Intersecting Memories of the Holocaust and Colonialism:
Caryl Phillips’s *The Nature of Blood* and André Schwarz-Bart’s *La Mulâtresse Solitude*

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1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the Second World War theoretical questions raised about how to think about the Holocaust. A debate on the possibilities of Holocaust uniqueness or comparability was born. Max Silverman argues that while it was harder for “the post-war generation of theorists not to relativize or universalize but to seek for overlaps and tease out similarities and differences” between different events of historical suffering, cultural practitioners such as writers and filmmakers “are not bound by the same constraints as historians and sociologists” (418). Writers such as Caryl Phillips and André Schwarz-Bart are free from restrictions in juxtaposing the suffering of different racial and historical groups. Phillips in his novel *The Nature of Blood* and Schwarz-Bart in *La Mulâtresse Solitude* aim at a juxtaposition of black and Jewish histories. They connect for instance the Holocaust with colonialism and the slave trade. But how does this juxtaposition work exactly? What are its consequences? In this dissertation I will search for a common vocabulary, imagery, and set of themes that underlies the juxtaposition found in both novels. These novels “blur the frontiers between the literary imagination, memory and history,” which might lead to a better understanding of the traumatic instances that are narrated (Silverman 421).

First however, I will provide a theoretical framework that helps to gain insight into the problems involved in thinking about the Holocaust in relation to other genocides. Most of the thinkers I invoke agree that a better knowledge of other genocides, also non-European ones, is needed in order to be able to say anything about the Holocaust, which is now seen as the paradigmatic genocide. Alternative models are proposed in order to avoid a competition of suffering. These models, put forward by historians but also by sociologists and literary scholars, highlight both the differences and similarities between various genocidal instances of world history. With reference to literature, especially the model of multidirectional memory presented by Michael Rothberg is of interest.
2. Theoretical Framework: Holocaust Uniqueness and Beyond

Both Phillips and Schwarz-Bart connect histories of Jewish and black suffering in their work. They do so in different ways, which I will explore later. Their juxtaposition of Jewish and black experiences raises questions about Holocaust uniqueness and the possibility of comparing genocides. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the debate concerning Holocaust uniqueness and provide some useful alternative models that are available.

2.1 Situation and Terminology

The term Atlantic slave trade is used to refer to a colonial system which operated in a triangular form. It connected three continents, namely Europe, Africa, and America. During the passage from Europe to Africa manufactured goods were transported. The term Middle Passage is used to designate the shipment of African captives to America, including the Caribbean, where those who survived the trip were forced to work as slaves. In La Mulâtresse Solitude, Solitude’s mother Bayangumay goes through the horrible experience of the Middle Passage. The remaining part of the triangle was the route to carry products and crops grown on the American plantations to Europe. The slave trade continued to exist well into the nineteenth century, in legal and illegal forms.

The word holocaust literally means “burnt offerings” (Thomas 35). When used with a capital, Holocaust refers to the genocide at the hands of the Nazis during the Second World War. Several critics point out the problems concerning the terminology to refer to this event.

Amy Hungerford mentions the debate in which Berel Lang and Giorgio Agamben among others are involved. They worry about the fact that a word meaning “burnt offerings” is used to designate the Nazi genocide. She acknowledges that their arguments are valid but justifies her use of the term by saying that she wants to use “the term that has gained widest
use and has come to stand for the idea of these events” (162). I will follow this reasoning and also use the term Holocaust.

David Moshman states that Holocaust can be used in a narrow and in a broader sense. The narrow and most common meaning is “the Nazi Judeocide, the deliberate and systematic killing of five to six million Jews” (433). Nevertheless, the term also has a broader meaning, that of “Nazi efforts to eliminate Gypsies, Poles, homosexuals, the disabled, and others whose elimination served ideological goals distinct from the war effort” (Moshman 433).

Whereas Moshman points out that the term Holocaust has several meanings, Dominick LaCapra takes it a step further and states that the term is not innocent. He provides some alternative terms but is not blind to their problematic nature either. LaCapra departs from the notion of burnt offerings and is concerned the term Holocaust might bring the events into the sacrificial realm. However, he admits that using the term in ordinary contexts can prevent a sacralizing of the designated events. To him the term Shoah situates the Nazi genocide in a specific religious and ethnic tradition, which may give rise to an “exoticizing” effect felt by those of different traditions. Terms which recall the terminology of the Nazis themselves, such as final solution or annihilation, are undoubtedly not neutral either. The term Judeocide, cited above as used by Moshman, is a neologism coined by Arno Mayer. LaCapra disapproves of this term because it repeats “neutralizing bureaucratic jargon favored by the Nazis” (History and Memory 53). Genocide on the other hand is criticized for its potential “levelling effect” (History and Memory 54). LaCapra considers Nazi genocide “one of the better terminological compromises” (History and Memory 54). Moreover, he states that “each name creates a somewhat different site for memory and mourning” (History and Memory 53).

In the earlier work Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma (1994) LaCapra defends the use of the term Holocaust despite its problematic nature. He acknowledges the fact that in the field of this type of terminology “no easy, uninvolved, or
purely objective choices are available,” yet he gives three reasons for using the term Holocaust (Representing the Holocaust 45). LaCapra argues that Holocaust is “both less bureaucratic and less banal than certain alternatives” because these alternatives risk repeating Nazi terminology (Representing the Holocaust 45). A second reason is that the term has been used by the victims of the Holocaust themselves. LaCapra believes there are “ritual and ethical grounds for honouring their choice” (Representing the Holocaust 45). His third argument for using the term Holocaust, which is restated in History and Memory after Auschwitz (1998), is based on the observation that the term is widely used, also by nonvictims. This regular use has in his view “helped to counteract its sacrificial connotations without entirely reducing it to cliché,” although he still warns for the commercialization of the Holocaust by the media (Representing the Holocaust 45). In History and Memory after Auschwitz (1998) LaCapra’s preference for the term Holocaust seems to have weakened. In this work he argues that it might be better to make use of various terms and be aware of their specific problems (History and Memory 54).

While there is something to be said for LaCapra’s position, for convenience’s sake I will limit myself to using the term Holocaust. Throughout this dissertation I will use the term Holocaust to refer to the Nazi genocide of the Jews. I, like Lang and Agamben for instance, find the association with burnt offerings distasteful. Nevertheless, using the term Holocaust for many people is without this significance. I will therefore restrict myself to the most common usage of the term Holocaust. This dissertation will serve to investigate ideas of the Holocaust and how this event is represented in literature. More specifically, I will examine how the Holocaust is represented in relation to colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade.
2.2 Holocaust Uniqueness and Comparative Models

The debate about whether the Holocaust is unique or can be compared to other genocides started in the aftermath of the Second World War and still goes on today. Critics like Hannah Arendt and Aimé Césaire investigated the possible connections between the events of the Second World War and imperialism. This is a sensitive matter, which might explain the continuous character of this debate. Moreover, the question of Holocaust uniqueness plays a role in the debate about how to define genocide.

The term genocide was coined by Lemkin in 1944, but various dimensions have been added since. Lemkin’s definition of genocide provided the term a legal basis. According to Hungerford his definition combines two kinds of crimes, namely barbarity and vandalism. Barbarity is understood as a “personal destruction” and vandalism as a “cultural destruction” (Hungerford 7). Lemkin defines barbarity as “oppressive and destructive actions directed against individuals as members of a national, religious, or racial group” and vandalism is the “malicious destruction of works of art and culture” (Lemkin qtd. in Hungerford 7).

The United Nations also offer a definition of genocide. Resolution 96 (I) (1946) states that “genocide is the denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings” (qtd. in Hungerford 8). This definition was expanded at the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948. At this convention genocide was defined as:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures
intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (qtd. in Moshman 437)

This definition includes acts that do not kill people as being a form of genocide. The acts of “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group” and “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” for example could be seen as characteristic of slavery. Although of course many captives died during the Middle Passage or while working as slaves, those who survived could not do so as an ethnic group. Many African tribes did not survive the period of colonialism.

Lemkin’s definition already suggests that the Holocaust can be viewed as an instance of genocide. This idea is further supported by Resolution 96 (I) of the United Nations and the definition that came into existence at the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The expanded definition of the United Nation Genocide Convention enables us to see other extremely traumatic events which did not necessarily lead to death, like slavery, as genocide. This is an important aspect to bear in mind when talking about genocide.

2.2.1 The Historikerstreit

A famous instance of the debate on Holocaust uniqueness started in Germany in 1986 and is known as the Historikerstreit or historians’ debate. Historians exchanged their opinions about how the Holocaust had to be understood historically. The centre of the discussion was whether “Nazi crimes were unique, a legacy of evil in a class by themselves, irreparably burdening any concept of German nationhood, or whether they are comparable to other national atrocities, especially Stalinist terror” (Maier qtd. in LaCapra, Representing the Holocaust 44). Max Silverman identifies the Historikerstreit as “another example of using the comparative argument to absolve specific crimes against humanity (in this case, the
comparison by neo-conservative historians of Soviet and Nazi murders to deflect attention from, or at least downplay the uniqueness of, the latter)” (425-26). A possible danger thus lies in the fact that “[r]elativizing the Holocaust can always be exploited for revisionist ends and can fuel an invidious culture of competition for victim status” (Silverman 426). What makes this debate so difficult is that whatever option is chosen, the consequences are serious. If the Holocaust is seen as the paradigmatic genocide, can other traumatic histories also qualify for this label? If the Holocaust is seen as being unique and cannot be compared “the past may never be ‘worked through,’ the future never normalized, and German nationhood may remain forever tainted, like some well forever poisoned” (Maier qtd. in Representing the Holocaust 44). But if the Holocaust is just another instance of genocide, comparable to many others, there is a danger of downplaying the impact of the specific crimes committed during the Second World War. This debate divided German historians into two camps and no real solution was found. In a way no solution can ever be found. That is why, I argue, alternative models are needed.

2.2.2 Present-day Responses to Holocaust Uniqueness

Even today many people are struggling with the notion of Holocaust uniqueness. Historians, philosophers, literary critics and many others try to grasp the concept and its meaning but never seem to be fully able to solve the dilemmas they are confronted with. LaCapra notes that the Holocaust had “retrospective effects” and changed our understanding of previous events and texts. Yet he feels that this should not be a reason for its uniqueness. He inclines towards the argument that “the Shoah was both unique (this kind of genocide had not happened before) and comparable (how did Hitler’s camps compare with Stalin’s gulags?)” (History and Memory 6). LaCapra mentions that comparison might be necessary to achieve an understanding, although we have to be careful to monitor “how this process of
comparison takes places and the functions it serves” (*Representing the Holocaust* 47).

Comparisons are useful to him if they show both the similarities and the substantial differences between separate historical events (*Representing the Holocaust* 48). Nevertheless, he also acknowledges the fact that the Holocaust was “neither unique nor comparable, for there is a sense in which comparatives (especially in terms of magnitude) are irrelevant, and even superlatives . . . are questionable except perhaps as hyperbolic expressions of one’s own inadequacy in trying to come to terms with problems” (*History and Memory* 6).

LaCapra tries to confront the question by saying that the Holocaust is both unique and comparable and at the same time arguing that it is neither of the two. Others reject the notion of uniqueness completely, for instance Henry R. Huttenbach, the editor of the Journal of Genocide Research. He acknowledges the connection of uniqueness to the Holocaust on a “popular, non-academic level” (Huttenbach 7). This use is “simply to stress the frightful dimensions of its horror” and without any “comparative reference to another genocide in mind” (Huttenbach 7). To him it is an “emotive, non-academic claim” (Huttenbach 8). He argues that the lack of knowledge of other genocides, also on the part of some scholars, helps to develop this position (Huttenbach 7). Huttenbach examines the different meanings of the word unique and identifies them as including “dissimilarity, originality, inequality, exceptionality, singularity, and unprecedence” (8). He dismisses these meanings as non-academic and uninformed. For instance, he sees logic behind the claim that in fact “*all* genocides are dissimilar in some fashion” (Huttenbach 8). The term uniqueness in itself also has met some opposition. A. Dirk Moses for instance states that it cannot be used as a category for historical research, since it is a “religious or metaphysical category” (18).

Huttenbach concludes that “[t]he more extensive one’s knowledge of other genocides, the weaker the case of uniqueness – meaning paramount apartness – becomes” (8). He favours a comparative approach, arguing that “[t]he fear of losing identity through invalid comparison
is a deeply imagined reflex; yet, it should not stand in the way of applying a disciplined, scholarly, horizontal methodology of comparison” (Huttenbach 8-9).

In his work *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (2000) Michael Rothberg distinguishes between a realist and an antirealist approach to the representation of genocide. The realist approach implies an “epistemological claim that the Holocaust is knowable” and a claim that it can be represented in a familiar frame (*Traumatic Realism* 3). According to Rothberg, this approach “has characterized the dominant scholarly methodology, that of historians and others who assert the necessity of considering the Holocaust according to ‘scientific’ procedures and inscribing the events within continuous historical narratives” (*Traumatic Realism* 4). Rothberg argues that this line of thinking “insists on erasing all lines of discontinuity” between the Holocaust and other histories (“W.E.B. Du Bois in Warsaw” 171). The antirealist approach on the other hand claims that the Holocaust is not knowable and “cannot be captured in traditional representational schemata” (*Traumatic Realism* 4). The antirealist discourse “draws an infrangible line between the Holocaust and all other events” (“W.E.B. Du Bois in Warsaw” 170). This approach appears in “more popular discourses, in some survivor testimony and pronouncements, and in many literary, aesthetic, and philosophical considerations of the ‘uniqueness’ of the Shoah” (*Traumatic Realism* 4). By associating Holocaust uniqueness with this antirealist approach Rothberg clearly signals his reservations about the concept. He proposes the notion of traumatic realism as an intermediary between the antirealist and realist approach, in other words between “absolute discontinuity and complete continuity” (W.E.B. Du Bois in Warsaw” 171). Traumatic realism is meant to provide a solution to the “conflicting demands inherent in representing and understanding genocide” (*Traumatic Realism* 9). It does so by “considering how the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of genocide intersect and coexist” (*Traumatic Realism* 9).
Hungerford draws on work done by Michael Goldberg to explain how the uniqueness of the Jewish people is being transferred to the event of the Holocaust. This alternative way of understanding uniqueness seeks to demonstrate that “traditional religious characteristics of the Jewish people – such as the belief in chosenness or uniqueness – are secularized by transferring those characteristics to the experience of the Holocaust; hence the intense scholarly interest in theorizing its uniqueness” (Hungerford 78). In my opinion this may hold true for the Jewish community, but I am not sure whether it can explain the tendency of non-Jewish scholars to claim Holocaust uniqueness. I believe there are other reasons to explain the popular view of Holocaust uniqueness: emotional reasons, lesser knowledge of other genocides and a Eurocentric framework that downgrades other genocides to name but a few. It is necessary to gain a wider knowledge of other genocidal instances, also those outside of Europe. This would make possible a more critical consideration of whether the Holocaust should be seen as the paradigmatic genocide.

2.2.3 Comparative Models Proposed by Historians

Claims for Holocaust uniqueness are often based on emotion. The same holds true for demands for comparison. After the opening of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, questions that frequently returned were: Why not a Museum to remember American slavery? Why not a Museum that centres on the sufferings of the American Indians? Asking these questions implies a comparison or even a competition of different sufferings and genocides. Charles Maier argues that the Holocaust Memorial Museum promotes a feeling of group cohesion among the American Jews. He raises the question why there is no museum of American slavery. Maier wonders whether it would not be “a more appropriate expenditure of national land and funds to remember and make vivid crimes for which our own country must take responsibility rather than those perpetrated by a regime
which, in fact, Americans gave their lives to help destroy”. He feels that it also might be more suitable to have a “museum of American Indian suffering from smallpox to Wounded Knee and the alcoholism of the reservations” than a Holocaust museum. Moreover, it seems to him that this kind of museum should not only focus on the catastrophe. In Maier’s opinion, a museum which shows “the proud moments of their [African Americans’ and American Indians’] history and culture with its moments of victimization in some linear or historical order” might be preferred (qtd. in LaCapra, *History and Memory* 14).

In the passage quoted above, Huttenbach expresses the need for a methodology of comparison in genocide studies. The field of comparative genocide studies challenges the notion of Holocaust uniqueness and does so in different ways. Among its practitioners are Dan Stone, David Moshman, A. Dirk Moses and Jürgen Zimmerer. Early examples of this approach can be found in Hannah Arendt and Aimé Césaire, among others. In *Discourse on Colonialism* Césaire establishes a connection between colonialism and Nazism:

People [in Europe] are surprised, they become indignant. They say: “How strange! But never mind – it’s Nazism, it will pass!” And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it . . . what he [the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century] cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the
humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of Africa. (36)

Césaire thus states that the Nazi atrocities are similar to the practices of the colonial system. He says this in a rather sharp way, showing his anger about European colonialist procedures and the fact that the West considered itself master of the world, not to mention Western hypocrisy. Nazism turned these colonial procedures against Europe, which caused a severe shock. Césaire believes that Europe reaped what it had sown in the colonial era. He criticizes “the way in which the genocide of the Jews had been set apart from genocides committed against non-Western peoples with a searing attack on Western values” (Stone, “The Historiography of Genocide” 132).

Césaire’s views indicate that in order to achieve a comparative model one must be aware of the dangers of Eurocentrism. Eurocentric thinking constituted a basic part of the colonial enterprise. In the introduction to Discourse on Colonialism, entitled “A Poetics of Anticolonialism”, Robin D.G. Kelley writes that “colonial domination required a whole way of thinking, a discourse in which everything that is advanced, good, and civilized is defined and measured in European terms” (27). Europe, as centre of the world, was seen as civilized and morally good, while the margins were viewed as barbaric and uncivilized. This thinking is repeated by opponents of comparative models. Eurocentric thought can reinforce our thinking of the Holocaust as a unique event, since other genocides that took place outside of Europe are seen as less important or less terrible. Paul Gilroy for instance notes that Eurocentric reasoning “banishes the slave experience from its accounts of modernity” (54).

In modern genocide studies a continuation of the ideas of Arendt and Césaire can be found. Jürgen Zimmerer for instance conducts research in the field of comparative genocide studies. He is particularly interested in the relationship between colonialism and National
Socialism. In “The Birth of the Ostland out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A Postcolonial Perspective on the Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination” he offers an examination of the colonial elements in the Nazi policy concerning Eastern Europe. Zimmerer believes that knowledge of colonial practices can help to achieve a better understanding of National Socialist politics. To him both historical phenomena are “based on the same concepts of ‘race’ and ‘space,’” making them similar in structure (Zimmerer 197). This approach opposes Eurocentric thinking: Zimmerer argues for a global perspective. He “connects non-European with European history” (200) and thus reveals that aspects of “Nazi occupation policy, the war of extermination and genocide” that are often thought of as being unique are actually “extremely radicalized variants of colonial practices” (197). In his view the Nazi atrocities are not isolated from what happened before, during the period of colonial rule. Insisting on its uniqueness does not do justice to the sources of the Nazi occupation of the East. Zimmerer argues that this so-called occupation is better described as colonialism (199). The difference is that colonial rule aims at long-term effects and “a profound political, economic and social restructuring of the subjugated society” (Zimmerer 199). Colonialism is rooted in “a civilizing mission, often connected with racial hubris,” whereas “military necessity and outcomes” form the official basis of military occupation (Zimmerer 199-200). Considering this, the occupation of the East by the Nazis was a form of colonialism. The parallels can be found at the levels of the ideological, the administrative and the military. What binds colonialism and Nazi expansionism ideologically is “the belief to secure space for one’s own people’s survival” (Zimmerer 203). In the colonial system the original inhabitants of the colony were subjugated or exterminated. Racial motivations “justified the policies that divided humankind into superior beings, destined to rule, and lower races, destined to be subjugated. The lowest in this hierarchy were those destined for extinction” (Zimmerer 202-203). This inequality also characterizes the Nazi policy in the East. The National Socialists wanted to organize the space
according to their ideas, which corresponds to what colonial powers did. Both groups of rulers felt the need to lead the occupied zone because of its underdevelopment, but also because of the “perceived backwardness” and the “immaturity of its inhabitants” (Zimmerer 205). The typical Eurocentric dichotomies between us and them, civilized and uncivilized, resulted in a new dichotomy, namely that between rulers and ruled. At the administrative level similarities between colonialism and the Nazi policy of conquest are to be found as well. In the traditional nineteenth-century colonies a small group of Western administrators “ruled over a much larger indigenous population that barely participated in governance” (Zimmerer 206). Similarly, the Eastern European population was “socially and legally separate from the Germans. However, their contributions as workers integrated them into the Third Reich’s economy and guaranteed their right to life” (Zimmerer 206). Zimmerer invokes the colonial precursor of the Nazi system of forced labour, namely the slave trade, a connection that will prove to be important in the novels *The Nature of Blood* and *La Mulâtresse Solitude*. Also in the military realm Zimmerer finds parallels between colonialism and the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe:

> The similarities include denying the enemy the status of a legitimate and equal opponent, who, even when captured or defeated, has certain rights, and leaving prisoners of war to perish on racial grounds or even murdering them. Summary executions of prisoners and mass murder through hunger, disease and dehydration also occurred during colonial wars. . . . Massacres and the destruction of all essentials of life were common practices in both colonial wars and the German war in the East. (208)

Zimmerer argues against the notion of Holocaust uniqueness by saying that the “ultimate breaking of a taboo – not only contemplating the extermination of whole ethnic communities but actually executing such a plan – was first committed in the colonies. This fact contributed
to making the Holocaust thinkable and executable” (211). Although he acknowledges that the “actual ‘industrial’ killings, as practised after 1941 in the Nazi extermination camps, had no precursor,” Zimmerer points out that more people died because of execution and starvation than in the gas chambers in the concentration camps (211). By making use of a global perspective, Zimmerer uncovers structural parallels between colonial practices and National Socialism, thus allowing “the expansionist policies of the Third Reich to be seen as a part of colonial history” (211). Leaving behind the “Eurocentric distinction between occupation in Europe and colonial rule overseas” permits seeing the Nazi policies for the occupied East “as part of the global historical tradition of colonial rule” (218).

While Zimmerer’s account is a concrete example of how two historical genocides can be compared, Dan Stone proposes a general comparative model in the form of a continuum. Stone finds it problematic that many people separate the Holocaust from other genocides. Even more problematic to him is the “Eurocentric position that perversely implies that ‘our’ genocide was better than yours” (“The Historiography of Genocide” 130). In Stone’s view, using the term ‘unique’ means becoming “involved in disputes that are other than scholarly” and overlooking “the fact that other genocides have more in common with the Holocaust than they do differences” (“The Historiography of Genocide”132). Nevertheless, putting forward another genocide “as the ‘worst’, as unique, thereby displacing the Holocaust and instating another genocide in its place” is no solution either (“The Historiography of Genocide” 133). Stone advises genocide scholars to stop getting involved in “this kind of competition for ethnic suffering, this search for the sacred event (Ophir 1987) that marks out one community as more worthy of attention and respect than others” (“The Historiography of Genocide” 134). Since both approaches - regarding the Holocaust as unique or making other genocides compete for that position - have their flaws and are no longer sustainable Stone suggests an alternative comparative model. A continuum is needed, which scholars can use for “genuine
comparative genocide studies without resorting to hierarchies of victimization or competition for ethnic validation through suffering” and which allows one at the same time to understand genocide at a larger scale, “through a meaningful historical framework that provides clarity when approaching the perpetuation of the phenomenon today” (“The Historiography of Genocide” 138). A thorough knowledge of the historical context can help us get at a better understanding of genocide. It is important to situate genocide “into the broader developments of world history and human behaviour, but without losing sight of the perpetrators” (“The Historiography of Genocide” 135). Stone discusses the new generation of genocide scholars who try to avoid “establishing the genocide of one’s own ethnic group as somehow ‘sacred’ or ‘beyond history’” (“The Historiography of Genocide” 135). It is their intent to put genocide in the adequate historical framework, addressing the distinguishing features of different genocides. This new generation of genocide scholars may use three overlapping approaches, namely the world historical approach, the nation-building approach and the anthropological approach. The first two approaches resemble each other very closely in that they both seek to understand genocide as belonging fundamentally to world history. The world historical approach differs from the nation-building approach in that it puts more emphasis on “structural or global economic factors” (“The Historiography of Genocide” 136). The anthropological approach focuses on “sociological explanations for the apparently contingent occurrence of mass violence, negotiating between ‘human nature’ and ‘social structure’” (“The Historiography of Genocide” 137). Stone’s conclusion sums up the main goals that the new generation of genocide scholars hopes to achieve related to the Holocaust, and which I believe certainly have merit in leading towards a fairer approach regarding other genocides than, for instance, proclaiming Holocaust uniqueness:

The developing intellectual conceptualization of the Holocaust is one which respects the horror that the victims witnessed, understands the specificities of
modern German and Jewish history, yet also sees that understanding genocide requires a broader outlook. In this approach, the absence of a conflict dynamic between perpetrator and victim (German and Jew/Roma) might make the Holocaust an extreme example of a widely recognized phenomenon, but will not place it in a category all of its own. Only this broader history of genocide, now being forged, may take us beyond uniqueness and ethnic competition, and engender the kind of victim-centred solidarity that should be the ambition of all those who work in this field. (“The Historiography of Genocide” 138-39)

Stone notes that genuine comparative genocide studies are not the same as “work which lists other genocides only to dismiss them in the face of the Holocaust” and should get rid of the ignorance of other genocides (“Genocide as Transgression” 47). The result of these studies will show that “the murder of the Jews shares many features with many other of this century’s most gruesome events” (“Genocide as Transgression” 47). Stone identifies transgression as a feature which all genocides have in common. He argues that “prior to and during any act of genocide there occurs a heightening of community feelings, to the point at which this ecstatic sense of belonging permits, indeed demands, a normally forbidden act of transgression in order to ‘safeguard’ the community by killing the designated ‘threatening’ group” (“Genocide as Transgression” 45). Stone does not try to universalize genocide but points out some striking similarities between different instances of genocide (“Genocide as Transgression” 49). One of these similarities is the occurrence of “ecstatic communities,” which are “communities of perpetrators who experience a heightened sense of belonging to their own group by virtue of the fact that they have transgressed together” (“Genocide as Transgression” 48-49). The formation of these communities is “based on a radical form of exclusion that occurs under sociologically and anthropologically explicable circumstances” (“Genocide as Transgression” 50). This exclusion determines who belongs to the group of perpetrators and
who is found in the community of victims. It usually has its roots in “racial or religious hatred or extreme nationalism” or a combination of these instances (“Genocide as Transgression” 50). Stone applies his theory of transgression to the Holocaust. He argues that the transgressive violence that occurred in the murdering of the Jews “permitted a heightened sense of belonging among the perpetrators” (“Genocide as Transgression” 56). What marks the transgressive aspect of the Holocaust is “the absence of any longer-term conflict . . . with the murders being carried out in the name of an ideology designed to cleanse the community, ensuring the perpetuation of the Aryan race” (“Genocide as Transgression” 56). It is important to acknowledge that not every individual killer belonged to the ecstatic community. Stone gives the example of “the ‘desk-killers’, those who bureaucratically facilitated the killing process” (“Genocide as Transgression” 56). What did happen during the Holocaust is that the community of perpetrators was taken “out of the realm of the everyday” and their participation in genocide provoked a “sense of liberation from the taboos of the ‘normal’ world” (“Genocide as Transgression” 56-57). Remarkable about the Holocaust is that “the actual killing took place in a region outside ‘the law’ such as occupied eastern Europe,” thus allowing people who did not want to be involved in transgressive violence themselves to “accept the occurrence of genocide” (“Genocide as Transgression” 57). Stone mentions that ordinary people can also transgress the borders of normal behaviour and take part in extreme violence. He acknowledges that perpetrators of genocides can also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, a condition normally associated with victims (“Genocide as Transgression” 57).

A. Dirk Moses proposes a model that fits the description of the nation-building approach set forth by Stone. Moses’s model departs from the notion of the “racial century”, the period between 1850 and 1950 in which colonial genocides often occurred (33). For a long time scholars were barely interested in these genocides, as opposed to the Holocaust
which was and still is widely studied. The belief in the uniqueness of the Holocaust implies “that such ‘lesser’ or ‘incomplete’ genocides – if indeed they are considered genocides at all – are marginal or even ‘primitive’, thereby reinforcing hegemonic Eurocentrism; and that the moral cache of the indigenous survivors of colonialism is less than that of Jews” (Moses 9). Moses continues this line of thought, saying that “the logical conclusion of the argument that the less-than-total, non-Jewish, profane genocides are much more common is that they should be the focus of scholarly attention and public memory” (15). In an attempt to “rethink the relationship between the Holocaust and the indigenous genocides that preceded it” (10), Moses sees the Holocaust as the culmination of the racial century. He seeks to understand history as a dynamic process and “the genocides of modernity as part of a single process rather than merely in comparative (and competitive) terms” (28). Moses proposes a linkage between colonial genocides and the genocides of the twentieth century, as parts of a “unified process” (31). This approach, “to conceptualize them as a totality” can already be found in Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), in which she investigates the continuity between imperialism and the fascist regimes of the first half of the twentieth century (Moses 31). In Arendt’s work Moses finds the basis for what he calls the racial century, the period 1850-1950 characterized by a “competition between rival projects of nation-building and ‘people making’ (that is, the fashioning of ethnically homogeneous populations domestically) that culminated in the Holocaust of European Jewry and other racial minorities in the 1940s” (33-34). The concept of the racial century “links the genocides that occurred in the European colonies with the intra-European population politics of the inter-war and war years” (Moses 34). Instead of viewing the genocides that took place during these hundred years as a succession of separate events, Moses sees the history of this period as dynamical (34). This approach “avoids the twin dangers of absolute difference and absolute similarity”, and alternatively relates “each genocide to others in a way that allows them to
retain their distinctive features” (34-35). The merit of Moses’s work is that it is aware of the need to study the Holocaust “in the context of racism, nationalism, colonialism and imperialism if genocide is to be a meaningful tool of historical understanding” (Stone, “The Historiography of Genocide” 137).

David Moshman rethinks the concept of genocide by identifying two major conceptual restraints on reflecting about it. Firstly, he argues that our thinking on genocides is prototype-based: genocidal events are judged on the basis of their resemblance to the prototype. The less prototypical genocides are measured against the standards of the chosen prototype. This chosen prototype which dominates is the Holocaust. It is widely recognized as being the most prototypical instance of genocide. However, “prototypical” should not be confused with “typical”, since the Holocaust “is almost universally seen as extraordinary” (Moshman 433). This in itself forms a problem, since our decision on whether an event can be seen as a genocide depends on its similarities to and differences from the chosen prototype. If this prototype is believed to be extraordinary, it might be more difficult to see the similarities between different genocidal events. Moshman believes that replacing the Holocaust with another genocide would not provide a solution, because since “every genocide is unique, any prototype-based concept of genocide will distort one’s understanding of some genocides as it filters them through whatever genocide taken as central and defining” (432). The solution he puts forward is “an alternative conception that relates all genocides to each other via a set of formal criteria” (Moshman 433). He proposes this alternative to think about genocides in a more objective manner, yet this may be difficult because our thinking risks being influenced by “implicit Holocaust-based (or other prototype-based) conceptions” or by the desire to choose criteria that classify a particular event as constituting a genocide (Moshman 437). Moshman gives a few examples of formal definitions of genocide, for instance the United
Nations definitions of 1948. Many genocide scholars have given an alternative definition, without a fixed agreement up until today. Yet, Moshman finds the debate very useful:

The process of articulating, justifying, criticizing, coordinating, and reconstructing such conceptions may lead to some measure of definitional agreement and thus to some measure of consensus in identifying cases of genocide in history and recognizing genocides in the future. Even without agreement on a particular conception, moreover, discussion and reflection with regard to multiple definitions and typologies may yield greater objectivity in the identification and analysis of genocides by directing attention to a variety of relevant considerations. (439)

Secondly, Moshman states that “genocide, however defined, has come to be seen as the ultimate human rights catastrophe, and thus the measure of all such catastrophes” (431). This is problematic because “genocide-based conceptions of human rights catastrophes have hindered our ability to recognize and understand other catastrophic violations of human rights” (Moshman 439). If genocide is seen as the prototype of a “larger category of ‘gross human rights violations,’” how should the less prototypical “massive ethnic cleansings, extended religious inquisitions, coordinated political disappearances, systematic programs of torture, and multigenerational chattel slavery” be considered (Moshman 440)? Are they less grave, or should we look for the similarities with the prototype? The difficulty with human rights catastrophes is that they nearly always belong to different categories at the same time: “[w]hen human rights are violated at massive levels, they are almost always violated in multiple ways. With due allowance for the uniqueness of every historical event, we can and should recognize a variety of general labels applicable to human rights catastrophes” (Moshman 442). In reality the aim should be “a complex network of prototype-based and quasi-formal concepts within which specific cases can be conceptualized and interrelated”
Moshman wants to heighten the public’s awareness about conceptual constraints on genocide.

Moreover, in his work Moshman elaborates on an example that will prove to be interesting regarding this dissertation. He claims that something that qualifies as genocide is not necessarily seen as “morally worse” than an event that is more difficult to view as genocide. Moshman gives the example of the Atlantic slave trade and considers it in relation to the Holocaust. He states that “[e]ven if we were to determine that this process fails to meet some defensible definition of genocide, perhaps because killing and cultural extermination were not the primary intent, it is far from obvious that the Atlantic slave trade is thereby less evil than any genocide. It is not even obvious that it is less evil than the Holocaust” (Moshman 443). Moshman gives three reasons why we should be careful in qualifying some “mass atrocities as worse than others” (443). The first reason is that there is no fundamental definition of genocide: the discussion is still ongoing and there remains disagreement among scholars. Secondly, “even if we could agree on a definition of genocide and could be utterly objective in applying it, actual human rights catastrophes, as we have seen, nearly always spill across any set of conceptual categories” (Moshman 443). The final reason is that it is not clear if death is the worst possible fate. This is an abstract discussion, but perpetual slavery or torture could arguably be considered worse than death. Thus, prototype-based and formal conceptions each have their merits and their problems. Moshman tries to show that we should get rid of Holocaust-based conceptions in order to arrive at a more objective understanding of genocide. He argues that “[i]n the long run, however, what is most needed is a shift from the automatic application of fixed conceptions to the increasingly deliberate application and coordination of a variety of justifiable conceptions” (Moshman 444). Awareness regarding our conceptual choices is needed in order for us to “better comprehend the nature and diversity of human rights catastrophes” (Moshman 447). With his approach, Moshman is not
trying to trivialize the Holocaust, but he wants to show that it is “a small part of a much larger picture” (448). The larger picture comprises other human rights catastrophes and we should not stay blind to that fact.

2.2.4 Alternative Models Proposed in Fields Other than History

The comparative models discussed in the previous section are sensitive to both the similarities and differences between different genocides. They do not intend to revise or deny the Holocaust, but offer a wider historical context in which both the Holocaust and other genocides can be situated. The alternative models that we will examine in this section also set out to provide a larger framework comprising different genocides so as to counteract the implications of Holocaust uniqueness. These models however, have not been put forth by historians, like those in the previous section, but by sociologists and literary scholars.

The sociologist and cultural critic Paul Gilroy uses the concept of black and Jewish diaspora in his work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). In his view these diasporas should be studied together. He sees “gains involved in setting the histories of blacks and Jews within modernity in some sort of mutual relation” (Gilroy 212). Gilroy stresses that he accepts arguments for the uniqueness of the Holocaust: he “resist[s] the idea that the Holocaust is merely another instance of genocide” (213). He acknowledges however, that recognizing that uniqueness should not be “an obstacle to better understanding of the complicity of rationality and ethnocidal terror . . . This is a difficult line on which to balance but it should be possible, and enriching, to discuss these histories [of blacks and Jews] together” (Gilroy 213). In Gilroy’s view it is necessary to explore the relationships between black and Jewish accounts of modernity, and this “need not in any way undermine the uniqueness of the Holocaust. It is therefore essential not to use that invocation of uniqueness to close down the possibility that a combined if not comparative discussion of its horrors and
their patterns of legitimation might be fruitful in making sense of modern racisms” (214). Moreover, Gilroy states that this should be done “without the development of an absurd and dangerous competition and without lapsing into a relativising mode” (213). He wants to avoid at all costs a “pointless and utterly immoral wrangle over which communities have experienced the most ineffable forms of degradation” (Gilroy 212). Instead, he pleads for a dialogue between the experiences of the blacks and the Jews in order to achieve an understanding of how modern racism works. The concept of diaspora allows Gilroy to connect black and Jewish history and “to assert and explore a kinship between the two cultures” (Whitehead 109).

In fact, Gilroy’s work is quite similar to the comparative models discussed in the previous section. For him, uniqueness does not preclude comparison, nor does it inevitably entail a hierarchy of suffering. Anne Whitehead identifies his work as an “important context or intertext for Phillips” (103). André Schwarz-Bart’s novel *La Mulâtresse Solitude* also seems to answer what Whitehead has called “Gilroy’s call for dialogue between black and Jewish cultures” (Whitehead 103). The connection between the theoretical framework and the novels by Phillips and Schwarz-Bart is something to explore later, in the section containing an analysis of the novels. However, it is already clear that the work done by Paul Gilroy constitutes an intermediate step between the models found in comparative genocide studies and the juxtaposition of Jewish and black experiences in literature. Michael Rothberg also discusses comparative models of genocides and proposes an alternative, with special focus on its applicability to literary texts.

Rothberg puts forward the model of multidirectional memory. In an attempt not to ignore “the overlapping legacies of genocide and colonialism” (“Between Auschwitz and Algeria” 161), Rothberg advocates a dialogue between the intersecting histories of the Holocaust and colonialism. In order not to fall for the “zero-sum logic of competition”
Rothberg argues that a new model of collective memory is needed (“Between Auschwitz and Algeria” 161). What happens when people understand the relationship between memories of different historical phenomena in terms of a competition is that “memories crowd each other out of the public sphere – for example, too much emphasis on the Holocaust is said to block other traumas from view or, inversely, adoption of Holocaust rhetoric to speak of those other traumas is said to relativize or even deny the Holocaust’s uniqueness” (“Between Auschwitz and Algeria” 161). It is hard to find a balance, and one always risks being caught in this kind of competition. In order to overcome any kind of competition and the problems it creates, Rothberg suggests “a productive, non-zero sum logic in which memories emerge in the interplay between different pasts and a heterogeneous present” (“Between Auschwitz and Algeria” 162). This is what he calls “the multidirectionality of memory: the interference, overlap, and mutual constitution of seemingly distinct collective memories that define the post-war era and the workings of memory more generally” (“Between Auschwitz and Algeria” 162). Different from the competitive memory model which is problematic because of the assumption “that both the arena of conflict, the public sphere, and the subjects of the competition are given in advance,” the multidirectional model “supposes that the overlap and interference of memories help constitute the public sphere as well as the various individual and collective subjects that articulate themselves in it” (“Between Auschwitz and Algeria” 162). The public sphere is redescribed as “a field of contestation where memories interact productively and in unexpected ways” (announcement Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization). Multidirectional memory is a collective memory which bears in mind both similarity and difference, “without relativizing or negating historical specificity” and thus avoids the pitfalls of both uniqueness and competition (“Between Auschwitz and Algeria” 171). Rothberg’s model might bring different social groups closer together, since it allows to see the common features of different traumatic
instances across time and place, without lapsing into competitive claims. The concept of multidirectional memory “recognizes the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during remembrance” (“The Work of Testimony” 1233). Contrary to what some might think, the presence of a particular history in collective memory does not mean that all other memories of events become erased. (“The Work of Testimony” 1233). The new framework of multidirectional memory allows different memories of suffering to address each other. Their interaction will lead to a productive and intercultural dynamic. The multidirectional model intends to bring together “traces of memory that transgress historical boundaries”, which is what happens when one connects, for instance, the Holocaust with memories of colonialism and the slave trade as in Phillips’s *The Nature of Blood* and Schwarz-Bart’s *La Mulâtresse Solitude* (“Between Auschwitz and Algeria” 171).

*A Literary Response: Toni Morrison*

A famous literary voice that enters the debate concerning Holocaust uniqueness and the comparing of genocides is that of Toni Morrison. Her novel *Beloved* could be seen as the text which first drew the attention of the literary critics to questions of Holocaust uniqueness and comparability. At the beginning of *Beloved* (1987) she wrote the dedication “Sixty Million and more”. Morrison described sixty million as “‘the smallest numbest I got from anybody’ for the number of Africans who died as a result of the Middle Passage” (qtd. in Zierler 47). However, it might not be a coincidence that sixty million is ten times six million, the number of Jews that died during the Holocaust. This act of evoking slavery in terms that recall the Holocaust is the cue for Stanley Crouch, a literary critic, to attack Morrison’s novel for “representing African American history in terms of the Holocaust” (Zierler 46). He writes:

Morrison recently told *Newsweek* that the reference was to the captured Africans who died coming across the Atlantic. But sixty is ten times six, of
course. This is very important to remember. For Beloved, above all else, is a
blackface holocaust novel. It seems to have been written in order to enter
American slavery into the big-time martyr ratings contest, a contest usually
won by references to, and works about, the experiences of Jews at the hands of
the Nazis. (Crouch 203, 205)

This review is very harsh, since nowhere in the novel, other than in the epigraph, can one find
traces of a contest. Wendy Zierler comments on the controversy that Crouch’s argument has
caused. She states that Crouch’s review does not only “go against the overwhelmingly
positive reception accorded the novel by reviewers and academic critics alike, it argues
against the invocation of the Holocaust in the context of African American history” (Zierler
46).

However, in interviews given after the publication of Beloved Morrison seemed to
reveal “a preoccupation with the Holocaust, as well as an element of competitive comparison”
(Zierler 47):

I’m trying to explore how a people – in this case one individual or a small
group of individuals – absorbs and rejects information on a very personal level
about something [slavery] that is indigestible and unabsorbable completely.
Something that has no precedent in the history of the world, in terms of the
length of time and nature of and specificity of its devastation. If Hitler had won
the war and established his thousand year Reich, at some point he would have
stopped killing people, the ones he didn’t want around, because he would have
needed some to do the labor for nothing. And the first 200 years of that Reich
would have been exactly what that period was in this country for Black people.
It would have been just like that. Not for five years, but for 200 years or more.
(Washington 136-138, qtd. in Zierler 47)
Morrison here mentions that slavery had no precedent and lasted for two hundred years. She relates the Holocaust to the history of slavery and states that the former only lasted five years. Her remark clearly displays “a desire to challenge the theory of Holocaust uniqueness with the historically antecedent example of American slavery” (Zierler 47). This is understandable since even in the United States much more attention has been given to the Holocaust than to the domestic trauma of slavery, “a group catastrophe that actually occurred on American soil and that continues to haunt American race relations” (Zierler 47). Morrison tries to undo the national amnesia concerning slavery. Since it happened closer the home, the memories of slavery are more distressing for many Americans. During the Holocaust, Americans or Jews that later emigrated to America often were either innocent victims or the heroes that liberated Europe. In contrast, the period of slavery brings back memories that are too painful for the African American community and too uncomfortable for the white Americans, since they were often perpetrators or bystanders.

Nevertheless, Morrison takes it a step further. She suggests that if the war had had a different outcome it would have resulted in the same state of slavery as America has known for two hundred years. By pointing out that the period of American slavery was unprecedented and by explicitly stating the difference between two hundred and five years, she “seems not only to draw attention to but to enter into a perverse competition with the Holocaust record of suffering” (Zierler 47).

In other interviews Morrison denies she wants to enter a competition of suffering. For instance in an interview with Cecil Brown she says: “[t]he game of who suffered most? I’m not playing that game. That’s a media argument. It’s almost about quantity. One dead child is enough for me. One little child . . . who didn’t make it. That’s plenty for me” (Morrison, Interview with Cecil Brown 466).
The sociologist Paul Gilroy does not agree with Stanley Crouch’s description of *Beloved*. Gilroy does not believe that it is Morrison’s intention to put American slavery in some kind of martyr ratings contest. In his view it might be useful to set the history of the Holocaust of European Jews and the “modern history of racial slavery and terror in the western hemisphere” closer together, “not so as to compare them, but as precious resources from which we might learn something valuable about the way that modernity operates, about the scope and status of rational human conduct, . . . and perhaps most importantly about the ideologies of humanism with which these brutal histories can be shown to have been complicit” (217). He understands Morrison’s desire to explore slavery in her writing as “a means to restage confrontations between rational, scientific, and enlightened Euro-American thought and the supposedly primitive outlook of prehistorical, cultureless, and bestial African slaves” (220). Gilroy acknowledges the suggestion made by W.E.B Du Bois and others that because of the experience of slavery blacks could be seen as the “first truly modern people” because already in the nineteenth century they were confronted with “dilemmas and difficulties which would only become the substance of everyday life in Europe a century later” (221). In an interview Gilroy conducted with Toni Morrison she articulates the same vision as Du Bois:

. . . modern life begins with slavery . . . These things had to be addressed by black people a long time ago: certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability. Certain kinds of madness, deliberately going mad in order, as one of the characters says in the book, “in order not to lose your mind.” These strategies for survival made the truly modern person. They’re a response to predatory western phenomena. You can call it an ideology and an economy, what it is is a pathology. Slavery broke the world in half, it broke it in every way. It broke Europe. It made them into
something else, it made them slave masters, it made them crazy. You can’t do that for hundreds of years and it not take a toll. They had to dehumanize, not just the slaves but themselves. They have had to reconstruct everything in order to make that system appear true. It made everything in world war two possible. It made world war one necessary. Racism is the word that we use to encompass all this. (qtd. in Gilroy 221)

Morrison stresses the continuity between slavery and the two world wars. Based on racism, slavery made everything in World War Two possible. She sees the institution of slavery as a direct predecessor to the Holocaust. In fact it does not really matter whether or not she intends to enter slavery in a competition with the Holocaust for which event caused the most suffering or deserves to be commemorated the most. More important is her signal that when examining these phenomena together something useful can be gained. As Zierler comments, Morrison “displace[s] an exclusivist Jewish interpretation of the Holocaust with a broader, American/Christian universalistic interpretation of catastrophe” (50). Everyone can learn something from the juxtaposition of slavery and the Holocaust.

This is also the objective of many of the models found in comparative genocide studies. For instance Moses’s model that links colonial genocides and the Holocaust allows “members of victim groups to situate their suffering, and that of others, in the sorry tale of European world domination” (36). Such contextualization leads to “mutual recognition of common suffering” which constitutes “a powerful moral source for the solidarity needed to prevent future victims of progress” (36).
3. Phillips’s *The Nature of Blood* and Schwarz-Bart’s *La Mulâtresse*

_Solitude: Multidirectional Memory in Literature_

### 3.1 Introduction: Caryl Phillips and André Schwarz-Bart

There is a considerable amount of common ground between the two writers I will discuss here, Caryl Phillips and André Schwarz-Bart. Their lives could be considered as being diasporan in nature. Caryl Phillips was born in the West Indies, on the island of St Kitts in 1958. When he was only four months old his parents moved to Leeds in England. The family settled in a white, working-class area, which Phillips later would compare to a ghetto (*The European Tribe* 3). His parents, being first generation immigrants tried to downplay their origins and repress their identity in order to blend in with the host society. This proved to be very confusing for the young Caryl Phillips. At the white-dominated schools he attended in Leeds and Birmingham he did not learn anything about race, where he came from, or his history. He says that “this was true for all of us black British children – there was nothing in the textbooks, nothing in the geography around me which actually acknowledged that I had a past” (Sharpe 157). A telling anecdote from his youth shows how Phillips lacked understanding concerning his background and the confusion this created inside of him:

About three years later one of the most painful episodes of my childhood took place. This time it was inside a classroom. Mr. Thompson, an English literature teacher, decided to demonstrate his knowledge of all things by explaining the origins of our surnames. So Greenberg was Jewish, Morley originally came from the small Yorkshire town of the same name, and Mackenzie was a Scot. I felt a hot flush of embarrassment long before he turned to my desk. ‘Phillips,’ he mused, ‘you must be from Wales.’ The whole class laughed, while I stared back at him stony-faced, knowing full well that I was not from Wales. The
truth was I had no idea where I was from as I had been told that I was born in
the Caribbean but came from England. I could not participate in a joke which
made my identity a source of humour. (The European Tribe 2)

Alexander Mousavizadeh argues that the teacher should have explained the English and
Welsh roots of many black and West Indian names. But he realizes that “such enlightenment,
such willingness to include more recent, more complex identities into the British family” was
and is often hard to find (Mousavizadeh 137).

Phillips struggled with the dilemma of being both black and British, being both of and
not of Europe. He needed to “reconcile the contradiction of feeling British, while being
continuously told in many subtle and unsubtle ways that [he] did not belong” (The European
Tribe 9). In The European Tribe he describes how his childhood search for answers led him to
consider the fate of the Jews:

As a child in what seemed to me a hostile country, the Jews were the only
minority group discussed with reference to exploitation and racialism, and for
that reason, I naturally identified with them. At that time, I was staunchly
indignant about everything from the Holocaust to the Soviet persecution of
Jewry. The bloody excesses of colonialism, the pillage and rape of modern
Africa, the transportation of 11 million black people to the Americas, and their
subsequent bondage were not on the curriculum, and certainly not on the
television screen. As a result I vicariously channelled a part of my hurt and
frustration through the Jewish experience. . . . But, as a black man living in
Europe, I always remember the words of Frantz Fanon, who wrote in 1952 that,
‘It was my philosophy professor, a native of the Antilles, who recalled the fact
to me one day: “Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention,
because he is talking about you.’’ And I always pay attention. (The European Tribe 54)

The Jewish experience was thus used as a surrogate, a reference point for what black people experienced in Europe. This helped Phillips while growing up, since events concerning the black minority were not discussed at school or at home during his youth. There is also a family connection that relates him to the Jews, a connection about which Phillips only learned in the 1980s. His maternal grandfather, Emmanuel de Fraites was a Jewish trader with Portuguese roots (Phillips, A New World Order 130). It was not until 1978 when Phillips travelled to the United States as an undergraduate and discovered African-American literature that he realized that black persons could be writers. Especially Richard Wright’s novel Native Son made Phillips aware of his calling as a writer. In 1980 he made a trip to St Kitts, the island of his birth, together with his mother. This trip made him realize all the more the complexity of his identity. In 1984 he went on a nine-month tour of Europe, “in which his eyes are opened to the continuing effects of racism and neo-colonialism” (Thomas 32). As a result of his experiences during this tour he published The European Tribe in 1987, in which he shares his impressions of Europe. In this book-length essay he “denounce[s] the European tribalism that ignores the presence and role of the African diaspora in the West” (Ledent 8).

At present he divides his time between Britain, the United States and St Kitts. This results in a “geographical triangle of life and work in different global locations” which appears to be “characteristic of the postcolonial diasporic identity” (Fokkema 284). Caryl Phillips himself acknowledges that he is “the product of a diaspora” (Sharpe 157). He has recently stated that he wishes for “his ashes to be scattered in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, at a point equidistant from Britain, North America and the Caribbean, and the West Coast of Africa – three locations with which he claims the paradoxical relation of feeling at home and knowing he doesn’t belong, of being both ‘of, and not of’ (A New World Order,
304, 1-4)” (Bewes 33). In interviews he comments that in his view it is “inevitable that people from the Caribbean should think of themselves in relation to both Europe and North America,” because they naturally think “in terms of that triangle” (Sharpe 156). Phillips’s life is full of cosmopolitan experience and his ancestry is mixed, “not only African but European, Indian and Jewish as well” (Ledent 7). Phillips’s plural identity makes it hard to pigeonhole him as “either Caribbean, Black British, British, or even, now that he resides most of the year in New York, as African-American” (Ledent 5). Bénédicte Ledent suggests that “none of the applicable tags would come closer to describing Phillips’s multifaceted identity than ‘Caribbean,’” because it is “in itself an essentially inclusive and multicultural label, which contains ‘both Europe and Africa’ (“Caryl Phillips interviewed by Graham Swift, 102) but also the Americas, and therefore sidesteps the conceptual straitjacket of adjectives such as ‘Black British’ or even post-colonial” (Ledent 5). Phillips comments on efforts made by critics to pigeonhole him and makes clear that to him labels are not so important. He states that “people always want to find a label for me. They may see me as somebody born in St. Kitts, and they say I live half of the time in St. Kitts. Then I open my mouth, and they hear this English accent coming out. So they want to know what my story is. What’s my game? What they are trying to do is make me choose” (Bell 593). Not only his origins make it difficult to place him, also the fact that he is an all-round writer often forces critics to make choices when talking about Caryl Phillips. He is a novelist, a playwright, an essayist, a teacher, a reviewer, an academic, and he writes scripts for radio, television and films. All of this leads to the identification of Phillips as an “exilic intellectual” (Ledent 177).

André Schwarz-Bart’s life similarly was an dispersed one. He was born in 1928 in France as the son of a family of Polish Jews who had arrived in France in 1924. His parents were taken in a Nazi roundup in 1941 and deported to an extermination camp. André Schwarz-Bart joined the resistance. He was arrested in Limoges but escaped. After the war he
had several jobs, from miner, foundry labourer, mechanic and salesman to librarian. This last job aroused his interest in literature and he entered the Sorbonne. Around 1950 Schwarz-Bart began to write. In 1961 he married a Guadeloupean woman, Simone. She also was a writer and they wrote novels in collaboration, like *Un Plat de Porc aux Bananes Vertes* (1967).

André Schwarz-Bart died in 2006 in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe. He was born in a family of immigrants in France, and later became an immigrant himself in Guadeloupe.

What Phillips and Schwarz-Bart also share is that their own diasporic experience becomes a theme in their work. After the success of his prize-winning “novel of Holocaust and Jewish history, *The Last of the Just (Le Dernier des Justes, 1959)*” André Schwarz-Bart, together with Simone, “set out on an ambitious, multi-volume project to write a comparative fictional history of blacks and Jews in diaspora” (Rothberg, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies” 225). Only parts of this projects have been published and often there is some doubt about whether André, Simone, or both are the authors of a particular part. *Un Plat de Porc aux Bananes Vertes* (1967), like *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, links the Holocaust and the Atlantic slave trade. This novel was the result of the collaboration between André and Simone Schwarz-Bart and was “conceived as the first in a cycle about the blacks of Martinique and Guadeloupe from 1760 to the present, of which Solitude was to be the central figure” (Brodzki 215). When *La Mulâtresse Solitude* was published in 1972, “it was designated the inaugural volume, while *Un Plat de Porc aux Bananes Vertes*, the story of a woman who might have been one of Solitude’s descendants, was identified retrospectively as its prelude” (Brodzki 215). Also in 1972, Simone Schwarz-Bart published *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle*, showing that the collaborative project had been abandoned. Bella Brodzki notes that it is “perhaps because of all this cross-fertilizing that a sense of authorial indeterminacy hovers over” *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, “at least in the minds of certain bibliographers and critics” (215).
As opposed to Schwarz-Bart, Phillips does not really set out to write a cycle of novels, there is no determined project that underlines his work. Yet his novels share some characteristics. What they have in common thematically is an exploration of the diasporic experience. Phillips’s novels often tell intersecting histories of Europe, Africa and America. They deal with the complexities of dislocation and alienation provoked by the slave trade and other unsettling events. Two of the novels by Phillips that I discuss in this dissertation do not take on the triangular shape Europe-Africa-America. The Nature of Blood is set in Europe and the Palestinian area, while The European Tribe describes Phillips’s travels across Europe and the north of Africa. Nevertheless, these novels also evoke the slave trade and mention America and black Africa, the latter for instance as the place of origin of Othello and Malka.

Higher Ground (1989) more faithfully mimics the triangle Europe-Africa-America, a form that played an important role in the colonial system. This novel consists of three separate stories, each set in one part of the triangle. The first story is “Heartland”, which is set in a British controlled slave fort on the west coast of Africa. It tells how an African interpreter struggles with his complicity and with the British racism directed against him. The second part, “The Cargo Rap”, tells about Rudy Williams. He is a young black American who is detained in a high-security prison for an attempted theft. In his cell he writes letters and reads pamphlets and books by radical black protesters. In his letters he tries to force his views down his family’s throat, thereby pushing them farther away from him. “Higher Ground” tells the story of Irina, a Polish Jewish refugee who was sent to England by her parents in order to escape the Holocaust. In England “she finds safety from the Nazis, but also alienation and loneliness” (Sharpe 154). She meets Louis, a West Indian who just arrived in Britain and decides he wants to return to the Caribbean. He is still able to escape the situation in which she is stuck. Phillips explains their behaviour in an interview conducted by C. Rosalind Bell:
It’s really about one of them who is too far gone because she’s been in the country for nearly twenty years now. She’s been sucked up into a vacuum of the nightmare of trying to survive as a displaced person. She knows no other way of surviving. The other can actually see, although he’s only been there a few weeks, that if he stays how things are going to turn out: he is actually going to become mentally damaged by the experience of environment, feeling like an exotic but unwanted appendage to the larger British culture. There’s a lack of despair, in that the black man, the West Indian, decides that he doesn’t want to know. (Bell 602-03)

In *Higher Ground* the experiences of black and Jewish suffering are linked through the stories of different characters. This also happens in *The Nature of Blood*, in which the voices of different characters intersect and uncover similarities between them. The main storylines are those of the family Stern, the Jews of the town of Portobuffole near Venice, and a rewriting of *Othello*. Eva Stern survives the Second World War and goes to England after the liberation of the camp in which she was put. She hopes for a love affair with the British soldier Gerry but becomes disillusioned and ends up committing suicide in a hospital. Her parents died during the war and so did her sister Margot, who went into hiding but was betrayed. Eva’s uncle Stephan abandoned his family in order to join the underground in Palestine. Years later, in the 1980s, Stephan realizes how his project failed. By then he is an old man and he meets the young nurse Malka, an Ethiopian Jew who is a victim of racism in Israel. In fifteenth-century Venice three Jews are accused of the ritual murder of a Christian boy and they are condemned to death even though they are innocent. Othello’s struggle for acceptance in Venetian society is depicted, a cause for which he betrays his roots and his family in Africa.

A third issue that Phillips and Schwarz-Bart share is that they both write against literary tribalism. In a review of *The Nature of Blood* James Shapiro writes that “in taking the
Holocaust as his subject, and in writing much of the novel in the voice of a white Jewish woman,” Phillips “challenges the current literary tribalism, pervasive in this age of identity politics, that would mark off black experience as the domain of blacks, restrict the telling of women’s lives to other women, and leave the Holocaust to the Jews”. This also holds true for André Schwarz-Bart, who as a white Jewish male writes about the capture of black Africans to work as slaves in the Caribbean. He particularly focuses on the black woman Bayangumay who gets raped during the Middle Passage and her daughter, the mulatto woman Solitude.

While *La Mulâtresse Solitude* went rather unnoticed by critics and reviewers, Phillips’s work proved to be more controversial. Ivan Kreilkamp remarks that “[i]n these days of identity politics, Phillips’s insistence that authorial identity places no restrictions on the fictional or historical imagination, and the clear analogy he draws between the pan-African and Jewish experiences, is bound to raise some hackles” (44). Hilary Mantel has given some unfortunate remarks about Phillips’s way of appropriating traumatic experiences of others. She questions whether it is proper for a black male writer to identify with a female Jewish Holocaust survivor. Mantel writes that “[t]his is the devil’s sentimentality: it is demented coziness, that denies the differences between people, denies how easily the interests of human beings become divided. It is indecent to lay claim to other people’s suffering: it is a colonial impulse, dressed up as altruism. The heart may be pure, but more than heart is needed; good motives sometimes paralyze thought” (39). Mantel’s claims have met some opposition. Ledent for instance argues that Mantel is “oblivious of artistic freedom” and that though her “charge of literary usurpation may originate in political correctness, it could well be fuelled by racial bias too” (151). According to Ledent the problem is that “in writing about the Holocaust and the origins of racism in Europe, Phillips has aroused the European fear of being judged by so-called outsiders” (151). Helge Nowak claims that Mantel’s “caveat has to be taken seriously”, but acknowledges that the reproach seems “to be misdirected in the case
of *The Nature of Blood* and its author” (128). Also according to Stef Craps Mantel misdirects her criticism, it seems to him that “she does express a legitimate concern, albeit one that does not actually apply to Phillips’s work” (196). Mantel claims that Phillips is erasing the differences between people while he is juxtaposing the stories of black and Jewish protagonists. She is not necessarily saying that Phillips should stick to black history, but she is concerned that there is not enough distance between Phillips and his characters. As Craps puts it, “Mantel’s fatal flaw is not a dubious attachment to old-fashioned identity politics but rather a failure to fully appreciate the self-reflexiveness of the text she reviews, leading her to misdirect her criticism” (196). In other words, Mantel does not appreciate the literalness of the novel and misses the fact that Phillips makes use of intertextuality to signal the distance between him and the described events. Craps “questions Mantel’s reading skills rather than her politics” (197). Caryl Phillips himself has commented on the breaching of identity boundaries, even before the publication of *The Nature of Blood* and Mantel’s perception of it. In 1994 the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute published a panel discussion between Anita Desai, Caryl Phillips and Ilan Stavans. In this discussion Phillips expresses his resistance to literary tribalism:

> any writer can write about anything they want, so long as they do so out of a sense of honesty and as long as they do so with some insight and some compassion. It would be ludicrous to suggest that a black person shouldn’t write about a white person or that a white person shouldn’t write about a Chinese person, or a Gentile shouldn’t write about a Jew, or vice versa. The purpose of literature is to dare to imagine into regions that help to expand not only your understanding of the human condition, but help the reader to understand and expand their own notion of what constitutes the human
condition. So those barriers are there to be transgressed, if necessary. (Desai, Phillips, and Stavans 88)

In an interview with Jenny Sharpe in 1995 Phillips states his view on fiction:

It challenges our own feelings and our own assumptions, and the best way of doing that is through an engagement with a character whose views you don’t share. And that engagement gives us an insight into their mind. . . . But that’s what fiction should do for us. It should expand our minds. And I’m sure there are a lot of people who feel uncomfortable with a lot of what I do. Good” (Sharpe 160).

In this conversation Caryl Phillips already predicts that some of his readers might feel uncomfortable with the transgression of identity boundaries within his work.

3.2 The Juxtaposition of the Holocaust and Colonialism in the Work of Caryl Phillips and André Schwarz-Bart

3.2.1 Stylistically

Both Phillips and Schwarz-Bart draw in their work, as Zierler calls it, “literary comparisons between the African Diaspora experience of slavery and the Jewish experience of the Holocaust” (46). In this dissertation I will focus on the novels The Nature of Blood by Phillips and Schwarz-Bart’s La Mulâtresse Solitude. These two novels are very different in structure, and juxtapose the suffering of Jewish and black communities in other ways.

3.2.1.1 Epilogue versus Overall Juxtaposition

Schwarz-Bart’s novel focuses on the experience of slavery and only mentions the Holocaust in the epilogue of La Mulâtresse Solitude, whereas Phillips tells stories of the
Holocaust and other Jewish suffering together with traumatic black experiences within his novels themselves. In *The Nature of Blood* there are no clear boundaries between the different voices and stories. In *Higher Ground* on the other hand the three stories, two of black men and one of a Jewish woman, are clearly separate yet echo each other. Thus in Phillips’s work there seems to exist an overall juxtaposition, while Schwarz-Bart only links the Holocaust and slavery in the epilogue, outside the narrative proper.

*La Mulâtresse Solitude* links a history of black slavery and revolt in eighteenth century Guadeloupe with the Holocaust “[i]n an extraordinary final gesture that crosses historical, spatial, and racial boundaries” (Brodzki 222). Schwarz-Bart also crosses another boundary, namely within the structure of the novel. While the “suicidal black slave insurrection against Republican and Bonapartist efforts to reinstate slavery” is recounted in the final chapters within the novel proper, the “suicidal Jewish resistance to the Nazis in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943” only appears in the novel’s epilogue (Brodzki 222). The epilogue starts with a description of what remains of the Danglemont plantation, where black rebels fought against the reinstating of slavery, and ends with an imagining of the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto. According to Brodzki, this is a “landscape of martyrdom and extinction” in which “Schwarz-Bart’s vision is a testimony to the sheer will to remember, or the inability to forget, what has happened there” (224). There is no linear continuity between the final chapters of the novel proper and the epilogue. At the end of the narrative proper the slave rebellion and its aftermath are recounted, including the execution of Solitude, after she gave birth to her child. The epilogue is set in an undetermined future. The “historical frame of the text” is broken and the narrator imagines a future in which a tourist will visit the remains of the plantation (Rothberg, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies 224):

> After the climb from Basse-Terre, the traveler will stop a hundred yards or so from the present village of Matouba. On his left he will see a gateway, leading
to a banana plantation. . . . If the traveler insists, he will be permitted to visit
the remains of the old Danglemont plantation. The guard will wave his hand,
and as though by magic a tattered black field worker will appear. He will greet
the lover of old stones with a vaguely incredulous look, and they will start off.
A long walk among the shaggy trunks of the banana trees will take them to a
hillock overlooking the sea and the neighbouring islands, Martinique, Désirade,
and Montserrat, each of them, like Guadeloupe, surmounted by a volcano. Here
they will stroll this way and that and ultimately come to a remnant of knee-high
wall and a mound of earth intermingled with bone splinters. . . . Conscious of a
faint taste of ashes, the visitor will take a few steps at random, tracing wider
and wider circles around the site of the mansion. His foot will collide with one
of the building stones, concealed by dead leaves, which were dispersed by the
explosion and then over the years buried, dug up, covered over, and dug up
again by the innocent hoes of the field workers. If he is in the mood to salute a
memory, his imagination will people the environing space, and human figures
will rise up around him, just as the phantoms that wander about the humiliated
ruins of the Warsaw ghetto are said to rise up before the eyes of other travelers.

(La Mulâtresse Solitude 177-79)

Most probably, the traveller did not live through the slave revolt at the plantation, nor did he
experience the uprising at the Warsaw ghetto. He is at one place, the plantation, and imagines
what happened there years ago. Brodzki comments that this “traveler” could be seen to
represent “the archetypical image of the Jewish wanderer, the figure of the nomad who,
having no place, finds himself momentarily in this one” (223). Brodzki bases this reading on
“the teleological terms in which the narrative has been cast,” making “traveler” seem “oddly
casual and deliberately understated” (223). However, the remark is made that this figure also
evokes “the image of the pilgrim, who has come to this site in search of something particular” (Brodzki 223). It is however not clear whether it is the traveller or the narrator who makes the connection with the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto.

The description of the landscape itself also enables a linking with the Holocaust. The faint taste of ashes in the air should probably be seen as being related to the nearby presence of a volcano, yet is also reminiscent of the ending of the slave rebellion, its desperate leader dynamiting the place. Ashes however, can also be seen as an almost universally acknowledged symbol of the Holocaust with its camps and incinerators. The Warsaw ghetto uprising took place in 1943 when the remaining Jewish population of Warsaw tried to prevent the Nazis from taking them to the extermination camp of Treblinka. The uprising failed and only ruins remained of the former ghetto. Rothberg remarks that “[a]lthough today the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto have been almost entirely paved over, leaving only the monument to the Ghetto uprising, the description of visiting the plantation could easily describe a contemporary visit to one of the sites of the Nazi extermination camps, where often ashes and bone splinters do persist” (“Decolonizing Trauma Studies” 233 note 2). By invoking “a landscape of trauma replete with ruins, bone splinters, ashes, and phantoms” at the closing of the novel, Schwarz-Bart “mobilizes various forms of anachronism and ‘anatopism’ (spatial misplacement) in order to depict multiple traumatic legacies” (Rothberg, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies” 225). In the course of the novel, the story moves from Africa in the mid-eighteenth century to Guadeloupe at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it is only in the epilogue that the juxtaposition of black and Jewish history surfaces. As Rothberg puts it, “the epilogue jumps to the contemporary moment of the novel’s enunciation and to a hypothetical, layered European/Caribbean space” (“Decolonizing Trauma Studies 225). Rothberg identifies *La Mulâtresse Solitude* as an excellent example of his concept of multidirectional memory. In this novel, Rothberg says, “Schwarz-Bart not only brings the
memory of the Holocaust to bear on a ‘forgotten’ piece of world history; he also ensures that a
fragment of the Caribbean past unexpectedly recontextualizes the Nazi genocide”
(“Decolonizing Trauma Studies 225). Schwarz-Bart sets “black and Jewish histories side-by-
side,” the result of which is that La Mulâtresse Solitude “does not normalize the uniqueness of
the Holocaust or of slavery; nor does it set those histories in competition with each other.
Rather, such anachronistic and anatopic (dis)placements bring together the Holocaust, slavery,
and colonialism as singular yet relational histories in what I call multidirectional memory”
(Rothberg, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies 225). I argue that Phillips’s Higher Ground and
The Nature of Blood are also representative of Rothberg’s idea.

Higher Ground consists of three separate novellas, each written in a different style.
The first story, “Heartland”, is narrated in the first person, in the voice of a captured African
slave who becomes complicit in the slave trade when he starts interpreting for a group of
slave traders. The second novella is “The Cargo Rap”, in which the narration occurs in the
epistolary form. While Rudy Williams is in prison he writes letters to his parents, to his sister
Laverne, and to his lawyer. These letters are also written in the first person, but are more
direct and less formal than the narration in “Heartland”. They reveal Rudy’s life in prison and
“chronicle his intellectual and ideological development” (Zierler 59). The last of the three
novellas is “Higher Ground”, which also gave its title to the entire novel. In this part Irina’s
story is told in the third person. This third-person narration is identified by Craps as indicative
of the “hesitant, indirect manner in which Phillips tackles the subject of the Holocaust” as
opposed to the more intimate accounts in the first and second part of Higher Ground (198).
Irina’s story mingles the present and the past, since Irina, called Irene in England where she
was sent by her parents, is haunted by memories of her childhood before and during the
Second World War. As Zierler puts it, Irina’s past “endures and recurs in her present, an
emotional state accentuated by Phillips’s technique of nonlinear narration. As the novella
The three different writing styles, diverse characters and experiences, and the fact that the three novellas take place in separate periods and in three different continents seem to indicate that *Higher Ground* is a mere collection of separate stories. Yet, Phillips seems to encourage his readers to find connections between the three sections. Ledent remarks that “[t]hough these stories make sense in isolation and seem at first to have little in common, their full meaning emerges when read as parts of a single narrative with a dense web of interconnections” (56). She also notices that “[b]y reflecting on one another beyond their narrative borders” the novellas of *Higher Ground* already hint at “the complexity of Phillips’s cross-cultural vision developed in his later works” (Ledent 56). A first hint about a connected reading can already be found in the novel’s subtitle. *Higher Ground: A Novel in Three Parts* invites the reader to see the three parts as forming one novel. Ledent writes that the subtitle is a “paratextual clue” to the novel’s “inherent unity” (77). There exist thematic connections between the stories of the different protagonists, but also at a stylistic level there are parallels to be found. The problem of naming for instance occurs in all three sections. In “Heartland” the name of the protagonist is absent. Ledent sees this anonymity as a reflection of “the white man’s lack of interest in the African as a person” (57). It also has a collective significance and hints both at an allegorical dimension and the importance of group identity in the indigenous, African culture (Ledent 58). Being without a name also shows “the absence of genealogy of the anonymous millions who were deprived of family, language, culture, and name when deported to the New World and whose tragic history is re-enacted in ‘Heartland’ through the exceptional experience of one individual” (Ledent 58). Finally, another interpretation can be given to the narrator’s anonymity. The refusal to give his name can be seen as an intent to
escape “patronymic appropriation” and “Western modes of representation” (Ledent 58). Namelessness will also appear in *The Nature of Blood*, where Phillips never gives us the name of the Othello-like figure, thereby forming an example of the connections between different works by Phillips.

In “The Cargo Rap” the problem of naming takes the form of an alteration. The formal letters are signed with Rudolph Leroy Williams, while the more familiar ones are written under the name of Rudy Williams. At a certain point in the story something happened and the protagonist is punished by a prolonged stay in the maximum security wing. At that moment he changes Rudy slightly to Rudi and asks his father to “read between the lines” (*Higher Ground* 83). Ledent reads this as a sign that the Rudy his family knew no longer exists. Prison life has changed him and therefore he becomes Rudi. The protagonist changes his name by himself, yet it is motivated by the prison environment. The name alteration is “a subjective gesture of self-assertion in the face of the dehumanising penitentiary system” (Ledent 59).

The last story, “Higher Ground” shows a changing of name which is identified by Ledent as signifying through “dualism” (57). Irina and Irene refer to the same person, a woman “whose two selves can never be reconciled after being torn apart by exile” (Ledent 59). Irina is her original Polish name and reminds her of her childhood, close to her family in Poland before the war. This name occurs when the novel tells about her past, or about the dreams and memories of that past that continue to haunt her in the present. She is called Irene in England, where she lives a lonely, isolated life. She does not like the name Irene, she considers it an “Irina-Irina-Irene-Irina-Irene-Irina problem” that comes into existence because the “English people were too lazy to bend their mouths or twist their tongues into unfamiliar shapes” (*Higher Ground* 183). It is easier for the English people she meets to adapt her name to their standards, rather than to accept her for who she is, an immigrant and a refugee. Irene admits that she “can’t forget Irina” (*Higher Ground* 217). Her two selves torment her so much
that she attempts to commit suicide. Eventually, Irina-Irene has to be taken to a mental institution.

The connections between the three novellas seem to be working into the direction of multidirectional memory. Furthermore, the encounter between Irina and Louis, a West Indian immigrant, makes them both realize that their experience is one of captivity. This way, “an analogy is suggested between the captivity of Afro-Caribbean and Jewish peoples” (Ledent 69). Zierler remarks that this encounter is “indicative of Phillips’s desire to link Jewish history with the story of the African Diaspora” (60). Another example of this linking can be found in the lines entwining the novel. The epigraph that opens the novel reads “Lord plant my feet on higher ground” (Higher Ground epigraph) and is taken from a traditional black spiritual. The final line is spoken by Irina: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Higher Ground 218). She is reciting words from Jewish liturgy, more precisely “the words of the Sh’ma, reminiscent of the Jewish tradition of monotheistic faith as well as tragic martyrdom” (Zierler 60-61). Higher Ground as a whole is thus framed by “the language of black and Jewish spiritual yearning” (Zierler 61). The novel opens with a line from the black spiritual realm, and closes with a saying from the Jewish religious sphere. This might imply that the black and Jewish tradition meet inside the novel as a whole, which would mean that the three stories should be seen as addressing each other, thus leading towards a vision of multidirectional memory. Nevertheless, it depends on the reader whether or not he or she establishes the link between the separate stories within Higher Ground.

This is different in Phillips’s novel The Nature of Blood. In this novel the diverse narratives are not clearly separated from each other. There are no boundaries delineated between the different paragraphs and the reader gets the impression the novel functions as a whole. It is harder to miss the links established between the discrete events experienced by the protagonists. At times, it takes a while for the reader to understand about which character he
or she is reading. However, the stories of the various protagonists are not directly analogized, which is also the case in *Higher Ground*. Craps mentions that “by placing stories of black and Jewish suffering alongside one another, Phillips is in fact taking a metonymical rather than a metaphorical view of history” (198). He explains that “[w]hile the latter conflates distinct historical experiences, substituting one for the other, the former preserves the distance between them. The similarities between the narratives that Phillips juxtaposes in his novels, should not blind us to the differences between them, both formal and thematic” (Craps 198). This clearly acknowledges that *The Nature of Blood* is a literary example of multidirectional memory.

According to Ledent, *The Nature of Blood* is a typical “Phillipsian” novel, since it focuses on “individual, distinct yet similar, exilic existences which have grown here into ‘a human river of shattered lives’ (NB, 70 and 199)” (135-36). As is shown by for instance Rothberg’s model, a focus on both the similarities and the differences between distinct experiences of suffering is needed in order to avoid a competition between events to become the paradigmatic model of suffering. Phillips does not judge in this novel and does not put one experience of suffering before the other. The different narratives in *The Nature of Blood* form “a complex journey across space and time” (Ledent 136). This journey includes the fifteenth-century town of Portobuffole near Venice, Venice itself at the time of Othello, Nazi Germany, Cyprus both during the Renaissance and immediately after World War Two, post-war London, and contemporary Israel. The novel as a whole is identified as a “maze-like text” (Ledent 136), which the reader actively has to try to untangle. Nowak identifies this characteristic as being reminiscent of the workings of memory:

In *The Nature of Blood*, memory characteristically informs not only the overall ‘story’ but also the ‘discourse’, the whole structure of the narrative, and the writer can be seen to lay a stronger stress on (post-)modernist forms of
presentation throughout. On a first reading, what may stand out are the frequent ruptures, and a consequent fragmentation of the novel into about 20 sections of different lengths, occasionally with up to five or six subsections of their own. These reflect, like in the initial section introducing Uncle Stephan, or in later sections dealing with Eva Stern’s reminiscences, the wanderings of individual memory in time and space. Therefore, they are not bound to observe either a strict chronological sequence, causality or a ‘unity of place’. (119)

Without actually using the term Nowak identifies *The Nature of Blood* as a fine example of multidirectional memory. The central position memory occupies in the novel affects the technical side of the narrative; Nowak observes this in for instance “Phillips’s new handling of point of view, literary genres and characters’ diction” (120). The focus on memory, “in a personal and in a collective sense”, leads to three important consequences for Phillips’s writing technique in *The Nature of Blood*, as opposed to earlier novels (Nowak 120). These are “the dominance of forms of presenting thought”, “a radical cutting back of those literary forms associated with writing (such as fictional letters or journals),” and finally “a minimal effort in demarcating the various stories and narrative voices from each other” (Nowak 120). According to Nowak, these three techniques impose a “unifying effect” on the at first sight ruptured narrative structure (120). The inner thoughts of characters are represented in various ways. The story of the Othello-like character is shaped by interior monologues, as is most of Eva’s narrative, which sometimes also takes the form of free indirect speech. In the story of the Jews of Portobuffole a heterodiegetic narration can be found, although in one section, just before their execution, Servadio’s inner thoughts are presented to the reader (*The Nature of Blood* 181-82) (Nowak 120-21). Nowak argues that these inside views “may endear both black and Jewish characters to the readers” (120). These three techniques thus suggest a juxtaposition of the black and Jewish narratives, which can be found in the overall structure of
the novel. The juxtaposition often is quite complex. Ashley Dawson states that “[t]he interwoven strands of narrative that make up the novel must be disentangled, which encourages the reader to view these narrative as constituting a complex counter-point to one another. . . . Phillips’s fragmented style prompts his readers to connect experiences of racial terror across the ages” (86). Moreover, Phillips deploys a set of images that appear in various passages within The Nature of Blood, thus suggesting a link between those passages. Remarkably, some of these images can also be found in La Mulâtresse Solitude, thereby hinting at a connection between for instance the suffering of Jewish people during the fifteenth century and the Holocaust, and the suffering of black slaves.

3.2.1.2 Recurrent Motifs

Within The Nature of Blood a number of motifs is repeated. The image of blood for instance plays a prominent role throughout the novel. Whitehead argues that “Phillips develops the metaphor of blood into a complex and multi-faceted image, so that it becomes a substance which both unites and separates people” (113). Blood unites people in that it is “the substance of life that links all human beings together” regardless of race (Ledent 139). Blood at the same time separates people, by symbolising “the barrier between the different human groups, whether families or races, thus standing for their irremediable estrangement and the violence this eventually engenders” (Ledent 139).

Whitehead provides an overview containing many references to blood, taken from The Nature of Blood. She sees blood as something that “defines and demarcates the differences between people” (Whitehead 113). Her overview includes references to the Othello-like character, “a man born of royal blood” (The Nature of Blood 107) and Venetian society, which regards marriage as an instrument “to keep the bloodlines pure” and therefore opposes Phillips’s Othello (The Nature of Blood 112). The Jews in the novel are accused of the murder
of a Christian child, Sebastian. A common myth at the time said that Jews used blood of Christian children to put in their bread. Phillips repeats these anti-Semitic accusations in his account of the blood libel:

In Germany they frequently murdered the Jews, because the Christian people claimed (and provided good evidence) that the Jews spread the plague by poisoning the wells with whatever came to hand: spider webs, lizards, toads and, most commonly, the severed heads of Christians. Not only had the Jews killed Jesus Christ, but during Holy Week it was common practice for them to re-enact this crime and kill a Christian child in order that they might draw out the fresh blood and knead some of it into the unleavened bread which they ate during their own Easter celebration, known as Passover. Their feast was designed to celebrate the moment in their history when they claimed that the Red Sea turned into blood and destroyed the Egyptian army, hence their need for fresh blood. . . . In addition to using this blood in the preparation of bread, it is widely known that the Jews used fresh Christian blood for anointing rabbis, for circumcision, in stopping menstrual and other bleedings, in removing bodily odours, in making love potions and magical powder, and in painting the bodies of their dead. (The Nature of Blood 51-52)

The image of blood is abundantly present in this passage. Moreover, Phillips ironically presents the anti-Semitic allegations as being the truth, for example by saying that it is widely known that the Jews act in this way. It is only much later in the novel that the Jewish side is given a voice concerning this matter. At the trial against the Jews of Portobuffole two lawyers try to convince the Venetian senators that Jews do not want to have anything to do with blood:

They quoted all of the passages from the scripture which affirmed that, for the Jews, nothing is more impure than blood – not just from animals, from whom
the Jews drain the blood after slaughter, but even from their own women. How could they possibly have been able to feed themselves on blood? They reminded those present that Jews followed the Ten Commandments, which declared that it was forbidden to kill, and the prophet Moses also specifically forbade Jews to eat blood. And then, of course, there was the cumulative evidence of the Bible. . . . The lawyers rejected as mere rumour the idea that it was traditional for rich Jews to give poor Jews Christian blood without charge, and they concluded their presentation by suggesting that the confessions obtained, which ‘proved’ that these Jews had sucked out the blood of a Christian child, had been elicited by excessive use of that dreadful engine of torture, the *strappada*. (*The Nature of Blood* 149)

During torture, the Jews of Portobuffole confess everything the torturers want to hear, but of course these confessions are not necessarily what really happened. Nevertheless, three of the Jews are sentenced to death. There is no proof of what actually happened to the Christian child but the Venetian officials need a scapegoat. Given the fact that the Jews were outsiders in the society and the proliferation of anti-Semitic thought, they were an easy target. According to Zierler, this “Jewish blood-libel narrative refers to the idea of shedding blood, as well as to the role of blood as ritual symbol and taboo in Jewish and Christian sources” (62). This is contrasted with Phillips’s rewriting of *Othello*, which “refers to blood in its various social, racial, and tribal connotations” (Zierler 62).

Other instances where the image of blood recurs are to be found in representations of violence. Whitehead identifies for instance the moment of the execution of the Jews of Portobuffole, where the fire “consumed flesh and blood” (*The Nature of Blood* 155). When Eva arrives in the concentration camp she sees a “river of blood flowing across the platform” (*The Nature of Blood* 162). In the camp Eva asks herself: “How will they cleanse the earth
after this?” (The Nature of Blood 185). Whitehead finds an intertextual reference to “Lady MacBeth’s lament: ‘What, will these hands ne’er be clean?’ (MacBeth, V, i, 41)” (Whitehead 114). She argues that “[b]y modifying the quote, Phillips emphasises the lasting collective guilt or shame of the Holocaust” (Whitehead 168 note 9). After the war, Eva seems unable to leave the thoughts of blood behind and she is haunted by a girl with “a jagged slash of lipstick around her mouth, red like blood” (The Nature of Blood 196). Eventually Eva cannot shake off the haunting memories of the Holocaust and her family and she commits suicide. Her psychiatrist describes the moment her body was found: “There was a problem. There was also a lot of blood. She cut the right artery, as though she knew what she was doing. A lot of blood” (The Nature of Blood 186). Whitehead concludes her overview of the imagery of blood in The Nature of Blood by saying that “[w]hile the Jewish Holocaust forms the central focus, Eva’s story is nevertheless firmly situated in the context of a long and ugly history of European racism” (114). Blood sometimes appears as a metaphor and at other moments as a literal presence. It is not only connected with violence and racism, but also with humiliation. This is the case for instance when Eva Stern and her family are in a boxcar to be taken to a concentration camp and she sees a girl bleeding: “And then she noticed a girl of her own age, perhaps a little older. It was her time of the month, but she could no longer hide the blood. More than any of the others, Eva felt for this girl in her moment of humiliation” (The Nature of Blood 161).

The motif of blood is also found in the novel’s title. The Nature of Blood binds two connotations of blood together, namely that of being “the ingredient which binds societies together, whether Venetian, Jewish or African,” but also that of forming “the basis of a damaging and threatening tribalism which Phillips defines as the most pressing issue in Europe today” (Whitehead 113). Ledent quotes an article by Phillips, which explains how he
read a story in the paper that provided him food for thought and helped him finish *The Nature of Blood*:

According to the paper, it appeared that in recent years black Jews in Israel had been donating blood in the hope that it might be used to save lives. However, the Israeli government, fearful of ‘diseases’ that might be contained in this blood, had instructed the medical teams to dump the ‘black’ blood. The secret practice had now been exposed, and the black Jews were rioting and demanding that this racist practice be stopped. I could barely believe what I was reading. This, it turned out, was the story that would enable me to put the final piece of the narrative puzzle into place and finish my novel. (Phillips, “On *The Nature of Blood* and the Ghost of Anne Frank” 4, qtd. in Ledent 139-40)

This practice shows a form of racism which is centred around blood. Ledent remarks that this kind of racism, based upon visibility and ignorant of national boundaries, was directed against “the Jews of German origin under Hitler” and “the blacks and the Jews throughout their history” (140). In *The Nature of Blood* the racism against black Jews in Israel is apparent in Malka’s narrative, who is defined as representing “ultimate Otherness” (Ledent 143). The title also suggests that the various narratives together “tell a larger story about the ‘nature of blood’ according to its various biological, racial, familial, and religious meanings” (Zierler 61).

Blood also is a strong image in Schwarz-Bart’s *La Mulâtresse Solitude*. I have used the English translation by Ralph Manheim. The translated title *A Woman Named Solitude* saves the proper name of Solitude, yet it “unfortunately . . . reduces the historical Solitude to an abstract and arbitrary, indefinitely modified, female subject” (Brodzki 213). The original French title “insists upon Solitude’s identity being crucially inscribed in a racial category” (Brodzki 213). A *mulâtresse* is a woman with one black parent and one white parent. Solitude
is thus someone with mixed blood, in her two races are mingled. Schwarz-Bart describes that Solitude “was almost white at birth, and it took her six weeks to darken. . . . In the course of time, her skin became an acceptable brown” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 49-50). Her black mother Bayangumay is upset because Solitude has eyes of two different colours, “one dark and one light-green, as though belonging to two different persons” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 50). Bayangumay worries because “[t]he old saltwater blacks, rich in experience, told her that this was what happened when the mixture of bloods takes place too quickly and without pleasure: in ditches, by the roadside, and especially on slave ships” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 50-51). White men raped Bayangumay during the Middle Passage and thus Solitude was “conceived on shipboard in frenzy and confusion” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 51). The event of the rape took place during the *pariade*, which is a tradition that is maintained on board of the slave ships. This custom implies that “on a specified day, a month before the ship was due to reach port, the black women were washed in sea water and the drunken sailors allowed to make free with them” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 51). The children born as a result of the *pariade* show “conflicting features,” like “eyes divided between two worlds” and they bear inside them a mixture of black and white blood (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 51).

Being not completely black and not entirely white, Solitude does not really belong to either of these groups. At first the runaway rebels only want black people to join them, they do not want mulattoes because they are “yellow shit” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 108). Solitude eventually ends up in a camp of fugitives, who initially also see her as “yellow shit” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 116). Later however, the Mandingo acknowledges that Solitude “had always had a beautiful heart, a black woman’s heart, in her breast” and the others in the camp agree with him (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 137).

Blood does not only appear in *La Mulâtresse Solitude* with its racial meaning. The connection of blood with violence is also present. The last battle is followed by an explosion
and the few survivors among the rebels are sentenced to death. The final chapter of the novel describes a “wave of blood that poured over Guadeloupe” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 169). The atmosphere on the day of Solitude’s execution is explicitly compared to “the great days of the Republic, when the blacks went to the Place de la Victoire to watch the guillotine and see the knife fall” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 172). The guillotine is seen as a new form of “entertainment” and the blacks of Guadeloupe enjoy watching “white men cutting white men’s heads off” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 99). Blood is being spilt and the blacks like to see it. Solitude however “never went too near the guillotine because of the foul sludge around it. Every day fresh earth was thrown over the blood, but the lower layers worked their way upward, and pink splotches appeared between the bare black feet of the onlookers” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 99).

In *The Nature of Blood* and *La Mulâtresse Solitude* blood is not the only recurrent motif. Images of ash and smoke are present in different narrative strands within Phillips’s novel. Furthermore, in *La Mulâtresse Solitude* these images can be found as well. In the epilogue Schwarz-Bart offers his readers a portrayal of a deserted, volcanic landscape (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 178). The use of the image of ashes allows the reader to connect the slave rebellion with the Holocaust. The old Danglemont plantation evokes in the mind of the “traveler” a vision of the Warsaw ghetto after the uprising. Schwarz-Bart “unit[es] the image of the phantoms that haunt the site of the Matouba slave revolt with the image of the spirits that move about the ‘humiliated ruins’ of the Warsaw Ghetto” but in my view the presence of ashes also hints at a linking of the two distinct events (Brodzki 224). Also within the narrative itself particular images appear that may remind the reader of Holocaust imagery, for instance “a smell of burned flesh” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 35). Near the end of the novel, “smoke on the heights and spirals of black smoke” allow the fugitives to understand that a war is coming (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 154).
In Phillips’s *The Nature of Blood* images of smoke and ashes appear frequently. The description of the public burning of the three Jews of Portobuffole goes as follows:

As the smoke cleared, one could momentarily see Moses and Giacobbe jumping back and forth, while Servadio, positioned in the middle, remained immobile as though he felt no pain. And then the flames enveloped everything, and one could see only fire. . . . Later, when the flames had abated, an executioner approached with a long-handled shovel. He put it between the smoking coals and when he pulled it out it was full of white ash. He threw the ash into the air and it dispersed immediately. (*The Nature of Blood* 155)

This passage is echoed in the impersonal description of the burning process in concentration camps:

They burn rapidly. As soon as the remains of the corpses have fallen through the grid to the ash-collection channel below, they can be pulled forwards by means of a scraper, towards the ash-removal door. . . . In the meantime, further corpses can be introduced into the chambers. All bones will have disintegrated, but some small particles may remain. The ash is white and is easily scattered. (*The Nature of Blood* 177)

When Eva arrives in the concentration camp she also sees and smells smoke, coming from the incinerators that burn people: “The chimneys bellow smoke. A sweet aroma. We breathe deeply on the air that will enable us to live. We fill our lungs and stare. Plumes of smoke spin into the night air. A red glare. The smoke whispers the truth, but, at this moment, none wish to listen” (*The Nature of Blood* 164). There are also ashes to be seen, so it is hard not to notice what is going on in the incinerators: “And on some days the smoke pours so powerfully from the chimneys that daylight cannot break through. (I once passed close by a chimney. Ash-
freckled snow skirted its base. A seasonal cape of good cheer defaced.)” (The Nature of Blood 168).

By making use of these recurring images Phillips marks a certain continuity between the anti-Jewish feelings of the fifteenth century and its culmination point in the Holocaust. The term anti-Semitism came into use during the nineteenth and twentieth century and designates theories that “advanc[e] secular explanations for the supposed Jewish threat to European civilisation” (Dawson 85). Nevertheless, these theories include “religiously-based stereotypes concerning the Jews” and anti-Jewish sentiments that already were circulating since the twelfth century (Dawson 85-86).

In The Nature of Blood the original inhabitants of Portobuffole see the Jews, who have been living in the Venetian republic for about sixty years after being expelled from Germany, as outsiders:

In 1424, the Jews of Colonia were finally expelled for good, and most decided to travel to the Republic of Venice, where it was rumoured that life was more secure. Initially, the people of the republic accepted the Jews from Colonia with all the mistrust that is common among people who do not know one another. Sadly, as the years passed, this mistrust did not abate. (The Nature of Blood 51)

This mistrust did not fade in part because the Jews did not assimilate fully into their new home. According to the narrator of The Nature of Blood they lived secluded in their own community and none of the original inhabitants of Portobuffole really knew them. The Jewish people of Portobuffole thought separatism was a safe option:

It became apparent that the Jews wished to speak only among themselves.

Further, they chose not to eat or drink with the Christians, and they refused to attend to their heavy German accents. They looked different . . . Although their
women dressed with more propriety, occasionally wearing handkerchiefs on their heads like the Christian women wore in church, even these gentler creatures refused to join in the most innocent female talk about household matters or children. The Jews ate neither pork nor red meat sold from a butcher, preferring instead to slaughter live animals and then drain the blood. . . . These Jews arrived as foreigners, and foreigners they remained. (The Nature of Blood 51)

Yet, the Jews themselves are not the only ones who are to blame for their seclusion: “People detested the Jews for a variety of reasons, but the most often cited referred to their position in society as people who would loan money at an interest, more often than not requiring extravagant security from the borrower” (The Nature of Blood 52). Usury was considered a shameful trade and forbidden to Christians. Thus also in the professional domain, Jews and Christian remained separated in the Venetian republic, since “Jews were unable to practise in either the arts or trades, no matter how skilled, for the various guilds had been deliberately established with religious affiliations to Christianity. Usury, however, because it was forbidden to Christians, remained a professional outlet for the Jews” (The Nature of Blood 53). This reveals the hypocrisy of the local authorities since they maintained the Jews in social exclusion. The privileges and wealth the practice of usury brought with it made many Christians turn against the money lending Jews.

The Venetian authorities are complicit because “[b]y obliging the Jews to lend money in exchange for permission to live in their territory, the Republic of Venice could pretend to be implementing a policy of some tolerance towards the Jews, while serving its own interests and ignoring the fact that it was further exposing the Jews to the multiple dangers of Christian hostility” (The Nature of Blood 53). An important part of the Venetian economy depended on the Jewish usurers yet the city council introduced measures to isolate the Jewish community
even further. Two of these measures are represented in *The Nature of Blood*. In the narrative of the Jews of fifteenth-century Portobuffole Phillips includes the following passage:

“Although the Venetian *Grand Council* sought to discourage the propagation of false ideas about the Jews (for these people were an important part of the republic’s economy), the doge’s inner *Council of Ten* nevertheless passed a law according to which the Jews were instructed to distinguish themselves by yellow stitching on their clothes” (*The Nature of Blood* 52). This seems to be an antecedent of the star of David, which Jews had to wear to distinguish themselves during the Nazi period. The second measure is described in one of the encyclopaedic insertions within the novel, namely the one that explains what a ghetto is:

GHETTO: It is generally thought that the word *ghetto* was first used to describe the section of Venice where, in the sixteenth century, Jews were ordered to live apart from Christians in a ‘marshy and unwholesome site’ to the north of St Mark’s. The Italian word *ghetto* means ‘iron foundry’, the Venetian Jews being forced to live next to the site of a former foundry. Ghettos are generally subject to serious overpopulation, and they exercise a debilitating effect on the self-confidence of their inhabitants. (*The Nature of Blood* 160)

With this measure the Venetian authorities thus further isolated the Jews, not only socially but also spatially. Since the Venetian ghetto only came into existence in the sixteenth century it does not feature in the Portobuffole narrative, which is chronologically anterior to the installation of the ghetto. However, the encyclopaedic description is not the only passage in *The Nature of Blood* which mentions the Venetian ghetto. Phillips’s Othello visits the ghetto and he identifies it as an “underworld” (*The Nature of Blood* 130). He finds it hard to understand the ghetto and why the Jews do not object to living in such a place: “And what a strange place was this walled ghetto. Apparently, most of the Jews did not regard this arrangement of being locked behind gates from sunset to sunrise as a hardship, for it afforded
them protection against the many cold hearts that opposed their people” (The Nature of Blood 129). Phillips also describes the other side of the coin, making it clear that this feeling of protection could well be false: “Some frightened Jews argued that the ghetto, far from affording them protection, made it easier for popular outbursts against them to achieve some focus, for the Jews were herded en masse and enclosed in one defenceless pen” (The Nature of Blood 129). The course of history has taught us that these frightened Jews were right.

The Othello-like figure does not feel at ease within the gates of the ghetto and the experience leaves him with many questions: “My exploration had unnerved me somewhat, for it was well known that the Jews were fortunate in their wealth. Why they should choose to live in this manner defeated my understanding. Surely there was some other land or some other people among whom they might dwell in more tolerable conditions?” (The Nature of Blood 130-31). These final remarks bring Phillips’s Othello close to the character Stephan Stern, who wants to give the Jews a land in which they can be free. However, the difference between them is that the Othello-like character understands the dangers of separatism, while the young Stephan Stern is more idealistic and supports the Zionist movement. When Stephan grows older and meets Malka, he too has to admit that the creation of a separate state for the Jews in Israel poses several problems. While the Othello-like figure gains certain insights because of his visits to the ghetto, “he fails to recognise the danger of his position or to acknowledge the correspondences between his own situation and that of the Venetian Jews” (Whitehead 102). He witnesses the “xenophobia at the heart of the Venetian empire” but at the same time experiences an “increasing blindness with regard to his own situation and predicament” (Whitehead 102).

The connections established between the Othello-like character, Stephan Stern and the Jews of Portobuffole are an example of “Phillips’s exploration of the complex interrelations between black and Jewish cultures” (Whitehead 103). Whitehead argues that “[i]n suggesting
connections and interrelations between his characters, and in allowing different instances of trauma to address each other, Phillips departs from the isolation imposed by traumatic experience” (104). She pleads for an active role of the reader, who has to “listen to the resonances and dissonances” between the different traumatic histories of the characters of The Nature of Blood (Whitehead 104).

Another image that appears in various narrative strands is that of people who are treated as cattle. Malka describes how she and her family were taken from their homeland Ethiopia and sent to Israel: “Out in the desert, you flashed your lights to attract our attention. And then you herded us on to buses. . . . And then on to the embassy compound, where we were stored like thinning cattle. Grazing on concrete. And from the embassy to the airport” (The Nature of Blood 199). This resembles Eva Stern’s experiences in the boxcar train, taking her and her family to a concentration camp, about fifty years earlier. The chaos and inhuman conditions in the boxcar allow the reader to connect the passengers with animals (The Nature of Blood 153-54 and 160-61). The camp experience itself dehumanizes the inmates and Eva compares them explicitly to cattle: “I sit where I can see most of the camp. Men and women lining up to taste a thin trickle of water from a pierced pipe. Troops of cattle. To their side, sick animals lying in pools of their own filth. Glazed eyes” (The Nature of Blood 185-86).

The image of cattle also brings to mind the slave trade and the Middle Passage. The Africans on board of the slave ships “were seen and treated as cargo, as little more than cattle” (Haas 102). In La Mulâtresse Solitude Solitude’s mother Bayangumay goes through this experience. The people from her village are seized by “the sellers of men” and become objects of trade (La Mulâtresse Solitude 36). The captives are taken to slave pens, the description of which resembles that of a concentration camp: “Every morning the night’s corpses were taken out and thrown from a door overhanging the sea. They were replaced by new arrivals speaking new languages. . . . bodies became walls for other bodies, and life lost
its contours, merging into something that has no name in the language of men” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 37). When they are let out of their cells to eat “[o]nce again the captives knew a human feeling, which may have been shame” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 37-38). However, this feeling human again does not last long: “On the upper floor three white men, leaning on a low iron railing, smiled as they looked down on the cattle in the yard” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 38). The comparison is explicitly drawn here, leaving no doubt that the slave traders see the captives are mere animals to be sold. The black prisoners are treated like animals, chained and “driven with whips, iron clubs, and rifle butts into a corridor leading down to the sea” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 38-39). Together with other captives, Bayangumay enters the slave traders’ boat, described as “the white men’s floating house” which contains “human cargo” (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 40). Being inside the boat is a frightening experience for Bayangumay:

> she [Bayangumay] felt an agony of fear, a terror drunk on itself, which seemed at every movement of the waves to rise into the hot air. . . . The captives scurried through narrow passageways, crawled to the space assigned them, and lay down as best they could in the darkness of the unknown. . . . Then the light itself disappeared and nothing remained but indistinct sounds, slow, painful breathing faintly punctuated by the rattling of chains. The foul air, the smell of death imposed a new rhythm, cautious and miserly, on the breathers. . . . She was suffocating under the weight of the stump and the pervasive smell of rot; but every time she tried to stand erect and reach into the fresh air, she remembered she was a worm and told herself not to be foolish. . . . Here and there a moan ended in a clear, pure sob, and Bayangumay thought of the children who had been crowded into a cage in the bow of the ship. (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 40-44)
The miserable environment of the ship imposes fear. Misery and dead are everywhere around the captives and this provokes a tense atmosphere. They all feel lost and search for someone they know. Furthermore, they have no idea what will happen to them or where they will be taken. The confusion is great and the ship is overcrowded. The captives have to survive in terrible and unhygienic conditions: “Trembling as though with fever, she [Bayangumay] awoke to her miseries – hunger, thirst, vermin, the lack of air, the smell of others, and the smell of her own feces that had escaped her during the night” (La Mulâtresse Solitude 45). The captives on the ship are chained together as animals and treated as a herd of cattle. However, the ones who force them in these conditions are nothing more than animals themselves. The slave traders show no sign of human compassion or emotions. This is in tune with Césaire’s statement that colonialism “dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it” (Discourse on Colonialism 41). Colonialism, the system of which the slave trade was a part, turned men into animals. The slave traders see the slaves who make them rich as meat, as becomes apparent in the following quote: “The du Parc fortune had its origins in a contract signed in 1700, whereby the Compagnie de Guinée undertook it to supply eleven thousand tons of black flesh” (La Mulâtresse Solitude 68). Solitude, being a mulâtresse, is more valuable than a black woman within the system of slavery. Yet, she is treated little better than the other slaves because she scares her masters with her laugh:

In the last months of her stay at the du Parc plantation she seems to have worked in the fields with the black cattle. The new masters branded her on the shoulder and sent her to the cane fields. They thought they had bought a body with a soul attached, but when they heard her laugh they spread their ten fingers and unloaded her at another slave market. It was the same with the
masters who followed . . . And like cattle raisers, they all left their initials on her body. (La Mulâtresse Solitude 89)

Thus not only in his descriptions of the Middle Passage but also in those of the daily lives of the slaves, Schwarz-Bart uses the imagery of cattle. The slaves are sold at a market and their bodies are branded with their owner’s initials, which is what happens to animals as well.

3.2.1.3 Intertextuality

According to Whitehead there exist three literary techniques that are typical of trauma fiction, namely “intertextuality, repetition and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice” (84). She points out that these techniques “mirror at a formal level the effects of trauma” (Whitehead 84). Repetition in The Nature of Blood and La Mulâtresse Solitude takes the form of recurrent images. Furthermore, thematic analogies are to be found between the histories of Solitude and her mother Bayangumay, and between the experiences of the different characters in The Nature of Blood. Repetition thus can be found at the “levels of language, imagery or plot” (Whitehead 86). This technique mimics the haunting quality of trauma, or in Whitehead’s words “the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology and progression” (86). In Phillips’s novel the fragmented narrative voice is apparent because of the different narrative strands, scattered across time and space and each offering a perspective on the history of European racism. In La Mulâtresse Solitude the narrative is broken up as well, in a section about Bayangumay, a part about her daughter Solitude, and an epilogue which is set off from the narrative proper.

In The Nature of Blood Phillips makes ample use of intertextuality, he rewrites for instance the story of Othello and Anne Frank’s experiences are evoked. Whitehead argues that intertextuality can be seen in relation to trauma, namely because it “can suggest the surfacing to consciousness of forgotten or repressed memories” (85). Moreover, the evocation of
Shakespeare’s Othello as a literary precedent affects how the reader receives Phillips’s Othello. Whitehead writes:

> intertextuality can also evoke a literary precedent which threatens to determine or influence the actions of a character in the present. The protagonist seems bound to replay the past and to repeat the downfall of another, suggesting that he is no longer in control of his own actions. In *The Nature of Blood*, Caryl Phillips’s Othello echoes Shakespeare’s eponymous hero in journeying to Cyprus with his new bride. The reader is left to determine from the evidence in the novel whether he will repeat the tragic mistakes of his predecessor. (85)

Since most readers of *The Nature of Blood* know the outcome of Shakespeare’s version of *Othello*, a tragic atmosphere hovers over Phillips’s retelling of it. In Phillips’s account the Othello-like figure is never given a name and tells the story from his own perspective. The narrative does not include Othello’s suicide but is cut short after his arrival on Cyprus. Whitehead argues that “Phillips’s Othello is indeed doomed to repeat the pattern of Shakespeare’s play, but that it is Venetian society, rather than the influence of Iago, which is the determining factor in his downfall” (90). However, we are not completely sure whether Phillips’s character will end up the same way as Shakespeare’s Othello, or whether he will act differently. In the incomplete story, “Phillips suspends Othello between repetition and change” (Whitehead 97). An indication of the impending downfall of the Othello-like character is found in Phillips’s essay on *Othello*, “A Black European Success”, which is part of *The European Tribe*. Whitehead notes that in this essay, Phillips makes it clear that “Othello’s fate is already sealed by the time of his arrival on Cyprus” (97). Phillips writes that the pressures placed upon Othello by Venetian society “rendered his life a tragedy” (*The European Tribe* 46). Phillips identifies “the seeds of disaster” in Othello’s marriage to Desdemona, because it gives Othello a false feeling of security (*The European Tribe* 48). In
Phillips’s reading, the tragedy commences at the moment that “Othello begins to forget that he is black” (*The European Tribe* 48). All of this also happens in Phillips’s version of Othello, which therefore might also lead to the tragic death of the protagonist, even without the presence of a figure like Iago. Phillips’s Othello has a hard time when he tries to fit in with Venetian society. Yet, Venice needs him as a general and the pressure is high. He convinces himself that through his marriage he has assimilated into the community. In *The Nature of Blood* a voice reproaches Phillips’s Othello for forgetting that he is black:

> You tuck your black skin away beneath their epauletted uniform, appropriate their words (*Rude am I in speech*), their manners, worry your nappy woollen head with anxiety about learning their ways, yet you conveniently forget your own family, and thrust your wife and son to the back of your noble mind. O strong man, O strong arm, O valiant soldier, O weak man. You are lost, a sad black man, first in a long line of so-called achievers who are too weak to yoke their past with their present; too naïve to insist on both; too foolish to realize that to supplant one with the other can only lead to catastrophe. . . . My friend, the Yoruba have a saying: the river that does not know its own source will dry up. You will do well to remember this. . . . My friend, an African river bears no resemblance to a Venetian canal. Only the strongest spirit can hold both together. Only the most powerful heart can endure the pulse of two such disparate life-forces. After a protracted struggle, most men will eventually relinquish one in favour of the other. (*The Nature of Blood* 180-82)

This voice accuses the protagonist of tucking his black skin away, in a desperate attempt to fit in with the Venetian republic. The voice blames the Othello-like character for forgetting his origins and choosing only to remember his Venetian life. It is stated explicitly that this can only lead to catastrophe. In Phillips’s version all the elements that he identifies as leading to
Othello’s tragic death are present. It therefore seems that the catastrophic ending of Shakespeare’s Othello will repeat itself in Phillips’s version. The ending itself however, is not present in *The Nature of Blood* because, as Whitehead concludes: “If the outcome is certain, then the rest of the story becomes redundant” (97).

The return to the original text hints at a connection with trauma, in particular with its belatedness. Temporality is disrupted and “[t]he intertextual novelist can enact through a return to the source text an attempt to grasp what was not fully known or realised in the first instance, and thereby to depart from it or pass beyond it” (Whitehead 90). To Whitehead a return to Shakespeare’s canonical text evokes “the Freudian notion of repetition-compulsion” and is therefore linked to the aftermath of trauma (85). Yet Phillips does not simply return to Shakespeare’s *Othello*, he also rewrites it, thereby offering the reader new insights into the psychology of the Othello-like character. Whitehead comments:

> Novelists can also revise canonical works . . ., reading them against the grain and providing a new perspective on familiar texts. Trauma fiction overlaps with postcolonial fiction in its use of intertextuality to allow formerly silenced voices to tell their own story. Phillips rewrites the story of Othello from his own viewpoint, thereby revealing the racial insecurities the underpin his actions. . . . The intertextual recovery of hitherto marginalised voices signals the ethical dimension of trauma fiction, which witnesses and records that which is “forgotten” or overlooked in the grand narrative of History. (85-86).

With his version of Othello, Phillips thus demands attention for the other voice, which has been silenced for too long by official history. Schwarz-Bart, in presenting the experiences of slaves is involved in a similar operation. In Phillips’s portrayal of Othello, the implicit racist stereotypes as can be found in Shakespeare are left out (Whitehead 90). Rather, the racism in Venetian society becomes apparent, showing how it mounts up the tragic atmosphere.
Eva’s narrative in *The Nature of Blood* contains intertextual references to both Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl* and Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl* (Whitehead 92). By alluding to literary sources Phillips filters his own representation of the Holocaust. It is his “self-conscious literariness” that “suggests his own distance from the reality of the Holocaust” (Whitehead 92). Intertextuality allows Phillips to “distanc[e] his text from the reality of the Holocaust, providing a space for reflection on the ethics of representation involved in his writing. Phillips’s self-consciousness acknowledges his own indirect and highly mediated modes of access to the Holocaust” (Whitehead 106). This distancing is important with reference to multidirectional memory. Phillips does not equate the different narrative strands to one another. He does not want to imply that the narrated events are the same. He is hinting at a connection beneath the surface, without losing track of the differences between the discrete historical events.

In *La Mulâtresse Solitude* the most important intertextual reference can be found before the beginning of the narrative proper, in the novel’s epigraph. It says: “The mulatto woman Solitude was with child at the time of her arrest; she was executed on November 29, 1802, immediately after the delivery of her child” (epigraph *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, n.p.). Schwarz-Bart further mentions that this short piece of text was written by Oruno Lara in *Histoire de La Guadeloupe*. This reference makes clear to the reader that Solitude is a historical figure. She is a female Guadeloupean rebel who fought against the reestablishment of slavery in 1804, which makes her a legendary example of female resistance (Brodzki 220). Brodzki identifies the “mythical-historical” Solitude as a “figure capable of carrying the symbolic weight of a narrative devoted to the reconstruction of African-Caribbean collective memory” (218). By invoking this legendary figure Schwarz-Bart challenges official French history and presents an alternative, Caribbean voice (Brodzki 218).
The epigraph of *La Mulâtresse Solitude* refers to an historical account. For *The Nature of Blood* Phillips also made use of historical sources, which he mentions explicitly in the acknowledgements: “In the course of writing this novel I referred to many works which space does not allow me to acknowledge. I would, however, like to express my debt to two books: *Trent 1475* by R. Po-Chia Hsia (Yale University Press), and *Portobuffole* by Salomone G. Radzik (Editrice La Giuntina)” (*The Nature of Blood* n.p.). From the beginning of the novel Phillips makes clear that *The Nature of Blood* contains many intertextual references and that the story of the Jews of Portobuffole is based on historical reports.

### 3.2.2 Thematically

In *The Nature of Blood* and *La Mulâtresse Solitude* connections between histories of black and Jewish suffering can be found at a stylistic level, but also thematically speaking links are present. Both novels tell stories of discrete historical events, experienced by several characters at different times and places, yet brought together by larger themes. Zierler writes about Phillips that he “plant[s] within his narratives thematic seeds of connection and mutual engagement” which allow his novels to work because of a “dialectic of difference and sameness” (58). Zierler gives the example of the two Venetian stories within *The Nature of Blood*, one of which is a Jewish story and the other is a black one. There are many connections to be found between the account about the Jews of Portobuffole and the narrative of the Othello-like figure. Examples include the racism and prejudices inherent in Venetian society, the ghetto, the difficulties of assimilation and the fact of remaining outsiders. Yet, Zierler identifies a “pointed asymmetry” in the juxtaposition of both narratives (62). The Jewish story is told by a “detached, historical, third-person narrator” and “from beginning to end, culminating in the execution of Servadio and two other Jews” (Zierler 62). In the black Venetian story on the other hand, the thoughts of the Othello-like figure are presented in the
first person. Moreover, the ending of this story is missing. This shows Phillips’s awareness of the differences between the different narrative strands in *The Nature of Blood*. The readers are encouraged to see the similarities between the stories, but Phillips does not aim at total likeness. Nowak remarks that Phillips is “keen to provide for unity as well as for diversity, and for overall coherence and closure despite a seemingly necessary fragmentation on the surface. To this end, specific links between the individual stories are established, binding them all together into one grand narrative of human suffering as a result of racism and xenophobia” (122-23). Craps also acknowledges that the links between the narrative strands “appear to invite the reader to recognize a common human essence that persists across space and time. Differences between people that may seem profound are revealed to be only skin-deep” (195). Schwarz-Bart’s *La Mulâtresse Solitude* also seems to fit these descriptions. In *The Nature of Blood* the unmarked sections prompt the reader to “disentangle these closely interwoven storylines,” during which “the reader cannot help but reflect on what it is that unites them” (Craps 193). In *La Mulâtresse Solitude* there is a clean break between the narrative proper and the epilogue, yet the suddenness of this rupture stimulates a similar search for unifying elements.

The analogies and echoing themes, especially those in *The Nature of Blood*, are already widely studied by critics such as Ledent, Nowak, Thomas, and Whitehead. Many links are suggested between the characters of the different narrative strands. Phillips does so by making use of “numerous words, phrases, motifs, and themes that echo from one narrative to another” (Craps 193). A few of these themes deserve extra attention, since they can also be found in Schwarz-Bart’s *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, establishing connections between stories of black and Jewish suffering.
3.2.2.1 The Breakdown of the Family Unit

Several of the characters of *The Nature of Blood* as well as Solitude and her mother Bayangumay experience a breakdown of the family unit, often with traumatic consequences. While Stephan and the Othello-like figure choose to leave their families behind, the breakdown of the families of Eva, Bayangumay, Solitude, and the Jews of Portobuffole is forced upon them by violent events.

Eva Stern for instance falls apart after losing her family in the Second World War. The memories of her happy childhood before the war haunt her, and while she is in the camp she imagines seeing her mother. Aleid Fokkema writes that after the liberation of the camp Eva is “on the verge of a complete breakdown, the trauma of loss has wreaked havoc on her memory and sense of reality. She concentrates on the minute details of a day-to-day present, ignoring and repressing the past. One fantasy seems to keep her alive: that her mother is still with her” (286). She has to understand however, that her mother is dead. It is extremely difficult for Eva to mourn for those whom she has lost. Whitehead identifies the woman with the red lipstick, an image that Eva cannot shake off in Britain, as “an uncanny double of Eva herself,” but also as a representation of the women “whose absence she mourns: Margot, Rosa, Bella, her mother” (107).

In the opening sequences of the novel, Eva’s uncle Stephan is not with his wife and daughter in America, but on the island of Cyprus, where he helps refugees. As in Eva’s case, the memories of his old life haunt him, and he feels guilty: “A futile and self-corrosive guilt. Wondering what else I might have done. Memory. That untidy room with unpredictable visiting hours. I am forever being thrust through the door and into that untidy room” (*The Nature of Blood* 11). He is not able to forget his family and the life he lived before he went to Palestine and Cyprus: “I still carry within me the old world that I once cast aside. (She is in America with my daughter.) And my two nieces. Dear Margot. Dear Eva. A world that I can
never put down to rest. A world that, even now, I seem incapable of surrendering” (*The Nature of Blood* 11). Even as an old man he is unable to escape the memories of them: “He sat heavily and tried not to think of his wife and child. But it was useless. Every day, assaulted by loneliness. Every day, eaten up with guilt. His only companion was memory, and how he struggled with the burdensome weight of this single relationship. He now understood that to remember too much is, indeed, a form of madness” (*The Nature of Blood* 211).

Like Stephan, the Othello-like figure has left his wife and child. He marries Desdemona even though he already has a wife in Africa. As mentioned above, a voice in the novel reproaches him for having betrayed his African past and family. However, the Othello-like character has not completely forgotten his family and tries to construct “unconvincing self-justifications” (Whitehead 93):

> I had spent the latter part of the afternoon in great contemplation, much of it concerning my wife and son who remained in my native land. The word *wife* still gave rise to much private concern, but I tried to flush this anxiety from my mind. I continually reminded myself that my native wife was not a *wife* in the manner that a Venetian might understand the term, yet I wondered if this were not simply a convenience of interpretation on my part. The problem of whether I would ever return to my country, and my worries about how my new wife might be treated by my people were this to happen, distressed me greatly. (*The Nature of Blood* 146)

The character is trying to reconcile his new marriage with his past and his old country. Although he knows that it is all in vain, he defends his decisions to ease his mind.

Bayangumay and Solitude do not have such a choice. As soon as Solitude is born she is taken away from Bayangumay to be brought up among other mulattoes (*La Mulâtresse Solitude* 51). It is only because she needs her mother’s milk that she is allowed to come back.
But soon they become less intimate. Bayangumay runs away and disappears from the novel, while Solitude is sold and resold to other masters. The novel’s epigraph already makes clear what Solitude’s ultimate fate will be. She gives birth to a child in the moments before her execution. Her child is not killed but it will live as a slave. Both in *The Nature of Blood* and *La Mulâtresse Solitude* the historical events in which the characters find themselves tear whole families apart.

3.2.2.2 *Slavery and Captivity*

The theme of slavery and captivity is obvious in the case of *La Mulâtresse Solitude*. But also in *The Nature of Blood* the idea is present. The narrative of the Othello-like figure makes clear that although he is a general in the Venetian army, he is treated like a slave by the local authorities. They tolerate his presence because they need him. Dawson argues that in his version of Othello, Phillips stresses the “isolation and vulnerability of migrants to the metropolis. No matter how crucial a figure like Othello becomes to the state, he is nonetheless constantly made aware of his own marginalisation within European society. Although he is honoured for his military prowess, he is never allowed to forget that he is seen as capable of the most dangerous adulteration of bloodlines” (95). He is a general but functions as a symbol of “the empire’s ability to make servants out of those it has conquered” (Dawson 95). The reproaching modern voice warns him: “And so you shadow her every move, attend to her every whim, like the black Uncle Tom that you are. Fighting the white man’s war for him/Wide-receiver in the Venetian army/The republic’s grinning Satchmo hoisting his sword like a trumpet” (*The Nature of Blood* 180). The voice attacks Phillips’s Othello for being too docile and accepting a subordinate position. He tries too hard to please the white Venetians, thereby losing his dignity. The lady he is wooing sends him a gold bracelet. Phillips describes the character’s reaction to this gift: “I was astonished to discover a gold bracelet that was
heavily wrought but delicate in design. . . . I took the bracelet and fastened it about my wrist, determining, even at that moment, that I should never again remove it” (*The Nature of Blood* 136). According to Whitehead, the bracelet is a symbol of the “continuing hold on him of the past that he seeks to relinquish” (93). The gold bracelet “represents a link with Venetian society that he can never remove, even as it inescapably recalls the shackles of slavery that continue to bind his consciousness like mind-forged manacles” (Whitehead 93). The bracelet indicates that the character is tied to Venice like a slave is tied to its master. The gold of the bracelet makes the Othello-like figure blind for his condition as a slave of the Venetian republic. Moreover Phillips subtly hints at the former slavehood of the Othello-like figure in the following presentation of the character’s thoughts: “I was tempted to remind the gathered dignitaries that I, unlike my father-in-law, was born of royal blood, and possessed a lineage of such quality that not even slavery could stain its purity” (*The Nature of Blood* 158).

Shakespeare’s Othello was a former slave, this could also be an indication in that direction. Eva Stern is detained by the Nazis and put in a concentration camp. Furthermore, she is used as a slave in the camp. The passage in which she reveals that she is a member of the Sonderkommando disorients the reader:

> Today, they continue to burn bodies. (I burn bodies.) Burning bodies. First, she lights the fire. Pour gasoline, make a torch, and then ignite the pyre. Wait for the explosion as the fire catches, and then wait for the smoke. Clothed bodies burn slowly. Decayed bodies burn slowly. In her mind she cries, fresh and naked, please. Women and children burn faster than men. Fresh naked children burn the fastest. (*The Nature of Blood* 170)

In this section the first and third person are mixed, as if Eva is ashamed to admit her involvement in the process. This unsettling and confusing passage mimics the traumatic experience by making it difficult to read and make sense of. In this account of trauma the
narrative conventions are broken down, thereby reproducing the failure of understanding in trauma. Craps writes that Phillips uses “experimental modes of representation” which “register the shocking and unassimilable nature of the traumatic historical events they portray in formal terms” (199). The reader goes through a similar experience, albeit at a different level, which allows him or her to empathize with Eva. Yet it also “complicate[s] the reader’s involvement with her” (Craps 200). Throughout *The Nature of Blood* the reader gets to know Eva’s innermost feelings, and thus also the weak parts of her character. Ledent argues that “Phillips depicts an Eva who is all the more human for her imperfection” (157). On the one hand, this permits the reader to empathize with Eva. Yet it also makes Eva not entirely likeable because she was somehow complicit. Furthermore, she shows herself prejudiced and she even holds racist beliefs: “I disliked the dirty, uncultivated people from the east” (*The Nature of Blood* 169). Another fault of Eva is that she forges a letter from Gerry to go to England after the war. This makes the reader question her reliability as a witness.

### 3.2.2.3 The Difficulties of Witnessing

Both the Holocaust and the Middle Passage provoke difficulties of witnessing. Alexandra Haas points out that both events eliminated their own witnesses, “not only in a physical, but also in a psychological sense” (103). Since both the Holocaust and the Middle Passage are traumatic instances they are not fully experienced at the time of their occurrence. Ledent mentions that Eva’s narrative “raises questions about the nature of testimony, especially in relation to the unimaginable suffering caused by the Holocaust, and the painful desubjectivation that testifying about this event can imply” (157). This elimination of the own witness seems to be in tune with the work of Giorgio Agamben. Timothy Bewes also makes this connection and writes that the female characters in Phillips’s work “frequently seem to suffer the fate of those in Auschwitz who were called *Muselmänner*, ‘Muslims’ – characters
so destroyed by their suffering, or by the shame that results from it, that even if they live through it they are unable to speak of it” (42). As a member of the Sonderkommando Eva has witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust, yet she is unable to testify. After her suicide the psychiatrist says: “Quite simply, I didn’t know the danger. She didn’t talk much. In fact, I don’t think she said anything to anybody. Including myself” (The Nature of Blood 186). In Eva’s narrative the sentence “last night, in the pub, I finally abandoned words” appears three times (The Nature of Blood 190, 192, 196). Eva cannot act as a witness and provide testimony.

The theme of witnessing links The Nature of Blood to La Mulâtresse Solitude. Bayangumay witnesses the Middle Passage and she too is unable to testify. She tries to commit suicide by swallowing her own tongue, but unlike Eva she is not successful: “All you had to do was curl the tip of your tongue and suck it back with your breath, slowly, patiently, carefully, until it entered the throat and blocked it. But whatever people may say, a woman’s tongue does not lend itself very well to this exercise, and few women succeed” (La Mulâtresse Solitude 45). In both cases, Eva and Bayangumay, there is a connection between the impossibility of testifying to what they witnessed and their suicide.

4. Conclusion

The recurrent images and common themes reveal a connection, both between and within the narratives of The Nature of Blood and La Mulâtresse Solitude. These two novels are an example of Rothberg’s notion of multidirectional memory, since they do not aim at a “superimposition of one set of referents over another” but at the “positioning of one set alongside another” (Brodzki 214). The juxtaposed histories mutually enlighten each other, without entering into a competition of which group or character suffered the most. The memories of black and Jewish suffering do not cover each other, but are given alongside one
another. Multidirectional memory does not function as a competitive memory, in which recollections of certain events block other remembrances.

The Holocaust and colonialism form part of a larger multidirectional network, which comprises violence, suffering, racism, segregation, the breakdown of the family unit, slavery and captivity, among other things. In this multidirectional network the experiences of black and Jewish people are united, but they are not equalised. There is room for both the similarities and the differences. The analogies between the different narratives catch the reader’s attention and make him or her think about the common ground between the traumatic experiences. Yet, both Phillips and Schwarz-Bart make use of a certain asymmetry in their work. Schwarz-Bart focuses in *La Mulâtresse Solitude* on the experience of slavery. It is only in the novel’s epilogue that the Holocaust appears. In *The Nature of Blood* Phillips employs different narrative techniques to differentiate between the various narrative strands. Both novels allow historical events that cross cultures, races, time and space to address each other in a refreshing way. In *The Nature of Blood* and *La Mulâtresse Solitude* symmetries and asymmetries between the different historical events are represented, allowing a space for multidirectional memory.
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