Rewriting ‘white’ genres in search of Afro-European identities
Travel and crime fiction by Bernardine Evaristo and Mike Phillips

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Presuming that both travel and crime fiction can be described as traditionally ‘white’ genres, this article investigates how contemporary Black British authors appropriate these genres. Focusing on Mike Phillips’s *A Shadow of Myself* and Bernardine Evaristo’s *Soul Tourists*, the article examines how the two novels redeem and suspend the traditional racial and national coding of travel writing and crime fiction by rehabilitating black mixed-race characters. In both novels, moreover, the rethinking of traditional popular genres coincides with, and is partly enabled by, a transnational shift in focus from Britain to Europe. A closer look at the novels’ respective endings, finally, reveals how each conceptualises the relationship between Britain and Europe differently, and how this difference can be explained by the impact of genre.

**Keywords:** appropriation, crime fiction, imagining (Afro-)Europe, transculturality, travel writing

“[T]ravel writing […] can be seen – though not exclusively – as an imperialist discourse through which dominant cultures (white, male, Euro-American, middle-class) seek to ingratiate themselves, often at others’ expense.”

(Holland & Huggan 1998: xiii)

“[English] Crime fiction speaks to social identity and beyond that to national identity and political identity. What crime fiction has traditionally dealt in is racial stereotypes shaped by white structures of power.”

(Wells 1999: 209–210)
1. Introduction

Starting from the premise that both travel narratives and crime fiction can be described as traditionally ‘white’ genres, which tend to rely on national and racial/ethnic stereotypes, this article investigates how contemporary black British authors are revisiting these genres. Focusing on Mike Phillips’s *A Shadow of Myself* and Bernardine Evaristo’s *Soul Tourists*, the article examines how the search for Afro-European identities in the two novels coincides with a transcultural shift that results from imagining and locating black British identities within Europe – and not within an exclusively British (albeit multicultural) context. While, previously, scholars have already scrutinized the ‘colouring’ and ‘generic hybridization’ of crime fiction in Phillips’s writing on the one hand and noticed a ‘transcontinental sensibility’ and a ‘hybridization’ of Europe in each of the novels on the other, this article seeks to correlate both aspects in a comparative case study. The comparison of the two novels will highlight parallels between Phillips’s and Evaristo’s appropriation of traditionally ‘white’ genres and thus help to explore the potential of *Soul Tourists* for genre critique – a perspective that has received little attention so far. Moreover, in following Patrick Holland’s and Graham Huggan’s call for “a sustained critical analysis” in the approach to travel writing, i.e. “one that looks at travel writers as retailers of mostly white, male, middle-class, heterosexual myths and prejudices” (1998: viii), this article follows recent studies of the genre.

Published in the year 2000, *A Shadow of Myself* (Phillips 2000 = *ASOM*) tells the story of two half-brothers, British filmmaker Joseph Coker and former Stasi

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3. In an earlier article (Hauthal 2016), I compared Evaristo’s novel with Christos Tsiolkas’s *Dead Europe*, focusing my discussion of the novel on the ghostly as a means to (dis-)engage with Europe as imaginary homeland.


5. Cf. influential studies of travel literature in the field of postcolonial studies by e.g. Porter (1991), Pratt (1992), and Spurr (1993).
collaborator George Coker. Unaware of each other’s existence, Joseph and George grew up with different white mothers in national and ethnic homes separated by the iron curtain: George was brought up in East Germany by his Russian mother Katya, while Joseph grew up with their Ghanaian father and his English mother in England. It is only when Joseph attends a film festival in Prague and is sought out by his brother that the two finally meet. Set in post-wall Europe in 1998/9 and focalized alternately through different characters, the narrative strand of the present is cross-cut with the memoirs of Joseph’s and George’s father Kofi, who recounts his experiences in Britain and as a student in Moscow in the late 1950s in sections bearing the telling title “diary of desire. The life and times of Kofi George Coker” (ASOM 106).

*Soul Tourists* (Evaristo 2006 = *ST*), a fictional travelogue first published in 2005, combines the figure of the ghost with the motif of the journey. The novel centres on a couple of Jamaican and Ghanaian descent who meet in London and together embark on a journey across Europe. In the course of this journey, one by one, ten historical figures of colour, who had lived on the continent at different periods in the past but were omitted from European history, start haunting the novel’s male protagonist, Stanley Williams, and reveal European history as one of exclusion, having ignored or deliberately forgotten black presences in Europe.

My aim in what follows is to present a comparative case study which scrutinizes how the two novels adopt and adapt the traditional literary formulas of travel writing and crime fiction from an Afro-European perspective. Focusing on adaptation in the context of postcolonial (re-)writing, my analysis will set out from the concept of appropriation as defined by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. According to them, appropriation describes “the ways in which post-colonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture – language, forms of writing, film, theatre, even modes of thought and argument […] – that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities” (Ashcroft et al. 2013: 19):

> By appropriating the imperial language, its discursive forms and its modes of representation, post-colonial societies are able […] to intervene […] in the dominant discourse, to interpolate their own cultural realities, or use that dominant language to describe those realities to a wide audience of readers.

(Ashcroft et al. 2013: 20)

The concept of appropriation thus allows investigation of how each text takes over traditionally Eurocentric forms of writing in order to point to alternative histories and identities.
2. Crime fiction as a ‘white’ genre

I will begin by elaborating on this article’s premise, which the initial quotes above already introduced, namely that both travel writing and crime fiction can be perceived as traditionally ‘white’ genres. With regard to crime fiction, this claim has been put forward by various scholars. Marta Sofía López, for instance, alludes to crime novels’ “‘ideological underpinnings’, particularly […] those related to ‘nationalism and race’” and observes that Agatha Christie’s novels, by way of example, “naturalise a profoundly conservative and parochial idea of Englishness, rather obviously linked to whiteness, and usually to upper- or middle-class maleness” (2012: 58). Claire Wells (1999: 206), too, refers to Agatha Christie’s works and states that “English crime fiction has traditionally been concerned with the formation of ideas about the social and moral order and its role in policing the boundaries of class and race.” Charles J. Rzepka, moreover, has claimed that “[a]s a part of modern mass entertainment, detective fiction helps interpellate its readers into conformity with the hegemony of white, male, middle-class values in Western capitalist-industrialist societies” (2005: 21). In addition, and once again prompted by the “nonchalant racism” of Agatha Christie’s narratives, Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen have pointed to “the inextricable link between crime fiction and the imperial enterprise” (2006: 4).

While both crime fiction’s subject matter and overall ideological thrust have been considered as ‘white’, the ‘hard-boiled’ genre – a tough, realistic and often explicit type of (initially American) crime fiction – in particular, as Andrew Pepper observes, “has traditionally been the preserve of straight, white male writers” (2010: 151; see also Gregoriou 2007: 54). Likewise, quoting from an article by Liam Kennedy (1999: 224), Maureen T. Reddy asserts “hard-boiled fiction is […] substantially a ‘white genre’” (2003: 9). In her discussion of white-authored American hard-boiled fiction of the 1920s to 1950s, and of Dashiell Hammett’s The Maltese Falcon (1929) and its white, heterosexual, and masculine detective Sam Spade as a case in point, Reddy demonstrates how the genre’s racial coding traditionally validates white supremacy, either by casting racial Others as villains or by taking whiteness for granted, thus implicitly reproducing and maintaining the cultural hegemony of whiteness (cf. Chapter 1 “Cracking Codes”, esp. 6–14; 115).

Over the last four decades, however, crime fiction has not only proliferated internationally but has also undergone two major innovations, which Patricia Plummer describes as follows: “women authors […] have written against the grain

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6. Maureen T. Reddy has made a similar claim with regard to the subgenre of the hard-boiled detective, adding sexual orientation to it: “hard-boiled ideology interpellates readers as white/male/heterosexual regardless of their actual social positions” (2003: 79; cf. also 38).
of masculine hard-boiled fiction since the 1970s and ethnic writers […] have further transformed and questioned the conventions of the genre through the creation of ethnic investigators since the 1980s” (2006a: 256). Rzepka, similarly, points to the “number and variety of nationalities, races, and ethnicities that, since the 1960s, have been speaking truth to the power of the traditional white, male PI or police detective” (2010: 8). According to John Scaggs, however, alternative forms have proliferated mainly in hard-boiled fiction:

> [O]f all the sub-generic modes […] hard-boiled fiction is the most often, and easily, appropriated. […] [T]he most truculently misogynistic and often racist sub-genre of crime fiction is the one that has been most frequently and successfully appropriated for ethnic, cultural, feminist, and gay and lesbian reformulations. (2005: 4)

Reddy shares Scaggs’ observation but reads the affinity of the hard-boiled genre for revision as a response to the innovation and transgression that this genre claims for itself with its insistence on an outsider’s perspective, conceived of mostly, or even merely, in terms of class: “Writers of color and feminist writers exposed the limits of that transgression by rewriting the hard-boiled to include those conventionally silenced by it” (2003: 15). Gregoriou, by contrast, has expressed a more pessimistic view, suggesting that such novels featuring anything other than white, male, heterosexual detectives could be described as parodies since, by adopting the formula but changing this one significant element, authors can be said to undercut their protagonists so as to reinforce a social standard of female, gay or racial inequality. (2007: 54)

As Wells points out, this is the case with 1950s North American black crime fiction writer Chester Himes whose vision of a “moral underworld […] made into an analogy for black life […] fuelled racist expectations and thought prevalent at the time” (1999: 211). While Himes’s crime fiction reportedly gave Phillips “a dreadful object lesson” (ibid.), Himes’s negative racist vision of the black community has lived on, for instance, in works by black authors Iceberg Slim and Victor Headley.

Moreover, according to López, the innovations that Scaggs refers to apply predominantly to Asian, Chicano, Native American, Hispanic and black crime investigators featuring in ethnic North American detective fiction. In Europe, by contrast, ethnic crime fiction “has been and still is extremely rare” (López 2012: 57). Among black British writers, as Mark Stein’s seminal study has shown, the Bildungsroman has been one of the most influential generic templates (cf. Stein 7.

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For a brief but comprehensive introduction to postcolonial crime fiction, see Matzke & Mühleisen (2006: 1–9).
2004). Not surprisingly therefore, both Phillips himself and critics have stressed the exceptionality of his work. According to López, for instance, Phillips “is the only contemporary African European author who has published a crime fiction series, which stars [a] black detective” (2012: 57). Thus, his writing challenges “the conventional equation between crime and blackness” (Rupp 2007: 280) and, as Wells puts it, “writ[es] black’ to a traditionalist, white crime fiction” (1999: 221). In an interview with Plummer, Phillips himself has stated:

> I’m the only one like me [i.e. black British crime writer]. I was the first to write in the way that I do about the details of the London landscape, about local government and media from the point of view of a migrant.

(Phillips, qtd. in Plummer 2006b: 275)

It could be argued that crime fiction’s genre development and proliferation exemplifies Franco Moretti’s “law of literary evolution”, i.e. the dissemination of abstract Western formal patterns in “cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe)” (2000: 58) and could therefore be seen to reflect Moretti’s distinction between “foreign form and local materials” (60). According to Luc Boltanski, the genre of detective/crime/spy fiction originated in England and France. Approaching literary history from the angle of sociology, Boltanski convincingly connects the emergence of the genre to the modern nation state by arguing that both crime and spy fiction subject the nation state to “a trial or test” (2014: 18; cf. also 124). He explains further that,

> [f]or the appearance and very rapid development of crime novels and then spy novels, the identification of paranoia by psychiatry and the development of the social sciences […] were more or less simultaneous processes that also coincided with a new way of problematizing reality and of working through the contradictions that inhabit it.

(xv–xvi)

According to Boltanski, crime and spy fiction (are based on the possibility to) call into question ‘the reality of reality’ and set up situations, which seemingly indicate that the state does not have reality under control (cf. Chapter 1 “REALITY

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9. Boltanski calls Edgar Allan Poe “the inventor of the detective story” (2014: 6) and considers both Emile Gaboriau as well as Arthur Conan Doyle (whose adventures of Sherlock Holmes were published between 1887 and 1927) as the first “creators of crime fiction” (73).
versus *Reality*, 1–39). Hence, by connecting the emergence of crime fiction to the modern nation state, Boltanski’s historical contextualisation clearly substantiates crime fiction as a European form/Western influence in the sense of Moretti, thus further corroborating the genre’s implicit ‘whiteness’.

In appropriating the genre of crime fiction, postcolonial and/or ethnic crime writers have created new combinations of and compromises between the Western (white, male, heterosexual) formula of crime fiction and local/diasporic contexts. If we look at these appropriations as ways of ‘provincializing’ European thought, to take up an idea by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2007), this might help to explain why they first appeared in the different non-European contexts specified by López. In a similar vein, Moretti has stated that the unequal relationship “between core and periphery” (2003: 73) on which his theory of genre development is based allows movement in several directions, but that such movement rarely occurs from periphery to centre (cf. 75–76). Against this historical background, the exceptionality of Phillips’s appropriation of crime fiction in *A Shadow of Myself* can be further accentuated as it can be regarded either as a (rare) movement from the peripheries back to the centre *sensu* Moretti (i.e. from postcolonial/ethnic appropriations of the genre outside of Europe to a postcolonial writing back from ‘within’ Europe), or as a way of ‘provincializing’ European thought from ‘within’ (rather than from ‘without’) *sensu* Chakrabarty, i.e. from the position of a black British writer of ethnic crime fiction.

3. **Travel writing as ‘imperialist’ discourse**

*Soul Tourists*, too, engages with and rewrites a genre that has traditionally been perceived as ‘white’ because of its Eurocentric bias. Postcolonial studies of the genre, moreover, have revealed the travelogue’s implication in imperialism. As Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund have claimed, “[t]ravel writing allowed Europeans to conceive of areas outside of Europe as being under their control, as an extension of land through ownership” (2011: 1). The fact that travel narratives were “often written by those actively involved in the expansion or maintenance of empire”, as Douglas Ivison notes, has fuelled the tendency to regard them as “the cultural by-product of imperialism” (Ivison, qtd. in Edwards & Graulund 2011: 1) and as “a mode of colonialist discourse that reinforces European norms” (Holland & Huggan 1998: 47).¹⁰

¹⁰ Spurr, likewise, has identified travel writing as a “discours[e] of colonialism” (1993: 4). Similarly, Pratt has argued that travel narratives have helped to produce “the rest of the world” for European readerships at different points in Europe’s expansionist trajectory (1992: 5).
With reference to Birgit Neumann (2009), British travel writing’s implication in nationalist and/or colonialist discourses, in particular, can be linked to the emergence of ‘the patriotic traveller’, which the shift from description to evaluation in 18th-century travelogues attests to. Whereas early travel writing sought to provide its white readership with useful information about foreign countries and cultures through retrospective reports, travel narratives from the 17th century onwards increasingly turned to diary and epistolary forms for immediacy, and employed episodic structures to enhance narrativity. Accordingly, the focus of these narratives changed from the observed ‘other’ to the white and, initially, predominantly male observer, concentrating on the travelling and experiencing ‘I’. As a result, British travellers’ accounts became more subjective and the previously ‘neutral observers’ were replaced by ‘judgemental participants’. The patriotism inherent in these latter travel accounts often evinces itself in the denunciation of foreign traditions, religions, and habits as well as in a binary representation of space. Hence, by emphasizing difference, often implying inferiority in comparison to (white) England, travel writing’s ‘rhetoric of othering’ abetted in the construction of racial/ethnic and national ‘Others’. Critics therefore tend to “align travel narratives with other textual practices associated with colonial expansion – mapping, botany, ethnography, journalism and so on – to suggest that travel writing disseminated discourses of difference that were then used to justify colonial projects” (Edwards & Graulund 2011: 1).

Hence, similar to crime fiction, “travel and travel writing are determined by and determine gender, racial identity, economic status and a host of other interrelated markers of status and privilege” (Ivison, qtd. in Edwards & Graulund 2011: 1).11 Another similarity between the two genres consists in the fact that, according to Holland & Huggan, “most of the world’s producers of travel narratives are white heterosexual males who enjoy considerable economic privilege” (1998: 133). In recent decades, however, journeys in search of identity have frequently inspired, or feature prominently in, postcolonial and diasporic writing. Often, as Tobias Wachinger observes with regard to Caryl Phillips’s ‘counter-travelogue’ The European Tribe (1989), these narratives “draw on the conventions of the travelogue only to expose this genre’s (tacit) racial givens and Eurocentric assumptions” and have thereby helped to accentuate travel writing’s potential for cultural critique (2001: 363).12

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11. Holland & Huggan have identified “the assertion of race and class privilege, the traveler’s license to complaint, the use of a nonspecialist genre to pass off personal opinions as sociological observations” as “tacitly accepted conventions of European travel writing” (1998: 49).

12. For an exploration of the critical potential of postcolonial/diasporic travel writing, see also Nyman (2009).
travel writing by writers of colour through “counter narratives […] [that] pit themselves against the various forms of Western cultural imperialism still dominant within the genre” (Holland & Huggan 1998: 64) constitutes a third commonality between travel writing and crime fiction.

Holland & Huggan have shown that “forms of counter travel writing […] interrogate the privileges that accrue historically to the genre” (1998: 50) and tend to direct their anger against their white Euro-American readers (cf. 49). As a result, two registers coexist in travel writing today, acting alternately “as a repository for exoticist forms of cultural nostalgia and as a barometer for the recording and calibration of cultural change” (48). While some of the travel writers who record and calibrate change question conventions that relate to gender and/or class, others – such as Phillips in his above-mentioned “moral crusade against white racism” (51) and, as will be elaborated below, Evaristo – focus on privileges connected to the white male middle-class tradition of the Grand Tour of Europe, i.e. a formative journey for young white (English) men of means that was supposed to prepare them for taking up high positions in politics or diplomacy on their return.

As Jeremy Black (1997) has pointed out, the tradition to travel to/through Europe (and especially to touristic hotspots such as Paris, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples) goes back to the 16th century, subsequently gaining in popularity throughout the 18th and on into the first half of the 19th century, not only in Britain but also in France and Germany. By and by, the gentleman’s educative circuit became open to women, affordable to the middle class and attractive for writers. According to Jopi Nyman, British travel narratives, which flourished in the wake of the Grand Tour, in particular those published in the early 20th century, reveal that not only the depiction of colonies and other far-away places but also xenophobic constructions and “the discourse on the Other produced in British writings of Europe [have contributed] […] to nation-making, the making and promoting of Englishness as a position of difference” (2000: 4).

As the next section will demonstrate, Evaristo’s take on travel writing and the Grand Tour challenges the genre’s ‘white consciousness’ and the British tradition of ‘othering’ Europe from an Afro-European perspective. Like Phillips’s A Shadow of Myself, Soul Tourists thus contributes to ‘provincializing’ European thought from ‘within’ (sensu Chakrabarty).

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13. In her analysis of British travel narratives from 1789 to 1914 Katarina Gephardt, however, has suggested “nineteenth-century British perceptions of peripheral Europeans are more ambivalent than previous arguments by Roberto M. Dainotto and Larry Wolff indicate. The ‘othering’ characteristic of colonial discourse is undermined by identification with Eastern and Southern Europeans through shared history, institutions, religion, and the idea of Europe itself” (2014: 13).
4. ‘Rewriting’ travel and crime fiction from an Afro-European perspective

Having outlined why the genres Phillips and Evaristo engage with can historically be considered as ‘white’, this section takes a closer look at how the two authors revisit travel and crime fiction respectively in their novels and rewrite these genres from an Afro-European perspective. Both definitions of the detective and spy novel as “sociological genres” (Boltanski 2014: 11), as well as conceptualisations of travel writing as “a distinctly autobiographical form” (Holland & Huggan 1998: 14) and its close affiliation with memoir, warrant my focus on the novels’ concern with identity. As to crime fiction, this focus on identity also chimes with Matzke & Mühleisen’s observation that postcolonial crime fiction operates with “a figurative rather than a literal interpretation of crime”, using “elements of crime fiction for ‘social’ rather than ‘criminal’ detection” (2006: 8).

With reference to A Shadow of Myself, critics like Plummer (2006a), R. Victoria Arana & James Procter (2009) as well as López (2012) have noted that Phillips’s appropriation of the genre goes beyond a mere ‘colouring’ of crime fiction by way of substituting and/or adding black characters. Rather, it can be described as a way of ‘writing back’ against the genre’s racial coding, which – as Jan Rupp points out – “goes well beyond the question of character constellation, extending to social norms and values, questions of morality and crime, and to the prominence of blackness in discourses of crime generally” (2007: 281).

A Shadow of Myself addresses the issue of blackness and the social construction of black crime in a white society within a European context. In addition to London, the novel explores various places across the European continent, namely Prague, Hamburg, (East) Berlin and 1950s Moscow. The novel’s transnational perspective challenges crime fiction’s implicit nationalist underpinnings and draws attention to the frequent intersection of ethnic and national stereotyping in crime fiction. Already the ‘Doppelgänger’-motif of the two brothers, who are repeatedly mistaken for one another throughout the narrative, reflects one of the central generic modifications in ethnic detective fiction, namely its different take on identity, which tends to become manifest in the fact that “the importance of the detective’s community of origin often supersedes the traditional loneliness of the detective” (Fischer-Hornung & Mueller 2003: 12). The novel’s interest in (racially and nationally coded) identity is also discernible in the juxtaposition of a solid father-figure with two unstable sons: Joseph is shown to be on a quest, seeking to explore the black part of his mixed identity by making a film about his father and his father’s activist friends that documents this generation’s accounts of the past; George, by contrast, is rather unconcerned with history and focused on survival.
Nevertheless, he too suffers from an identity crisis while going through a divorce from his wife Radka.

The complex mix of generations, racial and national origins, ethnic belongings and love relations attests to the novel’s concern with identity. At the same time, however, it also serves to deconstruct essentialist views of the purity of Europe and draws attention to Afro-European presences in Europe that Eurocentric accounts of European history tend to marginalize or forget. However, the “new hybrid Europe” imagined in A Shadow of Myself “is not without its ghosts of racism, alienation, violence, and the burden of history”, as Nyman has correctly observed (2009: 90). Indeed, the examples discussed below record Katya’s, George’s and Joseph’s sense of displacement in spaces where national (and racial) purity is preferred.

In the first example George recalls growing up in East Germany and being discriminated against by other children based on markers of ethnicity and race:

Gerhard Havemann whispered in his ear, ‘Schwarzer Russky.’ Almost instinctively, George had turned and punched him in the face, a good clean hit. […] The fact was that other children often referred to him as black and sometimes when they knew about his mother they called him ‘the Russian’, but there was something about the way that Gerhard put those two words together which had sparked a moment of instant and blinding rage. (ASOM 8)

The novel also records that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, George feels triply ‘outcast’ in united post-wall Germany when he realizes, “with a little shiver of irritation, that he too was an Ossi” (ASOM 15). The novel, however, makes it clear from the beginning that not only George with his mixed Russian-Ghanaian heritage and different skin-colour is discriminated against, but that also his white Russian mother Katya feels ill at ease. George’s memory of a joint visit to Hamburg’s fish market hints at the displacement that both characters experience based on markers of language, race, gender, and age. While Katya feels self-conscious about her Russianness, George is aware of the sexualized stereotypes onlookers apply to the interracial and intergenerational relationship that they mistakenly assume to exist between him and his mother.

“You speak to them,” his mother said. In unfamiliar places she was still nervous about the distinctive sound of her Russian accent which she had never lost. “They’re staring at me.” He had laughed, enjoying the irony. “They’re staring at me,” he told her. “A black man, with a blonde beauty old enough to be his mother.” He had tickled her hand and she laughed with him, losing her self-consciousness for a moment. (ASOM 6)
Joseph’s sense of dislocation, finally, is reflected in his insecure sense of identity, which shows in his description of George as someone “he had been searching for […] all his life” (ASOM 97). Joseph’s insecure sense of identity is also revealed when he discloses that he only feels English outside of England: “In normal circumstances, he would hesitate before describing his nationality, but from the moment he got on the plane he’d been more and more conscious that he thought of himself as English” (ASOM 85).  

All three examples question the extent to which Europe has been able to deal with its racial and ethnic diversity. Moreover, they demonstrate that the characters’ migratory movements and their mostly forced exiles, which Cold War (postcolonial) politics and their aftermath have shaped, subvert nation-based identification, critique the idea of a fixed home and compel readers to recognize the importance of transnational and diasporic forces in constructing transcultural, Afro-European identities (cf. Nyman 2009: 79–80). In this way, A Shadow of Myself extends the Britain- or, rather, London-centred postcolonial focus of Phillips’s earlier Sam Dean novels to a wider, European context.

Soul Tourists similarly shifts attention from Britain to Europe by imagining and locating black British characters within Europe. The novel centres on Stanley, a second-generation migrant of Jamaican descent, who turns neither to his country of residence nor to that of his parents’ origin in his quest for identity (i.e. to England or Africa respectively), but engages with Europe as an imaginary homeland. Stanley’s journey is fuelled by a notion of travel as a means of education and self-formation and, thus, re-iterates and connects to the white, male, middle-class tradition of the Grand Tour. In contrast to his historical predecessors, travel, for Stanley, however, is motivated by a crisis of identity. The death of his father Clasford makes him become aware of the stifling influence that had prevented him from developing an identity of his own. Early in the novel, Stanley already remarks: “I’ve always known what’s around the corner. […] Then my father died and now it seems – my dreams were his” (ST 52). Similarly, he later reflects: “I longed for adulthood, but when adulthood came, I didn’t have a clue about what I wanted out of life. The muscle for making my own decisions hadn’t been used, you see. I was just a product of my father’s instruction, an automaton” (ST 239).

Stanley realizes that he neither shares his parents’ immigrant mentality nor his father’s refusal to belong (“We doan belong ina this country … we doan belong, Stanley”; ST 19, italics original). He also refuses the advice of his girlfriend Jessie,

14. Kofi, too, observes that Joseph behaves “[j]ust like an Englishman” when he can hardly restrain his impatience (ASOM 124).

15. Stanley characterizes this mentality as follows: “If I had flu, my parents dosed me up and sent me in. It’s the immigrant mentality. I couldn’t – so you must” (ST 45).
who emphatically embraces her Yorkshireness (“I’m a Yorkshire woman, and reet proud of it”; *ST* 198) and who urges him to consider himself as English:

‘You’re just another Englishman, don’t kid yourself. You think like an Englishman, walk like an Englishman, talk like an Englishman and most likely you dance like an Englishman. You’ve spent all your life in England, Stanley, so what does that make you? Mongolian? Peruvian? Egyptian?’ (*ST* 51)

*Soul Tourists*, moreover, critically re-inscribes itself into the tradition of travel writing that gained increasing popularity in the heydays of the Grand Tour. The fact that both Stanley and Jessie are of non-European descent challenges the established conflation of ‘travel’ with (white) ‘European(ized) travel’ as a cultural practice. Furthermore, the couple’s “resist[ance to] the history and cultural myths of Eurocentrism” and their oppositional stance towards conventional modes of travel and tourism makes them akin to what Holland & Huggan have called “(post-colonial) countertravelers” (1998: 198). But not just the travellers’ ethnicities, also their itineraries differ from the usual trajectory, as *Soul Tourists* ends with Stanley standing on the Kuwaiti shore.

Finally, *Soul Tourists* challenges the notion of Western superiority that underlies (reports about) the Grand Tour by focusing on the achievements of historical figures of colour, who have been downplayed or excluded in ‘white-washed’ travel accounts and who appear to Stanley as ghosts. By integrating humorous and magical realist elements, Evaristo’s playful appropriation of the ghostly and the concept of the ‘soul tourist’ subvert travel writing’s predominantly realist frame.

At the same time, the ghosts allow Stanley to stake a claim for his own right to belong in Europe:

> Was he, Stanley, really an outsider? Maybe you didn’t have to blend in or be accepted to belong. You belonged because you made the decision to and if you truly believed it no one could knock it out of you. These visitations came from inside the body of history, turning its skin inside out and writing new history upon it with a bone shaved down to a quill dripped in the ink of blood. Europe was not as it seemed, Stanley decided, and for him, at least, Europe would never be the same again. (*ST* 189)

Hence, *Soul Tourist*’s appropriation of the ‘white’ genre of travel writing coincides with an imaginative validation of “the black history of the world’s Great White Continent” (*Evaristo* 2008: 3). Writing back against a history of Europe that “all too often appears to have unfolded through […] traditions of relatively homogeneous peoples and cultures who are defined – and define themselves – chiefly by their shared whiteness”, *Soul Tourists* foregrounds “blackness as defining feature of difference and alterity in the ‘European’ cultural context” (Altnöder 2011: 36). As
Sonja Altnöder aptly points out, the fact that Stanley has decorated and furnished his London flat in “subtle complementary tones of white” (ST 11), which make his black presence stand out and perpetually feed an ‘unhomely’ sense of alterity and difference, can be read as “a metaphor for Stanley’s perception of British [and, by implication, European] society’s white hegemony” (2011:43).

Changing Stanley’s perception of Europe, the ghosts enable him to discover Europe’s plurality and to start considering it as a possible homeland. Thus, they “act as spiritual helpers” (Evaristo, qtd. in Hooper 2006: 10) and assist Stanley in developing an Afro-European sense of identity based on difference that offers him a way out of the impasse of feeling neither Jamaican nor entirely British:

Clasford always said that Jamaica delivered and England destroyed him, but he was wrong, Joseph, you see both formed him – one with the sun, the other with rain as you were the bastard son of the islands and La France and you dared to make that difference your own, so I will discover my difference and make it my own (ST 122–123, lineation original)

Accordingly, Stanley discovers new ways of belonging based on a plural and transnational affiliation which culminate in the following assertion: “I’m a Londoner and, well, it might sound pretentious, but these days a citizen of the world, so to speak, or of Europe at least” (ST 222). Thus hybridizing monolithic conceptions of (an exclusively white) Europe, Soul Tourists’s “fresh, enabling Afroeuropean articulation of time and space” (McLeod 2011: 180) epitomizes what Huggan – with reference to Paul Gilroy – has defined as a ‘postcolonial Europe’:

Europe, according to Paul Gilroy, has officially entered its postcolonial moment. […] ‘Postcolonial’, in this sense, is about the unmaking of Europe as a space of exemplarity, exception, and privilege, but also the remaking of Europe as a convivial space of inclusiveness, transcultural ferment, and openness to the rest of the world. (2011:1, italics original)

5. Puzzling endings: Questions of closure and imagining Britain in Europe

The last part of this article focuses on the endings of the two novels in order to explore if, and compare how, they relate to the appropriation of travel and crime fiction’s literary templates respectively. A Shadow of Myself ends with the prospect
of the reunited family relocating to London, except for George who will maintain a nomadic existence:

‘I’m not coming back,’ George said. ‘I lived most of my life in a kind of prison. Now I’m lucky to be alive and lucky to be free. The way I live with Radka is not how I want to live. She wants me to be the way I was. I’ll never be that again, but I want to find out what I am. You must understand. This is a new world for me. I’m going to shape myself to live on top of it.’

(ASOM 316–317)

To readers, the family’s relocation to London, which is only partly disrupted by George’s desire to be free and reinvent himself, does not come as a surprise because, throughout the novel, there are several instances where characters compare London to Europe and usually, as the following quotes reveal, deem England the better, more ‘advanced’ or more ‘normal’ place to live because of the larger number of people of colour, especially in London.

‘In England it’s different?’ George asked suddenly. ‘It feels different,’ [Joseph] said. ‘You’re the first black person I’ve seen here [in Prague]. In England it would be impossible to pass through the centre of a large city without seeing hundreds of black people or Asians. Maybe it was like this in England fifty years ago, but now it’s different.’

(ASOM 85)


‘It’s not that good in England,’ Joseph told her.
She gave him a wry smile.
‘I know that, but here he is the only one of his kind. Maybe there are others, but not enough to be normal. When he was growing up George felt like a freak.’

(ASOM 102)

However, even though the novel thus prepares readers for the relocation of the reunited family to London, the ending and the superiority of England that it implies is at odds with the transcultural shift from Britain to Europe as well as with the hybridization of Europe, which scholars like Nyman (2009) and John McLeod (2010) have emphasized in their analyses of the novel. The ending therefore, as Phillips himself puts it in an autobiographical essay entitled “European tribesman”, speaks of a straight “national identity which overrid[es] ethnicity” (2001: 199) and compromises the novel’s alternative transcultural Afro-European thrust.

16. In addition to Kofi and Joseph (who were already living in London), the reunited family includes Katya, who has rekindled her relationship with Kofi, as well as George’s divorced wife Radka and their son Serge.
Does the novel then merely echo the appraisal of London’s sophisticated ‘enabling cosmopolitanism’ that can be found in other works by Phillips (e.g. *London Crossings*, 2001; cf. McLeod 2009: 27–29)? Or could the sense of closure induced by the family’s reunion and their joint emigration to London also be attributed to the impact of crime fiction’s generic template? This seems to be at least a possibility, if we consider that Joseph – who is, according to Eva Ulrike Pirker (2009: 251), the detective figure of the cast – goes even further with his desire for closure by wanting George’s wife Radka to come and live with him in London – a desire that is thwarted by Radka and dryly rebuked by Kofi who tells him: “Don’t expect everything to make sense” (ASOM 318). Given the disturbance that Phillips has referred to in an interview with Claudia Sternberg,¹⁷ Kofi’s remark could implicitly be addressed to readers who might find it difficult to cope with the novel’s relative inconclusiveness when compared to traditional crime novels that end with the delivery of a definitive moral judgement.

*Soul Tourists*, likewise, does not offer readers a full sense of closure. In the chapter “The ocean floor”, Stanley poetically imagines his father as a “blue whale” and the two of them “sailing together, finally” (*ST* 256). Eventually, Stanley’s dreamlike vision of reunification develops into one of nutrition and scavenging. The poem ends with Stanley feeding on the carcass of his father, i.e. with an image that corroborates Stanley’s emancipation from him:

> your carcass lies, a long grey rock on the ocean bed, your chinless wonder of a son is a scavenger at your flank,
> [...]
> wrapped like an eel into a knot to better extract your nutriments
> [...]
> I will suck all the energy from your bones until I release you
> I will take what is mine…

(*ST* 257)

Hence, towards the end of the novel, Stanley has not only split up with his dominant older girlfriend (cf. *ST* 270) but has also emancipated himself from his father. Consequently, the novel’s close finds him standing alone on the shore of the Kuwaiti desert, feeling “like a monolith[,] […] like a man” (*ST* 281; cf., similarly, *ST* 239). Despite the sense of closure implied in this statement, Evaristo refrains from ‘fixing’ her protagonist’s identity and defies a ‘rite of passage’ by not having

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¹⁷. “A lot of people who read my books expect a very straightforward crime story. I think there was some disturbance in the fact that *Shadow* was not neatly tied up at the end, that the characters just went on and nothing definitive happened” (Phillips, qtd. in Sternberg 2001: 390).
Stanley return to Britain and reintegrate into British society.\textsuperscript{18} His declared readiness to continue travelling, instead, suggests that he is likely to maintain a nomadic existence: “I cannot return home. Perhaps not ever. The mammoth ocean-going junks [...] are waiting for me. [...] I will be ready for anything. / And this is what I want” \textit{(ST 282)}. Hence, similar to George in \textit{A Shadow of Myself}, Stanley will grasp the opportunity to reshape himself in continued mobility.

Whether a positive future awaits the two protagonists, however, remains unclear. After all, the community with which Stanley affiliates himself is unreal and belongs to the past, and he does not meet any ‘kindred spirits’ in present-day Europe either. Similarly, George announces that he wants to shape himself after Valery Kirichenko – a powerful, transnationally connected and, ultimately, criminal businessman. Hence, a closer look at the novels’ endings reveals that they confront readers with the problematic nature of the characters’ quests for an Afro-European identity without offering easy solutions. The endings of both novels indicate a diasporic condition that does not end with finding one’s identity, but that requires continuous connection and reshaping of the self alongside plural imaginary affiliations. In other words, instead of simply reproducing the dominant structures of crime and travel fiction, or inverting them in order to replace the white traveller or urban investigator with a black protagonist, the novels disrupt the oppositions embedded within crime and travel writing and undermine their traditionally divided moral universe, neatly compartmentalised into self and other, good and evil, black and white.

Before I conclude, the fact that \textit{A Shadow of Myself}’s imagination of Britain in Europe is diametrically opposed to \textit{Soul Tourists} deserves further attention. \textit{Soul Tourists} shows how Stanley suffers from growing up in Britain, where “no one resembled [him]” \textit{(ST 69)}. It is only by travelling to and across Europe and by encountering the ghostly presences that he feels both Britain and Europe opening up to him. The same applies to Joseph in \textit{A Shadow of Myself}: even though his sense of a British identity is more developed than that of Stanley, he only feels English when abroad and develops a more secure sense of identity only after he has met George, his Ghanaian-Russian-German Doppelgänger. Radka, by contrast, wants to move to Britain for the sake of her son Serge because, in Eastern Europe, he is the only one who does not resemble anyone else \textit{(cf. ASOM 102, quoted above)}. With regard to the future generation therefore, \textit{A Shadow of Myself} projects an opposite journey, namely from troubled post-wall Europe to safe and sophisticated Britain. Hence, although Phillips imagines Britain in Europe and not separated from it, he highlights and positively evaluates Britain’s genuine difference from

\textsuperscript{18} The fact that Stanley does not return to Britain plays a central role in Vedrana Velickovic’s argument which designates Stanley as a ‘melancholic traveller’ \textit{(cf. Velickovic 2012)}. 
‘the continent’. Thus, the novel affirms one of the most classical auto-stereotypes of the British, viz. Britain’s insular exceptionalism that sets the island off from mainland Europe and only recently fuelled the Euroscepticism of the 2016 ‘Brexit’ campaigns.

In addition, the recourse to generalisations (especially in passages focalized through George) as well as the use of ethnic and national markers and stereotypes in the description of minor characters so typical of popular crime fiction equally undermine the novel’s overall transcultural discourse. George, for instance, holds that “Russians sold everything, like hucksters at a market, even the boots of their feet” (ASOM 10). In an equally stereotypical manner, the narrator refers to “Turks and Arabs, Africans, dockworkers and whores” in the streets “on the other side” of Hamburg station as “outcasts” and differentiates them from “the newer outcasts – Russians, Uzbekis, Chechens, Serbs, Croats and Kosovars, groups of waddling women, their heads wrapped in scarves, their eyes lost, shepherded by men in cracked dirty boots and knitted caps” (ASOM 28). The continuing impact of crime fiction’s ethnic and national coding is further corroborated by the narrator’s use of animal similes as a means to describe a group of young people from the Middle East: “they crowded round the stairs, […] like a flock of sheep huddling together. They were muttering and whispering, though, producing a buzzing sound, like a roomful of big lazy flies” (ASOM 264). This affirms that, even though A Shadow of Myself writes back against crime fiction’s racial coding and its traditional validation of white supremacy, it still perpetuates ethnic and national stereotypes – which, as a result, limits the novel’s overall potential for genre critique.

6. Conclusion

Exploring Phillips’s crime thriller A Shadow of Myself and Evaristo’s ‘road novel’ Soul Tourists from a genre-specific perspective has revealed how the protagonists of both novels are driven by a search for Afro-European identities. Both novels – by way of appropriating the ‘white’ genres of travel writing and crime fiction – redeem and suspend the traditional racial and national coding of these genres by rehabilitating black mixed-race characters and allowing them to stake a claim for their own right to belong in Europe. Thereby, the two novels also challenge homogeneous conceptions of Europe based on the idea of the nation state. Conjuring up transcultural spaces and identities in writing back against travel and crime fiction’s

19. On characters as “tokens” of “social types” and the type of determinism that underlies crime and spy fiction as social novels, see Boltanski (2014: 11–13).
racial and national coding, both novels furthermore suggest that Moretti’s (2000) distinction of (and the hierarchy between) ‘foreign form’ and ‘local material’ is much less stable and more complex than the binary model of centre and periphery implies when applied to such instances of ‘writing back’ from ‘within’. Ultimately, in both novels, the rethinking of traditional popular genres coincides with, and is partly enabled by, their transnational shift in focus from Britain to Europe – even though, in the case of Phillips’s novel, the potential for genre critique is limited by the recourse to traditional ethnic and national stereotypes. Finally, a closer look at the endings of the two novels has revealed how each conceptualises the relationship between Britain and Europe in a radically different way and how this difference might by explained by the impact of genre.

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Rewriting ‘white’ genres in search of Afro-European identities


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