africa and the African Diaspora" conference held at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1992, Aidoo presented a key note address to those present, stating that:

Every woman and every man should be a feminist – especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives, and the burden of African development [...] It is high time African women moved onto centre stage, with or without anyone's encouragement. Because in our hand lies, perhaps, the last possible hope for ourselves and for everyone else on the continent (Ama Ata Aidoo, 1992). (Guy-Sheftall 27)

These politicised and feminist sentiments, though voiced by Aidoo in 1992, were clearly at work within her literary and socio-political consciousness while writing *Our Sister Killjoy*, as Sissie certainly functions as a woman "taking centre stage". The unfolding of the text reveals the way in which she comes to inhabit this role, as her own personal growth, development and sense of having an authentic African identity are mapped out in conjunction with the various locations she moves to and through. When Sissie leaves Accra, she is merely a tender-aged girl; by the time she leaves London to return to Ghana, she has been transformed into *Our Sister Killjoy* – a "transnationally learned Black-Eyed Squint" (Yan 119).

The way Sissie comes to perceive the world through her acquired "black-eyed squint" is clearly portrayed in the love letter that she writes towards the end of the novel. The letter is also the first time we are made privy to the voice of Sissie in first person narration, insinuating that the thoughts she expresses here are genuinely hers – the conclusions and

deductions she has drawn from “knowledge gained since” (69) leaving Africa and a confident assertion of her identity as an African woman ready to take responsibility for her own country and nation. It is also worth noting *where* Sissie is when writing this letter, as her liminal position within the aeroplane functions as a means of lifting her above the geographical spaces of both Europe and Africa. In this way, her thoughts and deductions are not a product of immediate contextual influences, but purely the textual solidifying of “her knowledge gained” and her chosen identity.

In an interview, when asked about the significance of Sissie’s love letter written to her boyfriend, Aidoo comments that:

Sissie uses her...ex-boyfriend...as the conduit through which she is speaking with a communal voice, a kind of collective voice and her address really was to everybody because in the long run what hurt her most was not what happened between her boyfriend and herself – “I” and “I” – but between “them” and “them,” between “We,” between “us” as an African people. It’s a love letter to everybody and also to herself. I didn’t say “let her write a letter to herself,” but in effect that is what it is, a letter to herself in an effort to clarify her own views, to state her case, and examine it to see if she agrees with the conceptions of her own mind, her thoughts. So I think that is why she tears the letter up after writing it. It becomes irrelevant once she has clarified herself to herself and realized “We’ll be ok.” So it’s larger than herself. It is a message to her, to him, to both of them, to the whole of the African world. (Needham 129)

Not only is Sissie’s positioning in the text crucial to the way in which she sees herself as an African woman and the way in which she perceives the African identity (the nation and its people), but the position of the readership as well as the author herself is fundamental to the construction and perception of identity. Evidently, “the ambivalent relationship between Third World writers and the coloniser is only one of the many questions centring around the identity of the individual writer” (Hawley xx). In conjunction with the idea that Aidoo is ultimately creating a particular *terragraphica* with *Our Sister Killjoy*, one is compelled to question who it is that she is writing it for. Looking at the way in which Aidoo presents the narrative – in four distinct sections – Caroline Rooney suggests that each section targets a different audience:

For instance, in “the Plums”, the dramatic confrontation is between an African woman and a European audience, particularly as represented by Marija as would-be interrogator of Sissie. The text moves on to address an audience of “gone-to’s” and, in particular, Kunle, where the narrator writes as Kunle’s mother addressing her

truant son. The audience is then specified still further, in a sense, in “a Love Letter” which addresses a friend/”brother”/lover. Finally, in the concluding section, the text becomes, in a way, self-addressed: “Sissie wondered whether she had spoken aloud to herself” (124). Part of the effect of indicating who is being addressed is to indicate who has the “right to reply.” (115)

For Aidoo, given the time and context in which the text was written, as well as her own personal socio-political and cultural affiliations, *Our Sister Killjoy* seems to have been largely a product of Aidoo’s voice and sentiments. In relation to the readership, the text has had vastly different receptions amongst different people and at different times. Spivak (1990) puts it this way: “what can the intellectual do toward the texts of the oppressed? Represent them and analyse them, disclosing one’s own positionality for other communities of power [...] what we do toward the texts of the oppressed is very much dependent upon *where we are* (56-57) (Hawley xxvi; my emphasis).

Perhaps within the context of recent decolonisation, the text functions as an important reminder to African self-exiles of the place and the people they have left behind, a type of political and social manifesto, calling them home; a plea to avoid simply perpetuating the colonial relationship under the guise of intellectual advancement. Aidoo makes her intentions as an author clear in the following comment recorded in an interview: “I think part of our responsibility or our commitment as writers is to unfold or open for ourselves and our communities what exists, what is wrong, the problems. Right? To state our case in such a way that we would inform and perhaps, if we are lucky to be that good, to inspire others” (Needham 130).

The final three pages of the novel record Sissie’s arrival in Africa, with a voice over the aeroplane intercom stating “that they would be leaving the Atlantic in a minute and in fact, if they looked down, they would see the continent of Africa” (133). After having been “completely absorbed in what she was doing [...] Sissie woke up [to see] Africa, huge and from this coastline, certainly warm and green. In fact, she responded less to the voice from the pilot’s cabin than the heat which suddenly hit the plane and invaded its chilled interiors” (133). It is this warmth – the likes of which is juxtaposed with the coldness of Europe throughout the text – that signals to Sissie that she is home: “Below was home with its

unavoidable warmth and even after these thousands of years, its uncertainties” (133). Even in these final moments of the text, Aidoo chooses not to idealise Africa, nor does she romanticise the future with promises of metaphoric redemption. Instead, Sissie chooses to return to this “crazy old continent” (133) with its potential for change *and* its neo-colonial uncertainties. Yan suggests that in returning, Sissie chooses to “live a life relevant to reproductive humanity and conducive to the development of transformative human subjectivities” (Yan 120) – a choice she wishes all diasporic Africans to make.

It is thus evident that through *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo makes the following plea to both those Africans living abroad and those within the borders of the continent (to borrow Fanon’s words): “let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole [wo]man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth” (*Wretched of the Earth* 252). Instead of celebrating cultural assimilation and new ways of thinking about home and belonging within the fluid context of the transatlantic paradigm, Aidoo suggests that for the African self-exile, return to national, geographic origins is the only option available for the construction and maintenance of an authentic sense of identity.

Chapter Three:

Tidalectic Remembering

We are creatures of our history [...] the past predicts our present and the present is, in the end, what we call home.

Brathwaite 237

Offering a compendium of perspectives on the construction of transatlantic and diasporic identity from the position of the third point of the Atlantic triangle – the Caribbean – Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969) further complicates and clarifies what it is to belong within a neo-colonial paradigm. Franca Bernabei (2008) asserts that the Caribbean can be considered as a number of things: "an inter-American contact zone *par excellence*, the paradigmatic archipelago of contemporary urban syncretic cultures, or, rather, the last of the great meta-archipelagos, lacking either a boundary or a centre" (110; emphasis in original). Set in the midst of this great archipelago, upon a tiny island surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, Marshall's narrative grapples with what it means to be suspended historically and contemporarily between the colossi of the West and Africa, between memory and forgetting and between the subjective notions of progress and stasis.

Having looked at Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, a text involving two distinct points of the transatlantic triangle: Africa and the West (embodied by Europe in the narrative), this chapter now turns to a novel that deals with one geographic location, indelibly infused with elements of both. The singular focalising space of this novel by no means underplays the multifarious space of the Atlantic however, containing within its boundaries an amalgam of cultures, histories and stories, a direct result of colonial expansion and the African diaspora. Indeed, Caribbean history – "political, social, economic, and cultural – is a history of myriad colonial and neo-colonial entanglements with loose ends that reach well into the present" (Kutzinski 9), and it is these "loose ends" that Marshall attempts to identify and weave into the fabric of her text, making for a complex and challenging read.

In an interview with Joyce Pettis (1992), Marshall describes *The Chosen Place* as a “vehicle” and a tool with which to look at the African Diaspora and its intimate encounters with the metropolitan powers of Europe and America, the historically weighted conversation between the “West” and the “rest” (124). With emphasis placed on transatlantic movement, cultural exchange and shifting perspectives, the characters Marshall presents are simultaneously allegorical and individual, allowing for a penetratingly polemical reading of the text as well as a narrative in which one is able to identify with the characters as real people. According to Barbadian poet and critic Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The Chosen Place* is,

no mere externalised or exotic investigation. Mrs Marshall has reached as far into the West Indian society as her imagination, observation and memory will allow. The questions raised and answers suggested are, one feels, an integral part of her own development while being the same – and for the first time – a significant contribution to the literature of the West Indies. (226)

Considering Paule Marshall’s background and the context from (and within) which she writes *The Chosen Place*, it is evident that her biography is far from simplistic, linking her both to the United States of America and to the Caribbean. Marshall is American by birth and Caribbean by descent, with her parents having been a part of the first wave of Caribbean immigration to the United States, a movement taking place between 1900 and 1930. This dual-location places Marshall among those who can identify with the consequences of colonial oppression within the Caribbean, as well as those who have experienced hegemonic oppression at the hands of the United States and other powers in the Global North. It must be noted however, that Marshall is herself “one of the Global North elite whose status enables her mobility throughout the Americas” (Felix 12).

Despite being born in New York, the Caribbean (and more specifically Barbados) came to play an integral part in Marshall’s life from an early age, both as a result of the West Indian/Afro-American environment in which she was brought up and numerous trips to the West Indies. Living a decidedly peripatetic lifestyle, much of Marshall’s adult life also consisted of movement between America and the Caribbean, with brief visits to various African countries as well, reviving and establishing, for her, direct links between the three locations (in a psychological and genealogical sense). She also received numerous fellowships to live and write in the Caribbean, immersing herself in its historical and

contemporary landscapes. In the 1960s, Marshall spent time living in Grenada, with the express purpose of preparing for the writing of *The Chosen Place*. Writing, for Marshall, thus served as a means of functional coalescence, bringing together three very different geographic (and socio-political) locations in one space – that of the novel.²¹

Marshall's genealogical and cultural positionalities are both fascinating and crucial to the purposes of this project, having great significance regarding the way in which she perceives diasporic identity formation and the way in which her fiction creates a particular *terragraphica*. Brathwaite highlights the significance of Marshall's hybridity as an author, with specific reference to *The Chosen Place*, saying:

Had Paule Marshall been a West Indian, she probably would not have written this book. Had she not been an Afro-American of West Indian parentage, she possibly could not have written it either; for in it we find a West Indies facing the metropolitan West on the one hand, and clinging to a memorial past on the other. Within this matrix, she formulates her enquiry into identity and change. (226)

The fact that Marshall is an insider to both Caribbean and western socio-political and cultural paradigms, qualifies her to make comment on the interaction between the two, as well as to provide authentic insight into the complexities of an African diasporic existence. A number of Marshall's essays highlight the influence and constant presence of the Caribbean in her life, with "Shaping the World of My Art" (1973) and "Poets in the Kitchen" (1983) being two of the most prominent and widespread. Like Aidoo, Marshall's writing is an extension of her own political and social awareness, positioning her amongst a number of highly notable African American contemporaries such as Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, Malcolm X, Richard Wright, and Amiri Baraka. Together with these influential people, Marshall "viewed the problematic post-Cold War United States race struggle through an international, pan-African lens. This positioned Marshall and her contemporaries in

²¹ Significantly, in her memoir *Triangular Road* (2009), Marshall describes her life as:

a thing divided in three: There was Brooklyn, USA, and specifically the tight, little, ingrown immigrant world of Bajan Brooklyn that I had fled. Then, once I started writing, the Caribbean and its conga line of islands had been home off and on for any number of years. While all the time, lying in wait across the Atlantic, in a direct line almost with tiny wallflower Barbados, had been the Gulf of Guinea and the colossus of ancestral Africa, the greater portion of my tripartite self that I had yet to discover, yet to know (163).

solidarity with those who had been subjugated under colonialism and were now potentially oppressed by the United States' belief in its international manifest destiny" (Felix 14).

The Chosen Place reveals Marshall's awareness of neo-colonial realities within the Caribbean context, of creolity, of hybrid culture and the anomalies embedded within diaspora. Like present-day Barbados, the novel's fictional Bourne Island is situated closer to the African continent than any other West Indian island, functioning, in the words of Marshall, as "a microcosm in which can be seen in sharp relief many of the basic problems and conflicts which beset oppressed peoples everywhere ("Shaping" 111)" (Olmsted 3).

Since receiving independence from colonial rule, Bourne Island has drawn the attention of a number of anthropological ventures. Despite all outside attempts of poverty alleviation and countless development projects set in motion by western charity and betterment schemes, the island (particularly the eastern most part of the island, Bournehills) is textually presented as being stuck in a state of adverse inertia. Hoping to reverse this cycle and bring true change to the poverty stricken Caribbean region, Saul Amron, a Jewish American anthropologist agrees to take on a new development project in Bournehills. Together with his wife Harriet and his research assistant, Allan, Saul sets out across the Atlantic for Bourne Island, with the hopes of conducting a thorough anthropological survey of the region and getting to know the people and the place before applying his findings to practical development schemes. At the outset of the text, we learn that Saul is reluctant to take on this project, having lost his previous wife while conducting anthropological research in Honduras. Memories of her death and the guilt he feels in connection with it haunt him throughout the text.

The narrative opens in Bournehills, where the reader is introduced, not only to the disparaging socio-economic state of the village, but also to the impulsive, vibrant, enigmatic Creole woman, Merle Kinbona. The (now middle-aged) daughter of an exceptionally wealthy British plantation owner and an African woman (his servant), Merle is the embodiment of "of all the racial, cultural and sexual identity crises the novel thematises" (Schenck 50). Merle is also the owner of the guest house in which the Americans are invited to stay, functioning not only as a gateway into the community for them, but also as a symbol of diasporic and transatlantic identity. While much textual space is given to various characters,

Merle is essentially the protagonist, functioning as narrative focaliser and personification of Caribbean creolity.

Bournehills is the region of Bourne Island in which the cane-cutters live, where “all the worn, wrecked hills [...] appeared to be racing en masse toward the sea at the eastern end [...] like the crude seats of some half-ruined coliseum, where an ancient tragedy was still performed” (99). On this section of the island, the people’s lives seem to revolve around the planting and reaping of their meagre harvest, sending their small bundles of cane to the local (but British owned) mill, Cane Vale. Constant reference is made to the fact that Bournehills appears to exist in a realm outside of time, where “yesterday comes like today” (102) and the past is spoken of as if it is still unfolding in the present.²² Much of this can be attributed to the way in which the Bournehills people hold to a particular historical event, the Cuffee Ned Rebellion, also referred to as the Pyre Hill Revolt:

The Pyre Hill Revolt has been the largest and most successful of the many rebellions that had taken place on the island. Under the leadership of Cuffee Ned, the slaves had not only fired the hill and the surrounding cane fields and captured Percy Bryam [the “owner” of the Island], who had died shortly afterward yoked to the mill wheel at Cane Vale, where he had been tied and tortured, but they had also, with weapons raided from the arsenal atop Cleaver’s, driven back the government forces in a fierce battle there and sealed off the ridge – and then for over two years had lived as a nation apart, behind the high wall, independent, free. (102)

Recalling this moment of triumph is not only part of the islanders’ everyday lives, but culminates in a ritualistic re-enactment of the rebellion each year at the island’s annual Carnival. It is into this seemingly timeless, memory-bound and diasporic community that Saul, Harriet and Allan become assimilated, having to come to terms with their own past experiences and memories.

Although this novel, like *Our Sister Killjoy*, adopts a four-part structure, the narrative progresses in a linear fashion, adhering to the use of a single, omniscient narrator for the duration of the text. From a fairly general overview of the characters and the context in the first section entitled “Heirs and Descendants”, the text moves the reader (and the American anthropologists) into a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Bournehills and its

²² See page 16 for a discussion of Mikhail Bakhtin’s chronotopic theory, which serves to expand and explore this spatio-temporal fusion.

inhabitants in the second section, aptly named, “Bournehills”. While “Bournehills” occupies a considerably larger amount of narrative space than the other sections, it seems to build up to the following two sections which function as crescendos in the text, amplifying the voice of history (the colonial history of the island as well as the personal histories of the various characters) *as memory*. Entitled “Carnival” and “Whitsun” respectively, the last two sections present these two key events (both of which are celebrated as annual community festivals) as crucial to the understanding of the way in which diasporic identity is perceived and constructed by the characters. For some, remembering brings the hope of redemption and the creation of a new, hybrid identity. For others, it proves to be their ultimate destruction.

Entitled “Heirs and Descendents”, the first section remains true to its label, affording the reader a glimpse into the pasts not only of many of the characters, but also the place itself. In this way, Marshall introduces history and past experience as vitally important locations from which to view and understand the present as it unfolds on Bourne Island. Many of the descriptions in this section reveal the undeniable creolity of the Caribbean and the indelible entanglement of the three points of the Atlantic triangle manifested in both people and physical place. This is most apparent in the first contact between the Americans and the islanders. Upon arriving, they are taken to the house of a wealthy Lawyer – Lyle Hutson – in order that they might address the islanders concerning their plans and intentions for the island’s socio-economic development.

Lyle is a particularly transatlantic character, having been born in the Caribbean to a somewhat obscure village tailor, but “later, he had been a Bourne Island Scholar and gone to England to study, first to Oxford (and there could be a fine Oxonian thrust to his speech when he chose), then to the London School of Economics, and finally the Inns of Court” (61). Returning to Bourne Island, Lyle had married into the famous Vaughan family, granting him power and prestige among the people, and with his British education, accent and attire, Lyle is every bit a product of the “colonial motherland.”

Lyle’s house, like himself, is an amalgamation of Caribbean and English, the contrasting aesthetics revealing a distinct and awkward incongruity between the two:

[It] looked to be modern, although it had been built out of the remains of an old Georgian estate house that had once stood on the site [...] The house was a failure, although this was not immediately apparent, and most people thought it handsome, progressive and new [...] Though it stood high on its private rise above the town [...] it still could not rise above the profound error and confusion of its design. (54)

The description of Lyle's house, presented in conjunction with various descriptions of the people meeting within its ambiguous walls (black men who had "for the most part had been passed through the white prism of their history and been endlessly refracted there, altered, alloyed" (53)), highlights the fact that there has been an inevitable fusion of past and present, as well as a mixing of cultures in this neo-colonial space. The fact that the narrator calls the house a "failure", unable to rise above the "error and confusion of its design" is also worth exploring. In light of the previous chapter, one may assume that like Aidoo, Marshall is naming diaspora as loss, that despite appearing "progressive and new", diasporans attempting to take on the postures of western culture are inevitably choosing the entrapment that was once forced upon them. I would argue that while this is certainly a pejorative view of hybridity, its analysis may be more nuanced than a simple dismissal of transatlantic identity. Before unpacking this analysis further however, I would first like to outline a number of other examples of this hybridisation.

Sugar's, a popular night club on the island, described as a place in which "all types" co-mingle, "from the P.M. down to the lowliest yard boy [...] all shades and colours, castes and classes" (79), is also evidence of the inevitable hybridity born of transatlantic interactions:

Because of the small space and the large numbers of dancers it was impossible to tell who was dancing with whom. To someone looking on, it appeared that there were no separate couples or partners, but that all the different bodies, black, brown, white, and the endless variations in between, had merged into a single undifferentiated mass, and the dancers were really one body, the inseparable parts of a whole. (81)

While this may seem a hopeful image in that there appears to be equality shared by all, a place in which people of all races and statuses can co-exist, this establishment is ironically built above what used to be one of the famous slave-holding barracks in the West Indies. Its name, "Sugar's", leaves a "bad taste in the mouth" so to speak, as it serves as a constant reminder of why there exists a hybrid community on the island: the descendants of sugar plantation slaves. The narrator divests that, "the rusted remains of the iron manacles that

had been fitted around the ankles and wrists, around the dark throats, could still be seen, some said, in the walls of the cellar. It had all begun here” (82). All of those now dancing upon the literal history of the slave trade, not only share in its memories, but also in its present day ramifications, the likes of which they embody – some through complicity, others through oppression.

Sugar’s (like Lyle’s house) may seem to be an outward coming together of that which was once separate, offering a glimmer of reconciliation between former masters and slaves, but the text reveals that colonialism is still an integral part of life in the Caribbean. Marshall insinuates that one cannot simply paste the veneer of modernisation and independence over the embedded structures of colonialism and pretend it is something entirely new and separate. The tell-tale signs are there, and only noticed by those who choose to see them, or rather by those whose pockets are not being lined by this (neo)colonial existence. More than an accusation and call to autochthony (Aidoo’s refrain) however, this text seeks to highlight the dangers of neo-colonialism, while simultaneously celebrating Caribbean creole identity.

Ginevra Geraci (2008) argues that the Afro-Caribbean historical and cultural identity represents one of the most evident “manifestations of what Homi Bhabha calls ‘interstices’, those ‘in-between spaces’ where subjectivity and self-hood are elaborated and the ‘intersubjective and collective experience of nationness, community interest or cultural values are negotiated’ (Bhabha, *Location of Culture 2*)” (212). *The Chosen Place* highlights the fact that much of this “negotiation” takes place in *relation*. This is true in terms of the characters functioning in relation to one another, in relation to place and in relation to history. In some cases, the hybridity and intersubjectivity of a character may come to mean that he or she, as a compendium of cultures, contexts and experiences, functions as a number of selves existing in relation to each other. Marshall also highlights the fact that identity is created at the point of meeting – of cultures, of individuals, of histories, of memories. Encounters with others, with new spaces and with oneself lead to a creation of something new, something far more subjective and flexible than an essentialist, nationalist conception of identity.

In thinking about relationality as a *route* to identity construction, one cannot help but think of Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (published in French in 1990 and translated into English in 1997), particularly with its direct association with Caribbean subjectivity. While there is much to say on this topic, it is necessary to be selective, and so I would like to briefly include some of his thoughts on the difference between what he terms "root identity" and "relation identity". "Root identity" is conceived of that which is fixed, predetermined and preserved by being projected onto particular territories. In this way, identity is "ratified by a claim to legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim entitlement to the possession of a land, which thus becomes a territory" (143). Consequently, self, other and community are viewed through the lens of geographic positionality and power systems determined by politico-economic factors. In contrast, "relation identity" is "linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures [and] does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates, newly extended" (144). In this sense, territory is not perceived as something onto which identity is projected and against which identity is determined, but rather a space of errantry and exchange.²³

Marshall's text, while highlighting the downfalls of perceiving identity as "root identity" (the likes of which have fuelled colonial thought and the notion of the West being the "centre" and the "rest" constituting the "periphery"), draws mainly on the perception of diasporic and Caribbean identity as a function of "relation". In this regard, the island itself comes to play a crucial role. Marshall uses the island space (territory) as a means of positioning the characters in relation to one another and in relation to the island's history – a tangible, entangled and living entity.²⁴ Suspended above the vast expanse of the Atlantic, flying home to Bourne Island, the Bourne Hills resident, Vere, offers us a glimpse of this place as he perceives it from the air:

²³ In the context of Glissant's writing, "errantry" (similar, though not synonymous with *errance*) reflects the ideas of motion and wandering, but not in the sense of idle roaming. Rather, as translator Betsy Wing asserts, this term includes a sense of "sacred motivation" (*Poetics of Relation* 211).

²⁴ Linked to this idea, the island's name, *Bourne* Island, may be a play on words, alluding to the hybrid culture *birthed/born* within its boundaries and the continual reference made to that which is *born* in on the tide – the incessant remembering of the island's history and the slave trade carried onto its shores by the waves of the Atlantic Ocean.

From this height it was simply another indifferently shaped green knoll at the will of a mindless sea, one more in the line of stepping stones that might have been placed there by some giant race to span the distance between the Americas, North and South [...] Unlike the others though, which followed each other in an orderly procession down the watery track of the Caribbean, the island below had broken rank and stood off by itself to the right, almost out in the Atlantic [...] And ever mindful of the responsibility placed upon it in the beginning, it remained – alone amid an immensity of sea and sky, becalmed now that its turbulent history was past, facing east, the open sea, and across the sea, hidden beyond the horizon, the colossus of Africa. (13)

Colonised by the West and peopled with African slaves, the island itself is a creole, a meeting place between the coloniser and the colonised, a space in which new cultures, linguistics and lifestyles have been indelibly fused and ambivalently created. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that the character Merle is the embodiment and personification of Bourne Island – caught in the middle of Africa and the West and a product of both. Over time, it becomes strikingly apparent that in order for Saul to come to a true understanding of Bournehills and its people, discovering just *who* Merle is, is crucial. A cultural paradox, a mosaic of juxtaposed ideologies and aesthetics, Merle is – as Marshall herself asserts – “the black man/woman of the Diaspora. There she is, a person who has come about in the classic way that so many of us have [...] This whole thing that is so much our history, Merle embodies” (Marshall in Pettis Interview 125).

While Merle’s history is slowly but surely revealed to the reader throughout the text as she is made to confront a number of defining memories and experiences that make her the hybrid woman that she is, Marshall is by no means cryptic in her presentation of Merle as symbolic of the diasporic condition. Her dress and appearance are evidence enough:

She was [wearing...] a flared print dress made from cloth of a vivid abstract tribal motif: cloth [...] which could have been found draped in offhand grace around a West African market woman. Pendant silver earrings carved in the form of those saints to be found on certain European churches adorned her ears [...] numerous bracelets, also of silver, bound her wrists [...] They lent a clangorous, unsettling note to her every move [...] She had donned this somewhat bizarre outfit, each item of which stood opposed to, at war even, with the other, to suppress rather a diversity and disunity within her, and her attempt, unconscious probably, to reconcile those opposing parts, to make them whole. (4-5)²⁵

²⁵ *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity* (1998), written by Doran H. Ross with contributions by Agbenyega Adedze, Abena P.A. Busia, Nii O. Quarcoopome, Betsy D. Quick, Raymond A. Silverman, and Anne Spencer, provides very interesting insight into the symbolic, political, social and historical

As mentioned above, Merle is the child of a white plantation owner (notorious on the island for having fathered at least 40 children with various women) and a West African woman. Due to the fact that Merle's mother was murdered when she was only two years old, and her father's sole involvement in her life was the paying of her school fees, Merle, orphaned and rejected, is unable to attach any personal sense of self to either of her parents' cultural identifications. Further complicating feelings of being *chez soi* and/or *à la maison*, Merle attended University in England, becoming involved with a wealthy white woman, whose constant gifts and "tokens of affection" held Merle in bondage, both physically and psychologically. Confessing this story to Saul later on in the text, Merle reveals that "she [the woman] needed someone to look after her mail and such and I could do that. I was grateful – and yes, I admit it, flattered. Good little brainwashed West Indian that I was, I thought it quite something to have a rich Englishwoman taking such an interest in me, an alms-house child, who couldn't even remember her mother and whose so-called father had for years passed her by on the road without so much as a word" (328).

Unlike Sissie in *Our Sister Killjoy*, Merle was taken in by the seductive methods of the English woman, a subtle picture of the continued neo-colonial dependence of decolonised nations on the wealthy benefactor, the "colonial motherland".²⁶ The earrings that Merle wears were a gift from this woman, and a stamp of the colonial blueprint. Mirroring the juxtaposition of her earrings and her West African dress is the relationship that Merle enters after finally having broken free of her benefactress's clutches. Meeting and marrying Ketu, a respectable man from West Africa while in England, Merle dons yet another garment of identity, adding another layer to her already hybrid self. After finding out about Merle's history with the English woman however (something Merle had not chosen to disclose to him), Ketu leaves

significance of West African cloth, particularly Ghanaian Kente. Considering the fact that Merle chooses to wear such traditional dress, signals her (chosen and genealogical) affiliation with West Africa, the home of some of her ancestors. In Victoria Rovine's 2001 review of *Wrapped in Pride*, she comments that: "Following Nkrumah's use of kente, contemporary American politicians, both black and white, have signalled their affiliation with African American communities through the cloth. In these and many other contexts, contemporary kente plays an active role in constructing both personal identities and civil societies" (13).

²⁶ It is interesting to note that where Aidoo refers to Europe as a colonial "fatherland", Marshall's text insinuates that the West is the colonial "motherland". Assuming that the role of mother is equated with a greater degree of nurturance and personal affiliation with the colonial "child", in this case the Caribbean, it would suggest that just as Africa functions as mother – the initial birth place of the African slaves whose descendants now people the Caribbean – so too does the West function as mother (however estranged), her cultural and historical personality having left large footprints in the West Indies.

Merle, taking their daughter back to Africa with him. Consequently, a broken and profoundly psychologically altered Merle, returns to Bournehills.²⁷

Throughout the novel, Marshall projects her perception of identity – as something internal – onto external spaces and objects. Having spoken about Merle’s dress, and other externalised (re)presentations of hybrid identity (such as Lyle’s house), a description of Merle’s bedroom is similarly presented as an outward metaphor for an internal condition (her own, and that of Bournehills). Merle’s room, suffocating under a collection of memorabilia from the past, like her attire, expresses a “struggle for coherence, the hope and desire for reconciliation of her conflicting parts, the longing to truly know and accept herself – all the things he [Saul] sensed in her” (401). Looking around her room, Saul

thought he suddenly saw the district for what it was at its deepest level [...] Like the room it, too, was perhaps a kind of museum, a place in which had been stored the relics and remains of the era recorded in the faded prints on the walls, where one not only felt that other time existing intact, still alive, a palpable presence beneath the everyday reality, but saw it as well at every turn, often without realising it. Bournehills, its shabby woebegone hills and spent land, its odd people who at times seemed other than themselves, might have been selected as the repository of history which reached beyond it to include the hemisphere north and south. (402)

Arif Dirlik, in his highly thought-provoking article entitled “Bringing History Back in: Of Diasporas, Hybridities, Places, and Histories” (2002), speaks of how hybridity and the way in which this word is glibly and generously applied in the postcolonial context has become, to a large extent, an abstraction, disarticulated from the historical, political and social locations from which identities unfold. While theoretically occupying a hybrid, “third space” (Bhabha) helps to transcend binary categories of identification, without context, “this ‘in between’ space risks becoming a mobile reactionary space, rather than a traveling site of resistance” (Mitchell 534). Marshall does well to situate the hybridity of the novel’s characters (particularly Merle) within identifiable socio-historic and political contexts (constantly referring to the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism). She takes this one step further however, locating Merle’s identity within memory as well as history, in order to reveal the

²⁷ An excerpt from Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks* (1986) provides a telling description of the fractal implications of neo-colonialism (as experienced by Merle):

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. (109)

way in which the past is fully imbricated in the construction of identity as it manifests itself in present memories.

Geraci asserts that, “if the modern subject is not whole, but inevitably divided and hybrid then figures like [Merle...] can be interpreted as an epitome of modernity exactly because they harbour in themselves a heterogeneous cultural identity” (220). As a means of exhibiting this sense of heterogeneity, Marshall textually imbues Merle with a capacity to talk unceasingly. Used largely as a defence mechanism, to hold all the pieces of herself together, Merle seems unable to curb the torrent of words that flow from her mouth. When asked about this narrative technique, Marshall says: “I saw Merle as a kind of “mouth king”, and I saw I could use that as a device, a technical device to first of all suggest her disjointed and fractured life [...] Also, I could use the talk as a means of saying what one is not supposed to say” (Pettis 124).

Merle’s incessant speech is also interesting to consider in light of the fact that women (particularly black women) have received very little textual space historically.²⁸ Remembering the times when her mother and other West Indian women would gather in their family kitchen in Brooklyn and talk – “endlessly, passionately, poetically, and with impressive range” (Marshall, “Poets in the Kitchen” 24) – Marshall describes how these women “held up the world” (Pettis 122). Taking centre stage in Marshall’s life, they too take centre stage in her writing (however textually manifested), having both personal and political resonance. Marshall reveals that for her, women are “agents of change [...] embodying a certain power principle [...]. I [have] a deep sense of a certain kind of power residing in women, and I [don’t] see the power of women as that threatening to men, just simply as power” (Pettis 122).

In “Poet’s in the Kitchen”, Marshall reflects on the use of language and speech as the foundations of this “power” – a power that is invested in the character of Merle. Taking the Standard English “taught them in the primary schools of Barbados and transform[ing] it into

²⁸ See Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Carry Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg’s *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988), with particular reference to the way in which she discusses the “(re)presentation” of the subaltern woman’s voice (275-276).

an idiom, an instrument that more adequately described them – changing around the syntax and imposing their own rhythm and accent” (Marshall, “Poets in the Kitchen” 27), these women created a refuge through language. Quoting the émigré Polish writer and Nobel Laureate, Czeslaw Milosz, Marshall asserts that for the “Poet’s in the Kitchen”, those remarkable diasporic women, “language [was] the only homeland” (Marshall, “Poets in the Kitchen” 26). In a sense, Marshall uses the language that she has learnt from her mother and the other “poets”, together with the culture-laden words birthed out of her own hybrid experiences and personal life-narrative, sculpting them into the form of the novel and the short story to create a homeland for herself and other diasporic people, a particular *terragraphica* in which to feel “at home”.

In line with Marshall’s assertion that language and words are inherently powerful tools for constructing identity and a sense of belonging (particularly in light of the fact that colonised subjects had been previously silenced by the language of the coloniser), Kobena Mercer (1988) makes helpful comment regarding the function of language for the transatlantic subject:

Across a wide range of cultural forms there is a ‘syncretic’ dynamic which critically appropriates elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and ‘creolises’ them, disarticulating given signs and re-articulating their symbolic meaning. The subversive force of this hybridising tendency is most apparent at the level of language itself where Creoles, patios and Black English decentre, destabilise and carnivalise the linguistic domination of ‘English’ – the nation-language of master-discourse – through strategic inflections, re-accentuations and other performative moves in semantic, syntactic and lexical codes. (57)

Mercer’s reference to the “carnavalesque” (discourse falling outside of the “established language of authority” (Webster 40), deflating what is considered “central” and subverting monologic and hierarchical discursive relations), and indeed the general gist of the above extract, leads one directly to a consideration of Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on language. Viewing language as essentially a “centrifugal/dialogic” force, not impervious to multiple meanings and plural interpretations, Bakhtin proposes that language is a “site for struggle”, rather than a set of centripetal, stable and fixed codes of meaning (Webster 39). This is precisely what Marshall does in *The Chosen Place*, using the postcolonial novel as a means of re-articulating western history – a history of imperial expansion and edification – as Caribbean *memory*. Due to the fact that Caribbean memory is a palimpsest of African, western and

creole consciousnesses, given voice through the fictive narrative of an Afro/American woman with Caribbean ancestry, also lends credence to Bakhtin's term, *heteroglossia* – the “many-voicedness” of the postcolonial novel (Webster 40).²⁹

Recognising that Marshall's text presents memory as the primary *route (rupta via)* to identity formation, it is worth looking at the many ways in which the narrative reveals this. Olmsted suggests that the “pull to memory [in the text] is identical to the body's longing to speak, and the story is like the tide of the sea that pulls and pulls, beckons, argues, demands its telling” (8). In my reading of *Our Sister Killjoy*, I argue that memory serves as an anchor for identity, largely as a result of Sissie's remembrances of Ghana *as home*. While Sissie's moments of remembering take up fairly little textual space, and memory is largely substituted for historicity, *The Chosen Place* is routed through and rooted in memory. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this text adopts Pierre Nora's notion that: “memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present” (8-9). Nora's assertion that in order to access sites of memory (what he terms *lieux de mémoire*), there must be a “will to remember” (19), runs directly parallel to the trajectory of *The Chosen Place* and throughout the text, it is only when the characters begin to confront their memories that they are afforded a sense of coherent self.

Marshall's novel presents the Atlantic Ocean as a living *lieux de mémoire*, a repository of memory in which the island is suspended. With its incessant supply of waves, the ocean rhythmically spills itself onto every Atlantic shore, in rushes of remembering. No people seem more effected by, or aware of this than the inhabitants of Bournehills however, who seem mysteriously connected to the continent of Africa beyond the horizon and to living in the present as if the past had simply occurred minutes before. Redolent of the “many-tongued chorus” that will be spoken of in the proceeding chapter on Phillips's *Crossing the River* (and reflective of the narrative chorus in *Our Sister Killjoy*) Marshall paints a vivid image of the Atlantic Ocean, a carrier of memories and voices from the past:

²⁹ Bakhtin conceptualises the postcolonial novel as being comprised of multiple layers of discourse, both harmonious and oppositional to one another. Recognising the high index of dialogism inherent in the novel (the absence of a singular, monolithic voice), he suggests that the novel problematizes and complicates meaning, exhibiting that which is *heteroglossic*.

It was the Atlantic on this side of the island, a wild-eyed, marauding sea the colour of slate, deep, full of dangerous currents, lined with row upon row of barrier reefs, and with a sound like that of the combined voices of the drowned raised in a loud unceasing lament – all those, the nine million and more it is said, who in their enforced exile, their Diaspora, had gone down between this point and the homeland lying out of sight to the east. The sea mourned them. (106)³⁰

Marshall's fictional presentation of the ocean is analogous with Glissant's formulations in *Poetics of Relation*. Glissant speaks of the human "cargo" thrown into the ocean during the voyage of the Middle Passage, becoming "underwater signposts" (6), punctuating the ocean floor with balls and chains. Ironically, the routes marked out by these underwater signposts are frequented now by "glorious regattas or traditional races of *yoles* and *gommiers*" (6), the living history below all but forgotten. Taking this into consideration, Glissant refers to the sea as a tautological abyss: "the entire ocean, the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, make one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green" (6). In order to understand what Glissant means by "the abyss", particularly as it relates to Marshall's text and the dynamic relationship that exists between the ocean (as a repository of history) and Bourne Island, it is useful to consider the fairly lengthy extract below:

Experience of the abyss lies inside and outside the abyss. The torment of those who never escaped it: straight from the belly of the slave ship into the violet belly of the ocean depths they went. But their ordeal did not die; it quickened into this continuous/discontinuous thing: the panic of the new land, the haunting of the former land, finally the alliance with the imposed land, suffered and redeemed. The unconscious memory of the abyss served as the alluvium for these metamorphoses. The populations that then formed, despite having forgotten the chasm, despite being unable to imagine the passion of those foundered there, nonetheless wove this sail (veil). They did not use it to return to the Former Land but rose up in this unexpected, dumbfounded land. (*Poetics of Relation* 7-8)

For want of a descriptive rhetoric when referring to this dynamic relationship between the land and the sea, Brathwaite conceptualised the term (and the notion) "tidalectics". Editor of *Transatlantic Voices: Interpretations of Native North American Literatures* (2007), Elvira

³⁰ This description is allusive of Derek Walcott's poem, "The Sea is History", published in his *Collected Poems: 1948-1984* (1987). Including the first stanza as a means of illustrating the intimate link between Marshall's pelagic rhetoric and that of Walcott's is useful:

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that gray vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History (1-4).

Pulitano, asserts that this notion seeks to move away from the Hegelian dialectic (fashioning this relationship as simply linear and progressive), and chooses instead to recognise it as an “ebb and flow process that is circular and repetitive” (305).³¹ If history is indeed a living entity – alive through conscious memory – as both Marshall and Glissant propose, then the relationship between the ocean and Bournehills is certainly a “tidalectic” one, particularly as a result of the island’s physical location, situated literally “at sea”. This idea also finds convergence with Bhabha’s assertion that in order to “inscribe the ambivalent and chiasmatic intersections of time and place” in one’s writing, one needs to look beyond a horizontal, one-dimensional view of things to “give the nonsequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity its appropriate narrative authority” (“Dissemination” 141).³²

One example of the way in which a tidalectic dynamic is expressed in the novel takes place soon after the Americans arrive in Bournehills. As they sit in silence and awe, watching the sea, “a huge white-crested breaker which looked as if it had been gathering force and power and speed across the entire breadth of the Middle Passage broke with the sound as of some massive depth charge on the most distant of the reefs” (106). Interestingly, with the thunderous impact of this wave against the rocks, the characters are not only aware of the weight and force of slavery’s history behind the wave, but both Saul and Harriet experience a sudden remembering of significant moments in their own histories, fusing personal past experiences with the broader socio-political context in which they occur. Saul recalls the horrors of the Second World War, of being a first-hand witness to the cruelty, pain and injustice of it all, linking the atrocities of war to the experience of the Middle Passage, and in a way, seeing a connection between his own suffering and theirs.

³¹ “Hegelian dialectic” refers to Enlightenment philosopher, Georg Hegel’s (1770-1831) idea that history (and the way in which we think about the world) progresses as a dialectical, linear process, adhering to a particular developmental model, comprised of three stages, namely, thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

³² This also finds expression in Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas of the chronotope, a useful tool for exploring the way in which spatial and temporal relationships are connected in the novel. Usually applied as a means of understanding genre theory and literary history, the chronotope may also be seen as the construction of a particular reality. Nele Bemong and Pieter Borghart (2010) point out that “From Kant, Bakhtin borrowed the idea that time and space are in essence categories through which human beings perceive and structure the surrounding world” (4), functioning as modes of cognition. Bakhtin does not view these categories as abstractions transcendental to lived reality, but rather as “forms of the most immediate reality” (FTC: 85). Where the past meets the present (as perpetual memory) in the text – metaphorised by the relationship between the island and the sea – is where the Bournehills residents find their most “immediate reality”.

Harriet's memory places her on the other side of the spectrum however – not as someone who can identify with the suffering of humanity, but one who is complicit in its creation. She recalls the nightmare that saw her fleeing from her first marriage to a man named Andrew Westerman, a nuclear scientist. In the nightmare, Harriet's hand guides Andrew's over the lever that will detonate an atomic bomb, destroying the world: "to her horror [...] it was not, as she had believed all along, only Andrew's hand on the lever which triggered the holocaust, that mass suicide [...] but that her hand was also there, resting lightly on his, guiding it" (39). Eugenia DeLamotte (1993) points out that the personal and the political (as represented by this memory) are "inseparable manifestations of each other through the double image of the private suffering [experienced in Harriet's marriage] and her complicity in the more widely exploitative power structure that [the West] represents" (229).

Harriet Shippen, as representative of the history of colonialism and American agency in creating and sustaining the slave trade, functions as both a signifier of the history of rampant racial injustice and as a means of revealing the neo-colonial imperatives of "First World" developmental schemes aimed at applying western models of progress onto still-dependent "Third World" nations. An early forbear of Harriet, "the widow Susan Harbin, had launched the family's modest wealth by her small scale speculation in the West Indies trade, which in those days consisted of taking a few shares in a number of sloops making the twice-yearly run between Philadelphia, the west coast of Africa, and then back across the Atlantic to the islands" (37). The vast wealth accumulated by the Harbins (and consequently the Shippens) was built upon this lucrative triangular trade, the exchange of human cargo. Harriet, as "heir to the widow's questionable legacy" (38) asks Saul: "must I really be held liable for them? [...]for all those Harbins and Shippens and what they did and didn't do" (47).

While Harriet herself cannot be directly blamed for the decisions of her ancestors, the text reveals a deep-seated colonial mind-set at work through Harriet's ambivalent prerogatives. In her Doctoral dissertation on "Paule Marshall's Critique of Contemporary Neo-Imperialisms Through the Trope of Travel" (2011), Michelle Felix asserts that Harriet seeks to "escape the guilt she feels about her life of privilege, while also maintaining the status and power that this life affords her. She does not want to be held accountable for her slave-

trading Shippen ancestors, yet she maintains a fierce hold on the privilege that her race and her wealth afford her" (54).

Marshall's novel certainly explores the theme of guilt and complicity that indelibly colours any narrative surrounding the African slave trade and the colonial enterprise – something that permeates the identity of Harriet so deeply, she can no longer live with herself. Without mentioning the involvement of African slave traders in the horrific transatlantic exchange of human cargo, Marshall's text places the full weight of guilt and agency on the shoulders of the West. It is this weight that Harriet is unable to bear, choosing instead to join the countless victims subjected to the depths of the Atlantic – that great repository of memory – in taking her own life. Harriet's guilt surfaces throughout the text in moments of sudden remembrance, most of them involving the memory of her refusal to give away a particular toy to the nephew of her black domestic worker, a toy that held no personal significance to her, but that which she felt entitled to, that which she would not share with the "other". Harriet, unable and unwilling to find reconciliation in remembrance, finally gives herself over to it, becoming immersed in the history she cannot come to terms with.

For Merle, on the other hand, confronting painful memories (personal and collective) is the route through which she is able to locate a coherent sense of identity – albeit a hybrid combination (this will be elaborated on in due course). For Harriet, however, the opposite is true: the more she remembers, the more her identity becomes shaped around that which she detests. This juxtaposition, not only of personal choices, but of the possible outcomes for women of different races, cultures, and their connections to different shores of the Atlantic, is both interesting and troubling. While Marshall offers redemption for the diasporic subject (and even Saul, a Jew), there is little room for forgiveness and redemption for the white American woman, as presented by the character of Harriet.³³

If Harriet serves as a reminder of the oppressive role of the West in the Caribbean, the people's re-enactment of the Cuffee Ned Rebellion (see page 5) at the island's annual Carnival provides a vivid picture of the people's attempts at overcoming this oppression,

³³ I return to this troubling presentation on page 86, looking at Marshall's inclusivity as well as exclusivity.

and according to Merle, the “only bit of history [they] have that’s worth mentioning on Bourne Island” (102). Melvin Rahming (1993) suggests that Bournehills is presented as “an archetypal aspect of human consciousness, a fact which, given the African impulses within the collective Bournehills spirit, reveals this spiritual aspect of the African continuum to be both universally accessible and specifically crucial to Caribbean indigenization” (86). The people of Bournehills are defined (and define themselves) by their ritualistic recollection of the Cuffee Ned rebellion, a rebellion set in motion by their African ancestors. This “Pyre Hill Revolt” was their “one significant act of unity and strength, an act that is alive despite the passage of time. The Cuffee Ned Rebellion is chiselled into the sculpture of this land, shaping everyone and everything on it. Their collective act is living history, an acknowledgement that the present and the past are fused (Black 112)” (Meyer 103). Not only do the Islanders live within this fusion of past and present through their incessant reference to the coup, but their recalcitrance in performing a rendition of the revolt at the Bourne Island annual carnival, despite the protestations of the New Bristol community, is even greater testimony to their need for reviving this memory in order to hold onto some semblance of unchanging identity.

At Carnival, the people of Bournehills march down the streets in grand sombre procession. Not unlike the mighty waves of the Atlantic surging onward, carrying history in their wake, the people “conjured up in the bright afternoon sunshine dark alien images of legions marching bound together over a vast tract, iron fitted into dank stone walls, chains – like those to an anchor – rattling in the deep holds of the ships, and exile in an unknown and inhospitable land – an exile bitter and irreversible in which all memory of the former life and of the self as it had once been had been destroyed” (282). They march to revive these memories, to call them back into existence, even if recollection of the Cuffee Ned Rebellion is the only embodiment of a collective memory of loss and violence, culminating in one brief victory.

Interestingly, the memory of Cuffee Ned and the combined voices of the Bournehills peoples, reach out to include all those who have suffered at the hand of injustice, calling them into a “chorus of a common memory” (Phillips):

They were singing, it was true of [...] a particular event, place and people, simply telling their story as they did each year. Yet, as those fused voices continued to mount the air, shaking the old town at its mooring on the bay, it didn't seem they were singing only of themselves and Bournehills, but of people like them everywhere [...] The experience through which any people who find themselves ill-used, dispossessed, at the mercy of the powerful, must pass. No more, no less. (Marshall 286-287)

Identifying themselves as the descendants of those who risked their lives in the Pyre Hill revolt, the people of Bournehills simultaneously locate themselves as distinctly "other" to the West (those against whom Cuffee Ned revolted) and simultaneously akin to all those people (regardless of geographic and cultural disparity) who have suffered in similar ways. In this way, Caribbean identity becomes affiliated with diaspora in general, and *home* becomes an extension of community and human association rather than bounded geographic space.

This idea is extended as Saul seeks to explain the significance of the Carnival in his own words, stressing the need for action that supersedes simple performative ritual:

People who've truly been wronged – like yours [referring to Merle], like mine all those thousands of years – must at some point, if they mean to come into their own, start using their history to their advantage. Turn it to good. You begin, I believe, by first acknowledging it, all of it, the bad as well as the good, those things you can be proud of such as Cuffee's brilliant coup, and the ones most people would rather forget, like the shame and ignominy of that long forced march[...]use your history as a guide in other words. Because many times, what one needs to know in the present – the action that must be taken if a people are to win their right to live, the methods to be used: some of them unpalatable, true, but again, there's usually no other way – has been spelled out in past events. That it's all there if only they would look. (315)

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) Frantz Fanon speaks of the way in which colonisation "is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content [...but] by a kind perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (170). If this is the case, then perhaps what the Bournehills people are trying to achieve in their repetitive rehearsal of the past is a refusal to let their memories and their history be distorted, disfigured and destroyed. It is the memory of the rebellion that allows them to be a people united. Stuart Hall also makes comment on the production of identity that speaks to this part of the narrative, suggesting that identity construction is not necessarily about the digging up of something buried in the

past, but rather found in the “*re-telling* of the past” (“Cultural Identity” 224; emphasis in original). By re-telling the past as they do at Carnival – through oral performativity – the Bournehills people revisit colonial resistance, and this conflation of storytelling and history provides a space in which they are able to participate in the discourse of shaping West Indian identity. Essentially, “by blending the voice of official history, which denies that there is a history, with the oral transmission of historical resistance encoded in the “magical” narrative of myth [...] reveals historical representation in discourse to be the site conflict” (Edmondson 186).

Even so, while this may have a positive impact on the characters within the text, and also serves as a warning against the perpetuation of colonial dependence (under the guise of “progress”), one must question the pragmatism of such a practice in relation to the production of not only a unified sense of identity, but also in the general well-being of the community. The pressing question remains: if westernised progress and development are just as detrimental (or at least ineffectual) in alleviating the poverty and stagnation of Bournehills and places like it, to what method must they turn? Are diasporic communities destined to remain impoverished victims of history or are there alternative avenues (routes) that should be explored?

Even though the memory of Cuffee Ned is positive in that it is the remembering of the overthrow of the colonial powers, outside of this memory, the Bournehills people still define themselves as inferior and build their identity in relation to the white “master.” Still trying to come to terms with a past of servitude, “the enslaved African is the ‘stripped migrant’. He could not bring his tools, the images of his gods, his daily implements, nor could he send news to his neighbours, or hope to bring his family over, or reconstitute his former family in the place of deportation” (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 50). In a sense, the people’s ritual reiteration of this historical event becomes disabling, separating their real lived experience from an imagined reality that, while certainly boosting community identification and solidarity, simultaneously erodes all agency at overcoming present oppression and impoverishment.

A striking example of the people's continued subordination is when Sir John – the British owner of Cane Vale factory – arrives for his annual appraisal of the factory's progress. Ferguson, one of the factory workers and respected community members has been planning to tell Sir John of the desperate need to replace some of the machinery in the mill. Without a replacement, the mill will soon be ineffectual, unable to process the meagre amount of cane the Bournhills people grow to eke out a living. However, Ferguson is rendered mute in the presence of this man, who, "playing to the hilt the eighteenth-century absentee landlord come out to the colonies to look over his holdings" (225), revels in the fact that these poverty stricken people still conceive of themselves as subordinate and fearfully dependent. The inside of the factory appears in the mind's eye like the belly of the slave ship, where the workers go unnoticed as if simply numbers in a logbook, cogs in a wheel.

Parallel with Aidoo's ideas regarding the continuation of "enslavement" post decolonisation are the thoughts voiced by Lyle (the lawyer) in relation to the island's so-called independence: "how independent [are we] when if England were to cease tomorrow taking our sugar at a preferential price we'd be finished. How when you Americans can plant a missile-tracking station right on our back-side and there's nothing we can do about it because the agreement was made long before the present government took office..." (208). Continued economic dependence is simply slavery in another guise, and the desire of the Bourne Island government to build casinos and hotels on the island in order to boost the tourist industry in the region and adopt western models of "modernisation" and "progress" is simply another means of strengthening the dependence and broadening the gap between the rich and the poor. With reference to the building of a casino, Merle retorts: "signed, sealed, delivered. The whole bloody place. And to the lowest bidder. Who says the auction block isn't still with us?" (209). Attempting to highlight the fact that they are no better off under a neo-colonial government than they were under the colonial powers, Merle berates Lyle:

Is this what we threw out the white pack who ruled us for years and put you chaps in office for? For you to give the island away? For you to literally pay people to come and make money off us? [...] It is no different now than when they were around here selling us for thirty pounds sterling. Not really. Not when you look deep [...]. The chains are still on [...] haven't you fellows in Legco learned anything from all that's gone on in this island for the past four hundred years? Read your history, man! (209-210)

This inability to learn from the past is expressed in glaring clarity on the beach while Merle and Lyle discuss the implications of the building of a casino on Bourne Island. Having built an elaborate sandcastle near the shoreline, three children watch as “a wave dark with the oncoming night and swollen by the rising tide suddenly charg[es] up the beach and [washes] over the castle with a roar [reducing] it in a matter of seconds to a few indistinct lumps” (201). Ironically (and in perfect reflection of what the Bourne Island government are seeking to achieve on the island), “after soberly contemplating their ruined handiwork, [the children] began rebuilding in the exact same spot” (201). The insistent presence of the incoming tide highlights the fact that no one holds the power to erase or alter history, but the choice regarding how one builds in relation to it remains available.

When looking at the situation in Bournehills, one cannot help but think of the idea of mimicry in postcolonial theory. Glissant, in his writings on “Dispossession” (included in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*), speaks of the reductive power of imitation, stating that: “The pressure to imitate, is perhaps, the most extreme form of violence that anyone can inflict on a people; even more so when it assumes the agreement (and even, the pleasure) of the mimetic society. This dialectic, in fact, suppresses this form of violence under the guise of pleasure” (46). While the negative effects of mimicry are unambiguously presented in *The Chosen Place*, Bhabha’s “Of Mimicry and Men” (1984) helps provide an alternate corollary, or at least a far more ambivalent idea of mimicry. He asserts that mimicry is a double articulation, not only a form of reductive violence through resemblance, but also one of menace. What Bhabha has called mimicry is not the “familiar exercise of dependent colonial relations through narcissistic identification so that, as Fanon has observed, the black man stops being an actional person for only the white man can represent his self-esteem [...] The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (“Of Mimicry and Men” 129).

Interestingly, memory, as the text expresses it, functions as just such a disruption, for it belongs to the people, and in turn, affords them a sense of belonging within mimesis. One may even go so far as to say, that *home* for the diasporic subject is found in the interim where memory meets the instant present. Remembering that during the time of Cuffee

Ned, "*They had worked together [...] they had been a People*" (287; emphasis in original), affords the people of Bournehills both hope and home. As pointed out by Brathwaite (and used as the epigraph for this chapter), "we [Caribbean people] are creatures of our history [...] The past predicts our present and the present is, in the end, what we call home" (237). This can be seen in a description of the Bournehills people too as, "Their deep-set eyes appeared endowed with a two-fold vision: of not only being able to see backward in time so that, unlike most people, they had a clear memory of events long past, but, by some extraordinary prescience, forward also" (385).

This intimate connection between memory and present consciousness is not only true for the people of Bournehills however, but for Saul as well. Having worked out in the cane fields with a man named Skinner and his team, Saul is overcome by exhaustion and an overwhelming sense of the harshness of life as lived by these people. In this moment he is also overcome by memories of his own past, both of which involve aspects of his Jewish heritage. Fleeing from the field, he is "hurled, blinded, back into his past, into those memories that served as a reference to the world" (166). Finding Saul in this state walking along the road, Merle ironically and ambiguously asks: "were you on your way home?", to which Saul replies, "yes" (166). This is certainly a defining moment, as not only does Saul consider Merle's guest house to be "home", but that in confronting his own past, he walks a step further in his journey towards a sense of belonging. The fact that Merle is the one who gives him a lift "home" is also symbolic as it is she who eventually gets him to confront his memories of guilt regarding his first wife's death, and to take his own advice in learning from the past rather than being weighed down by its silence.

The idea of identity being rhizomatic rather than geographically rooted (see page 91) is reflected in the character of Allan, an American citizen, but a combination of Irish and Italian blood: "all the strains that had gone into making him [...] might have been thrown into one of those high-speed American blenders, a giant Mixmaster perhaps, which reduces everything to the same bland amalgam beneath its whirring blades" (17). Allan, having been to Bourne Island once before is welcomed "home" by the islanders upon arrival with Saul and Harriet, and he mentions to Merle later on in the text that, "in a way Bournehills is more home than the States to me. That's strange isn't it?" (376).

Unlike *Our Sister Killjoy* and like *Crossing the River*, Marshall's novel includes the white character (as a victim of homelessness and hybridity) as being able to empathise with the diasporic condition:

Highlighting the transnational dimensions of literature is thus not a matter of privileging "migrant" contexts of culture over all others [...] but drawing attention to the fact that the dynamics of transnational and transcultural connections have long since become a lived reality even among the non-migrant majority of the world's population – and a ubiquitous reality shaping modern literature in "Western" and "non-Western" settings alike (Schulze-Engler 2000: 328). (Nyman 12)

However, this inclusive view is not *all-inclusive* in *The Chosen Place*, as can be seen in the way in which Harriet is constructed and situated in the text. The mainstream American history and context into which she fits – the active complicity of her ancestors in the slave trade not being overlooked – seemingly disqualifies her from the "chorus of a common memory", without hope of rapprochement. The novel's disqualification of Harriet has deeper roots than a simple narrative twist however, revealing Marshall's own political orientation and prerogatives. In a discussion of *The Chosen Place* in "Shaping the World of My Art", Marshall makes the following comment: "In it [the novel] there is a *conscious* attempt to project the view of the future to which I am *personally committed*. Stated simply it is a view [...] which sees the rise of revolutionary struggle of the darker peoples of the world and, as a necessary corollary, the decline and eclipse of America and the West" (108; my emphasis). This "eclipse" is directly alluded to in the text by Harriet's suicide.

Saul, on the other hand, is able to feel *chez soi* on Bourne Island on account of his socio-cultural history and context. Despite being an American, Saul's minority status as a *Jewish American*, and his people's history of oppression aligns him with "the darker peoples of the world" who have suffered at the hands of colonialism. Elliot P. Skinner, in his discussion of the "Dialectic between Diaspora's and Homelands" (1993) draws a number of parallels between the experiences of Jewish and African peoples. He suggests that the concept of diaspora, "sometimes defined as *galut* – exile or bondage – and as *golah* – a relatively stable community in exile – derives from the historic experience of the Jewish people [and] in many respects, the plight of the people of African descent, especially those in the New World, is similar to that of the Jews" (*Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* 12). Like the forced migration imposed upon thousands of African people through the infamous slave

trade, the Jews too have experienced the ravages of involuntary exile and inhumane treatment for centuries.³⁴

With reference to Saul's experience as an anthropologist (and with specific reference to his experience in the cane fields mentioned before), his Jewish heritage "became the means by which he understood the sufferings of others. It encompassed them all. It had even, suddenly, reached across the years to include within its wide meaning what he had just witnessed on the hill" (164). Saul also considers himself a "professional wanderer" (321), having lived in numerous and varied places among disparate and foreign people. He goes on to say that in being assimilated into communities of people other than his own, meant living "with them on a decent human level, in situations where, by and large, the colour of a man's skin isn't the first damn thing you notice about him [...] Proof of this is that the most meaningful relationships in my life have been with people outside my own country" (322).

Never-the-less, despite common identification through suffering, "home" still remains a contested and complex issue for the transatlantic subject. In her Interview with Joyce Pettis (1992), Marshall mentions that much of what was spoken about by the "Poets in the kitchen" was the "whole nostalgic memory of home as they called it, home" (117). Marshall goes on to say that from a very early age, the concept of "home" took on a very distinct dualism for her. To her, Brooklyn was all she knew of home (and by extension, America), "and yet, there was always this very strong sense in the household of this other place that was also home" (Marshall 118).

Not only do many Caribbean people feel this sense of split subjectivity between the West and the Caribbean, but the continent of Africa, as original "home", also looms large. Africa plays a significant role in the text as a mythic presence, constantly in the background, and yet return to this place of ancestral departure is not emphasised in *The Chosen Place* as it is in *Our Sister Killjoy*. The people of Bournehills seem content to venerate Cuffee Ned, an African slave, and seek a sense of nationhood as felt after the rebellion, but it is a

³⁴ Not only did the Jews suffer the brunt of Nazi fascism and racial purging in the 20th century, but their homeland, Israel, has been caught up in the imperial politics and wars of countless major powers as recorded in the Old Testament and later historical records (Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, Turkey and Great Britain) (Skinner 12), not to mention the on-going conflict between Israel and Palestine.

nationalism that exists within the island space, not necessarily one that calls for an exodus back to Africa.

Hall provides most helpful comment on the Caribbean identity as being both an outcome and a construct of particular positionings (as mentioned in the Introduction). He argues that in order to rethink the ways in which Caribbean cultural identities are (re)positioned, one needs to consider the influence of three “presences”, borrowing Leopold Senghor’s and Aimé Césaire’s metaphor: “*Presence Africaine*, *Presence Européenne*, and the third, most ambiguous presence of all – the sliding term, *Presence Americain*” (“Cultural Identity” 230). Having discussed the European “presence” earlier (as embodied in Merle and the island), a discussion of the African “presence” is necessary too. Like the “colossus of Africa”(13) hiding beyond the horizon in *The Chosen Place*, Hall asserts that Africa is “hiding behind every verbal inflection, every narrative twist of Caribbean cultural life. It is the secret code with which every western text was ‘re-read’. It is the ground-bass of every rhythm and bodily movement. This was – is – the ‘Africa’ that is alive and well in the diaspora” (“Cultural Identity” 230).³⁵

While the novel suggests that “Africa must at last be reckoned with by Caribbean people [...] it cannot in any simple sense be merely recovered” (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 231). Africa cannot be reified as either an idyllic utopia or as unchanging, primitive and irredeemable. While it is indeed origin for Caribbean peoples, it can no longer be “home”. In Caryl Phillips’s *The Atlantic Sound* (2000), he states that for the African diasporic subject who is now residing elsewhere, “Africa cannot cure. Africa cannot make anybody feel home. Africa is not a psychiatrist” (216). It is now a presence that is tangible and real in its cultural and social manifestations (arts, crafts, music, oral traditions), but it is also a place in its own right, transforming and adapting at the hand of history. To borrow a notion of Said’s, Africa

³⁵ I do not discuss *Presence Americain* in any detail, but include this note in order to clarify what is meant by this term in relation to the other two “presences”. Referring not to the United States of America, but to the concept of the “New World” after decolonisation, Hall discusses how this “presence” is, “always-already creolised – not lost beyond the Middle Passage, but ever-present: from the harmonics in our musics to the ground-bass of Africa, traversing and intersecting our lives at every point. How can we stage this dialogue so that, finally, we can place it, without terror or violence, rather than being forever placed by it? Can we ever recognise its irreversible influence, whilst resisting its imperialising eye?” (“Cultural Identity” 233-234).

is now for the Caribbean people, an “imaginative geography and history [helping] the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the difference between what is close to it and what is far away” (*Orientalism* 55). Hall suggests return to Africa “by another route” (232) – to an Africa retold through “politics, memory and desire” (“Cultural Identity” 232). It is thus the *location* (geographic, psychological, ideological) from which one perceives Africa (real or imagined) that informs the way in which one comes to identify one’s self in relation to it.

Falling somewhere between Aidoo’s call for nothing less than “return” in *Our Sister Killjoy*, and Phillips’s refrain of “no return” in *Crossing the River*, Merle deems return to Africa necessary at the end of the text, but only for a particular purpose and a certain time. Having come to terms with her memories of the past, Merle resolves to travel to Africa to find her husband and daughter:

I have the feeling that just being there and seeing the place will be a big help to me, that in some way it will give me the strength I need to get moving again. Not that I’m going expecting perfection, I know they have more than their share of problems, or to find myself or any nonsense like that. It’s more what you once said: that sometimes a person has to go back, really back – to have a sense, an understanding of all that’s gone to make them – before they can go forward. I believe that, too. But I’ll be coming back to Bournehills. This is home. (468)

It is interesting that Merle is only truly able to name Bournehills “home”, once she has come to accept her own hybrid identity. Before leaving, in order to accumulate the finances needed for a trip to Africa, Merle purges herself of all of the external “symbols” of her internal fracture, by selling everything from her “saint” earrings to the paintings in her room. Olmsted asserts that “in preparation for a return to Africa, Merle has divested herself of all the symbols that helped define her – more to the point, helped her to speak the complex, disjointed, desperate language of history, her own and Bournehills” (6). In a sense, she has come to terms with her hybridity, and where all the symbols of history remained external reminders of her split subjectivity, she has now internalised these incongruences as true parts of herself. Locating identity as tidalectic, rather than simply neo-colonial or solely nationalistic (far more linear and prescriptive), Marshall introduces a far more nuanced idea of Caribbean transatlantic identity through the *terragraphica* of her novel.

Interestingly, while Pulitano writes that “the sea [is] a space of uncharted historiography, an element in flux that defies national and territorial boundaries therefore providing a perfect unifying trope to the chaotic scattering of the islands” (303), one is made to question the degree to which this “unity” is experienced. While the memories of slavery are certainly collective, the people of the Caribbean – scattered across this archipelago – do not have one homogenous and overriding identity. Even within Bourne Island itself, the divide between New Bristol and Bournehills is tangibly visible, not only in a physical sense, but in the vastly disparate identities exhibited by the people on either side of the Cleaver’s mountain range. Speaking about the people of Bournehills, those residing in New Bristol feel no affiliation towards them, and openly despise them: “those people? They are a disgrace!” (58). Upon hearing their comments, Saul thinks to himself that “they might have been speaking about a people completely alien to themselves, who didn’t even inhabit the island” (58). Here we see that there are numerous factors at play when it comes to a sense of cultural or collective (national) identity – that the identity of a people cannot simply be attached to geographic or even “racial” proximity. Saul confirms this as while “listening to them he suddenly remembered, to his own shame, how, as a boy, he had fled his brothers, those with the sallow, long-nosed look, sloping shoulders and side curls” (59).

In *Caribbean Discourse* Glissant speaks about the “subterranean convergence of [Caribbean] histories” and the “transversality” of Caribbean identity (66). Whilst there is much divergence among specific peoples of the Caribbean – manifested in disparate languages, cultures and social make-ups – he argues that there *does* exist a certain common identification, drawing on Brathwaite’s idea that “the unity is submarine” (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 66). Regarding the idea of “roots” versus “routes” in the configuration of diasporic identity, Glissant makes an interesting point in line with this notion of a convergent subterranean history. He argues that diasporic identity is an extension of roots, but rather than a sense of self and community being attached to a geographic space or specific polity, he suggests (linking his own findings and thoughts to those of Brathwaite’s) that the roots are “submarine”: “that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches

[through a] shared process of cultural mutation, this convergence frees us from uniformity” (67).

Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who seek to move away from the nationalistic conception of “rootedness”, Glissant explains that in place of the root – “a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it” (*Poetics of Relation* 11) – they propose the metaphoric rhizome. The rhizome envisions “an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root” (*Poetics of Relation* 11). In an interview with Michael Dash and Quincy Troupe conducted in 2006, Glissant uses the idea of the rhizome in explaining Caribbean identity. Unable to consider the Caribbean writer as being attached in his/her thinking, seeing and knowing to one specific geographic place, Glissant posits that his/her identity is rhizomatic – far more relational, hybrid and globally immersed. In essence, the Caribbean writer is the writer of the “tout-monde”, the entire world – as made up of a plurality of worlds.

Using the concept of the rhizome to envision the construction of Caribbean diasporic identity certainly resonates with the character of Merle, as it does with Marshall herself, whose rhizomatic affiliations with both the USA and Barbados (and consequently West Africa) simultaneously immerse her within a number of geographic, cultural and historical locations. It must also be noted that much of what Marshall holds to as a form of her own identification belongs to her memories. While she certainly feels a sense of affiliation to various people groups and geographic spaces, it is her memories of her mother and friends in the kitchen reminiscing about their Caribbean “home” that inform her sense of self as being a part of this history and belonging to this “perpetually actual” phenomenon. Through transatlantic movement (forced or voluntary), memories are constructed and through memories, identity is formed and negotiated. Marshall thus posits that a true sense of belonging for the diasporic subject is that which is gradually attained as one confronts the past – as a collective occurrence and as a mosaic of personal experiences.

The Caribbean, a “crosscultural dynamic entity combining island space and open sea in an intricate system of closed insularity and incessant travelling” (Pulitano 303), functions as the fulcrum around which Paule Marshall’s text revolves. Viewing the diasporic subject as an exemplar of transatlantic hybridity – aesthetically and intrinsically – Marshall presents identity as that which is indelibly attached to and informed by memory. The diaspora experience as Hall defines it, and as Marshall presents it, “is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 235).

Chapter Four:

Pelagic Moorings and Choric Memory³⁶

For two hundred and fifty years I have listened to the many-tongued chorus. And occasionally, among the sundry restless voices, I have discovered those of my own children. My Nash. My Martha. My Travis. Their lives fractured. Sinking hopeful roots into difficult soil.

Phillips, *Crossing the River* 1

Having explored Aidoo's autochthonous conception of diasporic identity and the way in which Marshall locates home and belonging for the transatlantic subject within the permeable space where memory meets the present, this chapter now turns to yet another narrative construction of identity: Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* (1993). As an exemplar of Phillips's postcolonial fiction – boasting a decidedly hybrid aesthetic – *Crossing the River* “portrays the descendants of the diaspora in various locations and temporalities, inscribing migration as a site of pain, remembrance, and deracination rather than a site of postmodern mobility” (Goyal, “Theorising Africa” 15). *Crossing the River* extends the definitional, historical and ideological boundaries of diaspora to include not only those who have been forcibly or voluntarily moved from the continent of Africa, but all those who have experienced the fractal implications of homelessness, dislocation and abandonment. In this novel, Phillips explores the Atlantic space (and its various shores) as an archive of common memories and a chorus of stories sung by discordant voices.

Caryl Phillips, an author well known within the transatlantic literary paradigm, is himself a product of “various locations and temporalities”, having lived in and been profoundly influenced by multiple geographic locations within the Atlantic world. His own diasporic experience thus acts as a filter through which many of his texts are written (and should be read), with the written word functioning as a means of dissecting as well as (re)constructing the Atlantic space: a foundation and disrupter of identity. Phillips was born in 1958 in St

³⁶ “Pelagic mooring” is a term I borrow from Bénédict Ledent (see page 104) and “choric memory” alludes to the “chorus of a common memory” to which Phillips frequently refers in *Crossing the River*.

Kitts in the West Indies. Shortly after his birth however, the Phillips family immigrated to England, settling in Leeds. Phillips grew up in Leeds and after spending some time in Birmingham, enrolled at Oxford University, graduating in 1979 with a degree in English. During his time at Oxford, Phillips travelled to the United States, a short visit that proved pivotal in his understanding of the duality of society and reinforced his desire to address the problems of exclusion, dispossession and dislocation, along with confronting what W.E.B. Du Bois terms “a double consciousness”. His discovery of the writings of African American author, Richard Wright, also became highly influential to both his thinking and his writing (Ledent, “Caryl Phillips”).³⁷

In the 1980s, Phillips embarked on a number of journeys, including a return to his place of birth, the Caribbean, as well as travelling to Europe and Ghana in Africa. His extensive (and intentional) travelling made him even more aware of the richness of his multicultural background – including African but also European and Indian ancestry – “and strengthened his determination to write, which resulted in the following years in a prolific and original production” (Ledent, “Caryl Phillips” 2). As an author of three books of non-fiction and eight novels, as well as plays and essays, Phillips has earned international recognition and received numerous prestigious awards for his work. Having been a Professor of English at Barnard College, University of Columbia and at Yale University, he now resides in New York and is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (Phillips *Cambridge*).

In reading *Crossing the River* and many of Phillips’s other texts such as *Cambridge* (1991), *Nature of Blood* (1997) and *The Atlantic Sound* (2000), to name a few, it is almost impossible

³⁷ Richard Wright (1908-1960), like Phillips, was a man of African descent living in the West - a complex man greatly troubled by ideas of belonging, home and identity for African diasporic subjects. His own sense of split subjectivity and his grappling with the anomalies of race, heritage and the politics of location, finds expression in an essay written in 1953 (“On Tour in The Gold Coast”), before visiting The Gold Coast (now Ghana) and spending time with Nkrumah:

Africa! Being of African descent, would I be able to feel and know something about Africa on the basis of common “racial” heritage? Africa was a vast continent full of “my people”...Or had three hundred years imposed a psychological distance between me and the “racial stock” from which I had sprung? [...] *But am I African?* [...] According to popular notions of “race”, there ought to be something of “me” down there in Africa. Some vestige, some heritage, some vague but definite ancestral reality that would serve as a key to unlock the hearts and feelings of the African whom I’d meet...But I could not feel anything African about myself, and I wondered, “What does being *African* mean...?” (90)

to disentangle the ideas he presents from those of Paul Gilroy in his profoundly influential (albeit somewhat controversial) book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). This will hopefully become more apparent as the rest of this chapter unfolds, keeping in mind the following excerpt taken from Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (also included in the introductory chapter):

Where the communities of interpretation, needs, and solidarity on which the cultures of the black Atlantic rest become an intellectual and political multiplicity, they assume a fractal form in which the relationship between similarity and difference becomes so complex that it may continually deceive the senses [...] *The perceived contours of these movements vary according to the precise location of the observer* [...] this diaspora multiplicity is a chaotic, living, disorganic formation. If it can be called a tradition at all, it is a tradition in ceaseless motion – a changing same that strives continually towards a state of self-realisation that continually retreats beyond its grasp. (122; my emphasis)

Indeed it is the “precise location of the observer” that this research project seeks to explore, with particular reference to the role of literary perspective in the formation and discussion of diasporic (transatlantic) identity. Manning and Taylor (2007) also point out that in *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy examines how the “nexus of imperialism and slavery created ‘processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity’ that constitute for him an idea of transnational modernity. He inextricably links the idea of being *rooted* with that of being *routed* within the ‘rhizomorphic’ mobility of the black Atlantic world” (“Introduction” 12). The conception of *routes* (*rupta via*) as perhaps having a greater impact on the realisation and formation of identity within the transatlantic context (rather than simply *roots* as Aidoo portrays in *Our Sister Killjoy*) is also something that Phillips grapples with in *Crossing the River*.

In speaking about the African diaspora, it is important to note that the meaning of this phenomenon (and the weight it carries when considering transatlantic identities) is by no means static (as revealed in the precious two chapters), and the angle from which theorists and writers have approached it has evolved over the years, particularly with the onset of the postmodern era. Yogita Goyal draws attention to this fact, and provides useful definitions of diaspora:

Theorists in cultural studies routinely invoke diaspora as a syncretised configuration of cultural identity: shifting, flexible, and invariably anti-essentialist. This notion

pointedly revises an earlier definition of diaspora structured by teleology of origin, scattering and return. While these older conceptions of diaspora posited an organic link to Africa, and imagined both symbolic and actual returns to the homeland, the new one focuses on displacement itself, maintaining that the lack of mooring in national and racial certitudes generates anti-essentialist identities. (Goyal, "Theorising Africa" 5)

Phillips's definition of diaspora (and consequently his outlook on diasporic identity) is certainly synonymous with what Goyal terms "a syncretised configuration of cultural identity: shifting, flexible, and invariably anti—essentialist."³⁸ In this way, Phillips posits – through his narrative and various narrative techniques – that for the African subject (in particular) and the victim of displacement and marginalisation (in general), identity includes elements of and yet transcends the confines of nation, race and culture, in both the geographic and psychological sense. For the sake of theory, *Crossing the River* may thus be termed a "transnational" text, shying away from the nationalist narrative mode. Donald E. Pease defines this nationalist technique as one of positioning "a totalised community as the narratee of a story that structure[s] the subject positions, actions, and the events of that community within a masterplot that perform[s] the quasi-metaphysical function of guaranteeing its perpetuity" (41). In contrast, while the concept of the transnational is not without its inherent paradoxes, Phillips, like Paul Gilroy, uses the multifarious Atlantic space, rather than the homogenised nation, as "one single unit of analysis [...] to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (Gilroy 15).

Using "multiple narrators, juxtaposing conflicting accounts, and crossing vast boundaries of time and space, [Phillips's] disjointed narratives embody the self-reflexive aesthetics that characterise postcolonial interrogations of modernity" (Goyal, "From Return to Redemption" 207). These "disjointed narratives", or vignettes, textually trace the lives of Nash, Martha and Travis, three children sold into slavery by their African father.³⁹ This act of selling, a "shameful intercourse" (1), lamented by the guilt stricken father as he confesses to having "soiled [his] hands with cold goods in exchange for their warm flesh" (1), forms the

³⁸ See footnote 5 on page 14 for definitions of "essentialist" and "anti-essentialist".

³⁹ It must be noted that Nash, Martha and Travis are constructed as both symbolic "children of Africa" and as individual characters. While it is intended for the reader to see that these individual characters (as revealed in the various sections) are a product of the slave trade, they cannot simply be conflated with the children spoken of at the outset of the novel.

opening of the novel: “A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children. I remember” (1). The father recalls handing his children over “where the tributary stumbles and swims out in all directions to meet the sea” (1). It is this oceanic, diasporic image that informs the rest of the novel as each of the protagonists are carried along on the tide of history, all reaching different shores, and yet lending their disparate voices to a “chorus of a common memory” (1).

The father, coming to personify Africa itself, is haunted by this “common memory” and the proceeding narratives function as articulations and discoveries of the consequences of his actions. Goyal asserts that “while the emphatic declaration of the prologue is that ‘there is no return’ (2), much of the novel leads us through the memories of its several protagonists, bringing us to its celebratory conclusion [...] from an understanding of diaspora that highlights the folly of return to one that champions the acceptance of dispersal” (“Theorising Africa” 15). Addressing “all those who have crossed the river” in the tribute in the opening pages of the novel, Phillips does not specify a particular people group or historical moment as being solely representative of diaspora, but instead, his novel reaches out a hand to those who have been “nominally written out of history” (Jaggi 24), and adds them (as individuals) to the “many-tongued chorus” of voices.

The text is comprised of four distinct sections framed by a prologue and epilogue. The first section, entitled “The Pagan Coast” centres on Nash, a former slave of Virginia. In the 1830s, after having undergone rigorous western education, he is freed and repatriated by the American Colonisation Organisation to Liberia to establish a Christian mission and colony. It is at this juncture of his life that we are given a narrative window into his complex character. Much of this first section is of an epistolary nature, comprised of numerous letters written by Nash to his former master, Edward Williams, whose voice we are also sporadically introduced to through third person narration. “The Pagan Coast” deals with Nash’s struggle to come to terms with his new African “home” (a struggle linked to an inescapable “double consciousness”) and the complex relationship between himself and Edward, culminating in Edward travelling to Liberia to see what has become of Nash after all forms of correspondence die out.

The second narrative is entitled “West”. Unlike the previous section, the historical framework within which this narrative unfolds is pre- and post- Civil War America and it is from within this historical context that the reader is presented with snapshots and fragments of Martha’s life. Martha, a former slave (and fugitive) is on her way to California, having joined a group of fellow “pioneers”, seeking true freedom and a society shaped by their own will and hands. Martha is also in search of her daughter who was sold away from her at a slave auction many years before. The reader is introduced to Martha only a day before she passes away, and yet, through alternating third and first person narration, the short narrative provides a welter of memories that conjure up the intensely personal (and yet effectively collective) pain, loss and connection that form the patchwork canvas of her life.

Before looking at what has become of the third child, Travis, Phillips seemingly incongruously inserts into the text a slave-ship captain’s journal, dated 1752. The journal is written by James Hamilton, the master aboard the *Duke of York*, a British slave ship. Using John Newton’s *Journal of a Slave Trader* (1754) as a historical guide, Phillips presents the reader with a startlingly impersonal recording of the acquisition of slaves along the African Coast – including the symbolic Nash, Martha and Travis. Interestingly however, this narrative is not confined to prosaic, abrupt journal entries recording the buying and selling of human beings (seen as mere cargo of economic value), but Phillips also includes letters written by Hamilton to his wife in England. The jarring juxtaposition of the letters and the logbook recordings make for a read that is by no means unproblematic and one-dimensional, calling into focus elements of a common humanity across the spectrum of transatlantic characters.

The fourth section is devoted entirely to the diary entries of Joyce Kitson, a young working-class woman of Yorkshire descent. Although we are never given a direct and unfiltered gaze upon the character of Travis, it is through Joyce’s first person narration that we are allowed a glimpse into the trajectory of his life. Set within the context of World War Two, this narrative exposes the lonely existence of Joyce, who, having lost her father in World War One, and experiencing the life-altering effects of a disinterested mother and an abusive husband (whom she leaves for Travis), is included in the diasporic “family”. Joyce is

immediately drawn to the African American soldiers who arrive in the English Village, they too being “outsiders”, and it is her “colour-blindness” that makes a relationship with Travis possible. Although the narrative exposes much tragedy – the death of Travis on the Italian coast and Joyce giving up of their son Greer for adoption – Greer’s return to visit Joyce some eighteen years later provides grounds for future hope, if not the power to change the past.

Just as the novels of Aidoo and Marshall (located at different points of the Atlantic triangle and at different points of history) provide narrative constructions of diasporic identity – distinct *terragraphicas* – so too does *Crossing the River*. The power of words to construct reality (even in fiction) should never be underestimated. If novels of exploration such as Ryder Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) and colonial narratives such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) were able to create in the minds of a western readership decidedly disparaging (and sadly convincing) images of Africa and her people (fuelling colonial justification), so too can postcolonial texts construct certain images of people that can promote cognitive and social change – in a positive or negative sense. With particular reference to *Crossing the River*, it is evident that Phillips’s *terragraphica*, birthed from within an entangled transatlantic space of diverse cultures and constituencies, “both constructs the nation as a discursive space and works to disrupt its imagined consistency” (Manning and Taylor, “Translation” 167).

Phillips’s hybrid aesthetics and refusal to paint with words a diasporic experience that reinforces binary oppositions and essentialist undertones will be closely explored. With regard to this and in an attempt to understand the angle from which Phillips approaches the topical subject of identity, Bénédict Ledent astutely points out that:

Phillips does not regard the diaspora as a notion to be exploited theoretically, but rather as an empirical and historical reality that needs to be probed without prejudices and from multiple and ever-changing angles [...His] thematic, structural and image choices all suggest that the diaspora is not an agenda imposed from the outside on Phillips’s work, but is a fully integrated element of his world vision, thus a catalyst for his complex approach to what home can be. His use of memory as alternative and ambivalent history within the individual may be taken to illustrate this interiorisation of the diaspora in his novels. (“Ambiguous Visions of Home” 200)

In her discussion of *Crossing the River*, Susanne Pichler (2011) makes some very interesting points regarding the imbrication of memory, diaspora, home and belonging. Pichler's article entitled, "Memory in Caryl Phillips's novel *Crossing the River*", raises a number of questions that I find to be particularly salient and of great importance in an exploration of this text as a medium through which the reader can understand the various constituents of identity. Despite having included some of the following quote in the introductory chapter of this thesis, I would like to include, verbatim, the list of questions that Pichler poses again. In doing so, it is my intention to provide (throughout this chapter) answers to some of them in the hopes of coming to a better understanding of diasporic identity as presented by Phillips:

What is it that diasporic identities remember, and what is it that they forget? Which are the themes that are perpetuated transhistorically and translocally? Is the past retained in the present 'memory' or 'history'? Can we assume that it is primarily traumatic experiences that diasporic identities (tend to) 'actively forget' to use Ramadanovic's term (Ramadanovic, 2001, p. 48) or are they imprinted in the characters' minds? How and when do diasporic identities establish 'home'? How do diasporic writers deal with these highly complex and topical issues? Is Avtar Brah right in suggesting that in diasporic writing 'home' is 'a mythic place of desire' (Brah, 1996, p. 192). (Pichler 3)

Phillips's intention in *Crossing the River*, unlike the historian's, is not aimed at critically and objectively analysing historical accounts and events, nor is it intended to convey a coherent, "comprehensive vision of the past" (Halbwachs 143). Instead, the novel seeks to reflect upon and explore the nuanced effects of history, "the fragments of a (trans)local, (trans)historical cultural memory that is unstable and in flux" (Pichler 4). These "effects of history" are profoundly etched into the lives of the protagonists in *Crossing the River*, and Phillips chooses highly significant periods of history as the backdrops for the different stories: the impact of imperialism and the slave trade, pre- and post-Civil War America and the Second World War. The fragmented nature of the text itself, dealing with 250 years of history in a somewhat contrapuntal style, subverts any notion of reading it as a coherent and continuous narrative, while various thematic concerns weave threads of association between the vignettes, drawing them together as a chronicle and harmonic "chorus" (1) of diasporic experience.

From a theoretical point of view, the contrapuntal style of Phillips's narrative and the implications of this in relation to his treatment of diasporic and plural identities, leads one

directly to the consideration of one of Edward Said's "most distinctive contributions to the postcolonial lexicon: the notion of *counterpoint*" (Hallward 58). Like Phillips, Said sees "cultural identities not as essentialisations [...] but as contrapuntal ensembles, [...] since] no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions" ("Overlapping Territories" 60). The fact that the term "counterpoint" has musical origins is also reflective of *Crossing the River*, with particular regard to the speaker's frequent mention of the "many-tongued chorus". When looking at a definition of a musical counterpoint (as used in western classical music), it is almost as if reading an insightful analysis of Phillips's text: "various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order; an organised interplay [...] Counterpoint is the tying together of multiple voices in a kind of disciplined whole" (Hallward 58).

Presenting his novel as a contrapuntal ensemble, Phillips advocates and recognises individuality, lending voices to the previously historically voiceless, while simultaneously highlighting their belonging to a wider, global community. These ideas are made clear in the epilogue, where Phillips makes mention of a collective of "survivors", slaves (metaphorically and literally) to history, yet possessing a future hope – a hope and an identity that are vested in forward momentum, rather than return: "There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return. A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my beloved children. Bought two strong man-boys, and a proud girl. But they arrived on the far bank of the river, loved" (237).

Again, I would like to draw a connection here between Phillips's ideas and those of Said's with specific reference to the notion of "crossing the river". Said believes that: "Our truest reality is expressed in the way we *cross over* from one place to another. We are migrants and perhaps hybrid in, but not of, any situation in which we find ourselves" (ALS 164) (Hallward 59). In this vein, diasporic subjects – such as Nash, Martha and Travis – are shaped and changed by their (forced) crossing of the Atlantic and numerous other "rivers" (of loss, of abandonment). The idea of "crossing over", from one location to another invokes a sense of physical displacement (*dislocation/relocation*) that cannot be divorced from the resultant shifts in cultural, ideological and psychic subject positions. This *multi-axial locationality*

(Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities" 205) is exhibited in the transatlantic characters of Phillips's text, revealing both their hybrid subjectivities as well as elements of their common humanity.

Phillips's answer to a question posed to him during an interview with Maya Jaggi (1994) (intentionally focussed on *Crossing the River*) is certainly worth considering at this point. To the question: "This novel repositions black people in histories from which they're usually excluded. What's your purpose in this?" Phillips replies:

It's to look at that history from a different angle – through the prism of people who have nominally been written out of it, or have been viewed as the losers or victims in a particular historical storm. You take something which people presume they know about - like the West from John Wayne - and you make them look again from the point of view of people who have been written out [...] you subvert people's view of history by engaging them with characters. I don't think you subvert it by arguing schematically about ideas. (115)

In taking a closer look at the angle from which Phillips views history, it is no wonder that *Crossing the River* is a text comprised of fractural pieces of narrative that at first glance seem decidedly dissonant and discordant. When one uses a "prism of people" as a lens through which history can be viewed, there can be little linearity or hope of finding sense within a schematic framework. Indeed, a history filtered through the memories, experiences and idiosyncrasies of individual lives will not provide one with a text book of historical facts, but an intricate web of interconnections, loss, hybridity and amalgamation, subject to the ebb and flow of time and context. Like Marshall, Phillips seeks to "demystify the diasporic myth by highlighting the intricacies of individual lives [and] shrinks from the 'overstatement' that [an entirely] romantic view of diaspora entails" (Ledent, "Ambiguous Visions of Home" 203).

The individual lives that the text deals with are strikingly disparate on a number of external levels, yet they display many elements of a common humanity. Each section takes place on a different continent (with the exception of "Crossing the River" which plays out on board a slaving ship off the coast of Sierra Leone): the United States, England and Africa. The fact that Phillips deals with all three points of the Atlantic Triangle, as well as the Middle Passage, focussing on white as well as black textual characters, reveals his desire to highlight

the anomalies and complexities that come with being human in general and a victim of homelessness, abandonment and loss in particular. Phillips's inclusion of Joyce Kitts (a white, working class Yorkshire woman), James Hamilton (an English Captain) and Edward Williams (an American tobacco plantation owner), testifies to his fluid notion of diasporic experience.

Having looked at the ways in which *Our Sister Killjoy* and *The Chosen Place* present notions of "home", it is most evident that these novels, as particular *terragraphicas*, are extensions of the author's own (geographical, ideological, temporal) locations and their own desires to feel *chez soi*. This is certainly true of *Crossing the River* as well, and the complexity (and indeed perplexity) around the need to feel *chez soi* (as presented by the novel) is a direct product of Phillips's own grappling with belonging. In his semi-autobiographical text, *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips highlights the deep set tension encapsulated in the question, "where are you from?", asked of him by a Ghanaian man while on a flight to Ghana:

The question. The problem question for those of us who have grown up in societies which define themselves by excluding others. Usually us. A cooled question. Are you one of us? Are you one of ours? Where are you from? Where are you really from? And now, here on a plane flying to Africa, the same clumsy question. Does he mean, who am I? Does he mean, do I belong? Why does this man not understand the complexity of this question? I make the familiar flustered attempt to answer the question. He listens, and then spoils it all. 'So, my friend, you are going home to Africa. To Ghana.' I say nothing. No, I am not going home." (98)

Avtar Brah (1996) speaks of the "multi-locationality" inherent in the diasporic imaginary (within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries), where the possession of a "homing desire" may not be synonymous with the desire for a specific "homeland" ("Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities" 197). As early as 1981, in Phillips's play, *Strange Fruit*, the character Alvin (of Caribbean descent living in London) asserts that, "to live on a raft in the middle of the Atlantic at a point equidistant between Africa, the Caribbean and Britain" (77) is the frustratingly impossible, though somehow only solution to his cultural dislocation. Ledent points out that this desire to be anchored in the Atlantic, a hybrid space of plural identities, is also a wish of Phillips's. Phillips confesses that while (physically) living in such a place is of course an impossibility, it is his desire to have his ashes

scattered at a point “equidistant between Africa, the Caribbean and Britain”, and for the middle of the Atlantic Ocean to be his “long home” after death:

The choice of this watery grave is no doubt the expression of his being forever enmeshed in the complexities triggered off by the Middle Passage and the triangular trade. It also marks a development from a feeling of being homeless and existentially “adrift” to a sense of having finally found an anchorage in the ocean. What a critic of “Tidalectics” i.e. aquatic metaphors, in Caribbean literature seems to apply to Phillips’s arrangements for his posthumous life: “This imaginative return to the abyss”, she writes, “indicates an aquatic symbology that ‘territorialises’ through history rather than through ethnic or national ‘roots’ and therefore complicates the limitations of nation-based, terrestrial belonging” [Deloughrey, 1998, p.24]. No doubt this pelagic mooring is a welcome image at a time when identity construction, and “home”, are still geographically confined, and viewed by some in simplistic and static racial or national terms (Ledent, “Ambiguous visions of home.” (199)

Ideas of “home” and the struggles to find a sense of “home” are dealt with in each of the four sections of *Crossing the River*, some instances being more explicit than others. Nash, in his function as an allegorical “child of Africa” is forcibly removed from his original African home, while the Nash that Phillips gives voice to is seen to be returning to this “home” after having been born and brought up in an African American slave community in the USA. These circumstances of “return” however are unavoidably colonial, and the tension between Nash’s identity as a *western* as well as an *African* American is tangible throughout the first narrative.

“The Pagan Coast” begins with a description of Nash that, although a distinctly one-sided perception, gives the reader some indication of his character and the nature of his “return” to Africa: “Nash Williams, sent to Liberia under the auspices of the American Colonisation Society, having undergone a rigorous programme of Christian education, and being of a sound moral character”(7). It is interesting to note that while Nash agrees to this journey, his motives seem to be irreversibly coloured by a decidedly colonial enterprise, rather than a personal impulse to discover a lost African identity. Referring to the American Colonisation Society, we as readers are made privy – through the medium of third person narration – to the “auspices” under which Nash uproots himself and his family and crosses the Atlantic to settle in Liberia:

Not that [they were] ignorant of the dangers that would accompany their policy of attempting to repatriate former slaves on the west coast of Africa. This was, after all,

a continent belonging to the native African. But they hoped that the natives would see reason, and that the prospect of welcoming home their lost children might help to overcome any unpleasant cultural estrangement that the African heathens might temporarily experience. The American Colonisation Society was sure that benefits would accrue to both nations. America would be removing a cause of increasing social stress, and Africa would be civilised by the return of her descendants, who were now blessed with rational Christian minds. (9)

As one considers the idea of the “lost children of Africa” being unpleasantly culturally estranged from those who are to welcome them “home”, one cannot help but conclude that the philanthropic veneer of the Society’s “hopes” is steeped in paradox. This “homecoming” also comes with an imperial agenda – however subtle – as those former slaves are not petitioned to return home and be embraced by their fellow African people and their culture, but rather to be bearers of western ideology with the intention of “civilising the heathens” (perhaps not so subtly imperial). It is hoped that the “natives” will “see reason” – through the newly acquired lenses of western intelligence – while America is simultaneously divested of an “increasing social stress”. This paradox is inherent in almost all of the letters that Nash writes to his former master, Edward. In 1834, after having successfully survived the Middle Passage, Nash writes this of Liberia:

Liberia is a fine place to live in. I was at first astonished to see the bushes that grow in the streets, and the boldness of the nature all about, but my person is now accustomed to such sights [...] Liberia, the beautiful land of my forefathers, is a place where persons of colour may enjoy their freedom. It is the home for our race [...] the star in the East for the free coloured man. It is truly our home. (18)

Interestingly, juxtaposed with his declarations of Liberia constituting his true home (an assertion that occurs on numerous occasions in his letters to Edward), are Nash’s comments referring to the “robes of ignorance which drape the shoulders of my fellow blacks” (21), and his many statements such as: “indeed, the natives are a much-maligned people in this dark and benighted country” (31). In stark contrast to his sense of having returned home, such rhetoric (pertaining to the way in which he interacts with the people of Liberia) simply perpetuates the colonial voice, constructing an “us versus them” dichotomy, rather than one of shared identity and brotherhood. When taking a closer look at Nash’s reasons for calling Liberia “home”, it would seem that the feelings of belonging that he does possess are a product of the freedom experienced in Liberia, rather than familial or associative bonds with her people:

It was intended that Africa should be a land of freedom, for where else can the man of colour enjoy his liberty? Not in Haiti or Canada [...] further, in this republic the practice is to address me as *Mr Williams* and not *Boy*. There are a few white people here, and they are polite, moving to one side and touching their hats [...] the white man never calls me anything but my name. I am *Mr Williams*. (33)

The freedom to assert ownership over oneself, to be able to say *I am* rather than be crushed under the dehumanising weight of *you are* is certainly grounds for a positive sense of identity and belonging, as is reflected in both *Our Sister Killjoy* and *The Chosen Place*. Nash's response to this freedom is also mirrored in the second vignette, "West", where Martha, in referring to the migration of (recently freed) African American people across America, explains that they were, "prospecting for a place where your name wasn't 'boy' or 'aunty', and you where you could be a part of this country without feeling like you wasn't really a part" (74).

For Nash, a profoundly transatlantic character, this sense of positive identity is by no means one-dimensional however. While he is referred to as Mr Williams, the black people of Liberia also call him a "white man" (32). This serves to undermine Nash's identity as an African, particularly with regard to the fact that up until this point, Nash's whole existence has been ruled along the lines of colour disparity as a signifier of worth, status and positioning. It is also evident that America, to which he refers as a "land of milk and honey"(25) is very much a part of who he is, and at times he seems incredulous at the thought of considering the people of Liberia *his people*: "They can be very savage when they think they have the advantage. At times like this, it is strange to think that these people of Africa are our ancestors, for with some of them you may do all you can but they still will be your enemy" (32).

This sense of "double consciousness" reflects a narrative construction of Paul Gilroy's ideas about transatlantic identity, where the diasporic subject (for instance Nash, an African American) stands "between (at least) two great cultural assemblages [the likes of which] remain locked symbiotically in an antagonistic relationship marked out by the symbolism of colours which adds to the conspicuous cultural power of their central Manichean dynamic – black and white" (Gilroy 2). Gilroy goes on to say that: "these colours support a special

rhetoric that has grown to be associated with a language of nationality and national belonging as well as the languages of “race” and ethnic identity” (2). Gilroy, like Phillips, advocates a move away from a sense of belonging arising out of specific national affiliations, eschewing all forms of Manichean thinking and instead opting for a more postmodern view, transcending neat categories of race, ethnicity and culture. In the hopes of understanding identity for the transatlantic subject – who is indeed an amalgamation of multiple factors and cannot be simplistically “categorised” – Gilroy (and I would argue Phillips as well) chooses “the more difficult option: the theorisation of creolisation, metissage, mestizaje, and hybridity [...] rather unsatisfactory ways of naming the process of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents” (Gilroy 2).

With reference to the imbrication of memory and identity, it is interesting to trace Nash’s feelings of belonging and his interactions with the African people in accordance with his memories of America. Nash confesses to Edward: “daily I wonder about those names across the water, who, hearing no news, I constantly fear may have already departed this life” (40). Receiving no reply from Edward after having expressed his desire to “come *home* [to America] as soon as possible”(35; my emphasis), Nash feels “stranded on the other side of the Atlantic, which clearly, like a chasm, drives a wedge between Edward, America and his former self”(Pichler 6). In the last letter that Edward receives from Nash, Nash expresses, without his former will to please Edward, the extent to which his abandonment has altered him: “That my faith in you is broken, is evident. You, my father, did sow the seed, and it sprouted forth with vigour, but for many years now there has been nobody to tend to it, and being abandoned it has withered away and died. Your work is complete” (63).

Although Nash gradually becomes assimilated into the community, marrying not one, but numerous African women, he still reveals that “there are many things I cannot discuss with my native wife, for it would be improper for her to share with me the memories of what I was before. I am to her what she has found here in Africa” (42). In this way, Nash’s identity is not something fixed or certain. To his African wife (wives), he is simply a man living in Africa, without a history or a past or roots that extend deeper than his immediate situation. To Edward, Nash is still the loyal former slave (and lover), a paragon of western education

and civilisation.⁴⁰ Like Merle, Nash is a hybrid character, caught in a confluence of cultures and histories, effected by both geographical roots/routes and the *rupta via* of memory.

Pichler asserts that since he is no longer able to engage with his American past or its cultural memory, Nash chooses to sever ties with his former “American self” (just as history at large, his African father, and Edward have abandoned him). He decides to leave his mission school, take on three wives and move into the heart of the “Liberian paradise” (62). Ledent comments on this saying, “[Nash’s] jubilation at his new found freedom rings hollow, however, for his wholesale adoption of African customs is as inappropriate as his former exclusive allegiance [to the West]” (128).

Although “The Pagan Coast” looks at the character of Nash and how, through his ambiguous portrayal in the text, he emerges as “an instance of a mimic man, a sign of colonial hybridity” (Goyal, “From Redemption to Return” 219), the character of Edward cannot simply be overlooked. In various ways, Edward’s moral and psychological dilemmas are delivered with a greater sympathy and sense of urgency than those of Nash’s. Goyal points out that “while the first section of the novel establishes the folly of Nash’s return to Liberia, consonant with a post-colonial suspicion of return narratives, it also situates Nash as far less ambivalent or hybrid than Edward. Edward displays vacillation, guilt, suffering, and ultimately growth, thus displacing Nash from the centre of the narrative” (“From Redemption to Return” 220). The fact that Edward himself also undergoes the transatlantic journey – a journey (and *route*) that leaves him indelibly altered – is telling of Phillips’s intentions to widen the lens through which the reader perceives the Atlantic as a space of transformation, not only for the black diasporic subject, but for the white European or American subject as well.

Reading Nash’s words of hurt, imploring Edward to “explain to me why you used me for your purposes and then expelled me to this Liberian paradise” (62), in conjunction with

⁴⁰ Due to the scope and focus of this thesis, I have chosen not to explore very deeply the same-sex relationships that surface in all three novels. It must be mentioned however that in each instance, the relationships portrayed seem to parody or parallel the reductive and unequal relationship between the colonised and the coloniser. Here, this is revealed in the relationship between Nash and Edward, in *Our Sister Killjoy*, Marija tries to take sexual advantage of Sissie and in *The Chosen Place*, Merle is seduced by an older English woman.

Edward's acute and devastating sense of guilt at having abandoned Nash, serve to complicate our reading of the two men and their relationship. After having arrived in Liberia, "it occurred to [Edward] that perhaps the fever, the sleepless nights, the complex welter of emotions that he had been subjected to since his arrival in Africa, were nothing more complex than manifestations of a profound guilt" (52). Regretting having "banished not only Nash, but many of his other slaves, to this inhospitable and heathen corner of the earth" (52), Edward describes these memories as being like "an open wound" (43). Upon reaching Liberia, Edward draws the humbling conclusion that "this business of encouraging men to engage with a past and a history that are truly not their own is, after all, ill-judged" (52).

We are also confronted with other images of Edward that serve to further complicate his character (or rather the way we perceive his character) in the final lines of "The Pagan Coast". After having insisted on being taken by another one of his former slaves (Madison) to the place in which Nash had lived out the last months of his life, Edward, "stepped back in revulsion [wondering] [w]hat could possibly have occurred in the Christian soul of his Nash Williams to have encouraged him to make peace with a life that surely even these heathens considered contemptible?" (69). Despite exposing his prejudice towards the African people with whom he feels he cannot identify, the narrator asserts that: "he was alone. He had been abandoned" (69), aligning him with all those in the text who also experience the life-altering force of abandonment. In this moment of utter defeat, "the natives looked on and wondered what evil spirits had populated this poor man's soul and dragged him down to such a level of abasement. Their hearts began to swell with the pity that one feels for a *fellow being* who has lost both his way and his sense of purpose. This strange old white man" (70; my emphasis). Phillips sets up this rhetoric of guilt as an organising principle throughout the narrative, placing the characters' varying experiences on an "equal emotional plane by asserting a common humanity" (Goyal, "From Redemption to Return" 220).

In the second section of the text, entitled "West", Phillips also deals with the concept of "home". Martha's story is essentially a patchwork of tragic memories, traversing back and forth across the chronology of her life, resting on moments of transition (forced or

otherwise) and always on significant people. These snapshots, delivered in alternating third and first person narration, rearticulate experiences of abandonment, displacement and migration, embodying the plight of the diasporic subject in search of an authentic sense of self and belonging. While this vignette begins with a destitute Martha, left on the freezing streets of Denver, it is only a matter of sentences before we are transported into the realm of memory – a space “where linear narrative time is interrupted and dislocated” (Low 136). This initial memory reveals her point of departure from Africa, the first steps in a journey of fracture and disjuncture: “Martha peered back east, beyond Kansas, back beyond her motherhood, her teen years, her arrival in Virginia, to a smooth white beach where a trembling girl waited with two boys and a man. Standing off a ship. Her journey had been a long one. But now the sun had set” (73).

In this moment of defeat, a woman reaches out her hand to Martha (it is assumed that she is a white woman as Martha wonders whether she could have bought her daughter, Eliza-Mae). Martha reflects that, “After countless years of journeying, the hand is both insult and salvation” (75). Significantly, Martha’s present situation (her encounter with this woman in Denver) is narrated in third person and written in the past tense, while past events (those of her own pain and loss) are a first-person account written in the present tense, rendering the “presence of the past as strong and powerful as the present” (Low 136) – a recurring motif across the four vignettes. This may be directly linked to Phillips’s desire to reveal that diasporic identity, like memory, is in a constant state of flux, and indelibly linked to movement, disconnections and reconnections (with people, place and culture).

Thinking about the fact that she has been left in Denver by her fellow pioneers on their way to California (she being too old and weak to keep up), Martha muses: “Can this woman not see that they abandoned me?” (75). This heartfelt question raised by her present situation is by no means simply representative of this one moment however, having significant resonance throughout her narrative as multiple scenes of abandonment, loss and displacement textually unfold. In the context of the rest of the narrative, this question could be referring to any number of events. The proceeding pages portray various scenes from Martha’s life, including a number of geographic journeys involving the severing of filial bonds as well as the pursuit of family and kinship ties. Being one of the symbolic children to

be sold into slavery, Martha's first journey is one of leaving Africa – "a trembling girl" exchanged for goods and shipped to Virginia.⁴¹ This treatment as a commodity of economic value rather than as a human being of worth is echoed in Martha's description of another sale in which she, her husband Lucas and her daughter Eliza-Mae are sold at an auction (all being bought separately). Martha recalls standing, "with the rest of the Virginia property" (76).

Having a glimpse into the intensely personal world of a slave – a point of view previously unavailable in colonial and other western texts that portrayed African people as the "other" – is an effective way of recreating through rhetoric, an identity previously denied African people in colonial literature and history alike. Juxtaposed with Hamilton's dehumanising logbook records revealed in the proceeding section, the injustice of slavery and the trauma of dislocation is made acutely poignant. Referring to the aforementioned auction, Lucas confesses that in comparison to being sold and torn away from family, "death would be easier. This way we are always going to be wondering. Always going to be worrying" (77). Lucas's words take on a prophetic nature as they ring true for Martha throughout the rest of her life, a life consumed with memories, wondering [wandering] and worrying about her family.

After having been bought at the auction by the Hoffmans, "all her belongings dangled in a bundle that she held in one hand. She no longer possessed either a husband or a daughter, but her memory of their loss was clear" (78). Without a family and with a handful of possessions being the only painfully inadequate and hopelessly ephemeral link to her former existence, Martha has nothing left with which to identify herself (people or place), save her memories of loss. Years after this life-altering severance, Martha finds herself sitting on the streets of Denver, once again possessing nothing, and having no one to turn to, "assaulted by loneliness, and drifting into old age without a family" (79). She is not without memories of kinship however, and despite her "homelessness" at this stage, she

⁴¹ Martha's experience in *Crossing the River* is redolent of the poem "Taint" (1994), written by Guyanese poet Grace Nichol:

But I was traded by men/ the colour of my own skin/ traded like a fowl like a goat/ like a sack of kernels I was/ traded/ for beads for pans/ for trinkets? // No it isn't easy to forget/ What we refuse to remember// Daily I rinse the taint/ Of treachery from my mouth (9-19).

recalls the people and the desire for freedom that have enabled her to survive thus far. Low points out that along her journey, Martha “finds other daughters (Lucy) and other husbands (Chester) and they all echo her original family. She mothers the pioneers in their trail westwards, ‘rallying them to their feet’ in order that they may realise their dreams of freedom in California” (136).

Just as Nash finds a sense of “home” in a place in which he is free, so too do we see this same longing for freedom in Martha and in the other African American pioneers, “prospecting for a place where your name wasn’t ‘boy’ or ‘aunty’, and you where you could be a part of this country without feeling like you wasn’t really a part” (74). Self-ownership and identity are seen to be inseparable in this narrative: the need to be recognised as *someone* with a name rather than *something* of utility; the need to *choose* a destination and to put down permanent roots: “Once there [in California], they all dream of tasting true freedom, of learning important skills, of establishing themselves as a sober and respectable class of people” (93). We see this desire in Martha’s decision to head west (“Martha has a strange notion that she, too, must become a part of the coloured exodus heading west” (87)) as well as in her earlier frantic flight from the Hoffmans:

And then Martha heard the barking of dogs, and she tumbled into a ditch. (Lord give me Lucas’s voice). She waited but heard nothing, only silence. (Thank you). Eventually, Martha climbed to her feet and began to run. (Like the wind girl). Never again would she stand on an auction block. (Never). Never again would she belong to anybody. (No sir, never). (80)

Interestingly, although freedom affords great relief (we see this in the case of Nash and Martha), identity and belonging have hands that seek to reach further than that in order to find something more permanent to hold onto. Martha states after having left the Hoffmans and set up residence in Dodge: “I was free now, but it was difficult to tell what difference being free was making to my life. I was doing just the same things like before, only I was more contented, not on account of no emancipation proclamation, but on account of my Chester” (84). To belong to (and with) another or others is what those hands are reaching out to. In the case of Martha (as an exemplar of thousands of other diasporic subjects), her life is spent trying to hold onto those she loves, and in the end, when she is left with nobody in the physical sense, the memory of her daughter and her hope of reunion is what she

clings to and where her diasporic identity finds its roots: “she would never again head east. To Kansas. She had a westward soul which had found its natural-born home in the bosom of her daughter” (94).

While Martha is physically on her own on the streets of Denver, she is not entirely alone as she is able to hear “Voices from the past. Some she recognised. Some she did not. But, nevertheless, she listened” (79). This motif of “listening” is redolent of the African father, listening to the “many-tongued chorus” of his lost children – his “shameful intercourse” (1) – initiating a ripple effect of loss, displacement and the severing of familial ties over the years, now manifested in the story of Martha. Martha’s intensely personal pain is reflective of a collective past and collective experiences: “it is unique because it is her personal past that reverberates into the present, in the moment of telling her story, and it is cultural because Martha is part of this collective, diasporic memory of loss” (Pichler 7).

Another motif that links the four narratives together in a pattern of common experience is that of parental guilt. This will be elaborated on at a later stage, but it is of particular significance at this point of analysis with regard to Martha’s sense of herself. Having been a mother and a wife – two titles that are loaded with meaning and purpose and practical function for anyone who possesses them – Martha is now neither and yet remains both in memory. It is evident that her feelings of guilt at not having been able to do anything to prevent her precious daughter, Eliza-Mae, from being sold at the auction are as fresh in her old age as they were on the auction block:

I did not suckle this child at the breast nor did I cradle her in my arms and shower her with what love I have, to see her taken away from me [...] My Eliza-Mae holds on to me, but it will be of no avail. She will be a prime purchase. I want [...] to encourage her to let go, but I have no heart. ‘Moma’ Eliza-Mae whispers the word over and over again, as though this were the only word she possessed. This word. This word only. (77)

Gail Low asserts that: “ the recurring image of combing her daughter’s matted hair functions as a mnemonic image of her inability to mother given the structure of slavery [...] Martha cannot be physically united with her husband and child, but her connection with them, her desire for them, is nonetheless a powerful, incorporative, and transfigurative force” (135-136).

In returning to one of the questions asked by Pichler with regard to the role of memory: “can we assume that it is primarily traumatic experiences that diasporic identities (tend to) ‘actively forget’[...] or are they imprinted in the characters’ minds?”, in the case of Martha, she reflects, with reference to living with Chester, “For ten long years this man has made me forget – and that’s a gift from above” (84). Shortly after Chester is tragically killed however, Martha turns to Lucy and says: “Lucy...did I ever tell you that I had a daughter?” (85). It can thus be seen that while forgetting traumatic experiences (such as the loss of Martha’s husband and daughter) is something diasporic subjects may actively seek to achieve in order to survive the pain, the memories may be too deeply imprinted on their minds and hearts to be completely forgotten. For Martha, the desire to be reconciled with her daughter informs *who she is*. To forget her daughter (despite the longing to block from her mind the trauma of separation) is to forget herself. Having said this however, perhaps it is not so much a forgetting that Martha seeks as it is a new way of remembering, a remembering that informs forward momentum (*crossing over*) in place of a fixation with an unyielding past.

The proceeding vignette, “Crossing the River”, is written from the perspective of the man to whom the African father sold his three children: James Hamilton. Narratively delivered as a slave-ship captain’s journal – an impersonal logbook of facts and figures, modelled after John Newton’s *Journal of a Slave Trader* – this section is presented as strikingly incongruous to the rest. While it would seem a rather bizarre inclusion, particularly in light of the fact that one would expect the voices of the slaves themselves to be heard rather than that of the man who renders them voiceless, it must be noted that this is the section to which Phillips lends the title of the book. With this in mind, one is compelled to question its significance, and while many have tended to overlook this particular vignette as being less important than the others, I would argue that in order to understand what it is that Phillips seeks to achieve through the text in its entirety, one cannot offer “Crossing the River” less attention. Indeed, “if “Crossing the River” is the ‘moment’, or a microcosm, of slavery, then we see the continuing legacies of this moment in each of the other sections” (Ward 27).

Although one is presented with Hamilton’s “matter-of-fact logbook, which records his buying, selling, and routine torture of slaves” (Goyal, “From Redemption to Return” 220), these recordings are harshly juxtaposed with sentimental and deeply emotional letters

written by the same hand to Hamilton's bride at home in England. In order to highlight the jarring effects of this juxtaposition, I would like to first discuss the way in which Hamilton portrays the slaves he acquires along the African coast. It is interesting to make the connection between the stories of Martha, Nash and Travis – all of which signify the depth and scope of their individuality as human beings – and the recordings of these same people as nothing more than numbers or cargo, divested of all semblances of humanity in Hamilton's logbook. Having these two contrasting views of people translocated from Africa to Europe, America or the Caribbean allows one to see with some clarity the profound influence of literary perspective in the construction and portrayal of identity (with particular reference to black Atlantic subjects).

Hamilton's journal entries reveal the way in which he perceives the slave trade: a calculated, quantifiable process that takes place with little if any recognition of the fact that the "cargo" with which he desires to fill his ship is physically, spiritually and psychologically *human*. In Hamilton's writings we are reminded of the African father's words, mentioning his exchange of "cold goods for warm flesh" (1):

Tuesday 8th December ... sent Mr Foster in the yawl with goods for 5 slaves, that is to say close to 500 bars which in earlier times might have purchased 20. He returned at sunset in triumph, though it will not do to continue giving nearly what the slaves will fetch in the Americas, exclusive of freight and commissions, and besides the tediousness of trade and the great risk of mortality... (106)

Hamilton clearly sees no connection between his own humanity and that of the slaves he acquires. Instead, he equates them with the very "cold goods" he gives in exchange for them ("1 small girl had been added to the cargo" (108)) and reduces them to numbers of economic rather than personal value: "Before midnight buried 3 more women slaves (Nos 71, 104, 109). Know not what they died of, for they have not been properly alive since they first came on board..." (124). Also, it is important to note the ellipses inserted into the journal entries. Ward suggests that this may be the case as a result of the source having undergone editing, or to emphasise the fragmented and incomplete history of slavery as an institution. In these gaps, "we can perhaps sense the unspoken or missing parts of the past, such as the voices, or stories, of the slaves (and of other, poorer, crew members) of whom we hear nothing" (Ward 25).

The fact that a number of slave uprisings are recorded by Hamilton suggests the desire for freedom among the slaves, and yet this inherent desire is not recognised as such, and all attempts are harshly dealt with: “Surprised 4 attempting to get off their irons, and upon further search of their rooms found some knives, stones, shot etc. Put 2 in irons and delicately in the thumbscrews to encourage them to a full confession of those principally concerned. In the evening put 5 more in neck yokes” (114). It is not only the slaves who are treated with such a lack of dignity however, but the crew aboard the *Duke of York* are also afforded little sympathy and humane treatment. Hamilton records “correct[ing] the Carpenter with a dozen stripes of the cat for making a commotion while fetching wood” (103), and giving two crew members a good caning for disorderliness, with the intention of “carry[ing] them both confined in chains to the Americas but for the consideration of our being a slaving ship” (105).

The way in which life and death are treated in Hamilton’s logbook is also astonishing, with mortality being directly correlated with monetary value. While the crew members are known by name rather than by number as the slaves are, the event of death (a frequent occurrence) is treated with the same cold and unfeeling manner in both cases. Ward also astutely points out that, “the stark list of crew members [presented in the beginning of the journal] predicts the anonymous listing of the dead on the war memorial in “Somewhere in England”. Here, too, in the crew list, we encounter a place to know, but not to discover these men” (27). In order to illustrate this sufficiently, I would like to include a number of extracts from the text:

Saturday 17th April ... when we were putting the slaves down this evening, one that was fevered jumped overboard (No. 97). Got him in again but he died immediately between his weakness and the salt water he had swallowed. To remain much longer on the coast may affect my interest and diminish expected profits. (115)

Tuesday 20th April ... this day buried 2 fine man slaves, Nos 27 and 43, having been ailing for some time, but not thought in danger. Taken suddenly with a lethargic disorder from which they generally recover. Scraped the men’s rooms, then smoked the ship thoroughly with tar and tobacco for 3 hours, afterwards washed clean with vinegar... (116)

Monday 26th April ... This afternoon departed my second mate, Francis Foster, after sustaining the most violent fever. I am afraid his death will retard our trade. (117)

Friday 23rd April ... At 7pm, departed this life Edward White, Carpenter's mate, 7 days ill of a nervous fever. Buried him at once. Put overboard a boy, No. 29, being very bad with a violent body flux. Have three whites not able to help themselves... (116)

This disdain for human life is glaringly contrasted with Hamilton's own acute and debilitating grief at the loss of his parents. While he expresses his pain at their loss to his wife, he fails to see that all around him, members of families are perishing, and not only that, but their demise is as a result of his calculated actions. Instead, Hamilton views his time aboard the ship as a means to an end, littered with "petty concerns" when compared to his insatiable desire to return home to the woman he loves: "At present, I cannot imagine writing with pleasure to any on land or sea but to your own dear self, my head being full of the petty concerns of this valuable vessel, and the lives of the people who dwell hereabouts, whose fortunes are entrusted to my care. These are, indeed, petty concerns when set against my love for you" (108).

Another implicit irony that surfaces through a comparative reading of Hamilton's journal entries and letters is found in his heartfelt desire to have children, as he himself asserts: "my sole pleasure is to dream of our future children, and our family life together" (110). In the same hand, he writes of African children as being mere cargo, not recognising that in "loading" these "under-sized" slaves onto the ship, he is tearing children away from their families and resigning them to the most unthinkable future (if indeed they survive the Middle Passage). Phillips records acquiring, "a dozen slaves, viz., 4 men, 2 women, 1 man-boy (4 feet) and 4 girls (under-size)" (111). After having bought numerous "under-sized" slaves, he asserts, "I have in mind to engage no slaves under 4 feet" (114). This decision is in no way arrived at due to a sudden realisation of the fact that it is unspeakably inhumane to actively trade in human children, but that it is simply not economically viable.

Taking this into consideration, it is no wonder that it is a struggle to mentally synthesise the "slave captain" with the "gentle husband" who says to his wife: "I have written myself into tears, yet I feel a serenity I never imagined till I was able to call you mine" (109). In an interview with Jenny Sharpe, Phillips speaks of "the huge paradox of this guy's mind", going on to say: "As he wreaks havoc on other people's families, he's dreaming of beginning a

family of his own. He can't see that, can't recognise his own contradictions, but hopefully we can. That's the larger point that I wanted to make" (159).

This section of the text is a look at transatlantic identity for the white protagonist and because no accusation is offered, we are made to take a closer look at the person, transformed by his journey across the Atlantic. For many critics, the character is an uncomfortable one, arising from "Phillips's refusal to position Hamilton within their preferred rhetoric of slavery as specifically black history" (Ward 26). Just as the narratives about Martha, Nash and Travis allow us a glimpse into a more personal sphere of their lives (that which is denied us in "Crossing the River"), so too does Phillips allow us a window into the other dimensions of Hamilton's character through the letters written to his wife. Reading Hamilton's dispassionate, heartless, staccato journal entries alongside his passionate, heartfelt letters to his wife certainly makes a difficult reading and allows for no simple interpretation of both Hamilton's character and Phillips's intentions in creating this image. Ward elaborates:

Hamilton's letters are written in flowing, eloquent, and romantic language, full of hyperbole and sentiment. They demonstrate his loneliness and capacity to love, thereby humanizing and complicating his character; in so doing they pose a testing juxtaposition. Phillips has created a multidimensional and intriguing character, arguably indicative of the complexities of slavery, where ordinary men, often with wives and families, become embroiled in the trade. The association with Newton also demonstrates the ambiguous position of Hamilton, as Newton evolved from being one of the more notorious slave captains to a determined speaker against the slave trade. (26)

Goyal argues that "Hamilton [...] emerges not as a figure of authority, but as a lonely twenty-six year old son trying to succeed in his father's footsteps" ("From Redemption to Return" 221). Notably, the motif of abandonment and loss is also integral to our understanding of this section. Like all the other protagonists, Hamilton is also haunted by an absent father figure. Like Joyce Kitson (fourth section of the novel), who searches the two-dimensional facade of a photograph and the cold brass plaque of a war memorial to find some semblance of her father, so too does Hamilton desire to know where it is that his father has been, and where he was laid to rest. In Hamilton's imploring of a certain Mr Ellis to take him to this resting place, one is also reminded of Edward's fervent beseeching of Madison to show him where his beloved Nash died. In a letter written to his wife, in which

Hamilton confesses: “being too young to fully grieve for my dear mother, the departure of my father was the first blow, and a mighty severe one” (120), we read of this same restlessness:

At every opportunity I ask after my dear late father, but he parries my enquiries. I have constantly demanded of him that he transport me to the very place where my late father, only two years past, lost his life, but he refuses to aid me. He can see plainly enough that I need to vent my grief, but he responds to my entreaties with the curious suggestion that my father traded not wisely, and with too much vigour. (118)

Not only is Hamilton identified with the other protagonists as being deeply affected by loss, dislocation and haunting memories, but once having read “Crossing the River”, one is able to ascertain that the italicised thoughts in the prologue (interspersed among the words of the African father) are the very thoughts of Hamilton, echoed word for word in “Crossing the River”: “Approached by a quiet fellow. Bought two strong man-boys, and a proud girl. I believe my trade for this voyage has reached its conclusion” (1 and 124). Goyal points out that in “leaving who is speaking ambiguous, the novel refuses to distinguish between the two, insisting on complicity and symmetry” (“Theorising Africa” 219). It is evident that while Phillips would have the reader discern the degree of connection between the African father and Hamilton, and thus the common history shared by slave traders and African sellers alike, he is also suggesting that the two voices are not only connected, but that they are interchangeable. In this case, the guilt experienced by both the seller and the buyer is of an equal nature. Taking this into consideration along with the fact that among Phillips’s “morally ambiguous (and frequently unreliable) narrators [...] are slave-traders, slave-owners, and black colonisers, [it is clear that] Phillips wishes to argue that there are no easy victims or oppressors” (Goyal, “Theorising Africa” 218). Having touched on this with regard to Edward Williams, “Crossing the River” serves to further explore these ideas.

In one of his letters to his wife, Hamilton also explains how he is ridiculed by his shipmates for his unwavering devotion to her: “they say I am a slave to a single woman; I claim they are a slave to hundreds, of all qualities” (109). The meaning of the term “slave” is stretched and made malleable in the text, here and elsewhere, with particular reference to psychological imprisonment and bondage, the likes of which are reflected in Joyce’s narrative. In this way, while Phillips highlights the violently physical act of slavery – the

forced movement of African people across the Atlantic for the economic benefit of the West – there is also a distinct tendency to render slavery metaphorical in the novel. Indeed, “as slavery becomes a metaphor for a general human condition of dislocation, rather than a historical institution, racism can then be seen as a phenomenon experienced by individuals, rather than structural or historical” (Goyal, “From Redemption to Return” 221-222).

The idea of home and memory as creators and constituents of identity is also exhibited in the character of Hamilton as he clings to his memories of time spent with his wife in England as a mooring for some sense of belonging: “I travel abroad in the comfortable knowledge that my better, precious part is safe at home” (109). It is evident that Hamilton does not feel “at home” among the slaves or the crew who view him as “the *youthful gentleman* passenger” rather than the captain of the ship. Hamilton also mentions to his wife that he is “mocked by the *salty dogs*” (120). In an attempt to look beyond these feelings of discomfort and lack of surety regarding who he is on board the ship, Hamilton clings to “return” as his only hope and anchor of sanity: “what I have in view at the end of this voyage, is so fixed in my thoughts, that to be acknowledged and rewarded by you, outweighs any hardship that I might possibly suffer” (110).

Realistically however, Hamilton is “suspended in the act of crossing the Atlantic and does not, unlike the children he carries, necessarily reach the other side; the ellipsis trails off tantalizingly into an unsure future” (Ward 27). The crew list at the beginning of his logbook is testimony to this uncertainty concerning his destiny. While the column indicating the crew’s fate provides an explanation for the fate of some (discharged or deceased during the voyage), the space next to Hamilton’s name and a few others is left blank. Whether or not Hamilton ever returned home to his wife therefore remains unknown, with only the knowledge of the ship and the slaves’ arrival at the designated destination being sure. With the last words of Hamilton being recorded upon the ocean as he “los[es] sight of Africa...” (124), one is compelled to wonder whether Hamilton too has become a child of the diaspora – crossing the Atlantic never to return home.

The fourth section of Phillips’s text is entitled “Somewhere in England”. Like the title “West”, or “The Pagan Coast”, this section title also gives us very little specific information – a vague suggestion or general direction that creates in the mind of the reader a sense of

detachment and rootlessness. Again one is reminded of both Phillips's and Gilroy's focus on "routes" as opposed to "roots" in the exploration of transatlantic identity. While this vignette exposes the whereabouts of Travis, the third of the African father's children who, together with Martha and Nash, was sold into slavery, this narrative takes the form of a number of diary entries written not by Travis, but by a young white working-class woman from England: Joyce Kitson. With Nash in Liberia, Martha in America and Captain Hamilton and the slaves afloat in the middle of the Atlantic, given Phillips's own diasporic history and intentions, it is only fitting that this fourth section be set at the third point of the triangle: Europe in general, and England specifically.

The backdrop for this particular narrative is the Second World War. We are not presented with an impersonal, linear, or even chronological order of events however, as the snippets of diary entries included are seemingly delivered as remembered by Joyce, rather than as they occur. The entries, irregular even in the number of words devoted to each one, oscillate back and forth, predominantly between the years 1939 and 1943, also jumping as far forward as the 1960s and as early as 1936. Pichler asserts that "like in the sections before, Phillips 'experiments' with fragmentation – temporal and spatial – a fragmentation that Julien reads as 'a metaphor for fractured communities, fractured families, and fractured hearts' (Julien, 1999, p. 93), and one could add, fractured history too" (8). In this way, Phillips again draws on the method of memory rather than a linear structure of history as a representational mode for diaspora – both characterised by movement and mobility.

The first diary entry is written in 1942, recording the arrival of American soldiers in the small English village where Joyce lives. Joyce, having married an abusive alcoholic – Len – two years before, consequently relocating to his home village, is also somewhat of a "new arrival" (having previously lived with her mother). It is evident that Joyce does not feel as though she belongs in this place "somewhere in England", reflecting after moving in with Len: "And so this is my home now. God help me. Maybe I was better off in the warehouse" (151). Significantly, it is with the African American soldiers that Joyce is able to identify, rather than her fellow villagers. She records: "they arrived today [...] they stretched and looked around. Then, one by one, they began to saunter down the drive. They looked sad, like little lost boys" (129). Like these men, labelled "the bloody Yanks" by the villagers, Joyce

is treated as “other”. We see this clearly in her first diary entry: “Once the men had vanished, eyes turned upon me. I was now the object of curiosity. The uninvited outsider” (129). Said remarks in his essay, “Reflections on Exile” that “just beyond the frontier between “us” and the “outsiders” is the perilous territory of not-belonging” (140). It is within this “perilous territory” that most of the novel’s protagonists dwell, and it is within the state of “not-belonging” that they must seek to find a place in which to belong.

With this in mind, it is evident that Joyce, whose father was killed in the First World War and whose mother remains disinterested, aloof and uninvolved in Joyce’s life, is thematically linked to the descendants of the black diaspora by her feelings of dispossession and loss. Soon after her marriage to Len, she tells us, “not for the first time in my life I felt the humiliation of being abandoned” (155). These words directly parallel those of Martha and Nash, whose narratives display deep hurt and anguish at having been abandoned, both using the refrain, “Father, why hast thou forsaken me?” (73). The moment of Travis’s death is also foreshadowed by these words as we read of his lonely demise: “to die at first light on the Italian coast [...] in a strange country. Among people he hardly knew, among people who turned away from him” (229).

During a conversation with her mother, Joyce recalls: “I looked across at my father’s picture, which sat on top of the wooden mantelpiece. I had no memory of him, being just a baby when he died [...] occasionally I have found my dad on a bronze plaque, near the Town Hall, but his name is scattered among the names of hundreds of others. This is merely a place to find him, but not to discover him” (132-133). In a sense, this need to “discover” – a family, a home, a sense of belonging – is the centre of the diasporic condition. Phillips advocates that it is not enough to simply find or uncover memorabilia or labels of historical significance that have little personal value in the present. Discovery is a perpetual sense of *becoming* rather than holding onto a static and unchanging past that remains impervious to the changing nature of the present. In an interview with Maya Jaggi, Phillips discusses that:

The clue to [Joyce] is the same thing that binds the other three characters together: she doesn't have a father. What holds the novel together is that the father has lost these children. That's why at the end of the book the father says 'My Joyce' too [...] And it seemed to me emotionally correct that she should belong with the other three kids. (118)

Interestingly then, Phillips suggests that the discovery of a sense of solidarity of identity it is not so much a return to original filial bonds or a specific geographical space as it is the creation of new affiliations, establishing connections between people, across racial, geographic and cultural barriers, as well as across centuries.⁴²

Referring to the child who is born as a result of Joyce and Travis's union, Joyce muses: "My GI baby. No father, no mother, no uncle Sam. It must go into the care of the County Council as an orphan [...] For eighteen years I hadn't invited Greer to do anything. Your father, and I, Greer. We couldn't do anything. We couldn't show off. We had to be careful. And bold" (223). Significantly, the presentation of Joyce's memory here mirrors, in tone, cadence and rhythm, the confession of the African father uttered in the prologue: "For two hundred and fifty years I have longed to tell them: Children I am your father. I love you. But understand. There are no paths in water. No signposts" (1-2). Regarding this parallel, Anthony Ilona insightfully asserts:

The matching rhythm provides a forceful association between the two confessions which once again links the personal memory of Joyce to the wider historical process through the theme of parental guilt. The implication being that it is not Joyce to blame for the intractable situation in which she finds herself but a process of familial and social intervention that has been in existence for two hundred and fifty years. That is, the process by which Joyce has been separated from her son Greer is less a personal choice than one already determined by a broader social and historical circumstance. (8)

The motif of "listening" is also found in Joyce's narrative, linking her once again to the African father and the other children of the diaspora whose voices form a "chorus of a common memory": "I found myself just staring at the church and listening to the sound of their voices [...] Across the road I saw old man Williams [...] he stood and listened as though, like me, he too hadn't heard anything like this before. Just the two of us listening" (146). It would seem that Phillips is seeking to highlight the intimate interconnections between

⁴² Avtar Brah (1996) provides interesting analysis of this nuanced sense of diasporic identity, referring to "diaspora spaces" rather than simply "diaspora" as a descriptor of transatlantic movement/dislocation/homelessness. Brah suggests that diaspora space is "the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of "us" and "them", are contested. [...] It includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those 'staying put'. The diaspora space is the site *where the native is as much a diasporan as the diasporan is the native*" ("Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities" 209).

people and that in listening and being attentive to the plights of others, one is able to recognise elements of a common humanity and a sense of belonging despite disparity of place, nationality and race.

Greer's arrival at the door of his mother's house in 1963, "ends the cycle of pain, separation and betrayal that echo through each of the four narratives. It also returns us, chorally, to the original father who waits at the river's estuary with ears attuned to his long-lost children" (Low 139). While Greer's decision to seek out his birth mother is certainly suggestive of hope for the future and potential rapprochement, it does not signify a return "home", nor does it imply an idyllic family reunion. The highly problematic concept of "home" is dealt with delicately in the moments in which mother meets son after eighteen years of separation. We see this in Joyce's choice of words as she invites Greer in: "come in, come in. He stepped by me, dipping a shoulder as he did so in order that we didn't have to touch [...]. I almost said make yourself at home, but I didn't. At least I avoided that" (232). While this meeting reflects an awkward, difficult moment rather than one of simple reconciliation ("I knew he would never call me mother" (232)), the encounter is one of honesty and a tentative acceptance of a hybrid, new relationship rather than an attempt to alter an unalterable past.

Joyce cannot be absolved of the guilt that she experiences in connection with having given her child up for adoption – "my son who hadn't asked me to turn him over to the lady with the blue coat and maroon scarf" (228) – but as with the other characters who too experience parental guilt and regret, the text offers no accusation. While Joyce thinks: "my God, I wanted to hug him. I wanted him to know that I did have feelings for him. Both then and now. He was my son. Our son" (224), she is not able to articulate these things yet, and they remain ensconced in silence, a silence that clings to the space between mother and son, as it does to the Atlantic space between the African father and his diasporic children. Offering neither blame nor recrimination, Phillips chooses to recognise the humanity of all the characters involved, rather than weighing up their degrees of guilt and complicity and judging them accordingly.

Not only does Phillips include Joyce in the diasporic “family” as one of the African father’s “children”, but he also extends the boundaries of this family to include all those who are exploited through dislocation and loss: the “uninvited outsiders”.⁴³ Joyce’s journal entries also include a description of evacuated children sent to the village, an image reminiscent of the American soldiers who are made to feel unwelcome among the village people, as well as that of a slave auction. In reading the excerpt included below, one cannot help but think back to Martha’s description of the slave auction at which she and her family are sold and the dismissal of the children’s humanity as the village people look upon them as either objects of utility or inconvenience, presents a continuation of the past in altered form:

A dozen boys and girls of a sensible age standing in the church hall. Gas masks in a cardboard box, an identification tag around their necks, and carrying a bundle of personal belongings. They huddled together, their feet swimming in big shoes that were clearly badly scuffed hand-me-downs. Some of them looked as if they had never had a decent meal in their lives [...] Before us stood a dozen frightened children, the farmers eying the husky lads, the girls and scrawny boys close to tears [...] Not even one of them, he said. They can bloody well go back to where they came from. (144)

Again, the novel forces the reader to pause for thought on the abandonment of children and the dissolution of familial ties, extending the boundaries of slavery and the consequent African diaspora to encompass other moments of devastating socio-political upheaval such as war. Joyce describes the desolation and hopelessness that haunts the town in which her mother had lived after it has been bombed by the Germans: “in the streets, men with flatcaps and women with head-scarves scavenged at the ruins of their houses, avoiding any hot debris, trying to find bits of furniture, photographs, anything that remained of their lives. As they did so, others – maybe family members – stared on, dumbstruck” (179). She goes on to say, “I walked on knowing that there was no longer any such thing as a familiar route [...] the whole town was in a state of shock. Everybody seemed to be suffering their own private war tragedy” (180). In this way, Phillips opens up other avenues of thought regarding what it means to be homeless and orphaned, to be forced to walk unfamiliar

⁴³ Phillips’s use of the term “uninvited outsiders” invokes the sense that there exists a centre and a periphery in the minds of those who consider themselves to be the “invited insiders”, alluding to colonial dichotomous thought. The “outsiders” to which he refers do not only include those who were colonially deemed “the rest” by “the West” (falling largely along racial lines), but also those in “the West” who also experience the pejorative effects of dispossession and living on the “periphery” of mainstream society. Phillips uses this text as a subversion of the centre/periphery binary, but rather than simply seeking to reverse it, he complicates the relationship by doing away with an “inside” and “outside” all together.

“routes” and to suffer individually within the context of devastating collective socio-historical change. Goyal points out that “as the formal principle of fragmentation juxtaposes various kinds of experiences of displacement, the novel suggests equivalence between these experiences [...] Tracking the differential treatment of the African father, black diasporic subjects, and white Western subjects [...] the novel ultimately forecloses the exploration of complex questions of loss and dislocation by championing transcendent notions of redemption” (“Theorising Africa” 14).

Although we are not given much insight into the character of Travis, save that which is filtered through Joyce’s narrative, the fact that Travis’s colour seems to be inconsequential in the eyes of Joyce, allows one to look beyond race as a signifier of identity. Remaining unaware of Travis’s race for the majority of this section, with his “blackness” only fleetingly (and never directly) alluded to, it is in retrospect that the reader understands why the relationship between Joyce and Travis is conducted with much discretion and looked upon with great disdain by the villagers. While the nature of society at the time sees their union as abominable – the US authorities refusing to let the two live as husband and wife in America – “what emerges in their relationship is a love and kinship that echoes the transfigurative pattern of other diasporic connections in the novel” (Low 138).

Joyce, unlike the other English villagers, literally and figuratively chooses to bridge the gap between herself and the African American soldiers, initiating contact at a dance held by the soldiers: “And then I found myself on my feet and walking towards the two who asked me [to the dance], the tall one and the shorter one. I asked the tall one if he’d like to dance” (162). Only later do we find out that “the tall one” is in fact Travis, one of the symbolic children of the African father. While dancing, Travis asks Joyce if she is from “around here” and in asking why he wants to know, Travis replies: “Well, I was just wondering. I don’t know. I guess you don’t act like them in some ways. Can’t say how exactly, but just different”. Instead of finding this offensive, Joyce writes in her diary, “Inside I was smiling. That was just what I wanted to hear” (163).

With particular reference to the fact that Phillips advocates a “no return policy” for diasporic peoples – “There are no paths in water. No signposts. There is no return. To a land

trampled by the muddy boots of others” (2) – it is useful to look at Dionne Brand’s distinctly transatlantic memoir, *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2002). A Trinidad born Canadian writer, Brand, like her writing, is a product of a “continuous sequence of ‘repositionings’ which respond to the need to keep her voice sounding: a voice which is ‘constantly recalibrating its register against social forces as well as against the internal stagnation of community in the face of those forces’ (Olbey, “Brand in Conversation”, p.91)” (Bernabei 111).⁴⁴ Like Phillips’s *Crossing the River*, Brand’s non-fiction, equally postmodern text, deals with various positionings, rather than fixed nationalities or linear histories, exploring the “pathless” waters of the Atlantic where there are no prescribed endpoints, no signposts and no return.

The “door of no return” to which Brand refers (running parallel to Phillips’s ideas) is described, according to Bernabei, as “a geohistorical site of forced departures which provoked psychic tearing, the unmeasurable attrition of enslaved labour, the humiliations of colonialism and racism, and which, in its concrete referentiality, still causes inconsolable grief to the descendants of the slaves who visit it” (112). The idea of recognising the “door” and yet refusing to open it once more can be held in direct contradistinction to such ideas as pan-Africanism and Afro-essentialist views of Africa. These views purport that the only way to reassert any sense of authentic identity is to return to the past, to those “geohistorical site[s] of forced departure” and become re-immersed. The entryway to Elmina Castle in Ghana (Elmina being one of the key slaving ports in Africa) reveals a memorial plaque which reinforces this sentiment. It reads: “In everlasting memory of the anguish of our ancestors. May those who died rest in peace. May those who return find their roots. May humanity never again perpetrate such injustice against humanity. We the living vow to uphold this” (Hartman 757).

Marcus Garvey, a name synonymous with Afro-centrism and the “Back to Africa Movement”, proposed, not only a wholesale return of all Africans everywhere to Africa

⁴⁴ Dionne Brand’s memoir, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, an amalgamation and intertwining of various genres, excerpts, anecdotes, travel impressions and memories, is intentionally designed as a work of “structural fragmentation [...] both counterpointed and underpinned by the fluidity of a prose in which narration and mediation, essay and poetry, life-writing and historical/archaeological/geographical probing harmoniously flow into each other” (Bernabei, 111).

itself, but considered the solution to racism and black disempowerment to be found in replacing the British empire with an African one.⁴⁵ The inherently fascist nature of Garvey's ideology is not discrete by any standard either, expressed in the words of his son, Marcus Garvey Jr. in 1974: "We shall recreate the glories of ancient Egypt, Ethiopia and Nubia. It is natural that the children of Mother Africa scattered in the great diaspora will cleave together once more. It seems certain that the world will one day be faced with the Black cry for an African 'Anschluss' and the resolute demand for African 'Lebensraum' " (Goyal, "From Double Consciousness to Diaspora" 101).⁴⁶

In Phillips's text, *The Atlantic Sound*, he records a conversation he has with Dr Ben Abdallah, a pan-Africanist himself. Dr Ben Abdallah, with reference to all African peoples (living within and beyond the borders of the continent), asserts that: "our best way forward is to look to the past and see what we left back there, and then make sure that there is nothing there that we should have brought with us into the present" (115). In order to highlight the disjuncture between this essentialist view and the distinctly anti-essentialist views of Phillips and Brand, I would like to include something of Franca Bernabei's article on Dionne Brand's transatlantic writing before pursuing these thoughts in line with *Crossing the River*:

As [Brand] points out, [her writing] is not aimed at defining a place, but pursuing the intricate ways in which those 'places, those ports, had metamorphosed' into a lingering metaphor for black uprooting [P. da Costa, "an interview with Dionne Brand]. And since to have 'one's belonging lodged in metaphor is voluptuous intrigue; to inhabit a trope; to be a kind of fiction,' to live in the black diaspora is to 'live as a fiction – a creation of empires, and also self-creation.' As chronotope and trope founded on the violent erasure of origins and a 'million exits multiplied,' the door is therefore 'a site of belonging or unbelonging.' It is, in a desolate sense, 'a creation place...at the same time that it signified the end of traceable beginnings'

⁴⁵ In Garvey's "Africa for the Africans" (1925) he writes:

it is only a question of a few more years when Africa will be completely colonised by Negroes, as Europe is by the white race. What we want is an independent African nationality [...] it shall be the purpose of the Universal Negro Improvement Association to have established in Africa that brotherly co-operation which will make the interests of the African native and the American and West Indian Negro one and the same, that is to say, we shall enter into a common partnership to build up Africa in the interests of our race [...] Everybody knows that there is absolutely no difference between the native African and the American and West Indian Negroes, in that we are descendants from one common family stock. (67)

⁴⁶ It must be noted that Aidoo's pan-Africanist views (exhibited in the narrative form of *Our Sister Killjoy*), advocate return for all African people who have (been) moved from the continent of Africa, aligning herself to a degree with Garveyite thought. However, Aidoo's socio-political ideas do not insist on the existence of a pre-colonial African utopia to which all African's must return. Also, Aidoo does not project a romantic, utopic future image of the African continent or unrealistic visions of grandeur.

[Brand, *A Map*, 18, 19, 6, 5]. And it is exactly because she relies so persistently on this logic of inclusive distinction that Brand can state in an interview, that her intention in the book was to chart a journey to a new kind of identity and existence in an attempt to challenge all sorts of identitarian fixations: in short, “to live in another kind of world” [Mavjee, 2002, “Opening the Door”]. (113)

While much of Garvey’s ideology and that of Afrocentric thought is steeped in romance, dreams and the power of spectacle, Brand’s assertion that diasporic identity finds its definition in “metaphor” and “fiction” also seems somewhat ephemeral and unrealistic. It may be a valid question to ask *how* one is able to “live in another kind of world”. If it is indeed a possibility, then where does one find this new territory? Is it a temporal, psychological, relational space? And if one were to find it, how would one *live* in it? Would it be constitutive of a “home” or simply a space in which homelessness can be accommodated or made inconsequential? These questions also prove valid in an exploration of *Crossing the River* as Phillips uses the idea of metaphor as an instrument for attaining a poetic transcendence and redemption in the epilogue, where the children of the diaspora “arrive on the far bank of the river [“another kind of world”], loved” (237).

From a literary point of view, Yogita Goyal has a number of answers to these questions that essentially locate themselves in genre and a shift in perspective: not looking to *either* an essentialist view *or* an anti-essentialist one, but instead finding some middle ground. Before exploring this further, I would like to include a brief excerpt on the function of genre, which in turn, will explain the reason for Goyal’s insistence on using it as a primary avenue of entry into a better understanding of diasporic texts and their implications:

Genre categories frame the expectations both readers and writers bring to the literary text, embedding within themselves a veritable social history of narrative conventions, patterns, and modes of representation. Excavating the cultural work of genre, then, helps highlight aesthetic form as well as epistemological possibility. No genre is inherently conservative or radical, but insofar as genres and their circulation across various national and transnational literatures can be understood through historicist methods of analysing form, genre analysis can help call attention to both politics and aesthetics at once. (“Introduction” 11)

Goyal suggests that black Atlantic fiction straddles the expanse of two competing modes of genre, namely, nationalist realism (teleological, calendrical, modernising) and diasporic romance (non-linear, redemptive, mythic). As such, “black Atlantic texts constitute an

electric genre, where the realist narrative of the nation is interrupted by the romance of the diaspora" ("Introduction" 9), creating an imagined community in which national and transnational concerns are explored. Goyal's study of a black Atlantic canon exposes two potentially contradictory understandings of diaspora when looking to romance as a mode of representation. On the one hand, romance can be seen to imagine diaspora as a phenomenon which, looking to a utopian horizon transcends all geographical boundaries, locating identity and belonging in a realm outside of ethnic and racial confines. The other viewpoint considers romance to be a form of representation able to create synthesis out of what would otherwise seem to be irreconcilable opposites and "helps black Atlantic writers collapse distances of time and space to imagine a simultaneity of experience" (Goyal, "Introduction" 9).

With reference to these two readings of diasporic romance, Goyal highlights the fact that: "while the first mode theorises diaspora as difference, the second mode implies a wholeness of vision that refuses to accommodate any sense of difference at all (spatial, temporal, historical, or geographical)" ("Introduction" 9). Instead of identifying texts as belonging to either one approach, it is useful to consider the ways in which they inhabit both modes in constant tension. In this way, a text may offer a variety of fictional or "magical resolutions" ("Introduction" 9). This balancing of two modes of romance is seen to be true of Phillips's *Crossing the River*, as he explores transatlantic fracture and split subjectivities, as well as "a wholeness of vision" embodied in the "chorus of a common memory". In his interview with Maya Jaggi, Phillips comments:

I perceive a healing force that comes out of fracture. I wouldn't say I've always wanted to be an explorer of the fissures and crevices of migration. I have seen some connectedness and celebrated the qualities of survival that people in all sorts of predicaments are able to keep hold of with clenched fists. I didn't want to leave this novel as an analysis of fracture, because I felt such an overwhelming, passionate attachment to all the voices, and I kept thinking it seemed almost choral. These people were talking in harmonies I could hear. That doesn't just come from survival, but from something more than just getting to the next day. There's an underlying passion which informs the ability to survive, and it's that word that most people shy away from –the word that Salman [Rushdie] finished his review of [V. S. Naipaul's] *The Enigma of Arrival* [1987] by pointing out what was completely absent from that book - which is a love, an affirmative quality present everywhere I looked in those children of the African diaspora, from Marvin Gaye to Jimmy Baldwin to Miles Davis. I've always been interested in what makes people survive the most vicious

upheavals: the two qualities of faith and love, rooted in a family love. In the voice of the father is a love for all those who have crossed the river - a scattered diaspora and family. (121)

This “scattered diaspora family” to which Phillips makes mention reaches far beyond the confines of a specific group of people or a designated geographic space. Instead, the voices to which the African father listens, “insist that he acknowledge greetings from those who lever pints of ale in the pubs of London. Receive salutations from those who submit to (what the French call) neurotic inter-racial urges in the boulevards of Paris” (235). He listens “to voices in the streets of Charleston [...] to reggae rhythms of rebellion and revolution dipping through the hills and valleys of the Caribbean [...] To the Saxophone player on the wintry night in Stockholm” (236). The African father not only hears the voices of Nash, Martha and Travis, but also reaches out to Joyce and numerous other “children” – the dispossessed, the abandoned, the homeless and the lonely:

In Brooklyn a helplessly addicted mother waits for the mist to clear from her eyes. They have stopped her benefit. She lives now without the comfort of religion, electricity, or money. A barefoot boy in Sao Paulo is rooted to his piece of earth, which he knows will never swell up, pregnant, and become a vantage point from which he can see beyond his dying *favela*. In Santo Domingo, a child suffers the hateful hot comb, the dark moons of history beneath each eye. A mother watches. Her eleven-year-old daughter is preparing herself for yet another night of premature prostitution. (235-236)

The African father acknowledges the simultaneity of the harsh and brutal experiences of these people, but he also declares them to be “Survivors. In their diasporan souls a dream like steel” (236). It is this sense of survival and endurance, “arriv[ing] on the far bank of the river, loved”, that may be termed Phillips’s “magical resolution”, providing transatlantic subjects with an identity rooted in collective survival, if not in the soil of a nation. In conjunction with my argument that the three novels dealt with in this project are, in essence, *terragraphicas*, *Crossing the River* is visibly (in form and intent) a narrative construction of home that transcends *terra firma*, forming something *extra-terrestrial* with which all who are “homeless” can identify (and certainly something Phillips uses as a means of exploring, creating and harbouring his own sense of identification).

Goyal maintains that “once mimetic fidelity, consistency of plot or characterisation, and plausibility can be jettisoned as the only criteria through which to judge a text,

representations of excess in both form and content may be seen as offering greater possibilities for the political visions that prompt the questions: what is real, what is possible?" (Goyal, "Introduction" 13). These are crucial questions in the context of the transatlantic, and while prompted (and perhaps even created) by literary means, they have resonance within the daily lives of diasporic peoples seeking to discover for themselves an identity that is "real" and "possible". Ledent suggests that while the text may not provide facile answers to the many problems that plagued diasporic peoples in the past – problems that are still prevalent today – Phillips's "characters remain with us, all connected by [his] art into a tapestry of the human condition". He also goes on to say that Phillips's understanding of diaspora combines, "both dispersal and togetherness, the larger historical upheavals and the individual stories – convey[ing] a tension that invalidates attempts at exclusion, but can still lead to a sense of paradoxical belonging embodied in his "Atlantic home" ("Ambiguous Visions of Home" 209).

With the focus being on hybrid identity as the outcome of diaspora, a number of scholars have found that Africa (as reflected in the text) has been reified in the process, remaining a "a site of origin and purity, uncontaminated by those histories of the modern that have lent black Atlantic cultures their distinctive character – and thus risks reinscribing a conception of culture that Gilroy, Hall, and many of the new diaspora scholars otherwise spend much of their work critiquing" (Piot 156). Charles Piot (2001) also points out that where Africa is included in Atlantic texts (such as in Phillips's *Crossing the River* with reference to Nash's return to Liberia), the sites mentioned are usually those that have either been repatriated by freed American slaves or settled by Europeans, i.e. Liberia, Sierra Leone or southern Africa. This omission suggests that Africa has simply been the provider of raw materials – "bodies and cultural templates/origins – that were then processed or elaborated upon by the improvisational cultures of the Americas" (Piot 156), rather than a key constituent itself in the development of black Atlantic cultural production. The difficulty of finding an authentic and objective way of thinking about Africa, particularly as represented in literature, is perhaps rooted in the desire to remove from diasporic writing an Afrocentric vision of Africa. In shying away from an essentialist perception of the continent, and in advocating dispersal rather than return, it is difficult to position Africa as little more than mythic origin without any real contemporaneous existence.

In the context of *Crossing the River*, while diasporic subjects are shown to be “singing”, “insisting”, “declaring”, “hoping”, “haunting”, and finally, arriving “on the far bank of the river, loved” (236-237), Africa’s role in the text is one of “listening” rather than acting. Goyal points out that:

The voice of the African father functions as that of an all-knowing prophet who can perceive the mythic correspondences between various historical fragments and subsume them within his overarching vision. His redemption lies not in any form of agency, but in the ability to witness the redemption of his descendants in the New World. The novel cannot imagine a productive or dynamic role for Africa beyond that of celebrating the determined survival of its descendants, thus freezing Africa in the moment of the sale of its children. (“From Return to Redemption” 223)

Goyal also argues that Phillips’s conception of transatlantic identity may be too deeply anchored to his “pelagic mooring”, seeking to do away with all national boundaries as signifiers of belonging and identity in an attempt to escape the confines of an essentialist mode of thought. It is evident that the general epistemology of diaspora and transatlantic consciousness is “resistant or exorbitant to the form of the nation, whether on account of the far-reaching connections across the nations that transnationalism assumes, or because of nationalism’s conceptual entrapment within Enlightenment discourses of progress, reason and civilisation” (Goyal, “Introduction” 16). This essentially means that diaspora as a concept can be held in contradistinction to the territoriality and temporal schema of “nation”, extending beyond the boundaries of time and place. In keeping with Homi Bhabha’s ideas of “dissemiNation”, Phillips challenges the national narrative, perhaps motivated by a desire to dissolve the very idea of Britain as a white nation.

This dichotomy need not be employed in such a rigid manner however, as “black nationalism”, in reality, may collapse oppositions, “accommodat[ing] the territorial and the symbolic, the secular and the sacred, and the essentialist as well as the hybrid” (Goyal “Introduction” 16). This also finds expression in Afropolitanism (as mentioned in Chapter Two), where the African diasporic subject is able to exist in the liminal position of being African *and* European for example. Attachment and return to specific local geographies is not deemed necessary in this conception of diasporic identity, as the Afropolitan embraces his/her nationalistic roots, without denying the *rupta via* of cultures, memories and geographies through which he/she has moved and is moving.

In seeking to reinforce this idea, Goyal draws on Édouard Glissant's work, with particular reference to the concepts of "reversion and diversion" discussed in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1989). The framework through which Glissant views diaspora shies away from locating Africa as a physical or mythological space to which diasporic subjects *must* return, simultaneously positing that Africa cannot simply be marginalised or appropriated in diaspora consciousness. Instead, he "conceptualises diaspora and hybridity in ways that can negotiate productive cultural engagements with Africa and heterogeneous ways of understanding the memory of slavery" (Goyal, "Theorising Africa" 24). This conceptualisation is made possible through contrasting two cultural forms of strategic remembrance – namely, reversion and diversion.

While an in depth analysis of these forms is not possible in this context, it is worth briefly mentioning what it is that Glissant means by reversion and diversion, and the way in which this thinking is able to shift the diasporic perspective. Reversion is described by Glissant as "the obsession with a single origin" (16) and the impulse experienced by diasporic people to return to their geographic home of origin in order to secure a sense of belonging and wholeness. Diversion on the other hand is an alternative form of cultural and self-differentiation from, or resistance to, the dominant culture (into which the diasporic subject has been absorbed) when reversion ceases to be a possibility. In practical terms, diversion may be realised in the form of creolisation. Using Glissant's own words, "diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement [*point d'intrication*], from which we were forcibly turned away; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolisation, or perish" (26). Glissant sees these two cultural forms as being complex and circuitous, drawing value from both the "essentialist" viewpoint as well as the distinctly hybrid perspective. This "alternative diasporic terrain" creates a genealogy of the black Atlantic that supersedes linear or one-directional movement, allowing for that which is "cross-hatched by journeys and uprootings and political commitments to home and to elsewhere" (Goyal, "Theorising Africa" 26).

Crossing the River is, therefore, not without complexity of thought and suggestion, particularly regarding transatlantic identity and the ambivalence of diaspora. From a

postmodern and distinctly anti-essentialist perspective, Phillips perceives diasporic identity as something fluid, hybrid and fractal. In dealing with problematic conceptions (and constructions) of home and belonging across a wide spectrum of racial, national and historical boundaries, Phillips subverts essentialist notions of “return” and questions the inclusivity of the label of diaspora. As the “chorus of a common memory” gathers together in a song of redemption the fractured lives of the various protagonists, so too does the novel as a whole present to the reader a sense of completeness despite the seemingly discordant vignettes. Although the Atlantic space proves to be “difficult soil” in which to uncover and discover the memories and fertile histories of those who have (been) moved across its expanse, Phillips uses the literary tool of the novel most effectively. As a means of perceiving, constructing, discovering and essentially harbouring identity, the transatlantic text acts not only as an archive of exploration, but as a signifier of the possibilities available to those with fractured lives seeking to “[sink] hopeful roots into difficult soil” (1). *Crossing the River* therefore suggests that since “[t]hese days we are all unmoored [and] our identities fluid, the old narratives of race and nation no longer suffice: we must come up with new ones that can represent more adequately the hybridity of our times” (Goyal, “From Return to Redemption” 205-206).

Chapter Five:

Conclusion

Identities are marked by the multiplicity of subject positions that constitute the subject. Hence, identity is neither fixed nor singular; rather it is a constantly changing relational multiplicity. But during the course of flux identities do assume specific patterns, as in a kaleidoscope, against particular sets of personal, social and historical circumstances. Indeed, identity may be understood as that very process by which the multiplicity, contradiction, and instability of subjectivity is signified as having coherence, continuity, stability; as having a core – a continually changing core but the sense of a core nonetheless – that at any given moment is enunciated as the “I”.

Brah, “Difference, Diversity, Differentiation” 123-124

I would just like to say people is people and not damn white, damn black. Perhaps if I was a good enough writer I could still write damn white, damn black and still make people live. Make them real. Make you love them, not because of the colour of their skin but because they are important as human beings.

Head 23

Having explored three very different works of transatlantic fiction, it is apparent that my own analysis of these texts has simply scratched the surface of a topic that is as expansive and nuanced as the Atlantic Ocean within, across and around which these narratives are located. Choosing to look at the way in which transatlantic diasporic identity is constructed and discovered through written narrative, it has been my intention to untangle (to the degree to which the confines of this project allow) some of the complexities embedded in the way in which *location* – geographic, temporal, ideological – influences, creates and problematizes the notion of identity for the diasporic subject.

In my introduction, I maintain that the transatlantic postcolonial novel reverses the colonial travel narrative’s incessant and deliberate portrayal of the (forced) movement of African people across the Atlantic as the *transference* and *transport* of objects of utility, revealing instead, a process involving human beings, inexorably *transformed* by the journey (*rupta via*) and multiple destinations. This diasporic condition (a profoundly *human* condition) is precisely the aporia into which each of the chosen novels delves, reflecting and creating

identity for the diasporan: something far more ambiguous, unique and complex than a generic label assigned to an object of western economic edification. I have sought to show that the way in which the respective authors perceive and narratively portray diasporic identity is largely a result of the locations from which and into which the novels are written. In order to find a suitable way to navigate these texts, I use Erica L. Johnson's term *terragraphica*, a term allowing the reader to view the chosen novels not simply as fictional archives of transatlantic history and experience, but as literary constructions of *home* in the absence of an established sense of *terra firma* (symptomatic of the pluralistic Atlantic paradigm).

Not only does this thesis perceive the novels as three specific *terragraphicas*, but also as fictional *lieux de mémoire* (to borrow Pierre Nora's conception of "sites of memory"). Exploring the memories of transatlantic characters as (broken) windows through which to view history, as well as filters through which the present can be understood (or refracted), are techniques that Aidoo, Marshall and Phillips employ (although, Aidoo's use of memory is less frequent and prominent, with a greater emphasis on historicity). Tapping into various sites of memory in the lives of the fictional characters, the novels themselves become mediums of remembering, not as a means of storing facts about the past, but for the ambivalent purpose of understanding the impact of the past on the present.

Choosing to focus a textual analysis on that which is a "perpetually actual phenomenon" (Nora 8), and essentially a glimpse at history through a "prism of people" (Phillips, "Interview with Maya Jaggi" 115) enables one to get a closer look at *who* the textual characters are, not simply the linear period of history in which they have lived. Memory, as the "guardian of difference" (Misztal 2), and I argue the guardian of collective belonging as well, becomes the central route (*rupta via*) through which diasporic identities are recognised. In light of this, Nussbaum (2001) asserts that, "a really successful dissociation of the self from memory would be a total loss of the self – and thus of all the activities to which a sense of one's identity is important"(177).

Each of the novels discussed in this thesis is situated at different points of the Atlantic triangle (and at different moments in history), with each author narratively constructing

diasporic identity from a particular perspective (which may be comprised of multiple ideologies). Exploring each novel in turn, I attempt to uncover these conflicting (and at times contiguous) perspectives and investigate the reasons behind their adoption. I begin, in Chapter Two, with Ama Ata Aidoo's 1977 novel, *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*. While it can certainly not be claimed that Aidoo's polemical and political sentiments in this novel directly reflect and resemble all of her later work, I find her fictive construction of diasporic identity in this novel particularly interesting as an exemplar of the way in which historical circumstance and political necessity serve as catalysts in one's thinking and sense of self (and community). Writing this novel in the wake of postcolonial independence for Ghana, Aidoo grapples with the on-going neo-colonial climate in her home country as well as what she considers to be the continued (intellectual/ideological) enslavement of African peoples to the West through self-exile (or refusal to return to the African "nation"). Through the novel's female protagonist, Sissie, Aidoo portrays diaspora as loss of identity, rejecting the possibility of "cosmopolitanism" or, rather "Afropolitanism" as Simon Gikandi terms it, in favour of a distinctly autochthonous identity, *rooted* in the soil of the African continent.

Our Sister Killjoy thus advocates nationalistic and pan-African identification for African peoples who now reside in the West. In light of this, Aidoo does not propose the possibility of rapprochement between the West and Africa, instead seeking to reinforce a binary opposition between the two in order that African peoples may assert for themselves an authentic sense of self outside of the western model of progress and modernity. While this uncompromising sense of nationalism may seem a rather parochial solution to diaspora displacement (full-scale return is indeed impossible), discounting the irrevocable influence of the routes through which African peoples have moved, it does reflect a deep-seated desire within people to associate geographic roots with a sense of *home*, and the need to identify with a specific community of people. McClendon points out that the "cultural nationalist remains wedded to a linear view of history [...and that] the uneven evaluation of this linear history results in viewing the 'American [or European] Experience' as not just a chapter in African history but as a less *authentic* (tainted) African experience" (McClendon 13).

Using Said's terminology, *Our Sister Killjoy* may be seen as a "voyage in" (*Culture and Imperialism* 260), a satiric appropriation of the colonial narrative, shifting movement from the "periphery" to the "centre", rather than the stereotypical converse. This reversal, through discourse, displaces and transforms the western historical and literary archive, giving voice to the memories and perspectives of "the rest" to whom little narrative space was previously afforded. Embodying "the voyage in", Aidoo's text functions as *counter-memory* and *counter-history* (to borrow from Foucault's extensive lexicon), uncovering and exhibiting "subterranean knowledge forms", the likes of which are used as building blocks in the construction of a particular *terragraphica*, reflected in form and content by *Our Sister Killjoy*. As a self-proclaimed feminist, Aidoo not only uncovers and narratively exhibits "subterranean knowledge forms" previously suppressed along racial lines, but gives voice to the African female, constructing a distinctly African female identity (an immensely noteworthy task undertaken in an arena dominated by (western and African) male authors).

The *terragraphica* of *Our Sister Killjoy* also constructs Africa as providing the only sense of corporeal home with which the diasporan may identify, and returning to the continent as the only way to feel *à la maison*. The West however, is portrayed as offering only an illusory and ephemeral sense of belonging, not to mention continued enslavement to its ideologies. In this way, cosmopolitanism or diasporic living is presented in the text as a "nightmare" from which to wake, an *unheimlich* space juxtaposed with Sissie's memories of home (Ghana) and her actual return home at the end of the novel. Helen Lauer (2012) argues that, "what is nowadays dubbed cosmopolitan freedom, Aidoo displays as subjugating oneself and surrendering one's responsibility – to react honestly and freely to the indignities and humiliations, both huge and minute, which Africans undergo in transit (across the Atlantic, across Europe) over the centuries of foreign imperialism" (Lauer 103).

Aidoo's novel does not romanticise Africa, nor does she draw on ideas of a pre- or post-colonial African utopia. Subsequently, her ideas deviate from Garveyism, but not from pan-Africanism, as her call for autochthony finds validity in her desire to see African people actively engaging in the their own continent's economic and political edification, rather than pursuing "the invitation to fit into the global arena at the cost of one's dignity, in penury and discomfort (OSK 90)" (Lauer 104). Borrowing from Achille Mbembe's extensive research it is

evident that Aidoo's writing may be classified under such terms as *Afro-radicalism* and *Nativism*, categories of writing in which geographic space and race are conflated, drawing authenticity from each other.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, where identity is not something portrayed as that which is lost (or warped) by transatlantic routes, nor found in a return to roots, but rather something that is tidalectic. Just as the writing and objectives of *Our Sister Killjoy* cannot be divorced from the (historical/ideological) locations from which Aidoo writes the text, so too is *The Chosen Place* a *terragraphica* created by Marshall as a result of her own American, Caribbean and African subjectivities.

The history of the transatlantic slave trade and colonial expansion is etched into the collective memory of the people of Bourne Island, and exists in perpetuity in the abyss of the Atlantic Ocean and the rhythmic spilling of its waves onto the island's shore. Édouard Glissant's work on Caribbean subjectivity lends credence to the way in which Marshall textually paints the dynamic relationship between the island, its inhabitants and the sea, described by Glissant as a tautological abyss. The abyss, saturated by the memories of the slaves who were subjected to its depths, and marked by the balls and chains that carried them to their watery graves, functions as a constant reminder of how the Caribbean came to be populated and how history lives and breathes in the present through the unremitting presence of the ocean. It is in this sense that, for Marshall, Caribbean diasporic identity is tidalectic. It is not the result of belonging to a single geographic origin (or returning to it), but a result of being caught in the interstitial space of western and African encounters, subject to the ebb and flow of past and present.

The effects of slavery and colonialism are manifested as creolity in the novel, exhibited by the Caribbean characters in the text (with specific reference to Merle Kinbona) as well as the place itself: a coalescence of western imperialism and African ancestry. Remembering and performativity (revealed in the annual re-enactment of the Cuffee Ned Rebellion) function as routes to identity creation and the maintenance of a sense of national affiliation. The people's communal memory and celebration of their African ancestor's successful rebellion against the British is positive in that it provides a means of collective identification

and belonging. However, their incessant and deliberate reference to the past, living in the shadow of this rebellion, is also acutely destructive in that the people of Bournehills are unable to move beyond memory in order to create for themselves an original sense of identity in the present.

For Merle on the other hand, remembering enables her to acknowledge the roots of her ancestry, the transatlantic routes along which she has travelled and her resultant hybridity. Her confrontation with the past, does not render her static, but reveals how her memories (and the island's memories) have shaped her. *The Chosen Place* champions hybridity and creolity, expressed through the heteroglossic language Marshall employs (the *terragraphica* she creates through language), her rhizomatic conception of identity and her inscription of history *as* memory: something far more nuanced, subjective and malleable than a linear analysis of historical events. At the same time however, this novel, like *Our Sister Killjoy* functions as a warning against the dangers of pseudo *post*-colonialism, highlighting the deleterious and enslaving effects of neo-colonialism.

Chapter Four looks at Phillips's *Crossing the River*, situated contrapuntally in four disparate Atlantic spaces: West Africa, the Middle Passage, England and America. The narrative shifts between these spaces, disrupting temporal as well as geographic continuity, forcing the reader to "navigate these passages and crossings, assess parallax, transmission, and distance, hear echo and resonance, comprehend connection, faultline, correlation [... within] a transnational world of writing" (Clingman 79). Phillips's own history of multi-axial locationality (to borrow Avtar Brah's terminology) certainly resonates in both the construction and content of *Crossing the River* as he narratively wrestles with ideas of home, belonging and identity through a lens tinted with fractal experience. This text is by no means limited to the searching of a single transatlantic character for a sense of mooring however, but *Crossing the River* exhibits an "interest in all asymmetrically marginalised and excluded people of whatever origins whose routes cross in ways that shift from the complex and complementary to the jagged, tangential and disjunctive – in itself an underlying formal patterning in [Phillips's] work (Clingman 76-77).

From a post-national or even transnational perspective (such as Phillips's), memory is not a homogenous and strictly communal experience, but a product of "multiple and competing discourses, and thus unstable, multiple, fluctuating and fragmentary" (Miszta 134).

Phillips's novel suggests that detachment from a stable nation/community/country, as is the case with diasporic subjects, leads to pluralistic and fractal identities and the concomitant desire to find that which can be called "home". Phillips speaks of a chorus of common memory, including all those who have experienced the shattering implications of homelessness, loss and abandonment, and extending the definitional (and theoretical) confines of diaspora beyond racial, geographic and temporal spaces. His eclectic collection of characters in the text are testimony to this, including three allegorical children of Africa sold into slavery by their father, three African Americans given the same names as the original children (Nash, Martha and Travis), a British slave ship captain (James Hamilton), a young British woman (Joyce Kitts) and an American plantation owner (Edward Williams). For Phillips, memories of common human experience form the ground upon which diasporic identity is moored within a sea of conflicting subjectivities. Memory (even a constructed and mediated one) thus not only becomes a source of identity, but also a kind of home in which to belong.

Phillips's uncompromising transnational and anti-essentialist construction of identity is certainly not without its complications (and perhaps over-simplifications), and the poetic transcendence the text offers diasporic subjects may not be entirely realistic or representative of transatlantic experience outside of the fictive realm. However, the text's startling lack of accusation (usually inseparable from any discussion of the slave trade and (post)colonialism) and refusal to perpetuate binary distinctions between the West and Africa (as well as male and female characters), allow for a glimpse at the human condition, surprisingly outside of racial, historical and even gendered boundaries.

All subjective memories and experiences in text are considered valid and qualify each character as a child of the African father. As victims of homelessness (however caused or manifested) the characters' collective displacement affords them a sense of collective belonging and home. Identity for the diasporan (as portrayed in *Crossing the River*) therefore remains wedded to the *via rupta* of memory rather than anchored to a specific,

physical shore. The text itself visibly and narratively embodies and links the various stories of its characters, creating a *terragraphica* in which these stories, however discordant, form a common chorus.

When considering the scope of this thesis, I believe there is much room for expansion and the stretching out of some of the ideas presented. Having read Simon Gikandi's article, "Between Roots and Routes: Cosmopolitanism and the Claims of Locality" (2010), I believe it would be greatly beneficial to take a deeper look at the subjectively disparate experiences of diaspora among those educated elite who gladly welcome the label of a cosmopolitan, peripatetic lifestyle and those whose diasporic existences have unfolded as a result of fleeing their home countries and seeking asylum in the West. If I were to pursue further study along these lines, I would very much like to explore both fictive portrayals of these people's lives in conjunction with actual stories (gleaned from primary interviews). It is evident that the texts I have dealt with in this thesis cannot be divorced from the biographies (or locations) of their authors, who may be considered among the "cosmopolitan elite", and so it would be particularly interesting to uncover transatlantic stories from the perspective of "the other" so to speak; those refugees or immigrants who do not have the tool of the novel with which to create a *terragraphica*, a fictive space of belonging and a written archive of memories with which to identify.

Another avenue for further research would be the exploration of Caribbean authors such as Paule Marshall within the South African Academy (not to discount the significant research done on Caribbean writers within the Stellenbosch English Department). While her work has received a fair amount of Caribbean and American scholarly attention, I struggled to find critical material on her writing in any of the South African libraries. I also had great difficulty acquiring a copy of her memoir, *Triangular Road* (2009), which, after being ordered from America took several months to get to the Stellenbosch library, arriving three weeks before the due date for this thesis.

Having discussed the different perspectives of the chosen authors, reflected in their constructions of transatlantic identity, it has not been my intention to say which is perceived as more or less accurate; indeed this would be an impossible task given the deeply

embedded subjectivity at the core of something as intimately *human* as identity. Instead I have sought to trace the impact of various locations on the authors' fictive creations and to reveal the vast panoply of routes through which diasporic identity may be navigated, (re)made and rooted. Whether promoting a teleology of return to a specific geographic location, wrestling with the anomalies of creolity, or embracing a sense of transnational belonging bound by the chords of memory, it is evident that transatlantic fiction reflects a universal human desire for *home*. In reflecting such a need, the novels themselves become constructions of a particular kind of home – a *terragraphica* in which not only the textual characters find a means of belonging, but the authors and readers alike. Indeed, as Michael Chapman posits, “A valuable ingredient of the novel involves the subjective realm: the psychology of the experience, the impact on human relationships, on community life. Story takes precedence; its value is in the telling” (162).

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