4. Tracing Routes

The last analysis chapter focuses on the travel narratives by Caryl Phillips and Saidiya Hartman who retrace the historical and current paths of different people, including the trails of captives in West Africa, the travels of African-descended migrants, and the journeys of Black people who sought to return to the homeland of their ancestors. In *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) and *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007), both writers travel in search of stories of the past that have been silenced and ignored and to examine the legacies of the past in different localities. In particular, the narratives are concerned with the histories and experiences of displacement of the Black diaspora as well as with the cultural memory of the transatlantic slave trade, revealing that "'[t]ravelling in pursuit of traces' always involves tapping into the archives of cultural memory" (Pfister, "Travellers" 8). The narratives exemplify what Huggan describes as an important aspect of the genre, namely that it "mediates the dialectical relationship between memory and geography, as well as that between memory and history" (136).

The Atlantic Sound and *Lose Your Mother* are skillfully written, thought-provoking meditations on the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and the condition of the Black diaspora. They invoke past traumas of displacement and chart their aftermath and consequences in the present. Key concerns in both narratives are the cultural memory of slavery, the different histories, and competing interpretations of the past. Notably, they synthesize many of the themes addressed in the previously analyzed travel narratives, for example, they scrutinize issues of identity, race, belonging, home and homelessness, history, and memory. What sets these texts apart from the others is their generic mobility and their critical and self-reflexive engagement with the genre of travel writing. Both narratives can therefore be understood as innovative contemporary travel writing, which the editors of *Mobility at Large* define as "travel texts that are self-reflexive about the genre's historical grounding in colonizing rhetoric and are informed by postcolonial agendas" and that merge innovative textual forms "with a political project of resistance, providing a useful critical tool for thinking through the constructions of knowledge in articulations of identity, nationhood, gender, race and ethnicity in the context of travel" (Edwards and Graulund 200). Retracing the footsteps of their literary forebears, they reflect on the history and tradition of travel writing. Like other writers of innovative travel narratives, Phillips and Hartman expose the problematic nature of the genre and of the social and cultural practice of trav-

eling. Journeying and writing as Black mobile subjects, the travel narratives reveal that the authors "struggle with ways to inscribe themselves (and their voices) in representations of travel" (200). Resisting categorizations, Phillips and Hartman demonstrate the creative potential of innovative travel writing and deliberately create generic hybrids by combining fiction and non-fiction writing, essay, autobiography, memoir writing, travel writing, and historical writing. They thus evince a refusal to be fixed as both subject and text remain in motion (201).

4.1 Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* (2000)

Saint Kitts-born, Leeds-raised, and long-time resident in the United States, Caryl Phillips's biographical routes and his ambiguous national affiliations evince once again that the imposition of national categories upon authors and their literary productions is often artificial and arbitrary. The author's life as well as his work certainly defy neat categorizations according to place and nationality. A distinguished novelist, playwright, and essayist who has received several awards, Phillips's thematic interest in his work revolves around topics such as the cultural history of the Black diaspora, colonization, the memory of slavery, and migrant experiences in various locations across the Atlantic world. Like Ekow Eshun's *Black Gold of the Sun* and the works of contemporary authors who are likewise defined as Black British, Phillips's writing demonstrates his effort to reach beyond particular national histories and his focus on transnational and diasporic themes.

Phillips's travel narrative *The Atlantic Sound* is no exception. It maps the writer's journeys to different locations, among them places that were key sites in the transatlantic slave trade—Liverpool, Accra, and Charleston. The triangular geography between Europe, Africa, and America resonates with Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic and signals the narrative's preoccupation with the history of the Black diaspora. In this way, Phillips physically and intellectually traverses a Black Atlantic geography, exploring the physical spaces and delving into their respective histories, both past and present. Phillips addresses many of the already familiar topics that preoccupy Black travelers, including, for example, ambiguities of home and belonging, diasporic returns, and experiences of migration, displacement, and exile. The analysis that follows focuses on the narrator's retracing of various routes, physically, historically, and textually, and illustrates how such a 'traveling in traces' serves as a way to illuminate the hidden and silenced stories connected to the history of slavery

and colonization and to examine its aftermaths and consequences on diasporic lives. Phillips's journeys are framed as an interrogation into the history and current condition of the African diaspora. The analysis further illustrates how travel writing is employed to retrieve, rewrite, and revise stories of the past to critically interrogate and reflect on processes of forgetting and remembering history.

The Atlantic Sound represents the narrator's geographical travels and the text's thematic journey across a Black Atlantic terrain. The travelogue is divided into three main chapters, each revolving around Phillips's visit to a specific location: In Liverpool, the narrator searches for historical remains of the city's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade; in Accra, he participates in the Panafest, a cultural event celebrating Pan-African unity; and in Charleston, he explores the legacies of a White federal judge who worked to ensure Black voting rights during the nascent Civil Rights Movement. The main part of the narrative is framed by a prologue ("Atlantic Crossing") that recounts the narrator's ship voyage from the Caribbean across the Atlantic to England and an epilogue ("Exodus") relating his visit to an African American community that has settled in the Negev desert in Israel. While each of the five parts could be read independently from one another, they are connected by the structural element of the narrator's journeys and, crucially, by the multitude of diasporic experiences. These experiences are reflected in the stories of historical and contemporary figures that are interspersed throughout the narrative. They include, for example, a nineteenth-century trader from the Gold Coast who travels to Liverpool for business matters; a young Black Liverpudlian with a passion for Black history who acts as Phillips's guide when he visits the city; a Ghanaian immigrant who was deported from Britain and who longs to leave Ghana for the United States; an Anglican missionary from the Gold Coast who, after being schooled in London, returned to his homeland to promote the Anglican faith among the local people; and an African American from Mount Vernon living in Ghana who supports other diasporic returnees to resettle in the motherland. Notions of displacement, dislocation, and fragmentation resound in all of the stories told in Phillips's travel narrative and "inevitably point to the fact that homelessness and (un)belonging are a painfully complex experience for the descendants of the African diaspora" (Pulitano 86). The range of themes, biographical sketches, and historical accounts presented in the travelogue makes *The Atlantic Sound* a rich and complex work that sets itself apart from conventional forms of travel writing.

Phillips's travels are presented as a retracing of personal and collective routes that allow the narrator to examine the consequences of past movements, both coerced and voluntary, on individuals and societies. The narrator's Atlantic crossing, which is recounted in the prologue, serves as a preeminent example: Boarding a banana boat that takes him and a few other passengers from the French-Caribbean island of Guadeloupe across the Atlantic to England, the narrator reenacts an earlier journey undertaken by his parents and many other postwar immigrants from the West Indies, known as the *Windrush* generation. They came to Britain under the British Nationality Act of 1948, which granted them national citizenship. As the son of immigrants, Phillips traveled this route as an infant in his mother's arms in the late 1950s. During his second transatlantic voyage onboard the banana boat, Phillips goes through a range of emotions—feeling anxiety, boredom, depression, and joy. Apparently, this voyage is one of many bouts of discomfort, self-imposed isolation, and loneliness that bears similarities to that of the earlier travelers: "I now know how [my mother] and all the other emigrants felt as they crossed the Atlantic; they felt lonely" (*Atlantic Sound* 20), writes the narrator. Retracing the routes of Caribbean migrants, he addresses the effects of this historical event that "would change the nature of British society" (7). He notes that the initial hopefulness of the people was disappointed shortly after their arrival in Britain when "they discovered that the mother country had little, if any, desire to embrace her colonial offspring" (21). The narrator gestures to the racism and exclusion that these migrants would experience in Britain, resulting in feelings of unbelonging and homelessness that characterize diasporic experiences.

During his sea voyage, Phillips isolates and distances himself from his fellow passengers. His experiences aboard the ship suggest that the experiences of the traveler, as well as of the migrant and displaced subject, are characterized by isolation. Elena Machado Sáez argues that Phillips's "observations point to isolation as a principal facet of migration" and that the poignant descriptions of "the atmosphere of despair that pervades the boat" underscore his assertion "that this shared experience could never lead to the development of any kind of migrant kinship" (20). She goes on saying, "The concept of community via migration" is revealed to be a myth that the narrator "seeks to demystify in his text" (19). His rejection of communal feelings based on the historical experience of displacement resurface throughout the narrative when he examines various groups and their efforts to create and sustain communal bonds.

Significantly, Phillips's Atlantic crossing is informed by the memory of his parents' experience, by the stories of Black migrants, but also by the 'initial' journey of the Black diaspora signified by the Middle Passage.[25] The transatlantic slave trade that forced millions of Africans across the Atlantic and into enslavement is not openly addressed in this first section of the narrative, but invocations of the Middle Passage appear throughout the portrayal of Phillips's sea voyage. For instance, attention is repeatedly drawn to the narrator's unlikely choice of transportation. Considering that the banana boat is a vessel designed to carry goods and produce, not tourists, Phillips and the other passengers are objectified and presented as human 'cargo.' Moreover, although his voyage does by no means come close to the terrifying conditions that African captives had to live through, Phillips evokes a sense of anguish and despair when he describes the monotony of his days at sea: "as I witness the sun rising on the vast unresponsive expanse of sea and sky, the bleak sight only serves to remind me that there is no prospect of land for days, that there is only the prospect of another day, and the undoubted difficulty of trying to endure another night" (*Atlantic Sound* 16). In addition, the image of Phillips's self-chosen confinement to a small cabin onboard the ship whose captain "introduces himself as the 'master'" (7) and whose crew of Burmese workers "appear to be treated as slaves" (8), as a fellow traveler comments, powerfully alludes to the slave vessels that set out toward the 'New World' with captives crammed in their holds. The allusion to the slave trade as well as the narrator's itinerary—which leads to England where the main European slaving ports were located—signal the narrative's preoccupation with this topic. Moreover, the evocation of the Middle Passage in the text demonstrates that the memory of this violent journey is a constant reference in Black travel writing. Already within this first part of the narrative, then, one can trace the discursive and thematic links that are established between diasporic experiences of dislocation, dispossession, marginality, exile, and labor exploitation—of isolated Caribbean migrants, African captives forced into slavery, Burmese workers on a cargo ship—that were generated by European colonialism and the global trade in human beings. Throughout the travelogue, connections between the

25 Phillips has commented on how his voyage aboard the banana boat relates to a host of other journeys. He explained in an interview, "I spent nights on deck, feeling the vastness and loneliness of the ocean, trying to relive not just my parents' voyage but Columbus's, the slave ships', and the Irish and Russian flotsam migrating to the New World" (Jaggi).

past and the present, the personal and the collective, as well as the local and the transnational are aesthetically foregrounded.

As the narrator retraces the routes of the triangular slave trade, his first destination is Liverpool, where he searches for historical remains of the city's involvement in the trade. Phillips's visit to the city is prefigured by the journey of a nineteenth-century African trader named John Emmanuel Ocansey, a historical figure around whom *The Atlantic Sound* creates a fictionalized travelogue. Switching from first- to third-person narration, the narrator creatively reimagines and rewrites the story of John, the son of a well-established businessman from the Gold Coast who travels to Liverpool in 1881 to take care of his father's business matters. While John's sea voyage recalls Phillips's Atlantic crossing in that he is similarly isolated, alone, and unable to make acquaintances, John's impressions of Liverpool differ from Phillips's. The focalization on John allows the reader to see Liverpool through the eyes of a nineteenth-century African traveler. This literary strategy "engenders a discursive reversal in which England is seen as an exotic location—a place that is as 'incomprehensible' for [John Emmanuel] Ocansey as the Congo is for a Victorian traveller" (Edwards and Graulund, *Mobility at Large* 66). From the perspective of John the city of Liverpool and its people and customs appear unfathomable and strange. By rewriting a historic account of an African businessman traveling to Liverpool, the narrative reverses the "hierarchies of traveller/native" (66); that is, of the European traveler and the African travelee.[26] Accordingly, *The Atlantic Sound* can be read as a "countertravel" narrative, which is defined by Holland and Huggan as a travelogue that articulates a counternarrative that undermines and opposes dominant discourses and stereotypes of Eurocentric travel writing (47-65). As "highly politicized forms of travel writing, which interrogate both the history of the genre they are employing and the underlying attitudes" (21), countertravel narratives can be understood as a discursive resistance to traditional or dominant perspectives, histories, ideologies, and systems of representation. Phillips inverts conventional trajectories of Western travel writing that depict Africa as a foreign, exotic, and unknown territory by recounting the story of a Black traveler from the Gold Coast who

26 The term "travelee" was introduced by Pratt who explains in *Imperial Eyes* that "[t]his clumsy term is coined on analogy with the term 'addressee.' As the latter means the person addressed by a speaker, 'travelee' means persons traveled to (or not) by a traveler, receptors of travel" (242).

visits Liverpool. Rewriting the account of a nineteenth-century African traveler in Liverpool, *The Atlantic Sound* facilitates a shift of narrative perspective that foregrounds the experience and consciousness of a subject who has been silenced and marginalized in traditional (White, Western) travel writing. The reversal of perspective, therefore, represents a commentary on the genre's problematic nature, its creation and perpetuation of discourses of othering that portray the Western traveler as superior to non-Western people and cultures.

The fictional account of John's journey is just one example of the various voices and narratives that are integrated into Phillips's travelogue and that illustrate its embrace of multiple, complex, and competing historical voices and interpretations of the past. Through a mixture of poems, for example, by Langston Hughes and Michael Harper, quotes by W. E. B. Du Bois and Fredrick Douglass, excerpts from Richard Wright's *Black Power*, snippets from *The New York Post*, epigrammatic quotations, eulogies, and conversations and interviews with different people, Phillips incorporates a variety of perspectives and voices in his travel narrative that comment on the condition of the African diaspora as well as on the legacy of colonialism and the implications of slavery throughout the Atlantic world. The richness of the material included in *The Atlantic Sound* distinguishes it from other, more conventional forms of travel writing. Phillips makes use of the elusiveness and flexibility of the genre and creates room for different and sometimes opposing views and opinions. Through these accounts, diverse perspectives are expressed and articulated that add different layers of complexity to his narrative. Through fictionalized accounts of historical events and subjects, historiography, and travel writing, Phillips creates links between different contexts and people and brings into consideration the complex range of experiences of migrant and diasporic subjects. In her discussion of the literary strategies that are employed in *The Atlantic Sound*, Rae Ann Meriwether comments on how the narrative joins a postmodern form, poetic language, and historical content (86). She reads this combination "of seemingly incompatible discourses to write history" as a "politicized refusal to submit to history's hegemony and [the author's] attempt to create non-generalizing ways of narrating the past—uncertain and difficult—by blending, blurring, and ironizing both events and contemporary understandings of those" (87).

More than a century after John Emmanuel Ocansey traveled to Liverpool, Phillips retraces his path. John's narrative is one of those hidden stories of Black presences in Liverpool that Phillips seeks to uncover as he visits the city.

His visit is introduced by an epigrammatic quotation from Wright's travelogue *Black Power*, an intertext that anticipates Phillips's own attitude toward the city and his agitation with the historical amnesia of its citizens:[27] "Yet, how calm, innocent, how staid Liverpool looked in the June sunshine! What massive and solidly built buildings! […] Along the sidewalks men and women moved unhurriedly. Did they ever think of their city's history?" (*Atlantic Sound* 93-94). Apparently, Wright's question occupies the narrator as he wanders through Liverpool. Despite the significance of the slave trade in the history of Liverpool, Phillips discovers that historical markers drawing attention to this essential chapter in the city's history are virtually absent. Liverpool appears to have forgotten its past and erased all ties connecting the city to the trade.[28] The realization greatly unnerves and disturbs the narrator—"It is disquieting to be in a place where history is so physically present, yet so glaringly absent from people's consciousness" (117)—whose attitude toward Liverpool finds expression in his descriptions of it: Arriving by train, he first notes Lime Street Station's "satanic quality" (94). Moreover, he contends that "the past casts a deep shadow" (116) over the city whose inhabitants seem "clinically depressed" (107). Liverpool's bleak atmosphere elicits memories of a racist encounter he had during a football game when he was young, which caused him to feel that "there was something disturbing about Liverpool" (95). For Phillips "Liverpool was a place to be avoided. A dangerous place" (96). Even many years later, Liverpool still figures as a disquieting place where he feels anxious and uneasy.

Phillips's visit to Liverpool is driven by his attempt to uncover the forgotten and repressed memories of the slave trade in the historical remnants, the landmark monuments of Liverpool. Examining the Cunard building, he notes that the names of major ports, with which the shipping company conducted business, are carved into the building's façade: "The word 'Africa' leaps out at me. Ships to Africa. The multiple ports of this huge continent are represented

27 Stuart Hall draws attention to the connection of racism and the repressing of history when he argues that "the development of an indigenous British racism in the postwar period *begins* with the profound historical forgetfulness—what I want to call the loss of historical memory, a kind of historical amnesia, a decisive mental repression—which has overtaken the British people about race and empire since the 1950s. […] [T]he native, homegrown variety of racism begins with this attempt to wipe out and efface every trace of the colonial and imperial past" ("Racism" 25).

28 It should be pointed out here that when Phillips traveled to Liverpool in the late 1990s, the International Slavery Museum was not yet established.

by this one word. […] Behind me the Mersey lies *silent*" (*Atlantic Sound* 101; emphasis added). The obvious material presence of the past, which is reflected by the word "Africa" that is carved into the façade, presents a conspicuous contrast to the erasure and silencing of history and Liverpool's connection to the slave trade that is insinuated by the "silent" Mersey River. It is this contrast, this imbalance, that defines Liverpool in the narrative. Phillips's account of the city, then, works to redress the apparent ignorance and amnesia surrounding the history and memory of the slave trade. In this regard, travel writing functions as a vehicle for criticism and a corrective to the dominant narrative of Liverpool, and by extension Britain, from which slavery has largely been written out.

Early in the narrative, it crystalizes that the narrator Phillips assumes a variety of roles and subject positions from which he addresses his topics. Shifting between privileged Western traveler, historian, anthropological observer, creative writer, and postcolonial subject, the roles he takes on lend Phillips a certain narrative authority.[29] Consequently, the narrator "splits his eye/I (i.e. his narrative gaze and his authorial subjectivity), thereby positioning himself in different temporal frames and even ideological positions and changing tense to announce perspectival shifts" (Miller Powell 96). For instance, he positions himself in opposition to the tourists—he travels not only in the opposite direction of the cruise ship passengers in the Caribbean but also intentionally chooses different means of transportation—and takes on the role of the distant observer. During his sea voyage, "Phillips shuttles between the roles of insider and outsider, between the sensitized son of Caribbean immigrants and the educated British scholar" (López Ropero 56). At times, he presents himself as a cultural insider who is, due to his heritage, a native both in England and the Caribbean. His privileged background as an independent Western traveler comes to the fore when he complains about the inconveniences of the ship; then "the travelling persona that Phillips projects […] seems aloof and elitist, slipping into gestures that we may associate with what David Spurr identifies as tropes of colonial discourse" (56). As a historian and anthropological observer, he recovers hidden stories of the past and examines the consequences

29 Commenting on postcolonial travel narratives, Paul Smethurst remarks that "narrative authority is linked to [the writers'] postcolonial experience and heritage and to strategies of self-authentication […]. Indeed, postcoloniality becomes a condition of possibility for their textualities and a source of narrative authority" (12).

of slavery and forced migration on the lives of individuals. His narrative accounts are rendered in a controlled, detached, guarded, and sometimes ironic voice; his commentary, however, leaves no doubt about his personal opinion.

In contrast to the other travel narratives that are discussed in this study, *The Atlantic Sound* does not foreground an interior journey. Although one learns about Phillips's parents' story of migration, his experience with racism in Britain, and his current residency in the United States, there are otherwise comparatively few references to his personal background and his motive for traveling. However, considering that he represents himself as a postcolonial subject, it is clear that questions of home and belonging are of concern to him, inciting his journeys and writing. This preoccupation with questions of home, homelessness, and belonging is reflected in the book's thematic concerns (particularly its focus on the consequences of diasporic displacement) but also in the chapter titles. The titles of the three main chapters—"Leaving Home," "Homeward Bound," "Home"—emphasize Phillips's engagement with the topic but also his frustration with easy invocations of home and belonging. Giving the contents of the chapters, these titles seem rather ironic. The elusive nature of home as well as the author's skepticism surrounding the concept are made visible by the narrator's frequent use of quotation marks around the word home. Zara Bennett observes that rather than outlining an itinerary and directing the reader, the chapter titles of *The Atlantic Sound* can cause confusion and disorientation. Pointing to Phillips's play with the myth of return through the chapter titles, she also notes that "[h]ome does not provide a fixed point of reference because there are several 'homes' being bandied about here. […] For Phillips, home is not a place of origins in the Pan-African sense, or even a fixed geographical location" (11).

The prevailing historical amnesia that characterizes Liverpool's relationship with its past is juxtaposed with the way history is treated in Ghana, Phillips's next travel destination. In Ghana, Phillips explores how a particular history is employed for the purpose of identification and unity. In contrast to what the title of the second chapter, "Homeward Bound," suggests, Phillips's journey to Ghana is not spurred by the idea of an African homeland—which is also underscored by the narrator's repeated statement: "No, I am not going home" (*Atlantic Sound* 125, 128). Rather, he critically reflects on the practice of diasporic tourism and the ways in which history is commodified by the Panafest, a biannual cultural event that encourages Black people from the diaspora to visit Ghana and celebrate their African heritage and Pan-African unity. As Phillips discerns from the publication material, it is "the biggest

gathering of the African family to celebrate our cultural unity" (143). Although Phillips takes part in several Panafest events, he does so only reluctantly. Assuming the position of a detached and distant observer who witnesses and comments on the spectacle that unfolds before his eyes, he critically examines the identity politics behind the proclamations of Pan-African unity. The descriptions of the festival and its diasporic attendees leave no doubt that for the narrator these gestures and the beliefs that inform them are shallow, embarrassing, and often outright absurd. With biting irony he describes the poorly organized performance of a "royal procession" that is led by "'warriors,' who appear to be badly dressed unemployed youth and old men." "[T]he chaotic sound of drums, whistles, cowbells and the random firing of rifles" (172) adds to the impression of chaos, disharmony, and utter randomness that undermines any notion of cultural authenticity. Phillips mockingly describes the African American tourists who wear "costumes" and shirts that announce "Africa. Our Aim Unity" (172) and who worry about not having the right currency to buy a can of Coca-Cola. He mischievously notes the distress of "the animal-loving American cousins of the diaspora" as a ram is sacrificed "to the ancestors who shed their blood in the cause of slavery" (173). The apparent indifference and a lack of sobriety of the Ghanaian performers and organizers clash with the overly emotional diasporic tourists. These satirical descriptions of the Panafest proceedings reflect the narrator's perception of the event as a caricature of diasporic celebration. The demonstrations of Afrocentric pride exhaust the narrator who finally proclaims, "This continual rush to overstatement is causing me to suffer from diasporan fatigue" (186). Obviously, the heritage tourism that Phillips witnesses in Ghana appears hollow. It exposes the tourists' superficial engagement with history and their belief in a progressive narrative of Black diasporic history that allows them to stage their journey to Africa as a recuperative homecoming.

Phillips criticizes the idea of diasporic return and draws attention to the way history is sanitized and commercialized for the tourists who are eager to claim their African roots (for example, the involvement of Africans in the slave trade is ignored to facilitate feelings of kinship and unity). Phillips's narrative counters and supplements such simplistic representations of the past and singular narratives of progress and redemption that are created by the tourist industry and embraced by the diasporic visitors. It does so by interweaving multiple other voices into the text, exhibiting a complex intertwinement and layering of narratives; for example, a biographical sketch of Philip Quaque, an African priest, missionary, and educator who worked at Cape Coast Cas-

tle, the principal British trade fort on the coast of West Africa, but who appears to have been indifferent or ignorant to "the indignities that were being visited upon his fellow Africans" (*Atlantic Sound* 180) in the dungeon of the castle underneath his feet. This narrative is complemented by a historical account detailing the building of the slave fort in Elmina and an outlining of how the trade between Africans and Europeans developed. Bringing these different narratives together, Phillips exposes the ironies and contradictions of history. Such historical complexities, however, are disregarded during the Panafest celebrations, where a sense of home and belonging is commodified and 'sold' to the African American and Jamaican returnees.

Reflecting on the problematic nature of diasporic return and the absurdity of claiming a cultural identity through the homecoming practices that Phillips witnesses in Ghana, he writes,

> People of the diaspora who expect the continent to solve whatever psychological problems they possess. People of the diaspora who dress the part, have their hair done, buy beads, and fill their spiritual 'fuel tank' in preparation for the return journey to 'Babylon'. They have deep wounds that need to be healed, but if 'their' Africa fails them in any way. If 'their' Africa disappoints, then they will immediately accuse 'these Africans' of catering to the white man. […] Do they not understand? Africa cannot cure. Africa cannot make anybody feel whole. Africa is not a psychiatrist. (*Atlantic Sound* 215-16)

It is clear, then, that for the narrator a journey to Africa can never heal the wounds created by forced displacement and dispossession and is certainly not the cure for the diasporic subject's feelings of unbelonging. He dismisses the way diasporic tourists project their dreams of a homeland onto Ghana and appropriate the material and historical spaces that it provides. Instead of unity, Phillips observes a social distance between returnees and Ghanaians. Although the visitors proclaim their kinship with the local Ghanaians, they remain oblivious to the contemporary problems and challenges that the people in Ghana face. While diasporic travelers are desperate to return to Africa, the Promised Land, many Ghanaians seek to leave their country for the United States, believing that it does not hold a future for them. As Phillips's Ghanaian guide and driver explains, "The only way up in Ghana is out" (197). Therefore, pointing to the divide between Africa and the Black diaspora that manifests in economic and cultural differences, the narrative deconstructs notions of unity and exposes the tourists' shallow claims to kinship.

The differences between Black visitors and Ghanaians also extend to their disparate perceptions of the history of the slave trade and its implications for the Black diaspora. The diverging attitudes become apparent in the debates over the preservation of the slave forts: For diasporic tourists they are important historical markers and sites of memory and mourning; for Ghanaians they are reminders of a history they would rather forget, but also something that can be turned into economic profit. Like the Panafest celebration, the crumbling slave forts are part of a tourist industry driven by profit. The Ghanaian playwright and renowned Pan-Africanist Dr. Ben Abdallah tells Phillips that it should be the Black diaspora's responsibility to take care of the forts and pay for their restoration, noting, "For us, they do not mean the same thing as they do for you people" (*Atlantic Sound* 149). Abdallah's remark certainly compromises the belief in unity that lies at the heart of Pan-African ideology. The narrative further demystifies the idealistic notion of family by including a quotation by Frederick Douglass who, commenting on the nineteenth-century repatriation schemes of African Americans, points to the African complicity in the slave trade when he writes that "the savage chiefs on the western coast of Africa, who for ages have been accustomed to selling their captives into bondage, and pocketing the ready cash for them, will not more readily see and accept our moral and economical ideas, than the slave-traders of Maryland and Virginia" (143). The pairing of Phillips's observations of diasporic tourism with Douglass's statement clearly reflects a pessimistic picture of return that deconstructs the myth of Africa as homeland and exposes the hypocrisy inherent in homecoming celebrations; and it also demonstrates a refusal to consider more satisfying and encouraging aspects of the experience of return.

The idea of diasporic return is further explored in a brief epilogue, entitled "Exodus," in which Phillips relates his visit to a Hebrew Israelite community in the Negev desert of Israel—the same community to which Emily Raboteau traveled several years later. The so-called African Hebrew Israelites are an isolated community of over two thousand African Americans who believe "that they are descendants of Hebrew Israelites driven into African exile from Jerusalem in AD 70" (*Atlantic Sound* 210). They have "left the land of great captivity" (268) and 'returned' from places such as Chicago and Washington, DC, to settle in the Negev desert where they established a community built on biblically inspired beliefs. They represent themselves as a utopian community, free of violence, racism, homelessness, and other ills, social and otherwise, including homosexuality, AIDS, and cancer, which leaves the narrator

in utter disbelief: "Are they serious?" (213), he asks. The narrator expresses his skepticism and complete bewilderment regarding their attempt to create a viable diasporic community—a community that seems to be built on exclusionary notions of identity and on the controversial idea of reversing the exodus. Notably, irony pervades the descriptions of the community as Phillips observes the people of this self-isolated and "closed society" (275) who wander around in "strange brightly coloured costumes" (268). Phillips wonders, "Circus clowns? Uniforms?," and contends that "[t]his is not African dress; this is not local dress; this is the costume of a culture I do not understand" (268). To the narrator the people and their beliefs seem alien. Pointing to their isolation and statelessness, Phillips remarks, "They tell me they have come home. To a world that does not recognize them" (270). Their 'home,' as he notes, appears to be merely a crowded makeshift settlement of small tents in an inhospitable desert environment that is also "[a] military zone" with "[j]ets flying overhead" (270). The description of the settlement conjures an image of an isolated and crammed gathering of people who are disconnected from the outside world and the lived experiences of Black people in the present. The hostile and sinister landscape disrupts any purported claims and notions of home as a comfortable, inclusive, and secure space. Phillips's visit to the Hebrew Israelites prefigures that of Raboteau, but his observations are far more skeptical and critical than those of his successor.

For Phillips the establishment of a secluded community in the desert and the attempt to create a new culture based on the belief that the exodus has been reversed are misled efforts to expunge the complex history of the slave trade and enslavement in the Americas: "There were no round-trip tickets in your part of the ship. Exodus. It is futile to walk in the face of history. As futile to keep the dust from one's eyes in the desert" (*Atlantic Sound* 275). His comment suggests that "[m]etaphorically, walking into the face of history manifests the refusal to recognize history's multiplicity, instability, and continual presence in the present" (R. A. Meriwether 91). The community's engagement with history is, according to the narrator, a flawed attempt to revise history and to return to a point of origin. While the Hebrew Israelites seek to sever ties with the United States, leaving behind their former lives and thereby dissociating the past from the present, Phillips counters that "the past surges like a mighty river […]. It empties into the present" (*Atlantic Sound* 275). The image of water as a symbol for pluralist personal and collective histories and diverse Black cultural memories presents a stark contrast to the "[t]hirsty landscape" (267) of the dry, dusty Negev desert the Hebrew Israelites inhabit. Notably,

the absence of historical complexity is symbolized by the lack of water and leaves the narrator constantly thirsty and longing for it—"I am thirsty. I need to drink" (275). The narrator sees in the community's engagement with history a conscious erasure and ignorance of the complex and varied histories of the Black diaspora. Their creation of a narrative of triumphal return to the ancient homeland—as well as the proclamation of a reversal of the Middle Passage—is a misled effort to expunge the denigration of colonialism and enslavement and an attempt to distance themselves from the past. However, despite the community's effort to distance themselves from their former lives in the United States, reverse history, and 'return home' to an imagined ancient past, they carry their cultural baggage with them. This comes to the fore through their language as well as through their inherited sense of dislocation: "The United States in the blood of the elders. Confusion in the blood of the children. […] Burdensome cultural baggage" (275). The narrator thus concludes, "There is no closure. There will be no closure" (275).

"Home" is the title of the last chapter of *The Atlantic Sound*, which relates Phillips's trip to Charleston, South Carolina, where the narrator traces the obliterated history of the city as well as the story of one of its (in)famous citizens, the late Julius Waites Waring, a White judge who sought to secure voting rights for African Americans in the 1940s and 1950s. Phillips pieces together the story of Judge Waring and his second wife Elizabeth Waring by talking to their former acquaintances, among them a Black Charlestonian who was friends with the Warings, and physically tracing their path to the place where both were laid to rest, the Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston. Interwoven within the accounts of the Warings are excerpts of legal documents, *New York Post* articles, letters, and poems that supplement their story, which is a story of displacement, social alienation, and the loss of home. The Warings were ostracized by the White conservative elite of Charleston for their progressive ideals, their outspokenness, and their friendship with a Black woman. Eventually, the hostility and harassment they experienced caused them to leave their home for New York—"their 'exile'" (*Atlantic Sound* 263). As the narrator remarks, "It was simply too burdensome to be among those who openly hated you in a place you called 'home'" (255). Even the location of their grave, which is positioned at the fringe of the cemetery, points to their position as outcasts and exiles (262).

Phillips's retracing of the Warings's family history and their path into exile is paired with his search for another story that resonates with the themes of home and exile, namely the silenced history of African captives who, upon

arriving in Charleston, were quarantined in so-called "pest houses" located on Sullivan's Island before being brought to the mainland and sold at the slave marts (*Atlantic Sound* 232). Phillips wanders around the island and notes the following: "Sullivan's Island is an eerie and troubled place. Flat, marsh, grassland. An arrival in America. Having crossed the Atlantic in the belly of the ship. An arrival. Here, in America. […] Farewell Africa. Welcome to America" (257-58). In contrast to Ghana where the slave forts on the coast represent the point of departure of African captives, Charleston has no historical markers that commemorate the arrival of the enslaved Africans regardless of the fact that it is "one of the most significant sites in the United States: the place where over 30 per cent of the African population first landed in the North American world" (257). Despite the importance of the place as "[t]he black Ellis Island," "nobody has thought it necessary at least to speculate and mark a place with a monument or plaque" (257). Charleston appears akin to Liverpool in that the city ignores its past. Although material markers that point to the arrival of Africans at American shores are missing, Phillips discovers a different form of remembrance when he watches a group of young Black women dance at the Charleston Festival of African and Caribbean Art:

> Here, in the city which 'processed' nearly one-third of the African population which arrived in the United States, a population who were encouraged to forget Africa, to forget their language, to forget their families, to forget their culture, to forget their dance, five young black women try to remember. […] Their sinewy bodies weave invisible threads that connect them to the imagined old life. (264)

The women's dance suggests an act of remembrance that counters the pervasiveness of forgetting and the historical amnesia that Phillips notices in the city. The dance is a response to the enforced forgetting of home, family, language, and culture to which the narrator refers in his evocative account of the arrival of Africans in Charleston. The image of the dancing women—their bodies weaving invisible threads that connect them to the past—can be linked to the image of weaving sweetgrass, which is invoked earlier in the chapter when Phillips watches women selling sweetgrass baskets in the streets of Charleston (228). Commonly found in the South Carolina Lowcountry, the art of basket weaving is practiced by the descendants of enslaved people from West Africa and is among the oldest African American art forms in the United States (see Marshall 35-38). The technique of weaving is passed down through generations, resembling a connection to African cultural heritage and the

memory of slavery. Both basket weaving and dancing are dynamic ways to remember and engage with the past that differ decisively from the static and fixed nature of commemorative plaques and monuments. The narrative suggests that these alternative ways of remembering the past are possibly the most productive forms of acknowledging it.

Taking the title of Phillips's travelogue as a point of departure for a literary analysis of the book, as some scholars have done (see, for example, Ledent, "Ambiguous Visions" 201), one can draw a connection between the 'Atlantic sound' and the literary strategy of polyphony and intertextuality, which is employed in the narrative to reflect the diversity of themes and ideas that we 'hear' in the narrative. As Bennet puts it, "The open-endedness of the title invites the reader to sound the depths of the Atlantic's history and to listen for the resonance of the past in the present" (11). *The Atlantic Sound*'s inclusion of diverse perspectives—represented by the great variety of (inter)texts in the form of multifaceted literary and historical narratives, poems, legal texts, letters, and speeches—alludes to the "polyphony of voices that account for the intricate experience of the African diaspora" (Pulitano 80). The sound of the Atlantic—the roaring and rumbling of the waves as well as the silent and calming sounds of the sea—evokes the many stories, memories, and experiences of diasporic people who populate the geographical and historical terrain of the Black Atlantic and are presented in Phillips's travel narrative. Giving voice to stories that are often unheard, to those excluded from historical records, the narrative "revises and refashions established perspectives and allows the author to sound/speak forcibly his opinions and perspectives; it sounds/tests/probes his connectedness and in all of this allows him to 'sound'/pronounce that, even in the face of history, the world is still not sound/right" (Miller Powell 99). Presenting diverse and often conflicting perspectives, opinions, attitudes, and versions of history, Phillips's travelogue rejects a singular, authoritative narrative of the history of the African diaspora. Instead of speaking with one authoritative voice and from one position, the narrative gives room to include multiple and opposing perspectives by integrating the opinions of fellow travelers, interviewees, travel guides, as well as historical.

In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips travels in the material and textual traces of historical and contemporary diasporic subjects to recover stories of the past in different locations, make history tangible, and counter the forgetting of the cultural memory of the slave trade. By exploring the legacies of enslavement and colonialism on contemporary diasporic lives, he establishes novel links

between the past and the present, the personal and the collective, and the local and the transnational and thus incites us to critically examine how history is remembered or forgotten. Phillips retrieves, rewrites, and revises simplistic narratives of the past. He allows those who are elided from historical accounts to speak and underscores that there is no singular historical narrative but instead plural, contradicting versions of the past. Moreover, *The Atlantic Sound* points to an ethical, social, and political responsibility to remember the past and understand the implications of displacement and the legacies of the slave trade and colonialism. Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*, the travelogue I turn to next, reflects similar concerns.

4.2 Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007)

Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*, which historian Robin D. Kelley calls a "landmark text" in his praise for the book, is a multi-layered travel narrative that skillfully interweaves the author's personal account of travel with autobiographical writing, historiography, critical theory, and fiction to examine the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies in the United States and Ghana. Appropriately enough, Hartman's travelogue was published in 2007, the year that marked the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade throughout the British Empire. An African American literary scholar, writer, and cultural historian, Hartman has extensively researched and written on the topic of slavery. *Lose Your Mother* is based on Hartman's year-long stay in Ghana as a Fulbright Scholar in the late 1990s, where she conducted research on the memory of slavery. The narrative recounts her visits to sites of memory, places associated with the slave trade, such as the slave forts with their dungeons and prisons on the Ghanaian coast, and the slave markets and villages in Ghana's hinterland. Against the backdrop of her journey, the narrative offers Hartman's meditations on the historical atrocities of the slave trade, its legacies, and the effects on the present-day lives of Black people.

Hartman's 'journey along the Atlantic slave route,' as I illustrate in my analysis of the travelogue, represents a retracing of historical routes. The narrator's interrogation of historically significant sites is coupled with her inquiry into the silenced and forgotten histories of the slave trade as well as with an examination of conflicting cultural memories of slavery in Ghana and the United States. Her journey and her writing are a means to reconstruct the experiences of enslaved Africans, the strangers, whose traces have mostly van-

ished and whose names and stories have been lost to history. Traveling across Ghana, the narrator seeks to retrace their paths from Africa to the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean, hoping to find remnants of the past in the slave forts and dungeons, so as to recover and recreate the lost stories and "to represent the lives of those deemed unworthy of remembering" (*Lose* 16). Hartman's writing shows that she does so in a self-critical manner, displaying a high level of introspection and self-reflexivity throughout her narrative.

Like Phillips's journey in *The Atlantic Sound*, which follows the paths of displaced people across a Black Atlantic geography to capture the multifaceted experiences and histories of diasporic people, Hartman's journey to Ghana is her effort to literally and symbolically retrace the historical slave routes that traverse the country: the paths of Africans who were captured by slave raiders and led from the Ghanaian hinterland to the Atlantic coast to be sold off and shipped away. In the prologue titled "The Path of Strangers," she relates that by following the routes that thousands of enslaved Africans were forced to walk, she sought "to reclaim the dead, […] to reckon with the lives undone and obliterated in the making of human commodities" (*Lose* 6). This effort, however, was complicated by the fact that the traces she tried to follow had largely vanished. In the narrative, she thus travels to excavate the stories of the unknown and dispossessed, who were violently uprooted from their native land and who are forgotten and largely absent from the historical archives because they "left behind no traces" (15). Enslavement, Hartman contends, turned people into strangers whose social ties were broken apart. She expounds that "[t]he most universal definition of the slave is a stranger. Torn from kin and community, exiled from one's country, dishonored and violated, the slave defines the position of the outsider. She is the perpetual outcast, the coerced migrant, the foreigner, the shameful child in the lineage" (5). The loss of kin, community, and home—the 'mother loss' to which the title points—continues to haunt the Black diaspora.

Hartman approaches the subject of slavery from the perspective of an academic, which is reflected in the meticulously researched accounts she provides as well as in the incorporation of references and secondary literature. But she also reveals her personal investment with the subject matter that incites her travel to Ghana and her research: Positioning herself as a "slave baby" (*Lose* 4), a descendant of enslaved Africans whose personal story is entangled with the larger history of enslavement and dispossession in the United States, her journey to Ghana is a very personal one. Her desire to recover the traces and stories of the captives is connected to her own history because her fam-

ily trail leads into the anonymous history of slavery and disappears. Since there are no distant relatives she can hope to find in Ghana, the possibility of searching for roots and family genealogies is foreclosed. These genealogical voids are paralleled with the absence of histories of the slave trade in Ghana. Hartman's quest for the lost and forgotten memories of strangers, therefore, is also a symbolical inquiry into her own history. Moreover, the desire to excavate stories of the past derives from the narrator's feelings of statelessness, dispossession, and unbelonging. As a descendant of enslaved Africans, she has inherited the status of the stranger and outsider that produces notions of alienation and exclusion. In Ghana, her outer appearance, including the way she walks, talks, and dresses, marks her as "*Obruni*. A stranger. A foreigner from across the sea" (3). She feels a sense of exclusion that is similar to her experience of estrangement and alienation in the United States, her home country. Casting herself as the perennial stranger, the narrator discloses, "I didn't belong anyplace. […] I was born in another country, where I also felt like an alien and which in part determined why I had come to Ghana. I had grown weary of being stateless. Secretly I wanted to belong somewhere" (4). Significantly, her journey testifies to her desire to find an alternative place of belonging, notwithstanding the fact that she forcefully rejects the notion of Africa as a homeland.

Lose Your Mother reveals contrasting impulses that are characteristic of Black travel writing about Africa: On the one hand, Hartman's journey to Ghana reflects her wish to discover Africa as "a world less racist than the one from which [she] came" (*Lose* 56) and her yearning "for a country in which [her] inheritance would amount to more than dispossession and in which [she] would no longer feel like a problem" (57). On the other hand, she acknowledges that this desire for Africa stems from the diasporic vision of the continent as an imagined homeland for African-descended people. It is a utopian vision—an "Afrotopia," as the title of the chapter suggests in which she critically engages with the tradition of Black American travel to Ghana in the post-independence period. Scrutinizing earlier travelers' attempt to find in Africa a "Promised Land," "a place where the color line didn't exist" (39), Hartman admits, "the dreams of the émigrés were part of my inheritance, which I couldn't entirely shake loose, no matter how hard I tried" (46). Notably, Hartman's contemplations recall Raboteau's motivation for traveling in *Searching for Zion*. Raboteau's journeys are fueled by her search for a Promised Land despite her realization that the idea of Zion is elusive and that it is not to be found in a physical locale. While Hartman situates her journey as well as her writing

within the tradition of African American engagement with Ghana—after all, her trip to Ghana represents a traveling in the traces of the Black émigrés and sojourners who came before her—she also writes against this tradition. She arrives in Ghana in "an age not of dreaming but disenchantment" (38), knowing that "[u]topias always have entailed disappointments and failures" (46). It is precisely the utopian vision of Africa, prone to disillusionment, that Hartman discards. For her, the idea of gaining freedom and finding a homeland in Africa cannot be sustained. In this regard, the title of the book can be read as an imperative phrase directed at her African diasporic readers that urges them to "lose your mother"—that is, "to abandon the notion of return to an African motherland, to give up on artificially constructed memories and invented rituals of recovery" (Newman 1).

The desire to find in Africa a place to belong is juxtaposed with the narrator's realization that "Black life was even more expendable in Africa than in the United States" and that she continues to be perceived as a stranger, unable to lose herself "in the sea of black faces and experienc[e] the intimacy of anonymity of the crowd" (*Lose* 57). The criticism Hartman voices with regard to the utopian visions of a Black homeland and the desire to return to Africa accords with that of Phillips's in *The Atlantic Sound*. Both writers caution against such ideologies of return that are based upon a singular version of the past. They shed light on the dreams of diasporic returnees and Black émigrés and their engagement with only one historical narrative, which offers little ground for solidarity and a sustained connection between Africans and African-descended people. As *Lose Your Mother* delineates, diasporic returnees' embrace of 'Mother Africa' in the mid-twentieth century was based on a flawed perspective on history. They crafted a revisionist narrative that aimed to restore dignity and provide a remedy to the divestment of the dispossessed: "In trying to reverse the course of history, eradicate the degradation of slavery and colonialism, vindicate the race, they looked to the great civilizations of ancient Africa" (40). Preferring the romance of diaspora to the tragedy of slavery, they imagined a noble African past and chose to believe in a fantasy of return that came at the expense of acknowledging the past in its full breadth. Hartman points to Maya Angelou's travel narrative *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* as an example of how diasporic returnees could only embrace Africa as a homeland by avoiding engagement with the complex history of the slave trade. In her 1986 account of her stay in Ghana during the Nkrumah era, Angelou confesses that she initially refused to visit the slave forts on the West African coast, deliberately ignoring the fact that Africans

were complicit in the trade. As Hartman notes, "eluding the slave past was the prerequisite to belonging" (42). In contrast to Angelou, who could only feel a sense of belonging in Africa by clinging to an idealized image of the continent and by disregarding African involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, Hartman condemns Black returnees' desire to belong that is predicated on ignoring the complexities of history.

Therefore, Hartman's engagement with the history of slavery and the Black diaspora differs decisively from the dominant vision of many Black travelers who came to Ghana before her. Whereas they "desired a monumental history and hungered for a grand narrative" (*Lose* 40), a trope that one can trace in Isaiah Washington's narrative and his engagement with his African heritage (especially his claim that he is a descendant of the courageous Sengbe Pieh, the leader of the *Amistad* rebellion), Hartman seeks to uncover a different narrative of the past. Consciously positioning her work in opposition to Haley's *Roots*, she does not come to Africa to search for her African *roots* but for the *routes* of African captives. Moreover, she also defies the idea of returning to an ancestral village (as Haley did) and instead visits the barracoons, slave dungeons, and prisons:

> Unlike Alex Haley, who embraced the sprawling clans of Juffure as his own, grafted his family into the community's genealogy, and was feted as the lost son returned, I traveled to Ghana in search of the expandable and the defeated. I had not come to marvel at the wonders of African civilization or to be made proud by the royal court of Asante […] I was not wistful for aristocratic origins. Instead I would seek the commoners, the unwilling and coerced migrants who created a new culture in the hostile world of the Americas and who fashioned themselves again, making possibility out of dispossession. (*Lose* 7)

Hartman's travelogue counters the triumphant and redemptive story that works such as *Roots* offer. While Haley conjured a mythical African past in his narrative, "the Africa of royals and great states" (30) that many Black travelers were eager to claim, Hartman rejects such a redemptive story. Instead of clinging to an ancient royal past or trying to escape "the ghosts of slavery" (42), as Angelou attempted, Hartman seeks to disinter these ghosts. Her aim is to listen to their silenced voices and to trace the routes of "the expandable and the defeated," "the commoners, the unwilling and coerced migrants" (7) to unearth the remnants of slavery. Crucially, positioning her project in contrast to Haley's, Hartman explained in a conversation with Nancy K.

Miller that her text is "an anti-*Roots* narrative" ("Memoirs" 112). However, she also discloses, "Like every oppositional narrative, *Lose Your Mother* is haunted by the thing it writes against—the desire for home" (113). Her statement points to an important characteristic of many Black travel narratives, namely the paradox, or tension, that arises from a desire for roots, return, and home (that is often the primary reason for journeying to Africa) and the realization that this desire cannot be satisfied, that return does not yield closure.

The journey to Ghana and Hartman's search for 'strangers' is a way to examine the imbrications of the past and the present as well as the contemporary racism she experiences and witnesses. Inhabiting the position of the perennial outsider whose sense of disconnection and exclusion is an inheritance of the legacy of slavery, she writes, "Being a stranger concerns not only matters of familiarity, belonging, and exclusion but as well involves a particular relation to the past" (*Lose* 17). The narrative underscores her intimate relation to the past by representing her mobile Black body as the symbolical bridge between the past and the present. Through her body, upon which the slave past is written ("Old and new worlds stamped my face, a blend of peoples and nations and masters and slaves long forgotten," 3-4), she makes the pertinence of the past in the present palpable. In an interview, the author expounded that "the journey through time and space is a device, a vehicle, a formal means to exist in the physical landscape of slavery and to embody that history and to carry it" (Saunders 9). The narrator uses her corporality to project onto it a history of loss and dispossession; her body is a living human remnant of the history of slavery, a "vehicle" and "host of history" (5) that many have tried to forget: "If the past is another country, then I am its citizen. I am the relic of an experience most preferred not to remember […]. I am a reminder that twelve million crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the past is not yet over," writes the narrator (*Lose* 17-18). Representing herself as the living testimony of the slave past, the embodiment of a history that has been silenced, Hartman highlights the proximity of past and present and, importantly, foregrounds slavery as a crucial, present-day political issue, not something of the past.

To expose the enduring impact of the past on the current historical moment and incite reflections of its consequences, Hartman employs the phrase "the afterlife of slavery" (*Lose* 6), which refers to legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and enslavement, in particular their effects on present-day Black lives. In an oft-cited passage, she explains,

> If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery. (6)

The conceptualization of slavery's afterlife offers an opportunity to understand and rethink the persistent impact of the slave past that characterizes the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Hartman dispels the myth of a post-racial or colorblind society, endorsing that the systems and dynamics installed during slavery continue to inform the present moment. For this reason, she argues that it is impossible to understand the precarious condition of Black life in the United States today without considering the history of slavery and its legacy. In line with contemporary Black studies scholarship, Hartman counters the simplified linearity that frames narratives of historical progress—rejecting the redemptive slavery-to-freedom narrative and instead presenting herself as a witness to the continuing forms of oppression.

Notably, Hartman's engagement with the past and the history of slavery serves a particular purpose: It is neither an attempt to claim African roots nor the result of "an antiquarian obsession with bygone days," as she remarks in the above quote. Instead, her scholarly journey into the past as well as her research and writing have a political dimension. "To what end," Hartman asks, "does one conjure the ghost of slavery, if not to incite the hopes of transforming the present?" (*Lose* 170). She calls for societal transformation and emphasizes the need to investigate the past in order to create a vision for a future and a more just society. Exposing the devastating consequences of enslavement, segregation, and racism and highlighting the ongoing struggle against oppression, Hartman articulates "[t]he demands of the slave on the present;" these demands "have everything to do with making good the promise of abolition, and this entails much more than the end of property in slaves. It requires the *reconstruction of society*, which is the only way to honor our debt to the dead" (170; emphasis added). Calling for a joint political commitment to eradicate continuing forms of slavery, *Lose Your Mother* continues the tradition of Black travel writing as a means to intervene in the discourses of racism, exploitation, and oppression—an aspect of travel writing that Arana identifies as a "revolutionary act" ("A Kaleidoscopic Genre" 1). Seen in this way, Hartman's

travel writing serves to express radical social criticism and to promote societal change. Her travelogue, therefore, "emerges as a protest narrative that centralizes the unfulfilled dream of black emancipation and liberation" as it turns "to the past of loss and despair in order to reflect on the present" (Nehl 90-91).

Driven by the wish to recover the slave past and to incite change and transformation in the present, Hartman ventures on a journey that is at once physical and historical. That this is not an easy task is made clear from the very beginning. Self-reflexively, the narrative problematizes her "quixotic mission" (*Lose* 17), that is, the search for records of African captives who left no traces. From the very beginning of her time in Ghana, the narrator remains acutely aware of the limitations and the potential failure of her project to excavate the stories of strangers and "reclaim the dead" (6). Drawing attention to the elusive nature of her goals, she wonders, "how does one write a story about an encounter with nothing?" (16). Connecting this project to her unsuccessful attempt to reconstruct the lives of her ancestors when she was young, she notes that even then she was forced to recognize that "fill[ing] in the blank spaces of the story" is a problematic endeavor (12). Indeed, "[t]he gaps and silences of [her] family were not unusual: slavery made the past a mystery, unknown and unspeakable" (13-14). Her efforts to learn more about her own past are thwarted by members of her family who abstain from talking about the past and "erected a wall of half-truths and silences between themselves and the past" (15). Similarly, the people she meets in Ghana either avoid the subject of slavery or present a sanitized version of the past with the purpose of turning it into a tourist attraction and a lucrative business: "Every town or village had an atrocity to promote—a mass grave, an auction block, a slave river, a massacre" (163). In this regard, "'Remembering slavery' became potent means of silencing the past in the very guise of preserving it" because the singular narrative told about the past "effectively curbed all discussion of African slavery and its entailments—class exploitation, gender inequality, ethnic clashes, and regional conflict" (164). The Ghanaians' engagement with history presents a sharp contrast to her attempt to gain a fuller understanding of it. Their tendency to forget slavery complicates Hartman's mission.

Hartman's desire to excavate the stories of "people who left behind no traces" (*Lose* 15) and to search for "the remnants of those who had vanished" (17) results from the lack of historical evidence in the archival records. In most accounts of the slave trade, Black people exist only in or merely as statistics. Hartman continuously draws attention to the limitations of the official histor-

ical archive of slavery: "The archive contained what you would expect: the manifests of slavers; ledger books of trade goods; inventories of foodstuffs; bills of sale; itemized lists of bodies alive, infirm, and dead; captains' logs; planters' diaries" (17). These material archives, Hartman shows, are not comprehensive repositories but rather reveal further silences and blank slates. Due to the limits of the archive, Hartman registers and critiques the preoccupation of academics and scholars with the calculation and estimation of the numerical aspects of the slave trade. The quantitative evidence and the "algebraic formulas," however, "obscured the disaster: Deck Area = Constant X (Tonnage) 2/3" (32). This kind of record yields no insights into the individual stories of the captives and neither does it restore their humanity. Instead, the quantitative data buries the names and stories of people and thereby dehumanizes them. Reimagining the experiences of the people who were rendered silent is Hartman's attempt to counter the "violence of abstraction" (Saunders 5), that is, the destructive and dehumanizing effects of transforming human life into statistical ciphers.[30]

Longing to hear the stories of captives, the narrator immerses herself in the physical sites of memory. However, not only the archives and historical records of slavery are devoid of the stories of enslaved people but also the sites Hartman visits. In the dungeon of Cape Coast Castle, she discovers that "there were remains but no stories that could resurrect the dead except the stories [she] invented" (*Lose* 116). In the dungeon, she tries to listen for the "groans and cries […] but the space was mute" (116). Neither listening nor touching the physical remains reveals any stories: "My hand glided over the walls, as though the rough surfaces were a script that I could read through my dull fingers. But the brush of my hands against the stone offered no hint or clue" (119). The silence in the dungeon points to her complicated mission to conjure into existence the nameless and faceless people from the findings that

30 For the past decades, historians have sought to write a subjective human history of the slave trade by focusing on personal stories of the lives of African captives. This is an attempt to counter the violence of abstraction produced by the quantitative evidence that risks to further dehumanize the enslaved people. Reflecting this shift in perspective, works such as Marcus Rediker's *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (2007) and Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (2007) revise the dominant discourse on slavery that too often measures the gravity of the slave trade in terms of quantifiable data. Hartman's narrative also addresses the need to supplement the quantitative evidence with personal stories of people to account for and comprehend the enormity of the loss created by the slave trade.

are accessible in slavery's material archive. In a similar vein, she also recognizes that even the museum of the castle does not provide insights into the enslaved Africans' lives: "Even in the museum, the slaves were missing. None of their belongings were arranged nicely in well-lit glass cases. […] None of their sayings were quoted on placards throughout the hall" (116).

Hartman's journey and her literary record thereof can therefore be understood as a response to the silence of the dungeon, the blankness of the documents in the archive, the silences in her family's past, and the omission of more complex narratives about slavery in Ghana. According to the narrator, the voids of the archive of slavery produce the need for reimagining and reinventing stories. The absence of records of the experiences of the enslaved incites the narrator's reimagining of what is left out. On various occasions in the book, Hartman reimagines the stories of enslaved people in an attempt to invoke the dead. Thus, her project is not limited by the aim to retrieve and preserve forgotten stories of the past. Rather, in an effort to counter the erasure and the silences, she creatively rewrites and reconstructs such stories.

One such story is that of an enslaved young woman murdered aboard the British slave ship *Recovery*—one of the many silenced voices of marginalized and oppressed people who were elided from history. The chapter titled "The Dead Book" (a reference to a journal that was used to keep record of the captives who died on board the slave ship) is placed at the center of Hartman's travel narrative and presents a multi-perspective account of the story of the unnamed young woman (see also Nehl 104-07). Split into different sections, each of which focalizes a different historical actor, the chapter produces a speculative account of the events that took place aboard the *Recovery* and that led to the woman's death. Drawing on her imagination and the historical records, namely the transcript of a trial held against the captain of the slave ship, John Kimber, in 1792 and a speech given by abolitionist William Wilberforce who accused Kimber of murder, Hartman reconstructs and rewrites the woman's story. This story is, in the broadest sense, a fictionalized travel narrative that is told from different perspectives, including that of Captain Kimber, the third mate, and the ship's surgeon. But while the testimonies of the captain, the surgeon, and the abolitionist in the trial transcript represent the only record of the woman's existence, their words, as Hartman stresses, "killed her a second time and consigned her to the bottom of the Atlantic" (*Lose* 138). She therefore devotes the last part of the narrative to the woman, endowing her account with significance and subverting earlier versions of the incident.

Hartman's fictionalized account thus serves as a counter-narrative that challenges the White male perspectives.

The chapter "The Dead Book" presents a complex intertwinement of different narrative voices and perspectives and transgresses the boundaries between fictional and factual historical accounts. In her article "Venus in Two Acts" (2008), Hartman expounds on her method of rewriting the stories of enslaved people: She employs the term "critical fabulation" to describe her writing practice, which is a narrative and aesthetic strategy that merges historical writing, archival research, and fictional narratives to address and redress the gaps and silences of the archive (Hartman, "Venus" 11-12). Contemplating the engagement of scholars with the archive of slavery and the challenges resulting from the absence of records, the authors of *The Silence of the Archive* (2017) write the following:

> How have researchers responded to the absence or inaccessibility of the archives? […] Some have simply imagined the missing records, while others have gone further and fictionalized them, producing novelistic accounts or even virtual-reality versions of what might have existed. Writers of the slave trade who suffer from an almost total lack of written sources about individual slaves are well known as users of these approaches. (Thomas et al. 117)

The questions that arise from these statements refer to the (im)possibilities of countering the silences of the archive by reimagining, recreating, and representing the records that were lost or never existed in the first place. Notably, *Lose Your Mother* is concerned with these very questions.

The fictionalized account portrays the nameless woman as a strong and determined character despite the violence inflicted upon her body and soul. Asserting control over her body, she refuses to eat and speak and finally resolves to die. Evoking the legend of the flying African, Hartman imagines that the woman "had discovered a way off the ship" and was "on her way home" (*Lose* 152). The woman's return to her home, however, is only possible in the imagination—in Hartman's speculative account. Accordingly, the chapter's closing paragraph defies hopeful notions of redemption and closure:

> If the story ended there, I could feel a small measure of comfort. I could hold on to this instant of possibility. I could find a salutary lesson in the girl's suffering and pretend a story was enough to save her from oblivion. I could sigh

> with relief and say, 'It all happened so long ago.' Then I could wade into the Atlantic and not think of the *dead book*. (153)

The use of the conditional tense in the paragraph signals the impossibility of recovering the dead and finding closure. The narrative dramatizes the delusion and failure inherent in Hartman's project of reconstructing and reimagining the lives of those who were silenced and invisibilized, thus suggesting that there is no working through or overcoming the trauma created by enslavement. Hartman's reconstructed account of the anonymous woman's story is an attempt "to remedy the slave's oblivion" (135), but it cannot repair the loss or heal the trauma. Rejecting the idea of "the slave girl's 'resurrection' through revisionist narratives that would utilize her as a teachable moment for present-day aims" (Woodard 5), Hartman suggests that the wounds inflicted by slavery cannot be healed.

Leaving the question of representability unanswered, Hartman is critical of her own wish to give a voice to the voiceless and to represent that which seems irrepresentable. Representational practices, she posits, can be responsible for producing and reproducing Black suffering and death. Therefore, the question that concerns Hartman is whether it is possible or desirable to represent the experiences of the enslaved and how such accounts can be reimagined from the vantage point of the twenty-first century. She self-reflexively explores the risks that such a reappropriation of stories and lives entails and draws attention to the conceptual, aesthetic, and ethical challenges in representing slavery.[31] In doing so, she scrutinizes the implications of representing the past and the linguistic limitations. Thereby, *Lose Your Mother* invokes a question posed in Toni Morrison's classic neo-slave narrative *Beloved*: "how can I say things that are pictures" (248). Hartman likewise asks how the woman's

31 Writers of fiction, in particular authors of neo-slave narratives, are confronted with the question of representation. Literary scholar Yogita Goyal explains that "the subject of slavery forces a confrontation with key literary questions: how to write absence into presence, how to attain the semblance of historical truth in light of the silences of the archive, and how to transforms loss into neither survival nor transcendence, but a reckoning" (148). These narratives creatively negotiate the question of representation and stress "the impossibility of ever being able to know the truth of slavery" (148). For an insightful analysis of the risks inherent in representing slavery in contemporary Black literature, see also Markus Nehl's *Transnational Black Dialogues: Re-Imagining Slavery in the Twenty-First Century* (2016).

story can be represented without transforming her death into a story of survival that caters to the naive wish to overcome and heal the wounds of slavery. The problems that such a project entails, she remarks, are those of repeating the objectification, suffering, and humiliation that Black people have experienced.[32] In self-reflexively fashion, Hartman reckons with her personal and scholarly desire to research and engage with the history of enslavement; she also demonstrates her awareness that filling in the blank spaces in the archive of slavery is a difficult project that risks committing further acts of violence. She illustrates the limits of her writerly project and addresses the problematic attempt to rewrite and reimage the enslaved people's lives and their voices. Hartman leaves open whether trauma can or should be represented, but she makes clear that it cannot be given closure and it cannot bring healing or reconciliation.

Throughout the narrative, Hartman displays a highly critical stance regarding her own limited and even compromised perspective as a traveler, researcher, and writer. She employs the metaphor of blindness to address her lack of critical insight and to scrutinize her assumptions and projections. In her astute analysis of *Lose Your Mother*, Tisha M. Brooks draws attention to the critical vision that Hartman exhibits throughout her narrative, contending that Hartman uses "tropes of blindness and sight in order to challenge traditional Western conceptions of vision, as well as conceptions of light and dark" (63). Darkness—often used in Western travel writing as a metaphor for the alleged irrationality, backwardness, and savagery of African populations that is presented as an antithesis to the 'enlightened' West—is introduced as a reality in the text: In the chapter "The Dark Days," Hartman relates her nightly wanderings through her neighborhood in Accra when the electricity

32 In her acclaimed book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997), Hartman addresses the dangers inherent in reproducing the "terrible spectacles" in the literature of slavery, such as the beating of Aunt Hester in Douglass's 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. She points out that "[r]ather than inciting indignation, too often they immure us to pain by virtue of their familiarity […] and especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering" (3). Hartman therefore refrains from representing the "terrible spectacles," making it her task "to look elsewhere and consider those scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned" (for example, the dances performed by enslaved people in their quarters) in order "to illuminate the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle" (4).

was turned off. Here, the darkness becomes a way for her to be more attentive to the things around her. She explores the neighborhood, now conscious of the people who populate it but whom she failed to notice during the day, such as the beggars, street children, refugees, soldiers, derelicts, and sleepwalkers (*Lose* 176). The darkness does indeed offer new possibilities for seeing the world around her and introduces her "to the multitude outside the circle of light" (176-77). Significantly, the trope of 'dark Africa' is subverted as she embraces the darkness caused by the blackout. Countering perceptions that Accra is dangerous and unsafe at night, she compares her comfort walking around the city with her fear of being robbed or assaulted in the streets of New York or Oakland (174). Hartman acknowledges her initial failure to see and notice things and draws attention to her flawed and limited perception: "I lived in darkness, not the darkness of African inscrutability or the gloomy cast of a benighted landscape but rather in a blind alley of my own making, in the deep hole of my ignorance" (174). Importantly, Accra's darkness is transformed into a metaphor for her shortsightedness and her compromised perception of Africa at large.

Hartman's exploration of the dark neighborhood functions to scrutinize her position as traveler, researcher, and writer. The narrative points to the fact that her journey is, at least to some extent, a continuation of Western (colonial) travel to Africa and that she follows in the footsteps of explorers of the nineteenth century: "I was self-conscious about my flashlight and feared it was the equivalent of the pith helmet worn by colonial administrators. Illuminating the world seemed like an act of violence, when everyone else was willing to fare in darkness" (*Lose* 174). Evoking the physical and symbolic violence that defined the traveling practice of colonial explorers and missionaries who set out to bring 'light' to 'dark Africa,' Hartman observes how her flashlight "stabbed through darkness and haphazardly entered intimate spaces" (175). Being aware that she is a participant in the tradition of Western travel to Africa and writing about the continent, Hartman subverts and challenges the position of the traveler-writer who claims knowledge and authority based on their ability to see. Writing back to colonial travel narratives, she unmasks the connection between sight/vision and discourses of power, knowledge, and appropriation in representations of travel.[33] She challenges the privileging of sight when she notes,

33 For a concise account of the privileging of sight in representations of travel and its implication with discourses of power, see Topping 283-85.

> In Western philosophy, knowledge has been conceived of primarily as an ocular function. To know is to see and to see is the inception of thought. […] Not being able to see clearly is tantamount to ignorance, and since early modernity the ignorance of the West had been projected onto Africa—the *heart of darkness*, the dark continent, the blighted territory.
> *But I knew better*. My flashlight was a defense not against dark, dark Africa but against my own compromised sight, my own thickheadedness. I had been in Ghana nearly half a year and I barely understood the world around me. […] I had found no stories. (174-75; emphasis added)

Importantly, as Brooks points out, Hartman "knows better" than "to project her own blindness onto Africa" and critically turns her gaze "inward to expose her own interior failings, flaws, and limitations" (66). By disassociating the sense of vision from the notion of objectivity, knowledge, and truth, the travelogue subverts traditional perceptions of the traveler. Hartman's critical engagement with the genre's history and conventions—in particular, the representation of the traveler as authoritative and knowledgeable, travel writing's claim to authenticity, and the 'dark continent' rhetoric that has defined discourses on Africa—demonstrate her struggle to inscribe herself in representations of travel. Hartman points to an understanding of seeing and perceiving as dependent on the individual's perspective and critically reflects on her viewing practice. Aware of the history and tradition of travel writing, Hartman—like Phillips and other authors of innovative travel narratives—transforms the genre as she carves out new forms of representing her experience in Africa. She recognizes the "need to be sensitive to multiple points of view, polyphonic voices, fluid conceptions of language and nuanced relationships to place while still allowing these perspectives to defy authority and remain tentative, in motion" (Edwards and Graulund, *Mobility at Large* 200). Hartman, therefore, "embraces multiplicity, complexity, and even contradiction over the ease of simplistic binaries at the heart of singular narratives" (Brooks 65) and explores the different and often conflicting narratives of the slave trade in the United States and Ghana. Throughout the journey, the narrator discovers that slavery is remembered differently by the people she encounters and in the places she visits, thereby drawing attention to the diverse cultural memories of slavery.

The journey along the slave routes leads Hartman to Gwolu, a village in the Ghanaian hinterland—"the heartland of slavery" (*Lose* 232)—that is the last stop on her tour and recounted at the end of the narrative. Delving into the

history of the village, the narrative relates the story of the people of Gwolu, the descendants of warriors and refugees, who successfully defended themselves against the slave raids. Hartman notes in surprise that "[t]heir story of slavery was a narrative of victory, a tale of resistance and overcoming" (233). In Gwolu, refugees from different regions who fled the slave raiders came together and became known as "the Sisala, which means 'to come together, to become together, to weave together'" (225). Although they came from different cultures, spoke different languages, and had different histories, they were bound together by their struggle to survive. Together, they created a future for themselves, establishing new traditions and building a community based on solidarity and freedom, not predicated on ethnicity: "'We' was the collectivity they built from the ground up, not one they had inherited, not one that others had imposed" (225). The story of the Sisala is a coming together of strangers—an embrace of differences and a creation of unity that derived from the common struggle for freedom and the fight against predators. While for Hartman, a descendant of enslaved Africans, the story of slavery is connected to subjugation, disinheritance, displacement, and oppression, the narratives revolving around slavery present a different picture for many of those who stayed behind. Discovering different legacies of the slave trade, she notes that for the descendants of Africans who had survived the slave raids, capture, and deportation, the memories and stories of the trade were decisively different than those told by the descendants of survivors in the Americas: "those who stayed behind told different stories than the children of the captives dragged across the sea. Theirs wasn't a memory of loss or of captivity, but of survival and good fortune" (232).

In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman undermines her assumption—and that of her readers—that the story of slavery revolves only around the people who were captured, sold, and carried across the Atlantic. While she expected to find another story of dispossession and defeat, she discovers a story of freedom, survival, and triumph in Gwolu instead. The history of the Sisala is a "narrative of liberation" (*Lose* 232) that presents an antithesis to the "history of defeat" (233) that the narrator had internalized. Recounting the Sisala's narrative of triumph and perseverance, Hartman subverts the hegemony of the American story of slavery that centers on the captives who were violently uprooted and forced to leave their homes and that ignores the narratives of the ones who stayed behind. Consequently, she incorporates the story of liberation into the narrative of the slave trade thereby complicates her own understanding of the past and the cultural memory of slavery. Signaling a shift

in perspective, the narrator discloses, "I had been waiting to hear the story with which I was already familiar," but "in listening to my story I had almost missed theirs" (233). Recognizing the different stories that comprise the history of the slave trade, *Lose Your Mother* problematizes singular narratives of the past and acknowledges that different contexts and perspectives shape the visions and versions of this history.

Importantly, Hartman creates a vision for future diasporic engagement with Africa based on this realization. Her ability to envision diasporic engagement distinguishes her from many of the other travelers whose narratives are discussed in this study. Africa, for Hartman, is not something that only defined and shaped her past; rather, it is part of her future: "At the end of my journey, I knew that Africa wasn't dead to me, nor was it just a grave. My future was entangled with it, just as it was entangled with every other place on the globe where people were struggling to live and hoping to thrive" (*Lose* 233). Crucially, the engagement she envisions is not rooted in a shared history, an ancient African past, or the idea of Africa as home. Knowing that the past is remembered differently in Africa and America, she asserts that the history of slavery "provided little ground for solidarity" (165) between Black people from different sides of the Atlantic Ocean. What defines Black peoples' relations and also their communities are heterogeneity and difference; for this reason, she argues that kinship and solidarity do not derive from a shared past. Instead, she finds inspiration in the narrative of the Sisala and understands that transnational diasporic connections stem from the shared fight for freedom. Her vision of future diasporic relations is thus informed by the "ongoing struggle to escape, to stand down, and defeat slavery in all of its myriad forms" (234). Hartman articulates a political project of resistance to ongoing forms of oppression that is built on solidarity. Her affiliation with Africa is thus productively oriented toward the future.

Lose Your Mother belongs to a strand of Black travel writing that Commander defines as post-civil-rights Black American literature about homeland returns, that is, "experimental texts whose methodology relies on fragmentation and uncertainty to portray the diasporan condition" (54.) Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* likewise fits this strand of writing. The two travel narratives by Hartman and Phillips demonstrate the fruitfulness of exploring the narrow and diffuse space that divides factual and fictional travel writing to talk about the Black diaspora. Their works display an intensive engagement with the past and its effects on contemporary Black lives. Tracing the geographical and historical routes of enslaved Africans, migrants, exiles, emigrationists, and diasporic

returnees, the writers use their travel narratives to explore the current condition of the African diaspora. Furthermore, both narratives are concerned with recovering the voices silenced by history and offering multifaceted stories of the past that challenge monolithic historical narratives. They do so using a variety of narrative strategies—merging, for example, fictional and non-fictional accounts, autobiographical and memoir writing, and historical scholarship—and thereby stretch the generic boundaries of travel writing.