

## Abstract

### Introduction

The thesis seeks to examine representations of Africa in contemporary black British fiction written by women, particularly those of African and Caribbean origins. The study situates these writers within the context of Britain's multiculturalist politics, where they either become a tokenized symbol of black writing or become direct victims of exclusionist practices. Most of their writings are often categorized and studied as African literature, Caribbean literature, or Diasporic literature, which understates their contribution to British literature and their experiences as black migrants in Britain. Furthermore, their subjective positions as black, British, and woman deny them the same opportunities available to black men in the UK and black women in the US. As portrayed in her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Second-Class Citizen* (1974), Buchi Emecheta discusses the challenges black women face in the British publishing industry due to racial and sexual bias. In fact, despite the establishment of black-oriented publishing houses in Britain since the 1960s, beginning with John La Rose and Sarah White's New Beacon Books in 1966, the majority of the writings produced were largely by black British men. It was not until the 1980s, thanks to the efforts of feminist publishing firms like *Allison and Busby* and *Virago Press*, that black women's writings came to be published in Britain.

The study contends that for these writers, their identity as British is as significant as their attachment to their ancestral origins, which complicates their process of self-discovery. Along with the trauma of history and migration engraved in their bodies, black women experience exploitation at the hands of the neo-colonial system, where they are classified as an exiled immigrant or a 'second-class citizen'. Homelessness thus becomes an acute condition, from which black women writers try to escape, searching for an 'elsewhere' for a sense of belonging. Hence, the study argues that by either accepting, rejecting, or reworking the idea of Africa as an ancestral homeland and its hold in the imaginary, these black women writers not only reject the legitimization of Eurocentric and black nationalist constructions but create possibilities for alternative readings of black people, their experiences and their cultural identifications in the diaspora. Within this frame of reference, contemporary black British women novelists either reject or re-work traditional 'return' narratives and the myth of 'origins'.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate how the significance of Africa as a physical, metaphorical, and imaginary space helps shape black British fiction by women through a thorough analysis of their selected works.
2. To examine the historical processes and the complex socio-political and cultural contexts that led to the development of a 'black British way of being'.
3. To explore how black British women writers' engagement with elements of 'refusal' and resistance by situating Africa at the centre of their political agenda, re-contextualizes specific characteristics of black Britishness.

In order to gain a thorough understanding of how black British women writers look back at Africa and allow it to shape their writing, the thesis conducts a comprehensive study of writers from the 1980s to the present. This includes a close reading of works by Buchi Emecheta, Joan Riley, Andrea Levy, Bernardine Evaristo, Jackie Kay, Jenny McLeod, Simi Bedford, Delia-Jarrett Macaulay, Aminatta Forna, Sarah Ladipo Manyika, Diana Evans, Zadie Smith, Irenosen Okojie, Nadifa Mohamad, and Helen Oyeyemi.

To justify its objectives, the thesis mainly draws from race theory and recent scholarship on Postcolonial Studies, Diaspora Studies, Black feminism, and black British feminist criticism, which is discussed in Chapter Two of the thesis. Furthermore, descriptive analysis and a close reading of the texts have been used as methodological tools for the study.

Chapter Three of the thesis delves into the ways in which Africa is represented as a metaphor for psychological and cultural healing. The novels taken for analysis are Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997), Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), Aminatta Forna's *Ancestor Stones* (2005), Simi Bedford *Not with Silver* (2007), Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* (2010) and Irenosen Okojie's *Butterfly Fish* (2015). These novels specifically include narratives of physical journeys to or within Africa, which is essential for the characters' development in the stories. Further, the chapter aims to argue that journeying back to the Caribbean, is also by extension a 'return' to Africa that creates a sense of cultural and historical identification for black British writers.

In Chapter Four, the thesis explores Joan Riley's *Unbelonging* (1984) and *A Kindness to the Children* (1992), Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994), Diana Evans' *26a* (2005), Delia Jarrett-Macaulay's *Moses, Citizen & Me* (2005), and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House* (2007). The chapter firstly argues that an underlying idea of 'rejection of home' dominates the narratives on homesickness and unbelonging, wherein a rejection of 'home' is translated to a rejection of homeland i.e., Africa. It is seen that the novels challenge the idea of Africa as a secure haven and show how actual 'returns' there can make people feel further displaced. Secondly, the chapter argues that a failed return to the homeland is symbolic of the disrupted longing for maternal bonding. In the case of Caribbean migrants, a detour from the myth of origins in Africa ensues a similarly disturbing experience. This is because going back to the ancestral homeland or native land means going back to the regressive social and cultural order, in which the identity and social meanings of women are determined predominantly in relation to men.

In Chapter Five, the thesis examines representations of constructing Africa/homeland in new locations. The chapter attempts a close reading of Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998), Jenny McLeod's *Stuck up a Tree* (2005), Diana Evans' *The Wonder* (2009), Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012), Sarah Ladipo Manyika's *Like a Mule Bringing Ice Cream to the Sun* (2016) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) and argues that by imagining a 'return' beyond Africa, these writers redefine the idea of 'home' and the black British migrant's sense of self and belonging. In relation to this, the chapter examines how black British writers present other ways of reclaiming these spaces by imagining a 'return' through performance. The idea of performance, here, emphasizes the figure of black, queer bodies and how they negotiate with their identity by traversing through different urbane locations within Britain and abroad. As a result, constructions of Englishness as innately 'pure' and 'white' is also contested.