Chapter One

Introduction

I

Much can be understood about a nation, "by the stories it invents, by what books it chooses to treasure, which paintings it displays in its galleries, and the nature of the histories it constructs", but a lot can also be learned from what a nation excludes (Nasta and Stein 2). Black British people, and black women in particular, have been erased from British history. Be it in literature, academia, sports, or visual media, black women in Britain have had to struggle not only with the problem of 'absences' but also with misrepresentations. As Hazel V. Carby states: "We [Black British women] have also been outraged by the ways in which it [British history] has made us visible, when it has chosen to see us" (45). Even the few books dealing with black historiography like Dilip Hiro's *White British, Black British* (1972) and Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984) deal very perfunctorily with black British women and their experiences. This study undertakes to examine how contemporary black British women writers grapple with this erasure or misrepresentation. The racial and gendered prejudices reflected in the institutional and structural systems of the British state, including its laws and policies are associated with certain images/ideas about Africa. The images of barbarism, abundant resources, lack of governance, etc. proliferated in early travelogues. These texts fed the prejudices of the English public and justified the inhumane trade. As David Olusoga mentions in *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2019), the descriptions of Africa and its people, figured in the texts of "Homer, Herodotus, Ptolemy and Pliny among others, as well as in pictorial form in pottery and sculpture" (Ch. 1). Subsequently, stories of Prester John and the like, disseminated through *Mandeville's Travels*, fascinated medieval Europe and incited a vision for an "intercontinental Christian alliance" in order to compete with the rising "military and cultural power of the Islamic world" (Ch. 1). These assumptions, the origins of which can be traced back to European colonial enterprise, are grounded in racial and patriarchal notions that have percolated British society. As a consequence, the institutional and structural systems of the British state, including its laws and policies, are embedded with such notions. Interestingly, the image of Africa is also used by black people to resist these prejudices. The exploration of representations of Africa presented in black British women's texts enables our study to take into consideration the varied waves of migration and to specifically contextualize the experiences expressed by black British women writers from different generations.

Black British women, or young female migrants have to deal with diverse forms of oppression and self-deprecating images. The exclusion of black women from history has lent few instances for these women to take inspiration. Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzzane Scafe in "The Book Collective" state how "lack of source material was a recurring problem confirming our absence from official history" (Ngcobo 125). Therefore, in their book, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (1985), the editors rely on interviews of ordinary black women who give personal accounts of their lived experiences in Britain. With the need to document their history, Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe became "the official translators, making politically coherent what were disparate and uncommitted experiences" (Ngcobo 125). This study draws its inspiration from this history of exclusion and marginalisation of black British people and seeks to examine how such an environment of physical and symbolic erasure forces the black British women writers to build a cultural and literary tradition that is not only unique in its forms of expression but is also built from heterogeneous sources. For black British women writers, their identity as British is as important as their attachment to their ancestral origins, which further complicates their process of self-discovery. Along with the trauma of history and migration engraved in their bodies, black women further experience exploitation at the hands of the neo-colonial state, where they occupy the status of an exiled immigrant or a 'second-class citizen'. Homelessness thus becomes an acute condition, from which black women writers try to escape and thereby search 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. These writers also exemplify the act of reclaiming suppressed knowledge and memories that are often considered to be without a historical context. By employing storytelling as a tool to preserve Africa's cultural memory, these writers emphasize on the passing down of traditions from one generation to another and the preservation of women's recollections of the nation's history. In doing so, they seek to rewrite narratives that are dominated by men and characterized by a racial bias. To justify its arguments, the study first examines how the significance of Africa as a physical, metaphorical, and imaginary space helps shape black British fiction by women. Secondly, it analyses the historical processes and the complex socio-political and cultural contexts that led to the

development of a 'black British way of being'. And thirdly, it explores how black British women writers' engagement with elements of 'refusal' and resistance by situating Africa at the centre of their political project, re-contextualizes specific characteristics of black Britishness.

Though the term 'black' has been used as a political symbol in the context of Britain, particularly since the 1970s, the study specifically focuses on black women writers in Britain of African and Caribbean descent. The study, nevertheless, acknowledges the influence and contribution of Asian British people and writers alike in their common political struggle against the racial discrimination and neo-colonial tendencies of Britain. Keeping in mind the debates regarding the use of the correct epithet and the contradictions between black British writers themselves on their categorisation as 'black British', the study justifies the use of the term by critically engaging in the discourses surrounding both labels as mutually exclusive or otherwise. In light of this, the study involves a close reading of novels by contemporary black women writers such as Buchi Emecheta (1944- 2017), Joan Riley (1958-), Andrea Levy (1956-2019), Bernardine Evaristo (1959-), Jackie Kay (1961-), Jenny McLeod (1963-), Simi Bedford (1963-), Delia-Jarrett Macaulay (1965-), Aminatta Forna (1964-), Sarah Ladipo Manyika (1968-), Diana Evans (1971-), Zadie Smith (1975-), Irenosen Okojie (1978-), Nadifa Mohamed (1981-), and Helen Oyeyemi (1984-) who have not only been publishing novels in Britain and writing about Britain but are also presently settled in Britain. Writers like Sharon Dodua Otoo (1972-) who write about Britain but have now settled in Berlin, are alluded to only as a peripheral reference in the study for her multicultural affiliations and, thereby, her contribution to black British writing. Similarly, novels like Leone Ross' *Orange Laughter* (2000) and Aminatta Forna's *The Hired Man* (2013) which are set outside Britain, are not included.

This study incorporates Buchi Emecheta's work because she is one of the pioneering black British women novelists. Published in 1994, Emecheta's *Kehinde* is the only work which depicts the physical visit of a black woman to Africa and her eventual return to London. Emecheta's other works either deal exclusively with Nigeria (*Slave Girl*, *Double Yoke*, *The Rape of Shavi*, etc.) or with London (*Second-Class Citizen*). Joan Riley's *Unbelonging* and *A Kindness to the Children* has been selected for similar reasons. Riley is also a pioneer among first-generation black British women writers and

these two works have been selected because they offer a nuanced perspective to the idea of 'return' and the homeland. Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* and Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* presents a vast and complex historical context which helps the study to analyse the modern forms through which black writers employ the 'return myth'. Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* is her latest work and is significant because it majorly encapsulates the present scenario of black people in Britain and also gives a critique of the recent developments in critical discourses on race (particularly the tracing of ancestral lineage through DNA), gender, and sexuality. Zadie Smith's *NW* has been selected due to its specific focus on the inner cities and ghettos of London and the marked absence of reference to Africa in terms of a 'return'. The study seeks to show how Smith attempts at creating new ways of building a sense of belonging for diasporic individuals. Both novels (*26a* and *The Wonder*) by Diana Evans are significant and has been selected for a detailed analysis due to its evident focus on Africa as part of a past that is indelibly inscribed in the identities of black British people. Sarah Ladipo Manyika's works are mostly based on the representation of an Afropolitan or cosmopolitan identity, but the study seeks to explore beyond these ideas and show how Manyika's novel deals with the crucial difference between 'homing desire' and nostalgia for homeland, that simulates writers to formulate alternate spaces of belonging. Works by Jenny McLeod (*Stuck up a Tree*), Simi Bedford (*Not with Silver*) Irenosen Okojie (*Butterfly Fish*), Nadifa Mohamed (*Black Mamba Boy*), and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House* have been fairly less explored critically than the other works selected for study. Hence, they deserve attention and a detailed analysis.

To add to this, the select black British women writers belong to different generations, namely, first, second, and the 1.5, indicating the varied waves of migration from Commonwealth countries to Britain and the diverse experiences as well. It is important here to note that instead of using the hyphenated term 'Afro-Caribbean', the words are used separately to refer to these writers because the study assumes that the specific histories and the origin of the writers determine the choice of form and content of their writing. Black British literature, as Benedict Ledent states, is not a "time-bound phenomenon", which means that their writings cannot be categorically divided based on their time or origin place of migration. As pointed out by Leila Kamali in her work *Spectres of the Shore: The Cultural Memory of Africa in African American and Black British Fiction, 1970-2000* (2018), the term 'contemporary' generally implies beginning

from the 1990s to the present, but black British writing is defined by a "temporal disjuncture" where contemporary involves an evocation of times that have passed (268). Hence, the term contemporary has been used by the study to denote novels published by black British women since the 1980s, the earliest being Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) as the latest.

This study is pertinent because black British women novelists have been unremittingly marginalised due to their affiliations as a 'black', a woman or queer, and British. Firstly, black British writing has been excluded from the British canon for decades. Tracey Walters explains how despite residing in Britain for years, she remained unknown to the existence of a growing body of black British literature.

> I grew up in a small suburb outside of London called Letchworth in Hertfordshire. As a child, I was not exposed to black British literature. In school we read no books written by black authors, and I did not question this. In fact, I never really thought about blacks writing books. Additionally, I did not define other black people as essentially British. Most of my elders and playmates were Caribbean immigrants, and so I was taught to celebrate the achievements of great Jamaican heroes such as Marcus Garvey and Bob Marley. Outside of these individuals and some sports figures, I was unaware that blacks in Britain had contributed to the culture in important ways. (170)

Secondly, the predominance of black male writers, particularly from the Caribbean region, in black British writing since the 1940s indicates that it is perhaps relatively easier for them to get published than their female counterparts. It has been observed that black women writers have been either tokenised or used as appendages to black British male writers. For instance, books such as Nick Rennison's *Contemporary British Novelists* (2005) include Zadie Smith and Caryl Phillips along with Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie, under a section titled "Postcolonialism and other 'isms'". In similar instances, names of a few black women writers of Afro-Caribbean origin are either included to justify topics on multiculturality and hybridity or appendaged alongside prominent black male writers. With the same tenor, James Acheson and Sarah C. E. Ross' *The Contemporary British Novel* (2005) and James F. English's *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* (2006), discuss black writing in Britain in more elaborate detail than most books published in this field in the same years. But these

books exclude writers like Buchi Emecheta, Beryl Gilroy, and Joan Riley, who had a significant role in shaping the present generation of black women writers. Even works that specifically deal with black British writing, like David Dabydeen & Nana Wilson-Tagoe's *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (1985) and Dave Gunning's *Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature* (2010) discuss black women writers in an insufficient, separate section or excludes the analysis of black women's works respectively.

Thirdly, the prominence of black British women writers is affected by the overwhelming dominance of prominent African American women writers and feminists until recently. Comparing their position with African American women writers, Helen Charles comments on how publishers in the UK refuse to publish books by women of African and Caribbean descent on the pretext that they had "already published black writers from the States" (141). The reason for this is that the latter has dominated the body of language both in theory and academia and has a comprehensive historical lineage. African American women writers write from an already established history of their presence, that can be traced back to the time of enslavement in the cotton and tobacco plantations of the American South. In the 1970s and 1980s when African American women writers like Toni Morrison (1931-2019), Angela Davis (1944-), Alice Walker (1944-), Michelle Wallace (1952-), Barbara Smith (1946-), and others wrote to redress the racism and gender bias of (white) feminists and Black studies respectively, the highly politicized activities of the civil rights, Black Power and Black Arts movement gave a boost to these new subject in academia. With their collective efforts in establishing a black woman's standpoint, African American women with time "have achieved a visibility unthinkable in the past", something that still affects Afro-Caribbean women in Britain (Collins 9). While African American women now struggle to resist the "strategy of symbolic inclusion" which shows an "illusion of change", black British women writers continue to challenge dominant/mainstream narratives and establish a central position (Collins 9). Here, it is also necessary to point out that though black women from both Britain and America faced largely similar structures of discrimination and oppression, the lived experience or specific history of black British people is quite different from that of African Americans. This does not mean denying the fact that black British women writers heavily draw from African American women's writing. However, the study argues that the practices, ideologies, and cultural-literary motifs found

exclusively in black British fiction that developed out of this lived experience of black British people, particularly women, are markedly different. Even in her introduction to *Heart of the Race* (1984), Beverley Bryan states that though the ideologies propounded by black women in America find resonance with the experiences of black women in Britain, the former "does not speak directly of it" (1).

Therefore, it becomes important to examine how a lack of visibility stands as one of the reasons that restrict black women writers in Britain from appropriately addressing their issues. Another instance can be given of contemporary writers like Beryl Agatha Gilroy who began her writing career in the 1960s, after she settled in Britain, but was only published in the late 1980s. Her memoir, *The Black Teacher* (1975) was one of the first works by a black British woman that was acknowledged during that time. Blacks in Britain, compared to African Americans, have a "liminal presence" but like them are a racial minority, therefore, "for black Britons, engaging with the cultural legacies of black America is, at least in part, an engagement with their own changing imperatives of identity construction" (Gunning and Ward 151, 153). This necessitates the study to examine how these writers not only demonstrate their awareness of being black in Britain but also substantially contribute to the culture and politics of Britain. In congruence with this, the study demarcates clear distinctions between Englishness and Britishness and how black writers constantly engage in the debate of identifying with each of these while interrogating absolute definitions of their blackness.

Unlike the African American writers, black writers in Britain, along with claiming their cultural identity, have to grapple with the idea of 'Englishness' as a collective identity and its construction through the years. Literary and historical discourses in Britain have always sought to maintain the hegemony of the whites and construct a homogenous national identity. Every definition of that identity "has a tendency to distinguish the community concerned fairly sharply from others, and in doing so to offer a highly distorted and unflattering view of the latter and to discourage intercultural borrowing" (Parekh 254). In this way, the binary between whiteness and blackness developed as the 'self's' anti-thesis to the 'other', and especially in Britain, between blackness and Englishness.

This study traces how black British women writers challenge the fixedness of identity and attempt to articulate beyond the established positions to search for a

collective experience to which they can belong. As a consequence, the otherwise peripheral voices are centralised within the discourse of exclusion and inclusion. How marginalised characters negotiate with their specific subject positions and attempt to find 'home', sometimes in the most distorted manner, raises questions about the politics of borders and territorialisation. Most of the writings of black British women novelists, our study observes, are not merely a response to Western misrepresentations of black people, but also offer a nuanced perception of African and black nationalist ideologies. The existing literature that has stressed re-positioning Africa at the centre, has sought to document its 'presences' like the Negritude movement and the Afrocentric ideology but at times has also employed the image of Africa in its abstractness like in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, as stated by Yogita Goyal, wherein all other aspects surrounding it, except the idea of Africa itself as a subject, is discussed (Goyal 3). The image of Africa invariably occupies a dominant part, in both shaping and being shaped by contemporary black writing. Inquiring further, the study explores how the concept of home, homeland, and belonging, which is signified through constructions of nation and nationhood, is reflected through very personal, domestic spaces, religious rituals or practices (paganism, Vodou, Obeah, Santeria), traditional social institutions (polygyny and extended families), otherworldly 'possessions', 'inhabitations' or visitations, and pastoral or urbanised spaces. Within this frame of reference, contemporary black British women novelists either reject or re-work traditional 'return' narratives and the myth of 'origins'. For these writers, resistance is against racialised and male-centric constructions of Africa as a nation that on one hand reproduces the image of "mythologised femaleness of nation culture" and on the other, limits black women into "simplistic maternal roles" (Nasta xi, Gagiano 48).

The chapter has been divided into four but interrelated sections to lay the groundwork for the study. In the first section, we will briefly examine the history of black people and back it with examples from literary texts to show how black British writers consciously engage with historical events as part of their political resistance. In the second section, we trace a short genealogy of black British literary tradition but focus on contemporary black British women writers developing and experimenting with their unique form of expression. The third section broadly discusses the existing literature available in the present research and examines its relevance to our study. Finally, in the

last section, we summarize the core chapters that are to be discussed later in more elaborate terms.

II

One of the earliest instances of evidence of contact between African and European people can be traced back to the third century AD, during which a Roman emperor named Septimius Severus, from North Africa, ruled England (Hiro ix, Fryer 10). Although such a significant historical detail is known to very few British people until recently, one cannot ignore the contribution Severus made in shaping Britain on the one hand, while consolidating the military and political power of Rome in it, on the other. Ian Bernard in the article, "Africans at Hadrian's Wall", asserts that there is enough evidence to prove that "a 500-strong unit of Moors manned one of the forts" along the Hadrian's Wall during that period which affirms black people's involvement in forming today's Britain. 'Moors' or 'blackamoors', meaning dark-skinned individuals, were terms used during the Elizabethan period to address people from Africa (Fryer 10). Bernardine Evaristo, who draws on this little-known fact in her verse novel, *The Emperor's Babe* (2001), is outraged at the British public's obstinate unacceptance of black British historiography. In an interview with Alastair Niven published in *Wasafiri,* Evaristo states that "the Romans were travelling all over the place and they were also going backwards, and forwards so why is it so difficult for people to think that black people could be in London 2000 years ago". By using an anachronistic narrative, Evaristo shows the existence of the crisis and confusion about nationality that afflict present multicultural London and Britain at large.

Evaristo's affirmation of her source i.e., Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984), which attests to the fact that blacks were present in Britain since the time of the Roman occupation, has brought the scholarly work into public attention. However, it is surprising that she did not mention Dilip Hiro's *Black British, White British* (1971) even though it was published more than a decade before Fryer's work, considering her intention of documenting 'absences'. Such contradictory and selective affirmation of history is perhaps what Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy hint at when they warn of essentialising the black subject. Nevertheless, the influence of Fryer and Evaristo's works in black British culture and literature has overshadowed such omissions. A critical examination of these exclusions finds traces in the history of

documentation that have always weighed the value of one aspect over the other. Thus, Peter Fryer's book presents a counter-history to such inequitable records, which also "answered the nationalism and racism that obstructed the paths to authentic inclusion and belonging" (viii).

Fryer states archaeological research claims that "among 350 human skeletons found in an excavation at York in 1951-59 – the greatest number yet exhumed in any Roman-British cemetery – were several of men whose limb proportions suggest that they were black Africans" (2). There is also proof of Africans settling in Scotland, of which many were associated with King James' court as musicians. Fryer cites William Dunbar's reference to a black lady in his poems. The mention of these Africans in the context of Britain is, however, not made concerning the slave trade but instead, as being "borrowed" (Fryer 5). It was only in the year 1562 that the English were involved in the triangular journey when John Hawkins brought around 300 Africans from Guinea Coast and sold them to the Spaniards in the Caribbean to compete with the Portuguese, who already immensely profiting from the lucrative slave trade (Fryer 8). What needs to be specified here, is the fact that even Africans were involved in the exchange of slaves. Equiano Olaudah in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), affirms this detail but judiciously differentiates it from the European trade. He states that while trading with "mahogany-coloured men from the southwest of us", the Africans "sold slaves to them, but they were only prisoners of war, or such among us as had been convicted of kidnapping, or adultery, and some other crimes, which we esteemed heinous" (Andrews and Gates Jr. 51). Narratives such as Equiano's, defy generalised views of Africa as a homogenised geographical space.

Other than as slaves, since the 16th century Africans became a presence in noticeable numbers as domestic servants, jesters or musicians in court, and prostitutes in England. These presences make obvious suggestions of miscegenation and mixed races, even amongst royalty. Like the 'dark lady' or Lucy Negro in Shakespeare's works, several historical figures are now being rediscovered, whose origins lie in Africa. Ivan van Sertima's *African Presence in Early Europe* (1986), Ron Ramdin's *Reimagining Britain: 500 Years of Black and Asian History* (1999), Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins' *Black Experience and the Empire* (2004), David Olusoga's *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2019) deal with re-discovering similar facts and incidents that have

remained obscured since generations. A fictional representation of such buried facts is seen in Bernadine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* (2011), where the protagonist, Stanley, encounters the ghosts of Louise Marie (the black nun of Moret), Joseph Boulogne, Hannibal of Carthage, Alessandro, Mary Seacole, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, Queen Charlotte, and King George. Commemoration becomes the core intent of this novel and is made clear through Joseph Boulogne's plea: "I beg of you, make of me a memory once more/ Let me be known" (Evaristo 121). The novel also shows Queen Charlotte's African origins which is Evaristo's confrontation with the concept of purity and absolute whiteness that the Royal family seemed to project until the marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. The portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle painted by David Martin in 1779 featuring Dido and her white cousin, Lady Elizabeth Murray, can be cited as the earliest instance of blacks as aristocrats[1]. In the article, "Identities: Britain's First Black Aristocrats" (2021) published in *BBC Culture*, Fedora Abu alludes to Amma Asante's feature film *Belle* (2014), starring Gugu Mbatha Raw, and the Netflix series *Bridgeton* (2021) that deliberates on the aspect of black presence among white English aristocrat class and the Royal family. The former deals with the life of Dido Elizabeth Belle and the latter highlights the African heritage of Queen Charlotte. In *Bridgeton*, the casting of black characters like Lady Danbury, the Duke of Hastings (in Season I), and the family of Sharmas (in Season II) in the most vital roles not only prove the importance of blacks as part of the nobility but also point to the prevalence of mixed-race marriages amidst them.

Lawrence Scott's historical novel, *Dangerous Freedom: Elizabeth D'Aviniere* (2021) revolves around the life of Elizabeth Dido after her marriage to John D'Aviniere in early 18th century London. Scott's work aims to interrogate the placid image of a harmonious mixed-race relationship that is portrayed through Dido's portrait. It seeks to demystify the sexualised and exoticized connotations underpinned by Martin's portraiture of Dido and examines how racialised ideologies were a widespread affair even during that time. While growing up in Kenwood House, not only did Dido address her uncle as 'Master', but also lived with the fear that her freedom as a black woman is somehow provisional. In relation to this, she remembers the James Somerset affair[2] and her fear of being captured as a slave again. Despite belonging to a family of aristocrats, Dido's precarious state is made clear in a conversation between Lady Mansfield and Lord Lindsay: "You know the streets of this city are treacherous with catchers, only too

eager to slap irons on her, throw her onto a ship bound for Kingston, Bridgeton, or elsewhere. My daughter, just a mite, will be snatched. The mixed ones are the most desired" (Scott 46). Leonora Brito too takes influence from this subject for her short story, *Dido Elizabeth Belle – A Narrative of her Life* (1995). After Dido escapes from her "family 'sweet-box' at Caenwood" to the nearby woods, her encounter with a fisherman reveals that "her's nothing but a black gal!", despite being born into nobility (Brito 40, 45). However, being a "scholard", Dido believes in redressing the "wicked fabrication" of her history by choosing to "possess, rather than be possessed by it" (45, 48). Sarah Bonetta Davies, a Yoruba princess who was gifted as a slave to Queen Victoria by the captain of the Royal Navy, is another instance of black presence in the Royalty. Contemporary black British playwrights like Janice Okoh allude to this lesser-known historical detail in her play *The Gift* (2020), which explores the foundations of today's racism.

Miscegenation and being outnumbered is a perpetual fear that pervades most justification of hostility meted out to the blacks. The fear, however, makes no consideration of the fact that enslaved women were used as child-bearing objects, which resulted in mixed-race offspring. The viciousness afflicted during slavery, particularly on women, is a subject many black British writers now reflect on, to understand the history of physical and psychological trauma suffered by their ancestors. Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* (2010) set in a sugar plantation named Amity in Jamaica during the 19th century, is told through the personal narrative of an enslaved woman, July, who is a mulatto born out of a rape encounter between her mother Kitty and a Scottish overseer, Tam Dewar. The whole story is a recollection of July and her mother's life on the plantation under a white mistress, Caroline Mortimer. Using humour as an artistic tool, Levy casually comments on the callousness of the slave masters and conversely, on the everyday lives of these slaves, who are preparing for a revolt against their merciless overseers. A lot of these slave histories are a significant part of the personal pasts of black Britons today. Levy herself had a great-grandfather, who was a slave and a mulatto, born out of an illicit relationship between an attorney and a housemaid.

However, despite the presence of black people in England, the English have constantly sought to maintain their purity by either segregating the blacks or attempting to wholly eradicate their presence from the British Isle. Many black people were known

to have actively participated during the American War of Independence as British loyalists. Most were positioned in the cavalry, as guides, spies and couriers, labourers, pilots, and many more. While some of these black people were free, most of them had also volunteered to join the war in exchange for their freedom from slavery. When the war ended a lot of these people were "evacuated" to Britain and thus, by the eighteenth century, there were around 10,000 black people in London alone (Bryan 63). The socio-economic condition of black people was already degenerated by the 1731 policy when the Lord Mayor of London prohibited them from the post of apprenticeship. In addition, they were barred from obtaining the relief provided according to the Poor Law (Bryan 65). The Loyalists were treated in the same manner, and many did not even receive compensation for contributing to the war. S.I. Martin's *Incomparable World* (1996) presents a graphic description of the precarious lives and future of four such black characters in London West End during the eighteenth century.

To deal with this issue, a committee was set up in 1786 that vouched to provide relief to these British Loyalists, who were now known as the Black Poor, including the newly arrived Lascars and seamen from East India. A relief of sixpence per day was provided to each individual by the Government, as observed by P. Fryer, R. Ramdin, and many others because this was part of a larger experiment of either resettling the black poor to Nova Scotia or repatriating them to Sierra Leone. According to this strategic experimentation, that was proposed by an "amateur botanist" named Henry Smeathman, the Treasury paid 14 pounds for every black who voluntarily willed to leave Britain and emigrate to the "terrestrial paradise" (Fryer 196). Thus, in 1787, "350 black settlers, 41 of them women, and 59 white wives (some now widows of, of men who had died on board)" were sent to inhabit a new land in West Africa (Fryer 201). Lack of sufficient amenities, disease, and unfavourable climatic conditions claimed the lives of many of these people. To top it all, those who survived, now belonged to the Sierra Leone Company. Another batch of black Loyalists, who had gone to Nova Scotia, complained of not obtaining any land despite residing in the place for more than six years. The complaint was addressed with an offer to return to Sierra Leone as free men, and consequently, another group of around 1,100 black people went back in the year 1792 (Fryer 202). Such an attempt at repatriation is, however, not a recent undertaking. The roots of this experiment can be traced back to Queen Elizabeth I's rule, during which she passed an edict citing "those kinde of people" i.e., the "great numbers of Negars and

Blackamoors which are crept into this realm" and are different from her "own liege people", to be deported (Fryer 12, Bartles 316, Weissbourd 3). The 1601 'edict of expulsion' expressed the Queen's perception of black people as "infidels, having no understanding of Christ or Gospel", thus establishing one of the earliest public manifestations of racialised discourse[3] (Bartles 305). A fictional account of these explicit realities is depicted in Simi Bedford's *Not with Silver* (2007).

Despite these obvious attempts at repatriation, the magnitude of imperialistic conduct continued to direct national allegiances of black people towards the Western world. This is the reason why many of them agreed to be posted as seamen merchants and factory workers during the First World War. When the war ended, they settled in the harbour areas of "London, Liverpool, Bristol, Manchester, Glasgow, Swansea, Cardiff and South Shields" (Hiro xix). The same harbours were ironically also important places of connectivity involved in the trading of human bodies and human trafficking. This insignificant number of blacks again caused an uproar among white Britons and it led to riots, the first being in Cardiff in the year 1919. This defies the general belief propagated by Right-wing nationalists in the 1970s and 80s of being 'swamped by outsiders' and thereby justifying the violence caused by anti-black groups such as the National Front and skinheads. More than the number, as stated by Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea, it was the evident difference in physiognomy, culture, and language, backed by already constructed narratives of savagery, disease, and sexual excesses, that threatened the British majority (5). The Cardiff Riot also demonstrated the beginning of Race Relations in post-war Britain. Particularly in Cardiff, it was the rise of the "coloured alien seaman problem", who were considered "undesirable competitors" by the British working class and seamen (Drake 199). Of the coloured seamen, many claimed their British nationality by producing documentary evidence of their British passports, but these were seen as irrelevant and confiscated by the police. All of them were irrefutably graded as aliens, despite their superior military position and years of service to Britain. In the mid-1940s, around 5000 and 12000 West Indian men served in the RAF and the Caribbean regiment respectively (Wills 10). After WW II ended, many West Indian servicemen and women who worked under Britain's Royal Air Force, Auxiliary Territorial Service, and Women's Auxiliary Air Force, decided to settle in Britain, which had undergone tremendous change in its political climate (10). Without their uniforms, these blacks faced a 'rude awakening' when they settled in Britain and sought to claim their Britain

identity. This is evidenced in Gilbert's frustrated outburst to Bernard Bligh in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004): "You know what your trouble is, man?" he said. "Your white skin. You think it makes you better than me. You think it give you the right to lord over a black man… we both just finish fighting a war – a bloody war – for the better world we wan' see" (525). Gilbert's idea of the war is in contrast to Bernard's, who says that "the war was fought so people might live amongst their own kind…. England for the English and the West Indies for these coloured people" (469). By stating as such, Bernard not only ignorantly amputates the colonial empires from its 'mother country', but also raises one crucial issue that immensely bothered the British public of the 1950s – the 'colour problem'.

Eventually, these coloured workers were side-lined from employment opportunities or paid extremely nominal wages. With the assistance of the British government through an outlet of subsidies, shipowners also intended to hire only white British seamen (Fryer 356). Furthermore, those who were already in service were forced to generate an "alien's certificate of residence" to receive payment (Fryer 357). Not only in Cardiff, London too was proving to be a hostile place for coloured students, workers, and medical practitioners. They experienced racism in the form of 'colour bar' in housing, health facilities, and also social spaces like hotels and pubs. Another issue that added to the noticeable colour problem during this period, was the problem of the half-caste (Drake 200). A number of the coloured seamen had relationships with white women, mostly Irish, and hence, the fear of miscegenation threatened the British public. In consequence, in the year 1948, an anti-black race riot erupted in an Indian café at St. James Street, Liverpool, which was a common meeting place for black men and white women. The riot was also caused by the National Union of Seamen's consistent efforts to work for the benefit of the coloured seamen.

In the year 1948, when the *SS Empire Windrush* arrived at Tilbury Docks, carrying around 500 migrants from the Caribbean islands, similar events of racial tension ensued. These incomers did not typically consider themselves as immigrants, but as citizens of the Empire and "bona fide travellers", who were invited against a call of duty to serve their 'mother country' (Drake 208). George Lamming recalls in *The Pleasures of the Exile* (1960) that,

> There were adverts everywhere: 'Come to the Mother Country! The mother Country Needs You!' That's how I learned I the opportunity was here. I felt a strong loyalty to England… it was really the mother country and being away from home wouldn't be that terrible because you would belong. (*qtd. in* Wills 6)

Taiwo, in Evaristo's debut verse novel, *Lara* (1997), recollects the same summoning on the radio. According to the British Nationality Act of 1948, a written "contract in black and white" as Clair Wills put it, the citizens of the British Empire were provided with the right to settle in Britain, on grounds of submitting their landing cards[4] as proof of documentation (3). This batch of immigrants, particularly coming from the Caribbean Island, were however equipped with the English language and mannerisms ingrained through colonial instruction in education, religion, and culture. Wendy Webster, in an article titled "Windrush Generation: The History of Unbelonging", gives excerpts from her interviews with immigrants who boarded the *SS Empire Windrush* in 1948. In one of those conversations, a Caribbean woman reminisces how institutionalised education directed their loyalty towards England. Some others like Walter Lother held deeply ingrained opinions regarding his Britishness and belonging to the British empire. As quoted in Webster's article, Walter Lother believes that "[He] didn't have a status as a Jamaican. [He] was British, and going to the mother country was like going from one parish to another. You had no conception of it being different". Contrarily, while some considered England as a vision for a better future, for some people it meant "adventure, a broader canvas, and an alternative to the constricted environment of home" (Wills 8).

Before experiencing the 'colour bar' and the structural racism, an evident "shock of arrival" occurring as a recurrent feature in most black British writing, is the experience of cold weather and the dull atmosphere (Wills 18). In *Fruit of the Lemon* (2005), Levy adds to the disillusionment of the Windrush migrants to Britain by staging their arrival during Guy Fawkes night, which momentarily gives them a feeling of being welcomed. The false illusion of these immigrants, however, was not completely backed by deception on the part of the British. In this regard, Clair Wills comments that the Labour Department in Trinidad relayed the ground reality of the living conditions in Britain to those who applied for passports, but "the advertisements for jobs in newspapers and magazines, the sunny brochures offering luxury travel, and the efforts of all the sub-agents, touts and loan sharks whose livelihoods depended on the migration

business, told a different story" (16-7). Again, contrary to the photographs of West Indian men in suits and trilby hats and women in summer dresses, the reality of the travel had involved the ships themselves turning into "less-than-dignified containers of human hopes and desires: victims of weeks of drunkenness, gambling, seasickness, or plain weariness swayed around now stinking of sweat, urine and vomit" (Wills 18). Randal Hansen elaborates on the 'silences' that reveal the Labour government's motive behind the 1948 Nationality Act. In a recent article published in *The Guardian*, David Olusoga also reveals that the 1948 immigration policy and the subsequent arrival of Windrush migrants, "was not a rosy one even before the ship arrived". According to Randall Hansen, the Act simply speaks of the government's objective to control "British subjecthood", which was challenged by Canada in the 1946 Act (69). The then Prime Minister of Britain, Clement Atlee, had tried to restrict the arrival of the ship on British shores. Again, Hansen mentions that the Colonial Secretary, Creech Jones, underlined in a Cabinet Memorandum the government's vehement opposition to permanent immigration from the Commonwealth countries (90).

However, the repeated attention drawn towards the arrival of the *Windrush* has legitimized the absence of black presence in Britain prior to the 1940s and established the idea for a majority of British people that the immigration of blacks is a very recent phenomenon. In fact, *SS Ormonde* had arrived in Britain a year before the *Windrush* carrying 110 male passengers (Wills 10). Even Lord Kitchener's 'London is the Place for Me' came to vaguely represent the general intention of the West Indian immigrants. Soon enough, as the recent arrivals experienced the hostility, they began expressing their predicaments through different forums. Kitchener himself, who was equally disillusioned, released his song 'If You're Not White, You're Black' in 1953, which echoes the changing political climate of that time. Though historians and creative writers alike have proven otherwise, fixed stress on this period enabled right-wing ideologists to stir the British public towards a new direction of race politics. Nevertheless, the *Windrush* as a symbolic gesture dominated the contemporary representation of blacks in Britain. Conflicting constructions were extracted from this symbol. In "Out of Hand" (1998), Jackie Kay deliberates on the "huge fiction of a ship" that became a consequential metaphor for post-war black immigration to Britain (103). The imagery of hand used in Kay's story commemorates the presence and contribution of black women,

which has not received much attention because, in the 1940s and 50s, the overwhelming majority of migrants were men.

Other than the patriotic longing to serve their 'mother country' and the cultural attraction towards Englishness, Peter Fryer points out, the mass immigration of the Caribbeans to Britain in the 1950s, not only stemmed from the need for employment and better opportunities but also due to the US McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, which curbed the inflow of migrants from that region (373). Most of these migrants, who were young men and women conditioned by English schools into the beliefs and values of English culture, were expected to work diligently in return for decent reimbursements. What they experienced was a disillusionment beyond their expectations. Excluding the blatant verbal abuse where these migrants are told to 'go back to their jungle' or 'go back where you came from', Britain's entire structural policies sought to downgrade them to a pattern of exclusion and discriminatory practices. For instance, in *The Making of Black Working Class in Britain* (1997), Ron Ramdin states that when the *Windrush* first arrived, some 242 West Indians were provisionally lodged in Clapham Common Underground Station, which was in a state of decrepit conditions. Even the newcomers who kept migrating to Britain in the 1950s found it difficult to settle due to the scarcity of room outlets. The area of the East End had an almost stable population and the other metropolitan boroughs were too affluent. Along with this, there were very few job openings that recruited black people readily. Hence, Ramdin points out, the population was mostly concentrated in areas around central London, that had started to deteriorate and accordingly been abandoned by white British people. In cases where black people are accepted as tenants by white landlords, the former is expected to pay exorbitant rates for very small units of the apartments, which is often termed as 'colour tax' (Holton 36). Few black people who had the financial stability to buy houses in such areas leased them out at much higher rates than whites (37). Caryl Phillips in *The Final Passage* (1985), demonstrates how black people like Leila and Michael, are deceived by an estate agency to pay twelve pounds for a dilapidated house that is described to them as "a terraced property… close to… all the conveniences". As pointed out by James E. Holton, while there are options to file complaints in the Rent Tribunal, many immigrants refuse to do it due to the amount of time and expenditure it incurs (37). An illustrative portrayal of the dismal living conditions of these black immigrants is a recurring aspect evident in black British writings.

The changing demography threatened the British public, particularly the working-class whites, who believed that the black immigrants were usurping their economic stabilities. The latter was generically considered an indolent lot "living off national assistance and off the immoral earnings of prostitutes" (Ramdin Ch. 7). Black people, however, came to Britain with the very intention of developing their economic state. Most of them were also educated and already working in well-off positions in their home countries. For migrants from Barbados, the government had arranged a scheme to secure jobs in the transport and health facilities of Britain (Ramdin Ch. 7). Despite being engaged in these jobs, their economic status was not secured due to a lack of pension facilities, health insurance, or opportunities for promotion. Many migrants also had to take up semi-skilled or unskilled menial jobs with meagre rewards, that disallowed them from improving their condition of living. Due to these discriminations, black migrants were relegated to the lowest rung in terms of the labour market. Another important fact about these migrants is that most of them had come to Britain with the purpose of a temporary visit and a guaranteed return to their homeland after collecting enough wages, but the patterns of social segregation indicate how conditions were made for blacks so that they do not plan for a permanent settlement. The anti-black nationalist slogan, 'Keep Britain White', used by the National Front during an election campaign in the 1950s states an instance of this. Stating against these occurrences, the 1968 Race Relations Act disapproved discriminatory practises related to housing and employment based on race, ethnicity, or nationality. A corollary to this was the British MP, Enoch Powell's controversial 'Rivers of Blood' speech in the same year which exposed his and many other British politicians' divisive politics. Powell's fear of the black man overthrowing the white man echoed the socio-economic concerns of the ordinary, English man and, therefore, resonated with a majority of the British public.

Other than jobs, immigrants from Commonwealth countries came to Britain for education too. For these immigrants, pursuing higher education in the universities and technical and medical schools in Britain proved to be a significant part of their personal growth and also the socio-political and economic development of their native countries which were in a nascent state of self-governance. Therefore, a sizeable number of immigrants, who otherwise had an agricultural background, settled in urban areas such as Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Nottingham, and particularly London (Holton 33). There were about 6000 coloured students who had come to Britain in the 1950s (Drake

208). Not only did these students experience racism, but also realised the lack of black representation among teachers, the school's management authorities, or the curriculum. A study by Lilian Godwin Pearce conducted on 22 black students educated between 1950 to 2000 in England, revealed that "teachers judged their academic potential based on their home address; whether they were from a single parent family; their parents' employment history and educational backgrounds, and, shockingly, even the colour of their skin" (31). The reports of underachievement of black students in schools and colleges were governed by such pre-conceived assumptions and summarized as detrimental to the growth of other pupils, particularly white British. As a result, instead of promoting them to Grammar Schools, Black children were automatically demoted to the Educationally Sub-Normal category, also known as 'special schools', a programme that was established with the 1944 Education Act but actively implemented since the 1960s in the schools of Britain, particularly England, and Wales. Contrary to such assumptions, Heidi Safia Mirza's research work on young, black females' performance in school states otherwise. In *Race, Gender and Educational Desire: Why Black Women Succeed and Fail* (2008), Mirza remarks that "young black women are relatively successful in education" but the lack of focus on this issue reflects the "political undercurrents which since the 1960s have sought to maintain the myth of black underachievement" (56, 11).

Including marginalisation in the education system and labour sector, black migrants suffer from a lack of proper health facilities as well. The National Health Service (NHS) which is known to have been raised by the countless efforts of the migrant population, denies the same provisions to them as compared to the white British people. In the case of black women, the situation is far more aggravating. *The Black Maternity Experiences Survey* released on May 2022 by *Five X More,* a grassroots organisation dealing with black women's health and maternity issues, reveals the stark reality of high mortality rates among black mothers. The unequal distribution of health services and disparities of treatment among black and white women in Britain are a cause of such circumstances, which largely remain undocumented and accounted for. According to the Survey, black women are not only "four times more likely to die during pregnancy, labour, postpartum, but they are twice as likely to have their baby die in the womb or soon after their birth and are at an increased risk of readmission to hospital in the six weeks after giving birth" (Peter and Wheeler 7). The Survey also highlights black

women's experiences of hostile interaction with healthcare professionals which are grounded on racial prejudices. Furthermore, the practice of stereotyping individual cases as collective experiences of black women undermines the distinctive cultural systems that influence the lived experiences in specific communities (10). By providing the details of the women's religious, ethnic, educational, marital, and citizenship status, the Survey seeks to challenge these stereotypes. In a blog named *Discover Society*, the writers Nasar Meer, Kaveri Qureshi, Ben Kasstan, and Susan Hill deliver a similar instance of inequality and disparate effects of COVID-19 on BAME communities. They survey the disproportionate spread of the infection and an increased rate of mortality among these communities compared to the white people and locate the cause in the socio-economic living conditions of the former. The deprivation of proper housing, employment, and health services has led to a heightened threat to their health. But instead of probing into these structural problems, medical experts rely on pre-conceived ideas regarding the association of ethnicity or race and a healthy lifestyle.

Moreover, racist practices backed by law came into expression in the form of "complex political and ideological racialization of immigration policy" that further determined the evolving British race politics (Solomos 160). Being discriminatory in nature, the Acts sought to execute stringent border control to prevent the deregulated incoming of 'strangers' from Africa and the Caribbean. The 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, which issued the display of work permits to enter Britain, was one of the first of this kind. According to this Act, only a specific number of Commonwealth citizens were to be allowed entry, and immigration controls were to be laid on those who attained their British passports from the colonial British government instead of the UK government. Then followed the 1968 and 1971 Acts, enforced by the Labour government while being continuously pressurized by Enoch Powell. To state in concise terms, the Acts allowed entry only to those whose parents or grandparents had settled in Britain for more than five years. The concept of 'patriality' or the right to abode, which was introduced in the 1971 Immigration Act, enlisted immigrants from the Commonwealth and 'aliens' under the same classification, which in itself exposed racial biases. In fact, in the year 1986, a new regulation in the UK imposed visas for visitors from five 'black' countries, namely Ghana, Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, once urged the black people to develop what he called, a "sense of belonging" in Britain and "do their bit". He also echoed, as reported by BBC News,

Right-wing politicians' biased views on integration, by stating that "we have norms of acceptability and those who come into our home – for that is what it is – should accept those norms just as we would have to do if we went elsewhere". In observation of these predispositions, Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea remark that "there is in Britain, much more than in countries more accustomed to immigration, an expectation of social conformity and a rejection of claims of distinct ethnic identity" (5). The reason for this, according to them, is its "insular position in the North Sea", which limited possibilities for immigration, until lately, and thereby a promotion of a homogenous national identity (5). Though this can be considered a factually valid cause, the protraction of race discourse and the ethnic segregation of black people from the 'indigenous' white people allude to the history of complex relationships between the British Empire and the colonised countries. In congruence to this, even Miles and Phizacklea believe that the advent of the so-called 'natives' to "English cities" in substantial numbers, perhaps not only indicated the "decline of the British Empire", but also affirmed the fact that "the world order, and Britain's preeminent role, is not what it was" (5).

The decade of the 1980s marked the development of new racist relations in Britain, when the 'colour problem' was beginning to be seen as a social problem and, thus, structural racism taking the shape of institutional racism (Hall et al. *Policing the Crisis*, v). Public debates on British national identity involved languages of war and territorialism, that created imaginary borders among different racial and ethnic communities, segregating major urban spaces into ghettos and inner cities (Gilroy, *There ain't* 2). Paul Gilroy identifies this as "new racism", which expresses the xenophobic tendencies of Britain, while John Solomos perceives it as "part of a wider campaign to use race as a symbol for the neo-Conservative ideology of Thatcher's wing of the party" (3, 172). Along with it, in most cases, the role of the National Front in instigating racist attacks is left unrecorded and discounted, as witnessed in Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (2001). Despite evident traces of the NF's raid in a library owned by a black woman, the police and the protagonist, Faith's white roommates, choose to believe that it was the work of mere hooligans. In this regard, extreme policing in black concentrated areas was used as a means of control, even though it was mostly black people who were the victims of such violent uprisings. The racial and ethnic identity of the communities were factors for an arbitrary suspicion and search of documents proving their legal status. The immigration policies were a direct effect of such policing, officially known as

the 'stop and search' or SUS laws, that came into effect in the 1970s and 1980s in Wales and England. According to a survey of the years 2005-6, "black people in England and Wales were six times as likely to be stopped and searched by the police in comparison with their white counterparts…. The British Crime Survey found…. Of those stopped in a car, 93 percent of white respondents stopped were given a reason to stop, compared with 86 percent of black respondents" (Bowling and Phillips 944).

Furthermore, in the 1980s, 'mugging' became a "social phenomenon" of having caused a "moral panic" (Hall et al. v, vii). Regarding the problem of 'mugging' as a recurrent street crime, Stuart Hall points out that the tense relationship shared between black people and the London Met police, pre-dates the "'mugging' panic" (*Policing* 181). To state in Hall's terms, "the 'mugging' panic emerges, not from nowhere, but out of a field of extreme tension, hostility and suspicion sustained by the relations between the police and the black communities" (181). Hence, policing is justified by the association of criminality with 'black' people, which is particularly perpetrated on white people. However, the episode of 'mugging' and murder of Felix Cooper in Zadie Smith's *NW* at the hands of two black men, subverts this racial logic of criminality. The pervading logic of black men involved in crime and disorder explains why the majority of prisoners in Britain are black people. As stated by Julia Sudbury, prisons in Britain also have incarcerated black women from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, "either as immigrant detainees, or serving sentences for drug incorporation" (165). While many black women convicted of drug dealings are bound by economic necessity, Sudbury points out, it is the abuse, and subservient role in heterosexual relationships that force black women into such unlawful activities. To add to their tribulation, the retributive mode adopted by the criminal justice system to eliminate them as undesirable elements from the decent British public, further separate them from their families and any future prospect of living a respectable life after their time in prison. Eventually, a hostile and chaotic environment is stimulated that develops a sense of suspicion and caution among black, ethnic, and minority communities. Policing strategies, in turn, influence the antagonistic attitudes of black people toward the police, which is why there are higher reports of complaints against police from black communities. Due to an unrestricted autonomy vested in the police, the former inflicts unwarranted violence on 'blacks', which in many cases has led to the death of the latter[5] This was followed by the eruption of the 1981 riots that occurred consecutively in five regions, namely Brixton,

Toxeth, Handsworth, Chapeltown, and Moss Side, within four months. Kit De Waal's *My Name is Leon* (2016) deals with these social and political conflicts and juxtaposes them with the domestic tensions of a foster home in Birmingham. Through the eyes of a 10-year-old black boy, readers get a glimpse of the community of mixed-race people living in "Rookery Road Allotments" and grappling with racialised discourses, amidst brewing riots at the backdrop (Waal 90).

It can be deduced from these instances that "the reports, and the events which engendered their [black people's] existence, act as historical markers in the relationship between race issues, policy-making and service delivery in a multicultural, postcolonial society" (Neal 57). In the aftermath of the 1981 riots, the then UK Home Secretary, William Whitelaw, appointed Lord Scarman with immediate effect to inquire into it. Sarah Neal, in her article "The Scarman Report, the Macpherson Report and the Media: How Newspapers Respond to Race-centred Social Policy Interventions", examines how Scarman's investigation highlighted racial discrimination but overlooked the existence of institutional racism in Britain. She argues that the Report "offered a pathological model for understanding the situation in Brixton", which was described as "not unhappy but disturbed" and of the black community as "an albeit disadvantaged but nevertheless threatening urban population" (65, 71). To add to it, Neal points out that newspapers like *Mirror*, the *Sun* and *Mail*, employed narratives of "disease" and "paranoia" concerning 'alien' bodies (64). In context to this, interrogating the ambiguous nature of the Report, Neal also questions whether the "disease" is "racial disadvantage" or "multiculturalism" (65).

The McPherson Report, which was published after the episode of Stephen Lawrence's murder at a bus stop in South London during a violent racial confrontation, for the first time acknowledged the presence of institutional racism. However, it also pathologized the black family as something that should be probed into for a solution to the rising number of crimes caused by black people. The absence of a patriarchal head in black families has been misjudged as the primary cause of disoriented black youth, a majority of whom are supposedly involved in gangs and drug smuggling. While the assumption pretermits the environment of hostility and depravity British society has created for the 'black' community, it also discourages the possibilities for change attempted by them. Written in a grimly intimate first-person narrative, Linton Kwesi

Johnson's *Sonny's Lettah* (1980) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Hello Mum* (2010), give glimpses of two black teenagers tracing their trajectories of life and death, as they face dangerous encounters of strategic policing and the drug and gangster culture. The epistolary form in Evaristo's novella, allows Jerome to express his sense of fear towards the alluring life of fast-money and materialistic gain, to which he is drawn by chance rather than choice. The respective literary narratives, in this sense, clearly seek to challenge racialised and ideological rhetoric of crime and disorder constructed by the nation-state.

Evaristo's narrative, by underscoring the subject of multiculturalism, challenges the history of Britain and the discourse of racist and anti-racist politics. Understanding the politics of anti-racism is significant because, as Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea point out, the anti-racist language used in laws and policies is a mere means to discriminate 'black' people and "depoliticize the race issue" (7). The idea of Britishness and multiculturalism have had a parallel development since the 1990s with the rise in power of the Labour Party and its development into the New Labour Party. Particularly Blair's government, since 1997, has implicitly adhered to reconstructing nationalistic discourses like the construction of Britain's image as 'Cool Britannia', which has simply followed in the footsteps of Thatcher's government in the earlier years. Along with it, by politicizing Britain's image as 'one nation', politicians like Tony Blair, David Cameroon, and George Brown, constantly stressed British values of tolerance, liberty, and openness that are bestowed on legally immigrated citizens as Rights. In the same way, black migrants were expected to conform to certain 'duties' as a citizen, of which one was the proper usage of the English language. What is evident in their speeches is their shallow statements on British pluralism, while also stressing the need for 'integration' of these immigrants into the country and its values, instead of vice versa.

The Parekh Report on the 'Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain', published in the year 2000, gave a perspective to these multiculturalist politics. The country's characteristic of tolerance is collectively a point of convergence where different hegemonic white nationalist ideologies meet, to 'other' the minorities, particularly blacks and Muslims in the contemporary context. The threat posed by decolonisation, as Richard Ashcroft and Mark Bevir state, is one of the first reasons that triggered Britain to constitute the image of a multicultural nation. The idea of Britishness or the British national identity has been

simultaneously restructured as the influx of immigrants since the 1950s increased. This supposedly impulsive undertaking, however, is not a novel trait in the sense that "a distinctive understanding of Britishness was first forged during the struggle against France and the subsequent period of colonisation…" (Ashcroft and Bevir 4). Accordingly, Paul Warmington points out, that these so-called "putative legislative advances around equal opportunity, representation or diversity had given the appearance of striking against racism, while, in actuality, maintaining racial inequalities at manageable levels" (4). Such discourses, instead of prioritizing the structural issues at hand, promote an essentialized Britishness that easily denunciates those who do not fall under their purview of categorization. Consequently, attempts at resistance and radicalization are deemed as un-British acts. In this way, a tradition of dismissing minority issues which had its beginnings in theories offered by pioneers of British Cultural Studies, proceeded in a rather more non-threatening form (Harris 487). Since the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/11, i.e., the violent attacks by extremist Muslims in the US and UK respectively, the race issue added religious and ethnic prejudgments in its purview. David Cameroon, during his speech in 2006, perceived this experiment of 'state multiculturalism' as a failure by basically targeting Islamic extremists. This is after the 2005 bombings in London, which further steered the 'ordinary decent' British public into the us/them dichotomy, where any 'non-white' who does not speak the Queen's English is considered to be an outsider. Nigel Farage, an independent party member expressed similar views, but in a more condescending tone, simultaneously revealing his underlying ideologies of purity and absolutism. In context to this, one can recall the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Megan Markle, which stirred an uproar among the British public, considering Meghan's mixed-race background. The publication of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* at the beginning of the millennium exposed these ethnic and religious undercurrents that regulate multiculturalist politics. Ethnicity and race as a source of identity are flouted when Archie, an Englishman, states that the Iqbals are "not those kind of Indians", just as his second wife Clara Bowden, a Nigerian, is "not that kind of black" (Smith 54). While Archie here consciously seems to ignore the purity or impurity of his own Englishness, a Bengali-Muslim immigrant from Bangladesh namely Alsana articulates that "it's still easier to find the correct Hoover bag than to find one pure person, one pure faith, on the globe" (Smith 85). Multiculturalism became the "euphemism", "which provided an escape route from the implications of racial equality" (Mike Phillips 150). Owing to such condemnation of multiculturalism, critics agree that

the term has become "politically damaged" but it is not a "complete or closed project" which is why many "intellectual and political developments…have been shaping British multiculturalism" (Meer and Modood 75, 76).

Similarly, multiculturalism continues to be critiqued as racist underpinnings and exclusionist practices are still reinforced through legislative changes. The 2016 Immigrations Act and the Housing and Planning Act is one such instance which, according to J. Brunett, has led to "further eviction, displacement of families and breaking up of communities" and discouraged influx of migrants (2). An approximate of 500 families are rendered homeless every week due to this new housing initiative (Burnett 5). To state in lucid words, while the Immigration Act "focused on addressing who can reside *in* the country", the Housing Act decided "who can reside *where*" (emphasis added, Burnett 3). Sonita Gale's documentary feature film named "Hostile" gives individual accounts of such policies that force migrants in Britain to voluntarily seek deportation. Again, as part of the project of urban renewal or gentrification, many deprived families have been relocated to old buildings in the cities that are deficient in providing even the basic spatial, domestic amenities to individual families. These spaces are not only overcrowded but, as a consequence, also lack essential sanitation. The fire in North Kensington's Grenfell Tower in 2017 states an instance of both an architectural and structural failure, where most people who died and were injured belonged to the BAME communities. Jay Bernard's poetry collection, *Surge*, is entirely dedicated to the lives lost in this grave event. The project of restructuring the state also is mostly targeted at the inner cities of London to convert them into exclusive spaces for the economically privileged. One such practice is the gentrification of old communal spaces into privatised commercial centres. In a situation where urban spaces in England are undergoing these transformations, black people realise that they can no longer hold on to materialistic possessions that claim stories of their presence in Britain; in a way, they become part of another set of amnesia strategized by the capitalist, consumerist nation-state. The dance troupe, 'Midnight Ballet', and the Ladbroke Grove in Diana Evans' *The Wonder* are depicted as undergoing the same ordeal of retreating to oblivion.

To add to this, the loss of lives, belongings, and physical deportation induced by the *Windrush Scandal* has caused further damage to the already raptured history of black people. A series of articles published in *The Guardian* since 2018[6] provides a detailed

demonstration of the pathetic state of black British people, mostly first and 1.5 generation, who have been rendered jobless, homeless, and debarred from health and other welfare facilities due to this new diplomatic policy of racial cleansing. Migrants who have settled in Britain for more than fifty years have been subjected to interrogation and demanded to provide documents that prove their British citizenship. In cases where these migrants were unable to deliver proper proof, they were certified as 'illegal migrants' and, therefore, subject to deportation. Stella Corradi's film *Sitting in Limbo* released in 2020, is a testimony to these experiences. Based on the story of one Anthony Bryan, the movie encapsulates the tribulations of many such migrants. As articulated by the central character, the intention of the Home Office to expel him and others like him from the country is followed by a series of lies and deception. It is only when the journalist Amelia Gentleman reports on this scam that Bryan receives a formal apology from the court. The movie ends with Bryan finally receiving a British passport and an ominous background score as he looks at his family celebrating their triumph, through the glass window of his daughter's house. The foreboding sound reflects the father's perpetual fear for the future of his children.

Most details of such instances of discrimination and exclusion remain undocumented and unknown to many. But black creative writers and artists have been striving to record them and describe their collective experiences. Britain as the centre for literary publication, therefore, drew the attention of these writers and artists from various countries in Africa and the Caribbean. As David Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe observe, this new opportunity of publishing in Britain and writing for a wider English-speaking public, allowed writers to critique the political and socio-economic transformations caused in their home countries following the independence from the colonial system of governance. In the succeeding section, therefore, the chapter will give a brief genealogy of black British writing and how it developed as part of a political struggle to assert their identity as British citizens of the Empire.

III

By tracing a brief genealogy of black British literature and its associated cultural developments, this study seeks to highlight the influences on our select writers by their peers. The different waves of migration brought along different generational, socio-cultural, and political experiences, and, therefore, writings from even the same period

differ to a great extent in terms of form, structure, content, or subject matter. Even the writers belonging to the same generation and migrating from the same countries have different perceptions and allegiance to their national identity and their ancestral native land. Our study has, however, attempted to draw a chronology of events and works published, wherever possible, and provided a thematic similarity of the works. Consequently, these black women writers also find alternative ways to negotiate with their hyphenated, hybrid identities.

The idea of a black individual forming his/her identity as a slave, black and British, can be said to find traces in the late 17th century i.e., in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688). Though Behn's work can be seen as one of the first narratives explicitly written on the life of a black individual, the earliest writings in Britain published by a black can be traced back to Gronniosaw's *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw: An African Prince, as Related by Himself* (1772). It was autobiographical in nature but written by Hannah More, an anti-slavery writer from Leominster. The *Narrative* consists of details from Gronniosaw's childhood in Nigeria and his noble family background. The issue of the slave trade was an underlying aspect amidst his personal accounts but was not as dominant as in Ottobah Coguano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of Slavery* (1787). Coguano's "trenchant and angry prose narrative" exposed the "inconsistency between British political identity that supported both slave-owning in British colonies and the civilising mission of Christian faith" (Markman Ellis 32). Besides that, he also critically evaluated the stance of the Enlightenment movement, which professed human equality but ironically did not deem the enslaved people human enough to oppose its continuation. Interestingly, in the same year, the Association for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was also founded. Two years later, Olaudah Equiano published *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789) by borrowing Gronniosaw's form of describing personal accounts and Coguano's anti-slavery tract. Besides describing the brutality of the slave trade, Equiano's *Narrative* also deals with "the loss or absence of an ancestral history and family, the discovery of what it means to be a slave… the importance of Christianity and the difference between true Christianity and hypocritical Christianity of slave-traders and slave-owners" (Innes 37). Accordingly, his writings project the construction of a persona that is of an African

and a freed slave, who values his ancestral origins but also aspires to learn from the new cultures he experiences.

Unlike Equiano, Ignatius Sancho, who published his *Letters* in 1782, had expressed a more ambiguous personality that altered according to the race and class of the people with whom he interacted. While Sancho maintains a satirically comic but dignified tone in his letters to Lawrence Sterne, he turns to an artfully coarse one in his responses to black writers or news reporters (Innes 27). Rightfully so, Innes calls Sancho "outsiders on the inside", as he is the only one among these black writers and polemists to enjoy the right to vote in the Parliament (29). The writings of these black men definitely presented an elaborate description of women in their homelands, particularly in Equiano's work, but hardly mention the presence of black women in Britain. Published in 1831, *The Autobiography of Mary Prince* articulates the experiences of these black women who remained side-lined in the earlier narratives. Innes observes that, unlike Equiano and Gronniosaw, Mary Prince was born a slave in Bermuda and therefore had no memory of her ancestral homeland prior to its colonisation (63). The male writers styled themselves as the 'sons of Africa', while simultaneously asserting their British identity. Mary Prince, however, had gained her freedom "in and through her status in Britain" (Nasta and Stein 25). This eventually had a great effect on her understanding of her 'self' and her identity as a free black, Christian woman in Britain. As expressed through her autobiography, Prince desires freedom from her enslaved status. In its treatment of the subject, Innes draws similar comparisons with Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Gir*l (1861), where both comment on the indignity heaped on slave women not only by their masters but also by their enslaved fathers who sold them off to traders. In contrast to the absence of acknowledgment of origins in Prince's narrative, Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857) reflects the assertion of both her Jamaican and Scottish ancestry. However, she indicates her role in the British army as significant, often representing herself as the Crimean 'heroine'. Her mixed-race ancestry brings in the element of a "doubleness of vision – seeing herself as through the eyes of others as exotic and alien, sometimes with weary irony, and sometimes with amusement" (Innes 130). These writings express the ambiguity in constructing a modern black figure while interrogating and unconsciously consenting to the complex undertakings of a racialised rhetoric. Nonetheless, what is reflected in these writings is the power of high intellectual agility and a capacity for comprehension of intricate nuances in human

relationships. With the same tenor, thus, Markman Ellis calls them "narratives of slave resistance" engaging with the "political campaigns of abolition and emancipation, with Christian discourse on human equality, and with the culture of common feeling known as sensibility" (25).

These early writings are said to have heavily influenced 18th-century narratives by African Americans. For instance, Mary Prince's enunciation of her mother's plight in not being able to salvage her children from slavery perhaps finds resonance in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). In fact, Markman Ellis observes an archetype created by early slave narratives that are re-appropriated as a model in contemporary black British writing, such as the incident of the *Zong* in Fred d' Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997). In the same way, it can also be stated that the disillusionment that Windrush generation writers expressed at their first experience of England and its people, draws similarities with what Gronniasaw and Equiano had expressed in their accounts. For instance, as documented in the Library of America compilation of *Slave Narratives* (2000), Gronniasaw remarks that he was surprised "to hear the inhabitants of that place curse and swear, and otherwise profane" and therefore, concluded that it was "worse than Sodom" (Ch. 1). Yet, as C. L. Innes, Susheila Nasta and Mark Stein note, little can be stated of a 'tradition' that they passed on to the later generation of black British writers (2, 6). The reason for this, John McLeod too argues, is due to the different "challenges – social and literary" and difference in access to opportunities and spaces that the present generation has to deal with, unlike the writers of the earlier generation ("Some Problems" 58).

The 1900s marked a significant growth not only in black writing across the African diaspora but also in the development of Afrocentric ideologies. The first Pan-African Congress was held in London, under the aegis of W. E. B. Du Bois and later Marcus Garvey not only led a political mobilisation in support of African cultural nationalism but also paved the way for literary output from the diaspora. In America, the Civil War had ended but with the subsequent imposition of the Jim Crow laws. Essays like Booker T. Washington's 'Up from Slavery' (1901) and Du Bois' 'Souls of the Black Folk' (1903) concentrated on the contemporary problem of the 'colour line' and the need for equal human rights circumscribed by such laws. There was, then, an eventual rise of writers from different genres during the 1920s and 1930s, a period known as the Harlem Renaissance by African Americans to indicate the revival of their cultural forms,

literature, and politics as a challenge to white hegemony. Nella Larson (1891-1964), Claude McKay (1890-1948), Langston Hughes (1902-1967), Zora Neal Hurston (1891-1960), and Countee Cullen (1903-1946) were some of the prominent literary figures, publishing with a distinctly African American style during this time. A similar literary development called the Negritude Movement was taking place in Paris around the same time. Taking influence from these, a "small but significant" number of black writers, particularly from the Caribbean and Africa, were collaborating and mobilising in an anti-colonial struggle while in Britain and also after returning to their home countries (Nasta 99). In context to this, activists, and literary figures such as Duse Mohammed Ali, George Padmore, Harold Moody, C. L. R. James, and Una Marson (1905-1965) had a significant contribution in building the grounds for the evolution of black political struggle both in the West Indies and Britain. Apart from the Workers' Welfare League (1922) formed by George Padmore which was triggered by the 1919 race riots in Britain and dealt with the issues of the sea lascars, the West African Students' Union (1925) founded by the black students in London, and the League of Coloured Nations (1931) of London started by Una Marson and Harold Moody were two other important organisations that came out of this common experience of racism and injustice. A significant number of journals like the *African Times and Orient Review* (1912), *West African Students' Union Journal* (1926), and *The Keys* (1935) were also launched, which devoted their attention to the interests of the diverse black population around the world. The journals commonly propagated a pan-African ideology stressing not only a physical return but also a cultural reclamation. Una Marson also published *Cosmopolitan*, one of the first journals in Jamaica by a woman. Her play *At What Price?* (1934) was the first production by a black individual in London to be performed in the New Scala Theatre. The play depicted the plight of a modern woman negotiating her life in the urban spaces of Kingston. As pointed out by Innes, Marson's duration in England instilled in her a "new awareness of herself as a black woman" by grappling with racial prejudices and forming a pan-African community of writers and political activists in England (211). Her poems like 'Nigger', 'Little Brown Girl', and 'Black Burden' challenge the archetypal images associated with a black woman. In 1936, she worked in BBC and ran a programme titled, *Calling the West Indies*, which was later re-titled as *Caribbean Voices* in 1943. Initially started for West Indian servicemen to contact their families, Marson gave the programme a cultural and literary turn by connecting and gathering the contribution of writers and artists from Britain and the West Indies.

C. L. R. James' play *Toussaint Louverture* (1934), performed by Paul Robeson in the Westminster Theatre of London in 1936, also gave voice to a rise in black and Asian theatre for the British public and that of the African and Asian diaspora. The play, later compiled into *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938), came to be known as one the first texts re-writing black history that exposed the objective of an economic enterprise in Wilberforce's stand for Abolition, usually showcased as a matter of philanthropy and humanity. Along with it, James' text which documents the history of black resistance against colonial forces, is his distinct attempt at Afrocentrism. A nationalistic spirit and revival of West Indian historiography inspired the budding literary tradition. A considerable number of writers emerging and establishing their literary career in the 1950s like Sam Selvon (1923-1994), Andrew Salkey, and Kamau Braithwaite (1912-2016), received their first break in Marson's *Caribbean Voices* that ran till 1958. As the West Indian social milieu was transitioning, the essence was captured in their writings through a reflection on "the developing consciousness of the child" (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 18). The use of folklore and creole in Louisa Bennet's poems since the 1940s, initiated the explicit denunciation of British imperialism by a black woman. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) also exhibited another example of writing back to a history of misrepresentations vested in the character of a black, Caribbean woman. Though male writers like George Lamming in *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and E. Braithwaite in *Rites of Passage* (1967) dealt with the issues of Caribbean society through the perspective of women, their works primarily alluded to an "old order" in conjunction with the lives of these women in rural societies (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 46). The rise of women writers like Grace Nichols, Erna Brodber, and Beryl Gilroy in the 1970s, following from the tradition of L. Bennet and Rhys, gave a new perception to the image of women associated with the progress and evolution of their gradually urbanising societies. The trials and tribulations experienced by these aspiring black women in general as well as black women writers in particular were reflected in their writings.

It has now been established that a group of black writers from Africa and the West Indies were already cognizant of the British publishing industry by the Second World War and sought to expand their readership by promoting their work in Britain. In addition to this, the 1948 Immigration Act made it more conducive for writers to travel and opt for settlement in Britain. Immediately after the mass migration from the

Caribbean, a significant body of fiction writing by men emerged. It was particularly the well-known and flourishing literature and cultural tradition from the West Indies that contributed to the evolution of black British literature, which is why the mode of resistance that structure their writings remains a shared space. Just as anti-colonial struggles, nationalistic spirit, and public consciousness of the changing social order fuelled writing on the West Indian experience, David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe observe, black writing in Britain too focused on specific immigrant experiences of post-war race relations. George Lamming's The Emigrants (1954), Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), and E. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love* (1959) deal with the experiences of the white hostile society in London from the perspective of migrants coming both from Africa and the Caribbean. Though writing as "individual representatives", these writers were beginning to form a new community "within" or "here and now in Britain", through the use of their unique form of expression in contrast to the Queen's English (Innes 234). The post-war experience of Britain which included a feeling of disillusionment and unbelonging but also a desire to assimilate, dominated the writings of this period. The establishment of exclusively black-oriented publishing houses during the 1960s encouraged writers to explore their creative powers. The poet John La Rose founded one of the first black publishing houses in Britain in 1966. Margaret Busby initiated the *Allison and Busby* in 1967 and in 1964 Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart established the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham which greatly influenced critical undertakings of race politics. In addition to the establishment of these publishing houses, the Caribbean Arts Movement (CAM) founded in London in 1966 under the aegis of Claudia Jones, was one of the most important cultural and literary movements that was uniquely based on the black British experience. Other than Jones herself, E. Braithwaite, John La Rose, and Andrew Salkey were among the co-founders, and they uniformly sought to separate themselves from any ideologically oriented movements like America's Black Power and instead focused on providing an opportunity for writers and artists alike to explore their creativity. The CAM unified Caribbean artists with a shared sense of 'nationhood' and spurred the development of Caribbean aesthetics in their works. Writers like C.L.R. James, Wilson Harris, Ivan van Sertima, and later Linton Kwesi Johnson, among others, were also part of it from its very initiation. Another noteworthy cultural initiative that took place under Claudia Jones' leadership was the Notting Hill Carnival in 1966. Since then, the festival has been celebrated once every year and has now become a global phenomenon.

During the 1970s and 80s, a specific type of performance poetry known as 'dub poetry' emerged, in which Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah's works were popular. Around the same time, some of the significant works on race and race relations in Britain were also published, such as A. Sivanandan's "The Liberation of the Black Individual (1977), Stuart Hall's "Black Britons" (1970), "Resistance through Rituals: Youth Sub-Cultures in Post-war Britain" (1976), "Minimal Selves" (1987) and "New Ethnicities" (1987), and Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (1987). These advancements can be seen parallelly with the formation of political organisations like the Rock Against Racism started in 1976, which directed the focus of black political activists not only towards anti-racism but also towards anti-fascism. In terms of visual representation too, a crucial development was taking place with the release of Horace Ove's *Pressure* (1977) as the first black British feature film. Known as the godfather of black filmmaking in Britain, Ove's other works include *Reggae* (1971), *The Mangrove Nine* (1993), *Pressure* (1976), and *Playing Away* (1987), which mainly concentrated on the violence against both black and Asian people in Britain and the rebellions arising in response to such situations. Ironically, these developments took place when the political climate was predominated by Thatcherite beliefs[7]. The formation of Channel 4 (1981), the Black Cultural Archives, Brixton (1981), Black Audio Film Collective (1982), and the Sankofa Film and Video Collective (1983) are some momentous developments that enabled the filming and broadcasting of various concerns relating to black people's lives. The latter two were a by-product of the social turbulence occurring in Britain in the 1980s. John Akomfrah and Issac Julien, who were the key founders of Black Audio Film and the Sankofa Collective respectively, are also known for their remarkable filmmaking as part of the black British cultural production. Documentaries or documentary feature films like John Akomfrah's *Handsworth Songs* (1986), *Seven Songs for Malcolm X* (1993), *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013) and Issac Julien's *Passion of Remembrance* (1986), *Young Soul Rebel* (1991), *Darker Side of Black* (1996), *Derek* (2008), etc. are among the most well-known. David Koff is another important filmmaker from the US whose documentary, *Blacks Britannica* (1978), brought the hostile living conditions of black people in Britain to a wider viewership. Other than these influential figures, black women filmmakers like Ngozi Onwurah and Amma Asante whose feature films like *Welcome II the Terrordome* (1995), *Belle* (2013), and *A United Kingdom* (2016) received both national and international accolades.

In addition to this, black culture and black political movements in Britain were also largely influenced by the protests and activism in America. Issac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (1989), an archival documentary film on 1920s Harlem and a tribute to the dominant literary figure of the time, Langston Hughes, is an instance that states the cross-national political and cultural influence America had on Britain. The visit of Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael to Britain in 1965 and 1967 respectively also played a crucial role. In terms of music, inspiration is taken from diverse sources. For instance, Reggae, the use of the sound system and steel pan comes from the Caribbean. Hip hop, jazz, blues, and soul are influenced by the American South and Afrobeat from Ghana. This transnational movement of music across the Atlantic is, according to Paul Gilroy, a reflection of the history of black people in Britain and their "distinctive counterculture of modernity" (*Black Atlantic* 36). It also needs to be mentioned here, as stated earlier, that the term 'black' more specifically signified a political category than a racial one, and therefore was used to refer to writers of Asian origin too. From the 1970s till the 1990s, along with Ben Okri and Linton Kwesi Johnson who racially identified as 'black' and had origins in Africa and the Caribbean, Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro (1954-) and Hanif Kureishi (1976-), etc. were also categorised and studied under the umbrella term 'black British'. This was considered a radical approach against the hegemonic system of canon construction in English literature. Since the millennium, though the political appendage did not hold much relevance for Asian British writers, black writers like Zadie Smith continued to explore and portray the marginalised existences of Asian British people too. In terms of academic discussions, writers like Monica Ali (1967-), Meera Syal (1961-), Gautam Malkani (1971), Rushdie, Kureishi, etc. are often found to be studied under the category of 'Asian British'. However, by stating examples of Pauline Melville and David Dabydeen who have a common Caribbean heritage but simultaneously belong to the white race and Indian ancestry respectively, Benedict Ledent observes in "Black British Literature" (2009) that this ideological shift has in no way made the classification of black British writers "neater" (17). The writings, conversely, reflect the changes taking place particularly post-9/11 and 7/7 in terms of the religious and ethnic demarcations.

These initiatives also promoted black women's writings like Beryl Girloy's *The Black Teacher* (1974) and Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* (1976), where they articulated their experiences from the perspective of being further marginalised by racial

and gendered politics. These women writers rejected the dominant male figures in black British literature and sought to substitute them with black women who were negotiating with traditional and modern values and seeking to assert their identities in a land far away from their own homes. They also challenged men's role in the political struggles and the dominant modes of resistance like Pan-Africanism, Rastafarianism, the use of the Calypso and the Carnival trope, and so on. As James Proctor points out, the works published during this period reflect with "dramatic immediacy", the political tensions of its times (129). In the case of writers such as Buchi Emecheta (1944-2017), the socio-political crisis in her ancestral homelands, i.e., Nigeria, was reflected as more demoralising for her female characters. Margaret Prescod and Norma Steele's *Black Women: Bringing it All Back Home* (1980) was one of the first pamphlet-like works that explored the relationship between black women, race, and immigration in Britain. Later, Bryan's *Heart of the Race* examined these issues and further on black British women's health, employment, education, and domestic abuse in more detail.

In the 1980s, writings by black women proliferated more widely and initiatives put forward by Maud Sulter[8] had a great influence on it. Sulter started the *Blackwomen's Creativity Project* in the year 1984-86 in the Women's Education Centre, where she also sponsored a creative writing week for British women of African and Asian descent. Anthologies like Lauretta Ngcobo's *Let It Be Told* (1985), Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins' *Watchers and Seekers* (1987) and Shabnam Grewal's *Charting the Journey: Writing by Black and Third World Women* (1988) helped black women's experiences gain some visibility and representation in various fields, especially literature, which was dominated by white writers (both men and women) and black men. The experiences of these black women were portrayed when a wide range of creative writing, visual, and performing arts circulated under the banner of 'black British'. However, despite the initiatives, black women writers and poets received less attention compared to their male counterparts. For instance, beginning their literary careers almost around the same time, John Agard and Grace Nichols came to Britain in the 1970s. Moreover, both the writers had achieved literary awards for their specific work but Agard's popularity overshadowed Nichols' significance as an early contributor to the contemporary black British literary tradition. From the same generation, Beryl Agatha Gilroy (1924-2001) also began writing in the 1950s. However, her works like the Nippers series for children and her novel, *In Praise of Love and Children*, were not published until the 1970s and

1994 respectively. Both Nichols and Gilroy's works revolve around the issues of black motherhood, the oppression of women both in Guyana and Britain, and the search for a sense of solidarity among women, defying racial and ethnic barriers. Likewise, Buchi Emecheta, who is of African descent, published works like *In the Ditch* (1972), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *Double Yoke* (1982), *The Rape of Shavi* (1983), that were preoccupied with the representation of African women and the Nigerian society at large. She intersects multiple issues of deprivation and socio-cultural and religious dogmatism with the emergence of educated Nigerian women, who oscillate between traditional and modern ideologies. As first-generation migrants, Nichols, Gilroy, and Emecheta had a first-hand experience of these irregularities in their ancestral homelands and therefore, were vehement critiques of the respective places. During the same period, however, another generation of writers like Joan Riley (1958-), who migrated to Britain during the ages of 6 to 12, also known as the 1.5 generation, had a different perspective to offer. Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985) portrays the struggle of such black female migrants who are unable to create a sense of home in Britain and frequently escape to their childhood memories of their homeland. It consequently leads to the creation of an imaginary, idyllic place and a desperate desire for a return. Journals like the *Wasafiri,* started by Susheila Nasta in 1984 not only provided a space for academicians to critically interpret these works but also for creative writers to publish their short stories and poems. Since 2009, every year a literary contest known as the Queen Mary Wasafiri New Writing Prize has been organised by the journal to support new writers debuting their work.

In terms of playwrighting, a profound development was taking place followed by the tradition established by playwrights such as Errol John (1924-1988), Wole Soyinka (1934-), and Barry Reckord (1926-2011). In the 1950s and 1960s, these playwrights successfully staged their works in the Royal Court Theatre and Theatre Royal at Stratford East. In the 1970s and 80s, with the establishment of black theatre companies, plays like Mustapha Matura's (1939- 2019) "Play Mas" (1974) and Winsome Pinnock's (1961-) "The Winds of Change" (1987) came to the fore. Deidre Osborne points out that due to a constant reliance on the "identity politics trope", even the rise of these companies did not help in the generation of new writing or promote new black playwrights (466). Yet, during the same period, a significant number of black women playwrights began writing and staging their plays. A notable figure along with W.

Pinnock, was Jackie Kay (1961-2021), who also wrote novels and short stories but engraved her name among mainstream playwrights. Her first poetry collection, *Adoption Papers* (1991), and short-story collections such as *Why Don't You Stop Talking* (2002) and *Wish I Was Here* (2006) are some of her other well-known works.

John McLeod believes that for black British writers, particularly novelists, of the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, "the insistence on dwelling in the UK and forging a robust black British identity, for both self and society, was of fundamental importance to the literary endeavours of black British writers who were often operating in a deeply prejudicial social milieu" (McLeod "Transcontinental Shifts", 169). Hence, "construction of a new form of subjectivity" that challenged and interrogated their notions, formed the basis of black British writing during this time (169). This period marks the beginning of the emergence of second-generation black writers, who were born and brought up in Britain. Benedict Ledent describes their writing as "domestic" due to their identification with Britishness and specific matters involving the black experience in Britain, unlike their predecessors (18). For instance, Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996), following from its apt title, revolves around questions of the protagonist's sense of blackness as he struggles to associate the black political and ideological approaches with his Brixton upbringing and his education at Oxford. The younger protagonist, Laurie, in Caryl Phillips' *In the Falling Snow* (2009) actively differentiated from his father Keith's experience and perception of race and race politics in Britain. Laurie, a new generation mixed-race character, points at 'other things' that young, black boys of his age have to deal with to survive not only in a hostile white society but among the black community as well. Similarly, playwrights like Roy Williams (1968-), Kwame Kwei Armah (1967-), and Bola Agbaje (1981-) also began writing on the lived experiences of black people in Britain amidst strategic policing and race-induced violence.

Other than writing on the current issues, re-writing and re-imagining the complex history and relationship of Britain with its erstwhile colonies, also formed a basis for developing a mode of resistance in black British writing. The writers realised the massive amnesia of black presence in British socio-cultural history or, as Stuart Hall states, "the profound historical forgetfulness" of British racism ("Racism" 145). So, many writers started exploring archives and anthropological surveys to re-establish the

historical existence and involvement of black people as citizens of Britain. There was, therefore, a considerable increase in historical fiction or novels dealing with the history of slavery. S.I. Martin's *Incomparable World* (1996), Andrea Levy's *The Small Island* (2005) and Bernardine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe* (2001) and *Soul Tourists* (2010) are some novels that re-discover lesser-known historical facts and establish the presence of black people in British history. In the same way, Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory*, (1994), Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River* (1993), David Dabydeens's *The Harlot's Progress* (1999), Laura Fish's *Strange Music* (2008), Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* (2010), Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* (2009) deal with different stories associated with the history of slavery that challenge the colonial narratives. Other than focusing on the brutality of the slave enterprise, the writers also subvert us/them or self/other dynamics by writing about it in correlation to African traders as well. Fish and Levy's works, among other things, explore how black or mulatto women find ways to get involved with white men as a means to negotiate their oppressed conditions. Interestingly, their work also presents this history from the perspective of a white woman, and in Fish's book, it is the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Based on the same theme, Evaristo creates a dystopic scenario in *Blonde Roots*, wherein she inverses the entire history by distorting the established cartographical locations, developing an experimental vocabulary, and "racially inverting the chronotopia" (McLeod "Transcontinental Shifts", 179). As a consequence, an imaginary space is created, which is Africa and Europe at the same time (179).

Benedict Ledent states that the ingenuity of black British writing is not only in its thematic production but also in its use of intertextuality as an attempt to dismantle the English canon. Ledent cites examples of David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991) and Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2005), which are references to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) respectively (22). Elizabeth Bekers in her unpublished paper titled "Writing Back: Intertextuality in Black British Women's Writing" (2013) presented at a conference at the University of London, explores works like Jackie Kay's poetic radio play "The Lamplighter" (2008), Fish's bio-fictional narrative *Strange Music*, Evaristo's dystopian novel *Blonde Roots*, Levy's *The Long Song*, and Joan Anim Addo's play and libretto *Imoinda or She will Lose her Name* (2018) that has intertextual references to early slave narratives. Bekers' efforts made an influential contribution to the body of literary outputs by black British women writers.

The code-switching between languages and experimentation with the form and structure of specific genres is another aspect unique to creative writers of this generation. Poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson, John Agard, and Benjamin Zephaniah use creole and the Reggae 'riddim' as a political statement against the hegemonic English language. Terms like 'dem', 'fe', 'yu', 'de', 'ina', etc. figure in their work as a declaration of their hybrid ancestry that shares a large part in the idea of 'Britishness'. When the speaker in John Agard's "Listen Mr Oxford Don" (2006), who is an immigrant from the Caribbean, openly challenges a fictional professor from Oxford University of "mugging de Queen's English" and using it as an "accessory to [his] offence", he simultaneously confirms the very realities of a black person's everyday experience in Britain (100). In his poems, Agard condemns the Eurocentric tendencies of whitewashing history and consequently, disintegrating displaced black people's sense of cultural identity. Kobena Mercer, in his book, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (1982), mentions the emergence of a host of young creative artists from various fields, particularly since the 1980s, who have contributed to the developing perspectives of Englishness and Britishness in juxtaposition with blackness. Among the playwrights, debbie tucker green (1964-) is considered "the most radical black British experimenter along these lines, with her unique re-workings of norms in language, casting demands, and treatments" and Kwame Kwei-Armah for using "overtly political theatre syntax" (Osborne 468). green's *born bad* (2003), Kwei-Armah's *Elmina's Kitchen* (2003) and *Fix You* (2004) deal with multiple themes like domestic drama, drug abuse, black-on-black violence, and separation of families. Like in fiction and poetry, the plays also reveal important facets involving the lives of black people in Britain and their constant tussle to find meaning in their existence and the varying definitions of blackness.

There has been a growing interest in the studies of black British literature since the year 2000, with the rise of Zadie Smith's fame immediately after the publication of her debut novel, *White Teeth* in the same year. The novel's portrayal of 'black' British characters from different ethnic backgrounds draws attention towards the significance of concepts like 'blackness' in relation to 'whiteness' in a broader context, and to 'Britishness' and 'Englishness' in particular. Including Smith, writers like Diana Evans, Bernardine Evaristo, Aminatta Forna, Helen Oyeyemi, and others, display a distinctive characteristic of this generation, that is their mixed-race heritage, which complicates their identification with a definite cultural identity. The certainty of their Britishness is

indisputably expressed in their works while searching for an enriching experience in different cultures at the same time. This group of writers also displays inventiveness in terms of the genres and forms they merge and contrive.

Besides fiction and plays, non-fictional prose like memoirs and essays are also significant publications as part of black British writing. For example, essays like Caryl Phillips' "The European Tribe" (1987), "The Pleasures of Exile" (1960), "Colour Me English" (2011), Andrea Levy's "Back to My Own Country" (2014) and memoirs like Charlotte Williams' *Sugar and Slate* (2002) and Jackie Kay's *Red Dust Road (2010).* Other important literary publications made were the collection of short stories like Irenosen Okojie's *Nudibranch* (2019), anthologies like Margaret Busby's *Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writings by Women of African Descent, From the Ancient Egyptian to the Present* (1992), *New Daughters of Africa*: *An International Anthology of 20th and 21st Century Writing by Women of African Descent* (2019), and Sareeta Domingo's *Who's Loving You: Love Stories by Women of Colour* (2021), books like Phyll Opoku-Gyimah's *Sista! An Anthology of Writing by Same Gender Loving Women of African/Caribbean Descent* (2018) which includes a mix of poems, memoirs, and fiction writing. These works variedly dealt with themes of identity politics and representation while simultaneously confronting racism, strategic policing, and the similar issues that come with gentrification or the physical restructuring of urban areas.

Bernardine Evaristo has recently started a project, titled 'Black Britain: Writing Back' series under Penguin publications, which aims at reviving texts, both fiction and non-fiction, by black writers that have gone out of print or have not been as widely known. The project is Evaristo's political attempt at redressing historical prejudices and reconfiguring the black British literary tradition. Evaristo states in an article titled "Why is still rare to see a black British woman with literary influence?" published in *The Guardian*, that her endeavour for the project essentially arises from the need to highlight "homegrown writings" which were side-lined by publishers as unmarketable during the 1990s. Evaristo's literary career itself, as stated by John McLeod, is a manifestation of the developments taking place in black diasporic literary tradition. To justify this, McLeod not only points out her mixed-race status but also mentions Evaristo's sense of "cultural plurality" or "Afroeuropean" traits in her work that defies the fixity of national

or British and black identities ("Transcontinental Shifts", 168). Including the 'Black Britain' project, Evaristo also co-edited along with Daljit Nagra the Ten: New Poets from Spread the Word (2009) and a special issue titled, "Black Britain: Beyond Definition" (2010) with Karen McCarthy in *Wasafiri* (McLeod 168).

The continuous efforts of these writers have led to their wide recognition and national and international acclaim. For instance, the Penguin Classics series has been publishing Linton Kwesi's works since 2006. Again, the most prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 2019 was bestowed on Bernardine Evaristo, one of the first black British writers to have received this. Recently, Goldsmiths University of London, under the collaborative effort of Deidre Osborne and Joan Anim-Addo, introduced a Masters course in Black British writing which has given concrete value to this area as a discipline and a revisionism of the English literary tradition. With these new developments, black British writing projects the emergence of a new culture and new identities while constantly negotiating with conflicts and contradictions arising from within or even outside its forum. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of these contradictions, the thesis will attempt to give a detailed overview of the literature existing in this field and address the gaps in it. Addressing these gaps will help justify the purpose of this study and present a clearer picture of the contribution this study seeks to achieve in the specific area of research.

IV

To state specifically, in this section, the study seeks to provide a critical commentary on the gradually thriving literature that has analysed black British writing and give a brief discussion of texts and ideas from which the study borrows. It needs to be mentioned here that the review has been conducted based on the fact that academic research in contemporary black British fiction by women is emerging, though is not yet as comprehensive as in the case of African-American fiction. Accordingly, the study essentially examines the existing literature in four different sub-sections.

Firstly, the study will assess works like David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe's *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (1985), Mark Stein's "The Black British Bildungsroman and the Transformation of Britain: Connected across Difference" and his book *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004),

Dave Gunning's *Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature* (2010) and David Ellis' *Writing Home: Black Writing in Britain since the War* (2014), which mark the development of black British writing and the evolution of black British identity, but hardly pays attention to black British women writers. David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe's mentioned work is one of those earliest works that aims at delivering a broad, but concise study of the history of the development of West Indian and black British literature. The intention of the editors was primarily to promote the understanding of said literature in secondary schools. As a result, one finds the two areas discussed in separate sections. However, the work takes an all-inclusive approach, wherein it is not restricted to traditional notions of region-based categorisation of novels. While both areas seem to deal with different, but familiar themes, the mode of resistance that structures their writing remains a shared space. In this regard, it needs to be mentioned that black British literature owes much of its present development to the cultural tradition of West Indian literature, which is reflected through Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe's work too, though it does not explicitly acknowledge it. Just as anti-colonial struggles, nationalistic spirit, and public consciousness of the changing social order fuelled writing on the West Indian experience, black writing in Britain too focused on the specific immigrant experiences of post-war race relations. Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe however, overlook distinctions and contradictions in black British writing tradition as they explore in West Indian writings. For instance, the generational (Caryl Phillips and Andrea Levy) and ethnic differences (Buchi Emecheta and Joan Riley) that is evident in the former.

In *Writing Home*, David Ellis also maps out the gradual evolution and re-definition of West Indian identity, by exploring works of writers with Caribbean origins, who primarily write about experiences of living in Britain by applying similar models of resistance from West Indian writers. For instance, Ellis mentions how writers like Linton Kwesi Johnson, derive from the revolutionary models of Rastafarianism, Reggae, or 'dub poetry', to express his political stance of rejecting hegemonic rule in Britain. The use of the "developing consciousness of a child", also forms a significant ground from which black British writers explore the idea of home and belonging (18). Mark Stein's works undertake a study on this, where he maps the transformation in the structure of the bildungsroman by analysing the writings of David Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar, Diran Adebayo, and Andrea Levy. Stein's work ensues a successive generational progression

of the novelists, which itself is a disruption of the non-linear aspect that defines black British literary tradition. In addition to this, the exclusion of works such as Joan Riley's *Unbelonging* (1985) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997), which could have added to Stein's perspective on the use of bildungsroman, is indicative of the lack of attention provided to black British women writers. However, unlike Dabydeen and Phillips' works, Ellis does attempt to highlight the gendered experiences of racism through Joan Riley's novels. Yet, he states that Riley's conscious endeavour of achieving a distinct identity by "writing (back) home" creates a "sense of historical progression" from an earlier generation of Caribbean or black British writers, who were predominantly male (xi). Ellis evidently evades from mentioning the presence of the black women writers like Una Marson in the 1930s, and Beryl A. Gilroy and Buchi Emecheta in the 1970s who had already begun a literary tradition.

In *Race and Antiracism,* Dave Gunning examines novels that provide a direct and evident connection between individual subjectivities narrated and the political and social undercurrents of the time. He is of the opinion that most black writing in Britain is preoccupied with the 'return' trope but stresses the "physical invocation of the African continent" (1). Mike Phillips' *The Dancing Face* (1997), Ferdinand Dennis' *Duppy Conqueror* (1999) and Fred D' Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) are assessed in light of their associations with Pan-Africanist ideologies and Rastafarianism, to show the "appeal, the potential, and the limitations of the 'return' to Africa" (14). Gunning observes that these novels not only implicate the symbolic value of Africa, as a basis of 'black pride' for displaced and traumatized black Britons, but also on Africa as an "object of material political practice" (60). Though Gunning shows distinctions between ideologies established about the 'return', he believes that they build a common ground in "venerating the continent as the point of origin for black people" so that the "foundation of an alternative ethical understanding" and that of anti-racist politics in Britain can be established (2). These writers eloquently express the difficulties of bringing a common ground between the political realities of Britain and the "symbolic assertion of African inheritance", considering the lack of enhanced knowledge and information on its history (62). However, he also points out that at times in an attempt to suggest a spiritual return to Africa, writers have been unable to allow characters a viable self-reflexive process to deal with their roles, sometimes, as "racializing agents" (62). For him, in cases like Dennis' *Duppy Conqueror*, there does exist a successful attempt both for a spiritual

return to Africa through an ardent consideration of the 'back-to-Africa' and antiracist movements, but the investment of the expansive political history into the individualized experience of a single character limits chances for contemporary black migrants in Britain who might not have such a range of personal experience. In other words, the idea of redemption that is connected to the concept of 'return' to Africa can be effectively attained only if it suggests the sense of a collective experience.

These observations have been developed in Chapter Three of the present study by taking into account narratives by women writers that do not adhere to a specific, pre-existing Afrocentric model as employed in black men's writings. Those models, as will be discussed in the chapter, are gendered in nature. In Gunning's discussion, again, the question of black women's (of African and Caribbean origin) writing is largely overlooked, which according to Susheila Nasta, is one of the most important aspects in understanding cultural and racial politics in Britain. In her article, "Beyond the Millennium: Black British Writing" (2000), Nasta justifies this by explaining how black women writers in Britain, unlike in the United States, have been "ghettoized" or have hardly drawn "any critical attention" (72). Even those books that have attempted to redress these absences have, according to S. Nasta, included these writers along with African American writers or Asian writers under the label of "postcoloniality" (73). She interrogates these categorisations by discussing the complex history of her family and her name and suggests a need to focus on the critical understanding of black writing, including films and creative arts, to evolve from the traditional definitions of terms like 'blackness', Britishness, and Englishness.

Taking forward from Nasta's arguments, in the second section the study group together works that deal with select fiction written by black British women writers such as Aminatta Forna and Joan Riley but studies them under specific literature based on their origins, vis a vis African and Caribbean respectively. For instance, works like Susheila Nasta's *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (1992), Anne Gagiano's "Women Writing Nationhood Differently: Affiliative Critique in Novels by Forna, Atta, and Farah" (2013) and Madhu Krishnan's *Contemporary African Literatures in English: Global Locations, Postcolonial Identifications* (2014).

Susheila Nasta's *Motherlands* deals with the theme of motherhood and its association with the concept of nation and nationalism. According to her, the idea of motherland and one's mother tongue are two of the most significant aspects determining post-colonial women's writings. Being marginalised by colonial and patriarchal oppression, Nasta argues, these women writers seek to re-write their stories by tracing the legacy of their female ancestors and thereby revising narrow representations of women as inactive "silenced" objects, which is an extension of the colonised nation (xiv). Nancy Chodorow, a critic in Nasta's edited work, points out that "female identity develops through early and continued *connection with the mother*", which also relates to one's association with the motherland (xxv). Therefore, in Chapter Four the study will elaborate on how disruption in that mother-daughter connection due to the generational gap impedes the process of self-determination in black female characters. For instance, in cases like Hyacinth in Joan Riley's *Unbelonging*, the absence of a mother and the detachment with the only maternal figure i.e., her aunt, further deteriorates her idea of 'home' even when she visits her homeland at the end of the novel. Moreover, these severed ties with mothers and motherlands, as observed by Nasta, initiate the use of "alternative modes of consciousness" like dreams and "spirit possession" which implicates the transfer of cultural values beyond borders (xxii, xxvi). Similar is the case in Diana Evans' *26a* and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*, but as the present study observes, even these 'alternative modes' hardly allow the characters a source of recuperation. The experience is rather disturbing and disorienting. The generational discontinuity of cultural and social mores is however problematised through an emphasis on post-colonial transformations undergone in respective African and Caribbean societies that relegated women to deprecating positions.

Annie Gagiano too, in her article "Women Writing Nationhood Differently", deals with creative reconstructions of nationhood in Africa, in contrast to the idea of the nation and nationalist ideals, that usually project women in "simplistic maternal roles" (48). She explores Forna's *Ancestor Stones* to explain how religious and ethnic fundamentalism control women's bodies by restricting their socio-cultural practices. These African women otherwise experience a communal sharing of space in a polygynous family structure. The first-person narration, however, observes this familial and societal structure in a sceptical way that defies any collective or homogenous view of the nation. The study takes help from Nasta and Gagiano's analyses to explore how contemporary

black British women's writing rejects gendered allegorization of nation in similar or disparate ways. However, both critics refrain from focusing on the Afro-Scottish identity of the protagonist, Abie, whose 'return' to Africa does not occur due to a longing. Hence, in Chapter Three the study will discuss how Africa is represented as an uneasy past, waiting for the diasporic migrant to be re-discovered and reconciled with.

Moving beyond the concepts of nation and nationalism, Madhu Krishnan discusses the imaginative readings of counter-subjectivities that help in the "creation and dissemination of a global Africa" (5). Among nine other novels, he considers Aminatta Forna's *Ancestor Stones* as representative of contemporary African literature in English and examines the correlation of gender and race discourse in it while being located in a space of conflict. According to Krishnan, the act of naming or dis-naming/misnaming women not only acts as a symbolic form of violence but also creates conditions for the operation of material violence by patriarchal structures. However, by stressing the concept of the "sacred maternal" that has a historical legacy, Krishnan describes *Ancestor Stones* as a novel of collective resistance against the "de-naturalization of the African woman as victim paradigm" (95). The articulation of nativism, pagan symbols, and a specific ritualisation process or a moment of initiation, elaborated in Chapter Three of the thesis, augment Krishnan's descriptions of the 'sacred maternal' and deriding colonial perceptions of the African landscape and femininity. In Krishnan's discussions, though there is a passing reference to Abie's mixed race it does not lead to further explorations of her distinctive black British identity, an aspect that will be examined in the study.

Again, Kelsey Ann McFaul's "'One Foot on the Other Side': An Afrofuturist Reading of Irenosen Okojie's *Butterfly Fish* (2015) and Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (2018) does a critical study of Okojie's work by categorising it under African literature. While McFaul's critical analysis validly justifies the Eurocentric discourses that denies place to myths and symbolism from African folklore by doing a comparative study with a novel by a Nigerian writer, the work does not take into consideration the generational displacement and the complicated socio-political and historical lineage that entails the protagonist's (of Okojie's novel) experience of living in Britain. The present study takes help from McFaul's exploration of how the water symbol structure human and non-human interactions and shape imaginaries of home. At the same time, the study adds to

McFaul's research by exploring the multiple narrative voices and multiple time frames in detail to juxtapose it with an invisibility or silence of the past in the protagonist, Joy's life, which is also suggestive of Britain's characteristic amnesia regarding its social and historical connections with Africa and the Caribbean. Documenting both personal and the cultural memory of Africa through the trope of 'possession' is a distinctive feature of Okojie's novel that is highlighted in the thesis.

Unlike the works mentioned above, some discuss black British fiction by women in more detail, instead of mere adjuncts to black male writing. The study heavily relies on them for its analysis of select fiction, hence, in the third section it reviews works like Carol Boyce Davies' *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994), Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey's *Black British Writing* (2004), Kadija Sesay's *Write Black, Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British* (2005) and Suzanne Scafe's "Unsettling the Centre: Black British Fiction" (2015). Each of these works deals with themes such as migration, the experience of 'unbelonging', and the various forms of resistance adopted by black British women writers to grapple with their diasporic subjectivities.

From perceiving black women's writing in Britain under African or Caribbean writing, there has been a huge evolution, of the said literature, to developing into a rigorous critical study providing context on the black British consciousness. The study reviews Davies' book in this section because it briefly sketches the writings of Joan Riley, Grace Nichols, Beryl Gilroy, and Vernella Fuller and their treatment of the trope 'going back home', and deals with Riley's *The Unbelonging* in detail. Though, it is to be mentioned that Davies does not exclusively acknowledge the writings of these women as 'black British', but rather as 'diasporic'. Nevertheless, her observations are undeniably relevant to the study due to their critical renderings of the experiences of displaced characters.

Davies perceives black women's writing, which is primarily based on a process of "re-membering", as a "series of boundary crossings" of writing that defies categorization and exclusion (3). In other words, at the core of her text lies the concept of "migratory subjectivity" that not only assumes its agency and constitution of multiple identities through multiple positionings but also suggests its "dissonance" in place of "harmony" (26). A sense of 'homing desire' remains at the core of these 'migratory subjectivities'

and therefore, to formulate an identity, re-writing home becomes a significant process. As Davies states, "it is a play of resistance to domination which identifies where we come from, but also locates home in its many transgressive and disjunctive experiences" (85). Symbols and imageries of gates, roads, houses, and a yard, that alternatively represent the notion of borders, mobility, independence or male dominance, are highlighting points for Davies to support her argument regarding home as a place of "creativity", "rememory", or "further repression" but also a positionality that assumes "movement" (113). She takes instances from Riley's *The Unbelonging* by explaining the author's "metonymic references" to rooms and homes, in contrast to the childhood 'home' the protagonist remembers, as an indication of the latter's sense of displacement and alienation. The study takes note of Davies' analysis of the novel and draws references to the association of rooms/homes and mobility. Hyacinth's attempt at self-identification and self-determination has been read in context to her newly found political awareness, though contradictory, in the university's premises. Her constant strife to find a home and a sense of belonging goes parallel with her attachments to the men in her life. Even political figures from Jamaica and their ideologies play a role in shaping Hyacinth's perceptions of her homeland and heightening her desire to 'return' to Jamaica.

In contrast to Davies' work, Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey address the development of black British writing by exploring the viewpoint of both first-generation and second-generation black writers. Chris Weedon, a critic in the book, investigates how historical traumas of the past and contemporary issues of racism and sexism get enmeshed in the determination of a black female migrant's identity. In some cases, there is the depiction of fragmented selves that are not unified even after a reconciliatory return to the place of origin. While questions of identity and belonging dominate such texts, determining one's mixed-race identity is presented as more problematic. To elaborate on this, Weedon explores Lucinda Roy's *Lady Moses* and Charlotte William's *Sugar and Slate,* which deals with characters of mixed-race origins. These works seek to portray that one might find fragments of a sense of belonging in their diverse origins, but can only form identification with it when it is reformulated and reinvented in the "home places" (95).

Likewise, Kadija Sesay's *Write Black, Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British* (2005) also strives for a comprehensive critical analysis of black styles, texts, and representations in British history and contemporary British society. The book includes women writers like Andrea Levy, Jackie Kay, and Zadie Smith along with Benjamin Zephaniah to discuss issues such as alienation, multiculturalism, body politics, and identity. Sesay seems to suggest a shift in the emerging writers in Britain from the term postcolonial to black British.

Suzanne Scafe in "Unsettling the Centre: Black British Fiction" also perceives that this term does denote a positive value and a mode of resistance, despite disparities, that is reflected through black women's writings. Davis, Sesay, Arana & Lamey, and Scafe's works have strived to either briefly refer to or discuss a few black British fiction by women, but are not comprehensive. Their discussions in terms of the contingent nature of 'blackness' as an identity and the transcultural and transnational connections that writers draw are certainly relevant to the present study.

In addition, since the trope of 'return' is a recurrent feature of black British fiction by women, the study has attempted to explore and list out critical works that deal with narratives of 'return' in areas other than black British fiction, and actual returns to Africa. Some of the articles published on the mentioned subject are - F. J. Griffin's "Who Set you Flowi'?" The African American Migration Narrative (1995), "Tourism in Ghana: The Representation of Slavery and the Return of the African Diaspora" (1996), Sara Ahmed's "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement" (1999), Andrea Queeley's "Remembering the Wretched: Narratives of Return as a Practice of Freedom" (2011), Karen Fog Olwig's "The 'Successful' return: Caribbean Narratives of Migration, Family, and Gender" (2012), Yogita Goyal's "Africa and the Black Atlantic" (2014), Jay Watson's "Dangerous Return: The Narratives of Jurisgenesis in Faulkner's Requiem for a Nun" (2014), Annie Gagiano's "Recovering and Recovering from an African Past: Four Women's Quest Narratives" (2019), "Tamara Aliyah Morrison's "Crawling B(l)ack Panther": The African Diaspora and the Narrative of Return" (2020), Gabrielle B. Sarpy's "Narratives of Genealogy: Return, Race and Body in the Black Imagination" (2021), Anna-Leena Toivanen's " Urban Mobilities in Francophone African Return Narratives" (2023).

The names of a few books published on 'return' to Africa are- Caroline Rody's *The Daughter's Return: African American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History* (2001), Joseph McLaren's "From the New Diaspora and the Continent: African American Return Figurations" in Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu's edited book, *The New African Diaspora* (2009), Prince Kwame Adika's *Remembered Kinship: African and African Diasporan Narratives of Return and their Relevance in a Transnational World* (2009) and Anne M. François's *Rewriting the Return to Africa: Voices of Francophone Caribbean Women Writers* (2011)

The last section reviews work such as Mpalive-Hangson Msiska's "Remembering Africa: Africa as a Sign of the Transnational in Black British Writing" (2010), Leila Kamali's *Spectres of the Shore: Cultural Memory of Africa in African American and Black British Fiction* (2017) and John McLeod's "Fantasy Relationships: Black British Canons in a transnational World" that concentrates on the significance of 'origins' and the invocation of Africa by commonly assuming Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* as a template to analyse and understand the identity politics concerning a mixed-race (Nigerian, Irish, German) British woman or a writer. Along with considering these observations, the study includes other instances of hybrid existences and shows how these multiple connections at times create perplexing situations for characters, thereby limiting their scope for a common identification.

Mpalive-Hangson Msiska's "Remembering Africa" explores the possibilities of redefining Pan-Africanism and how it relates to the concept of transnationalism and transculturalism. To illustrate his observations, he does a close reading of Bernardine Evaristo's novel-in-verse, *Lara* (1997), and states that the novel remembers and celebrates Africa by specifically positioning itself in "post-colonial novelistic discourse" (175). In the novel, Lara's negotiation with her mixed-race identity, through a recollection of her parent's experiences in Britain as first-generation migrants during the 1950s, is a reflection of the "ideological continuity between imperial and post-imperial Britain" (176). Also, the elaborate history of violence and displacement for Irish, German, and Afro-Caribbean migrants portrayed, indicates a cross-border connection between them; a possibility for transnational and transcultural solidarity, which has been encumbered by the rise of "extreme nationalism" (178). The novel, according to Mpalive-Hangson, thus narrates a tale of movements and journeys, that are separate but

overlapping at the same time and reveals the evolution of diasporic subjects as exemplars of alternative identities.

McLeod's chapter, titled "Fantasy Relationships" in Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davis' editorial compilation, *A Black British Canon?* (2006), is placed in a discourse of exclusion and inclusion in the formation of the black British canon and the complex identifications with the term, 'black British'. In context to this, Mike Phillips states in the Foreword of the limiting definitions attached by writers to this term and the need to associate blackness to wider definitions of Britishness such as "Celtic nationalism", considering the devolution of Scotland and Wales (29). McLeod's discussion involves an analysis of Evaristo's *Lara*, as an exemplar resisting "inaccurate evaluative terms and suggests alternative paradigms" (94). The diverse historical and cultural references drawn in the novel-in-verse, according to McLeod, is one of the ways contemporary writers create "fantasy relationships" with black people and black writers in the diaspora. In the present study, McLeod's idea is used to examine novels like Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* and Diana Evans' *The Wonder*, where African, Caribbean, American, Scottish, and Welsh associations to blackness are also represented. Then again, in a 2010 article, "Extra Dimensions, New Routines: Contemporary Black Writing of Britain" McLeod discusses how writers like Diana Evans use the concept of "cumulative twinnings as a structural and conceptual device" (48). McLeod believes that Evans, in her novel *26a,* conceives contemporary Britain as a space that seeks "post-racial linkages", instead of a narrow definition of exclusivity, cultural diversity, and racial mixture (48). In fact, Georgia and Bessie's ordinary story demonstrates Britain as a space of "cultural zygoticism", which demands "a post-racial politics of routine resemblance rather than exceptional or radically racialized difference" (49). This concept of zygoticism, that is accentuated in the novel through the use of the '+' sign, is what McLeod envisions against the negative connotations of "hyphenated" terms such as "black-British", "British-Asian", "non-white", etc. Besides drawing from McLeod's conclusions, the study explores the potential imaginative constructions of 'extra dimensions' beyond the domestic, private spaces.

In the same way, Leila Kamali's work too emphasizes the significance of *Lara* as part of the black British canon in dealing with "the performance of possession and the performative dimensions of narration" (268). The fact that black British writing refers to

a very individualistic expression of self and "contemporary ways of engaging with 'returning' pasts", is highly relevant to the study in justifying its observation of Africa as embodied by the present (269). Therefore, reference to physical performance, otherwise not highlighted in Kamali's work, featuring as an epitome of black socio-cultural presence in Britain and an imaginative, collective experience, is seen as significant. For instance, Evaristo's latest novel, *Girl, Women, Other* (2019) begins and ends with the performance of Amma's play, *The Last Amazons of Dahomey*, by simultaneously confronting the current struggles of being a black, British, queer writer. The idea of "being contemporary" is discussed in the study by emphasizing the contingent definition of 'blackness' and how it enables writers to find alternative agencies to embody the past (Kamali 268). As a result, not only diverse pasts, even those that are usually overshadowed by the prominent narratives of the Middle Passage, are evoked but also new methods of embracing that embodiment are generated.

Other than these critical works that use Evaristo's *Lara* as a template to explore mixed-race identities in Britain, Helen Cousins' "Unplaced/Invaded: Multiculturalism in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House* (2012)", "Katie Danaher's "Mapping and Re-mapping the City: Representations of London in Black British Women's Writing" (2018), and "Belonging and Unbelonging in London: Representations of Home in *26a*" (2018) attempts to extend the discussion of identity politics to other texts and also examines the idea of motherhood, which is relevant to the present study. The study uses Cousins' idea of 'possession' as a gendered experience exclusive only to embodied subjects. Cousins also discusses 'the notion of the black essentialist subject disintegrating in the absence of its binary opposite', which has been used in the study to understand the varied dimensions of race discourse and multiculturalist politics. However, the study extends Cousins' discussions to further explore the idea of the female 'mestissage' that is ambiguously invoked in Oyeyemi's novel to describe the protagonist, Maja's attempt at an intersectional experience through a bodily transgression. Katie Danaher's articles deal with the role of black mothers and how they negotiate with the hostile British system that disregards women's needs. The society places the burden of maintaining family integrity at the hands of the mother, regardless of the socio-economic conditions that further circumscribe her position as a an individual and a mother. Sara Ahemed's *The Promise of Happiness* is the core text of analysis for Danaher, who situates the black woman at crossroads with upholding the ideal image of a perfectly, happy English family. The

happiness index of these black families determines the visionary construction of a multicultural Britain. A critique of the social structures may ensue a public discontent and this justifies the evident silence of the black mothers represented in black British women's writings. Danaher looks at aspects like food, through which these black mothers attempt to create a sense of belonging. While drawing from the analysis done by Danaher, the study disagrees with the critic's assumption of black mothers successfully indulging in home-making practices in London. The study justifies this through the generational disconnection with the past and the inability of the second-generation black woman to create a complete sense of belonging either with their historical and cultural lineage or their British identity.

Keeping in mind the above discussions and the existing literature in the field of black British fiction by women, the thesis consists of four core chapters. The chapters have been divided based on the assumption that black women writers in Britain make either real, imaginary, or metaphorical constructions of Africa to deal with their displaced identity and fractured history in the host land. In consequence, these constructions have worked differently for black migrants of different generations and have, sometimes, allowed or disallowed them from reconciling with the complicated relationship Britain shares with Africa and the Caribbean. The influence of America plays a major role in the formulation of ideas on Africa as an ancestral homeland. An attempt will be made to provide a detailed theoretical framework on race/Critical Race Theory and gender in Chapter Two. The trajectories of black feminist and black British feminist movements and activism will be traced along with ideas/images of Africa. After a detailed discussion on the numerous constructions of Africa, as a geographical and metaphorical space, as observed in literature or visual media, the study will accordingly explore the broad themes of ritualism, black motherhood, and performativity in the core chapters. In all these themes, the ideological constructions of black womanhood and how it influences black British women's writing will be of crucial significance.

Chapter three, titled "'Rites of Passage': Momentous 'Returns' to Sacred Africa", examines representations of Africa as a place of psychological and cultural healing. The 'return' or 'back-to-Africa' trope is commonplace in African diasporic literature for the reclamation of diasporic migrants' cultural identity. In this chapter, it is seen how a ritualised return to roots acts as a cathartic process or an assertion of a political ideology

for black British women writers. The novels involve a physical journey back to Africa and the Caribbean by emphasizing the idea of 'initiation' or 'rites of passage' that characters have to undergo in order to heal from the personal and historical traumas of displacement. The characters' preoccupation with their origins as a geographical space and a metaphor possesses an enigmatic quality. The individual goes through different stages of self-discovery that involve unfamiliarity (an unconscious knowledge of past collective experiences), recognition (a conscious understanding of the past through collective memories), and awareness (a renewed insight into the present). The process of ritualisation is reflected through the practice of invoking their ancestors which involves pagan objects and symbols. The women of the indigenous communities in Africa are focused as the main agents of this process, preserving traditional practices and then transferring it to their female descendants in Britain. Consequently, the writers seek to evoke feminine principles that are not mystical or abstract but definite by attempting to trace and connect with the lived experiences of women. Most importantly, amidst the socio-economic and political changes, black women are presented as active agencies in altering traditional practices and social systems into modernizing forms, incorporating the essence of Ali Mazrui's "re-traditionalization" (77). Black British women writers re-imagine an Africa where notions of hierarchy and power politics guaranteed under a patriarchal system, are defied by this community of women.

Chapter four, titled "'The Point of no Return': Africa as a Site of Traumatized Pasts and Dispossession", examines how black British women writers use a rhetoric of rejection in their novels to show how 'return' to homeland evoke a sense of dispossession, instead of reconciliation. To elaborate on this, the chapter examines the writers' rejection of the myth of 'origins' in Africa and their portrayal of the socio-cultural, political, and psychological conflicts in their homeland. The chapter builds on the idea that there is no permanent sense of 'home' and hence characters are troubled by their state of unbelonging and a nostalgia for the homeland. Personal, historical, and cultural traumas from their ancestral homeland haunt the characters, disallow them from a source of healing, and lead some to a state of mental instability. The chapter also explores how black British women writers subvert the gendered and national allegory of Africa by problematising the role and representation of mothers. Most prominent in the novels is the projection of disjointed families, the absence of maternal figures, and fragmented selves. In context to this, the chapter observes the use of mixed-race twins

and an 'otherworldly' manifestation of cultural and historical trauma as a consistent trope to justify the writers' rejection of a simplistic understanding of racial mixing.

Chapter Five titled "'Extra Dimensions': Constructing 'Homelands' beyond Africa" examines representations of constructing Africa/homeland in new locations. The physical and metaphorical journeys back home that are necessarily "deferred", bring in the hybrid element to Britain, which is otherwise assumed to be monocultural (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 12). The idea of constant border-crossings or transnationalism is used here to examine how black British women writers attempt to re-create and re-imagine diasporic spaces by actively dealing with displaced black migrants' relationship with their countries of origin. These writers portray a "homing desire", which also involves "a desire to reinvent home in other spaces… redefining the migrant's sense of self and home…" (Nasta 7). Here, the 'return' journey that involves crossing boundaries beyond national and local borders significantly influences shaping diasporic sensibilities. Along with it, movement across and within borders is accompanied by performance, particularly of Africanness and queerness, in the host country. In addition to this, the alternate spaces and imageries created in the novels, function as "extra dimensions" that resist fixed categorisations and allow for the growth of creative predispositions (Evans 24). These 'extra dimensions', however, are not confined to the limited space of the domestic but expand to the ghettos and inner cities of London, and spaces undergoing gentrification which seeks for a strategic erasure of black historical and cultural pasts in Britain. The novels here suggest the possibilities of "important ancestral connections which go beyond the discreet terrain of nation-states or the heteroglot cultural exclusivities of the Black Atlantic" (McLeod, "Extra Dimensions" 180). But before we take up the novels for close reading, we will examine the debates and discussions regarding race and racism deliberated by black British cultural theorists like Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer, Kehinde Andrews, A. Sivanandan, etc. aid in examining how black British women writers have advocated, challenged, and/or augmented their arguments through creative imaginations.

Endnotes:

[1] Born of an African woman and a British naval officer, Dido was sent to England and brought up by her paternal uncle, William Murray, who was the first Earl of Mansfield and the Lord Chief Justice during the Georgian period. Dido was raised in Kenwood House along with her cousin Elizabeth Murray as an aristocrat instead of a servant.

[2] James Somerset affair relates to an African man named James Somerset, who was supposed to be sold to in England but won his freedom in the year 1771, following which a strong statement for an end of slavery in England was proclaimed.

[3] It is to be noted that Queen Elizabeth's request to deport black people from England was to be made in exchange for English prisoners captivated during the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

[4] Landing cards are proof of travel that was given by migrants from the Commonwealth nations, that were under the British colonial empire. These were basically first-generation black migrants who were allowed entry to Britain based on the 1948 British Nationality Act, which invited settlers to work in their mother country.

[5] Stephen Lawrence (1993), Sean Rigg (2008), Mark Duggan (2011), Chris Kaba (2022)

[6] Amelia Gentleman published one of those first reports on the 'Windrush Scandal' in *The Guardian.*

[7] Beliefs and policies that necessarily focused on a privatisation of nationalised services (like the NHS and transport), introducing free-market trade, and imposing stringent border controls.

[8] Maud Sulter (1960-2008) is a visual artist and poet of Scottish and Ghanaian descent. She used multiple forms of media (photographs including texts) to express her art and primarily stressed re-visioning black history by placing the black woman as the central subject. She published her poetry collection "As a Blackwoman" in 1982.

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