Chapter Three

‘Rites of Passage’: Momentous ‘Returns’ to Sacred Africa

I

In this chapter, we would explore representations of Africa as a metaphor for psychological and cultural healing in contemporary black British women's fiction. As an epitome of pride in one's heritage, Africa's mysticism, together with its diverse physicality, operates both as an escape from racial discrimination and a safe space for black British migrants, who grapple with issues of psychological and "cultural illness" (Wilentz 5). This illness, which has been induced by the rupture from their homelands i.e., Africa and the Caribbean islands, is also a consequence of their exiled status. In response to this, black British women writers use the 'going-back-to-Africa'/ 'return' trope as a means to redress constructions of homeland under either/or Manichean divisions. This is achieved by the black British women writers through a 'return' to a past that not only traces the complex history of Africa and its association with Europe but also links it to contemporary issues in specific African countries and the African diaspora. The reference to the vast socio-political history in conjunction with personal accounts outlines the broader collective memories of the people as well. Thus, this chapter argues that for black British women writers, writing back to history both functions as the formulation of a rational political ideology and a cathartic mode against psychological and cultural disease. To further explore this, the chapter attempts to do a close reading of Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997), Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), Aminatta Forna's *Ancestor Stones* (2005), Simi Bedford *Not with Silver* (2007), Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* (2010) and Irenosen Okojie's *Butterfly Fish* (2015).

The term/phrase 'going back' and 'return' generally connotes a permanent settlement or a visit to the native land at least for a long duration. This applies to Semi Bedford and Irenosen Okojie's novels, which end with the protagonists' return to their homelands. However, the study also includes Aminatta Forna, Nadifa Mohamed, and Andrea Levy's novels as literature of 'return' or 'going back' due to the objective of recuperation attained in the homeland in association with the journey of self-discovery for the characters. Some novels specifically involve narrations of physical journeys to or within Africa, which is perceived by the study as crucial for the character's development in the stories. Here, the figure of ragga muffins[1], *askaris* (an East African soldier or militia), and sailors in Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* can be referred to as those who

undertake a cartographic journey within the African continent and across the Atlantic. The protagonist, Jama's birth during a plague itself indicates that "he had been born with the protection of all saints and he would see the four corners of the world" (Mohamed 13). This recurrent emphasis on the aspect of movement or migration, as part of Somalia's history and the nomadic pattern of its people, is established through a reference to Rabindranath Tagore's line – "O troupe of little vagrants of the world, Leave your footprints in my words" – from his poem "Stray Birds", in the epilogue of the novel. In this regard, the chapter attempts to highlight how black British women writers reject simplistic representations of 'return' as an ideology. They have sometimes altered, subverted, or re-appropriated the idea of 'going back' as it was proposed through Pan-Africanism, Garveyism, and Afrocentricism. Going back to one's roots exposes both pleasing and unpleasing details, and these writers have attempted to address them by embracing and critiquing them at the same time. Quite interestingly, they have also broken the pattern of representing Africa either in terms of *romantic gloriana* or *romantic primitivism*, as postulated by Ali Mazrui. Instead of highlighting the achievements and glories of their ancestors, they have focused on the everyday, lived experiences of black women in Africa, the Caribbean, and Britain. Black British women writers also re-visit the Manichean binaries that perceive Africa either as Edenic or a 'dark continent'. Confirming similar arguments, Yogita Goyal states in "Africa and the Black Atlantic" that "Afrocentricism situated Africa as origin, authenticity, and purity' but "such romantic narratives fail to refute Eurocentric racism because they accept its assumptions of an essential division between Africa and the west and prioritize an image of Africa as anterior to modernity" (1). Again, Dave Gunning too observed that Paul Gilroy's claim of redundance in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) towards Africa's glorification and black pride, altogether deprives Africa of the "appeal" it continues to hold within the specific articulation of black resistant ideologies" (Gunning 23). Critiquing Stuart Hall as well, who states that "it is not the literal Africa that people want to return to, it was…the symbolic language for describing what suffering was like", Gunning argues that "Africa is not an instrumentalist concept conceived in order to aid the construction of coherent black identities in Europe and America" ("Negotiating" 14, *Race* 24). The imagined conception and the reality of Africa do create a conflict for black British individuals, who 'return' with the purpose of recuperation. In light of Gunning and Goyal's critiques, the chapter argues that black British writers dismantle the established, primarily male-dominated ideologies, and appropriate the 'return' trope by re-situating Africa as a

physical space at the centre of cultural and religious confluences, and as a symbolic value in developing an Afro-diasporic feminist ideology.

Thus, taking a cue from Leila Kamali's *The Cultural Memory of Africa in African-American and Black British Fiction 1970-2000* (2016), the chapter will first examine how the tradition of transferring the cultural memory or the connection to Africanness, "is to be found in the African setting… between knowing a cultural memory of Africa intrinsically and discovering it in Africa" (231). Kamali opines that it is travel that helps bridge the rupture that blacks in Britain experience while tracing their roots. She states regarding Bernardine Evaristo's novel-in-verse *Lara* (1997) that, with the eponymous protagonist's travel to Africa, her "relationship with the dialogic is resumed, reminding her that there are other stories to hear, outside of a monocultural version of Britishness" (229). Similarly, the protagonists in *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) and *Ancestor Stones* (2006) travel to the Caribbean and Africa respectively, to gain a first-hand experience of its sights and sounds and the everyday experiences of those living there. Here, the chapter also seeks to assert that journeying back to native land i.e., the Caribbean, is an extension of the 'return' to Africa that justifies the transnational connections of black British individuals. Though the replacement of Africa by the Caribbean space does suggest a detour from the myth of origins, there is a strong presence of African elements in the latter.

Secondly, the cultural memory of one's ancestral homeland proves to be a powerful source for characters like Jama's nameless daughter in Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* (2010) and Epiphany in Simi Bedford's *Not with Silver* (2002) to re-discover the essence of Africanity as a part of their British identity. By use of oral narratives, storytelling, and memory, black British women writers both critique and add to the body of 'return' literature that portrays women in marginalised terms. The examples of collective resistance portrayed in the novels are targeted towards a "de-naturalization of the African woman as victim paradigm", and, instead, highlight "female authorization" (Krishnan 95, 88).

Keeping in mind these observations, the chapter observes that journeys back to Africa are ritualistic in nature and are amplified in the novels through the existence of pagan symbols and the practice of ritualized ceremonies. It is the idea of initiation entailed in a specific moment that accomplishes the protagonists' journey of self-

discovery. In relation to this, the power of *nommo* as "the generative and productive power of the spoken word, in African discourse and specific instances of resistance to the dominant ideology" is accentuated in the novels (Asante 22). As pointed out by Molefi Asante, "Afrocentric presentation forms are related to music, particularly the epic styles of blues, jazz, spirituals, and work songs, with the latter predating all the others. In these folk forms, one finds the call-and-response, improvisation, and rhythm" (66). In Beryl Gilroy's memoir, *Sunlight on Sweet Water* (1994), there are similar references to songs that hold the significance of a collective experience of struggle and trauma. Beryl herself recalls how she used to enjoy singing and listening to "the work songs, folk songs, songs about love and family" and also the spirituals. She remembers her grandmothers and aunts in Guyana, who:

> Talked of times long gone, of slavery, and what it meant to those who experienced it, of injustices of all sorts, of exploitation, and of families who had been shattered by time. What a flow of history that evening was! Their speeches were interspersed with proverbs and other sayings from their forebears. I notice their regard for experience, which they all said no one could buy except the market of life. (16)

Gilroy's memories of the Caribbean from her past, picture how Afrocentric forms are displayed and spearheaded by women of the African/Caribbean community. Thus, it can be argued that by occupying the position of both the speaker and the audience, black British women writers seize the opportunity to affirm their agencies as transformers of the hegemonic modes of discourse.

The ritualistic returns are one of the ways by which black diasporic individuals can go back to their past and be a part of it. Therefore, the protagonists in the selected novels, go through both physical and metaphorical 'rites of passage' which involve a ritual (either explicit or implicit), wherein they transform from their old selves and roles to new ones. Throughout this process, African women, as upholders of the oral tradition, perform the role of healing the black British protagonists from their psychological and 'cultural illness'. The chapter will thus examine how these black British women writers confer a symbolic value to Africa and their Africanness without glorifying its mysticism. All things considered, the image of Africa as an "embryo" within black British identity, as expressed in Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*, will be seen as the underscoring idea behind

the ‘returns’ back to roots (188). Consequently, how “the power of the ‘return’ myth” applies to diasporic migrants will be discussed below (Asante 162).

II

In Molefi K. Asante’s *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987), the comprehensive critical assessment of the ‘return myth’ figure as a primary focus of pan-Africanists and cultural nationalists. While assessing specifically Turner and Garvey’s approaches, Asante elucidates how racially discriminated black immigrants in the African diaspora seek a physical and psychological return to the continent. These returns are prefigured by the idea of liberation from servitude and prejudices. The nuances of return migrants’ liberation are however truncated by such discussions. In context to this myth, Asante suggests that racial discrimination in the diaspora increases its power. Black British writers assert the fact that along with discrimination, several factors afflicting contemporary diasporic individuals add to the potency of the ‘return myth’. To mention a few, historical and cultural amnesia, the continuity of imperialist tendencies, and the anxiety of displacement are some of the contemporary dilemmas. For those displaced people, Africa, instantly becomes “a distant, intangible entity, yet for many, it also remained a pivotal constituent in their search for identity, a quest for cultural roots” (Tunca and Ledent 2). Therefore, the select writers will be seen employing the ‘return’ myth with all its power to “shape imaginaries, to give meaning to our lives and struggles and make sense of lost or forgotten histories” (Hall, “Diaspora” 49).

Novels like Beryl Gilroy’s *Gather the Faces* (1996) and Vernella Fuller’s *Going Back Home* (1992) suggests a return to their native land, i.e. the Caribbean, under similar conditions. In these novels, the ‘return myth’ is employed more as a ‘quest for cultural roots’ rather than instigated by discrimination. Though injustice and disproportionate distribution of resources may have been the cause of return for the characters in the novels, it is not made clear in the narratives. However, it is definite that the characters like Marvella and Joy in *Gather the Faces* and *Going Back Home* respectively are experiencing an identity crisis and believe that they can assert it only if they reclaim their roots by physically returning to their native land, which still upholds the cultural practices and traditions that has origins in Africa. This means that Africa holds a significant space in their imagination of home and belonging to a community.

Molefi K. Asante believes that "all African cultures reflect, in either the recent or the remote past, evidence of hybridity, and to separate the experience of Africans in the diaspora without appreciating their cultural roots in Africa is to construct a 'mulatto consciousness' and impose it as an African consciousness" (178). The connotation of 'mulatto', here, is seen as something that is superfluous to the African identity. If the recognition of African culture calls for an acknowledgment of its hybrid past and present, how can its consciousness be separated from the diasporic mulatto? The problem of the contemporary African diaspora is more than searching for an 'authentic' past or consciousness due to the heterogeneous experiences of these displaced black individuals. As will be evident in the discussion that follows, the multiple affiliation of black female characters is an integral aspect of their process of self-discovery and assertion of their roots in Africa.

In Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* and Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*, along with a physical return to homeland, there exists a recuperative measure that is attempted by black British women. Levy's novel is about a second-generation British migrant named Faith, who grapples with the lack of knowledge of her past and the overwhelming influence of English culture. Divided into three parts, namely, 'England', 'Jamaica', and 'England', the story starts with the description of her parents' arrival in Britain during the 1940s and the subsequent hardships that entailed. In the prologue, the narrative briefly recounts the experiences of Faith's parents, Mildred and Wade Jackson, in Ladbroke Grove of London as a newlywed couple. Initially, they live with Wade's brother, Donald, in a one-bedroom apartment, but when Mildred gives birth to Carl, they get a flat from the Council in Stoke Newington. After years of working as a nurse and painter, Mildred and Wade finally buy a house in Crouch End. However, when Part I begins, Faith's first-person narration states that her parents collected all kinds of empty, cardboard boxes to make use of it later, positively during their return to the Caribbean. The lives of Faith's parents are metaphorically portrayed through the imagery of boxes that seek to signify their state of uncertainty and instability. Despite living in Britain for long, Mildred and Wade desire to go back to their native land due to the evident hostility against black people.

Unlike her first-generation parents, Faith gets a job without much hassle in the fashion industry, supposedly based on her merit, but becomes a token for racial equality

and ethnic diversity. When her colleague comments on her racial and ethnic distinctiveness as "a sort of African or South American", Faith readily accepts that distorted image of black identity as *given*: "As I was born and bred in Haringey I could only suppose that I had some sort of collective unconscious that was coming through from my slave ancestry" (Levy 31). Unwittingly, she seeks to capitalize on that 'collective unconscious' without a consciousness of its origins and history. Her naïve stance is evident again when she perceives the illustrations of slave ships from her history lessons in school as an "innocuous pattern. A print that could be repeated and transferred to cloth to make a flowing skirt" (4). Here, Levy satirically plays with the idea of how consumer culture can demean and deride centuries of brutality in an attempt to commercialise aestheticism. This also exposes how the absence of a proper history of black people leads women like Faith to either be unaware or be complacent with racial hostility.

Faith's lack of racial awareness is, as suggested in the novel, due to the absence of an "oral tradition" in Faith's family. There were no stories of "life in Jamaica – of palm trees and yam and playing by rivers" (Levy 4). She remembers that as a child her mother used to "throw me little scraps of her past… which I would piece together like a game…fold the paper and pass it on – until I had a story that seemed to make sense" (5). Her identity crisis leads to her rejection of her blackness, which she equates with existential dilemmas. Her rejection also stems from a sense of embarrassment that she feels when reminded of her parents' past. The fact that her parents came in a 'banana boat' and that her middle name Columbine is in reality the name of her mother's goat are details that bothered Faith. These were not the kind of stories she wanted to identify as part of her past. In fact, when her parents once state that they "are thinking of going back home", Faith assumes they are talking of the old council flat of her childhood (44). For Faith, 'home' was England and it never occurred to her that it could be any other place. The shattering of Faith's idea of home leads her to a sense of self-denial, and therefore, when she sees her reflection in the mirror, even in the dark, she states, "I didn't want to be black anymore. I just wanted to live. The other mirror in the room I covered with a tee-shirt. Viola! I was no longer black" (160). After living with her parents and their "1940s Caribbean strictures" for years, Faith rents a house with three other white roommates and joins an all-white fashion industry in an attempt to consciously avoid

interacting with her "own people" (4, 158). However, Faith meets with a series of trigger points that remind her of her racial difference but is simultaneously silenced.

In an episode, Faith accompanies her friend, Marion, and her father to 'The Crown and Castle' pub which was old and was built with Victorian architectural design. The name of the pub itself draws allusions to constructions of Englishness as authentically and homogeneously white, situating Faith's presence as an anomaly. In the pub, a black dub poet with dreadlocks recites his poem with a Jamaican accent. Faith's first glance at the black poet is immediately followed by an imaginary identification with him as "my dad, my brother, he was the unknown black faces in our photo album, he was the old man on the bus who called me sister, the man in the bank with the strong Trinidadian accent who could not make himself understood. He was every black man – ever" (Levy 92). This sudden moment of envisioning her black identity is interrupted by Marion's father, who indirectly indicates the poet to stop. Faith is both ashamed and frustrated but Marion explains it as a "cultural thing" (93). In Reni Eddo-Lodge's words, the father's position is the "white privilege" which possess:

> …a manipulative, suffocating blanket of power…. Its brutal and oppressive, bullying you into not speaking up for fear of losing your loved ones, or job, or flat. It scares you into silencing yourself; you don't get the privilege of speaking honestly about your feeling without extensively assessing the consequences. (92)

The father again remarks on Faith eating out of their "house" and "home", which is satirical in the sense that blacks as an outsider, have been economically, socially, and culturally robbing Britain of its homogenous essence (Levy 84). With these instances, Levy highlights racism that is "easy to spot, grasp and denounce as white extremism" (Eddo-Lodge 63). However, there are also examples that denote the presence of racism as implicitly merged into the society's fabric. Faith experiences this kind of prejudice when she visits Simon's family home in a village that he describes as "quintessentially English" (Levy 115). When she questions the association of Englishness with British national identity, Simon answers vaguely suggesting the links between both as conventional and normative. This moment faintly hints at Faith's critical assessment of her identity as black and British in relation to Simon's Englishness and what separates them as independent individuals. Faith notices that village looks like the model villages in London's parks "green with perfect lush grass sitting in dappled light, little thatched

houses with windows and doors that looked too small, the pub, the post office, and the steeped church surrounded by yew trees and yestering grey gravestones" (116). Simon's house also has ample details of his heritage, namely the architecture, "the stained-glass windows, the architraves, the ingle-nook fireplace", the portraits of his relatives and the antiques (121). It also has a family tree on a wall "calligraphed in paint" (122). All of these images are juxtaposed with the 'absences' in Faith's case. She realised this whenever she visited Marion's white working-class family and envied the fact that Marion had a "gran and grandad and aunts and uncles and sisters and cousins" (93). The lack of the sense of inheritance and a single determined identity like Simon, therefore, forces her to state that she felt like she had "one ordinary leg and one made of concrete" (127).

To add to it, the village pub also had photographs from different periods of time demonstrating its rich heritage. Simon boasts about the ancient history of the English pub that had been existing since the Tudor times. He also asserts the contribution of white soldiers during the First and Second World Wars, quite ignorant of the presence of black Loyalists who fought in the war as well. In an article, Michael Perfect points out that the pub too qualifies Simon's definition of 'quintessentially English', "as a place where particular historical moments and connections are glorified and memorialized but where others are swiftly disregarded or denied" (40). Then again, a barrister named Andrew Bunyan is introduced to her who explains his discovery of a black man, during his visit to Jamaica, with the surname Bunyan. Faith disrupts his amazement and confusion by stating, "Well, the thing is that would have been his slave name, you see. Your family probably owned his family once" (Levy 131). Ashamed by the sudden remark, Andrew puts the blame on the vicars in his family, who were just "going round sowing his seed. Producing his little dark babies", and abruptly leaves the pub (Levy 131). The entire conversation not only turns uncomfortable for everyone but also reflects the "fear among many white people that accepting Britain's difficult history with race means somehow admitting defeat" (Eddo-Lodge 132). This episode is significant for Faith because it makes her aware of the sense of denial that prevails among English people and also Britain's complacency with the "complexities of historical silencing" (Perfect 40). Consequently, as she leaves with an ambiguous sense of gaining her personality and feeling at a loss, she is further dejected when she finds that Simon, whom she admires, chooses her white roommate instead of her.

Immediately after, there is an incident of a violent attack on a black woman by members of the National Front. Simon and Faith witness the incident and the vandalism of a nearby bookshop. There is "NF, NF, NF" sprayed on the walls with "angry red paint", the term "Wog" painted over black and Third World books, and shit thrown over gay and lesbian books (Levy 151-2). Despite the evidence present, the policemen and Faith's roommates consciously overlook the fact that it is a racially motivated attack. Instead, it is declared as a misdemeanour committed by a bunch of thugs against "leftie bookshops" (154). With its contexts set in the 1990s, the novel plunges into the debate of race politics and multiculturalism as a means of outnumbering marginalised voices that attempt to oppose the establishment. The novel satirically employs the idea of Britain promoting a multicultural identity through the image of Faith and her roommates, "three white hands and one black stretched forward" to take their mugs of tea on the table (157). The image makes Faith question her hybrid British identity because of the connections she makes with the series of silent and direct hostility she experiences. The symbolic image evoked here is significant because it instigates Faith to leave the house and, as her brother's girlfriend Ruth had earlier suggested, be with her "own people" (158). She goes to her parent's place because she knows they will understand how she feels – "black on the outside and cowardly custard-yellow on the inside" (158). The moment she reaches her house she has a sudden nervous breakdown as a result of the realisation that she has been duped all these years by the casual racism of her colourblind peers and colleagues, and she has been oblivious to it. Besides, the notions of blackness projected through her parents, her brother, and his girlfriend, do not reassure her of a sense of self-worth and self-actualization. It also becomes evident to her that every black individual's idea of blackness is shaped by their very subjective experiences. Therefore, when she sees Ruth's reality who projects a so-called authentic sense of black consciousness, it convinces Faith to go back to her parents' past in search of a genuine knowledge of her personal history. In the novel it is seen how Ruth tells Mildred that the latter is suffering from the "triple yoke of oppression" because she is a "poor black woman" (144). In fact, Ruth insists on differentiating her Black political ideology from other black people, such as Faith and her parents, by constantly reminding them to appreciate black food, black culture, and so on. It is, however, a surprising revelation for Faith when she meets Ruth's white family, comprising of her white mother, her stepfather, and two half-brothers. Her biological father, who is Guyanese, had left the country after his studies, and, so, Ruth too did not keep in touch with him. Faith's rude

awakening, which ultimately leads to her 'return' to Jamaica in search of her roots, is therefore, incited primarily from the erasure of black history and the silencing of anti-black hostility in Britain, but also notably by the urge to find a form of blackness that is derived from individualised stories of migration and displacement.

Faith's dilemma is shared by the eponymous protagonist of Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997), who is a mixed-race girl born in a white suburb of London i.e., Woolwich. She is the fourth child of Taiwo, who is Nigerian, and Ellen, who is English. The novel travels back 150 years, seven generations, and three continents, as Lara undertakes the journey in search of her 'self'. But the novel is not only about Lara and her trauma of being a mixed-race child in a multi-racial England. It is also about her paternal (Yorubas in Brazil) and maternal grandparents (English, Irish, and German) and their individual stories. With Lara's journey on the quest for selfhood, layers of the family history are uncovered. Lara's paternal grandparents, who were Yorubas, were enslaved in Brazil but they escaped to colonial Nigeria and then finally immigrated to Britain. The multiple narratives in the novel also describe other immigrants from Lara's mother's side like the poor Irish Catholics and the Germans. The presence of these multiple histories of Lara is problematised in the novel to suggest Britain's complex history of immigration and, along with it, the predicaments of "the bastard child of the Empire" like Faith and Lara (Levy 327).

Living in the hostile setting of Eltham district in London, Lara is constantly made aware of her blackness but is not able to associate with it because she has unanswered questions about her past and her roots, which British history has erased, and her black father is reluctant to acknowledge. Of the seven siblings, Lara is the only one who keeps pestering her father with an inquisitiveness about her father's country and his childhood memories of that place. Her father, Taiwo, on the other hand, gives passing details of his birthplace Lagos, his mother who was a "very nice lady", and his father who was from Brazil but was brought to Lagos during the slave trade (Evaristo 135). Besides, in his disclosure of the past Taiwo expresses more of his differences, firstly, as a Yoruba from other tribes in Nigeria, vis a vis the Hausas, Ibos, and Fulanis, and secondly, as an African from the West Indians, who supposedly lived in "shanty towns with goats sleeping under the bed" (135). The recollection of these facts triggers Taiwo, and he returns to his state of shunning himself and his children from his past. Taiwo struggles

with his own concerns regarding his relationship with his mother and twin sister, Kehinde whom he left back home in Nigeria, and the disappointments he has with himself in London. He knows he must "return prosperous or be shamed" and, therefore, wishes to "erase" the memory of his past in Nigeria (112). There is an ambivalence in his attitude toward the possibility of accepting his Africanness and disregarding it at the same time. On one hand, Taiwo relishes the Sunday delicacy of rice, spiced chicken, and boiled okra and longs for a reunion with his mother and sister, and on the other hand, fails to provide a safe space for his mixed-race children to form an identification with their black roots in a multicultural Britain.

From Lara's perspective too, growing up in Britain with an affiliation to multiple heritages hinders her journey of self-identification, and she describes that experience as "seasons of youth stirred in my cooking pot, a spicy mix of marinated cultures, congealed into cold, disparate lumps, untended, festered" (Evaristo 123). Thus, she begins to hate her father, his African lineage, and the cultural affiliations that came with it. On one occasion, she and her brother even make fun of 'black food'. The presence of a "black dad" embarrasses her because of the conventional strictures laid on her. So, she tries to blend in among the "nattering swarm/ of pink-flushed, off-white, excitable girlies" and one evening even imagines she has become of them by wearing "her mother's yellow cardigan" and pretending to have blonde hair (118). She even befriends two white girls at school but is often made aware of her physiognomic differences from them. Out of frustration, Lara searches for her 'HOME', metaphorically indicating Britain, of traces reflecting herself, but in vain: "Not in the screen, billboards, books, magazines/ and not in the mirror" (123). Born in Woolwich, she initially feels confident of her Britishness, which she imagines is reflected in her love for Ellen's "coveted treats" of Swiss rolls, fish and chips and having learned "The Odyssey, revolutions – Industrial, Agricultural, French, British royal lines" by rote (108, 123). She soon realises that these are not enough to make her British. In fact, she understands that even the presence of a white mother will not make her acceptable. Her maternal grandmother, Peggy, shared an affectionate bond with Lara and went to Sunday Mass together, but the latter knew it was an "unusual picture" for people who sometimes enquired if she was Peggy's nurse (139). Lara also finds out about the separation of her mother from her siblings and the insults she received when she married her father. An accumulation of her own anxieties and her mother's struggles leads her to self-loathing and a rejection of her blackness, which is

expressed when she writes "ugly bitch" all over her diary (125). However, the act itself relieves her anger and she feels self-aware while she drinks her "perfect morning cuppa, ta", realising its connection with the history of sugar plantations during the time of slavery (126). Gradually, from the moment of self-denial and rejection, Lara declares she did not want to blend in because she couldn't, but she definitely desired "to be noticed" (126).

Once on a rainy day, while young Lara sits by the window of their playroom, "she sees people watching her, young, old, so strange, sitting motionless in a semi-circle on the grass, lips unmoving but eyes alive with the singing of song: 'Lara kiss, Lara kiss, we love you always, Lara kiss" (103). Unable to comprehend the strangeness of the scene, Lara shuts her eyes for a moment and opens to find "nothing but bruised grass and a whisper of a tune" (103). When she reports the incident to her mother, she is reprimanded for being "too fanciful, too boisterous" and that "it had to stop" (103). In another episode when it is Lara's birthday, she "summons" the spirits, whom she addresses as "Daddy people", to appear like "phantoms perched in trees" (109). This time, her conversation with the 'Daddy People' is interrupted by her father from whom she later endures "nine hard strokes" (109). That night Lara finally calls the Daddy People and bids them farewell. The fact that Lara can see 'Daddy People' suggests that the past is a ubiquitous part of the present. From the moment she sees them, Lara immediately connects the Daddy People with her paternal African lineage. Despite the historical and cultural amnesia and the rupture in the cultural memory, aspects of the African tradition are still present and this somehow drives Lara to go back to Africa in search of her roots. However, this is not to ignore the fact that the past is also in a continuous attempt to bring a union with the present, or sometimes even become a part of the present. In the novel, Evaristo uses an experimental narrative form that "situates past and present as part of the same fluid realm" (Kamali 217). Hence, the repeated appearance of the Daddy People can be seen as the bridge that allows for the past-present nexus. Similarly, the past's efforts to be the present are evidenced when a year after Nana's death, she is reborn as Juliana's daughter, named Iyabo which means 'Mother Returns' because she is the "identikit of Nana" (154). This is how diverse "known and unknown pasts inhabit the present" (Kamali 269). Another demonstration of multiple, 'known and unknown pasts' in a disarrayed condition is seen in the basement of Lara's home, 'Atlantico'. The room is filled with objects like newspapers, household bills, a

record player, “a plastic replica of the Eiffel Tower, a framed wedding photo and two sullen Yoruba carvings”, that denote their belonging to different times and places (Evaristo 133). Describing it as a “hostile territory”, even when their mother enters the room, she sighs, states “Good grief” and leaves straightaway (133). The burden of unresolved pasts is muddled in such a way that she chooses to ignore it. This response to the past is in contrast to Lara who is insistent on interrogating the established forms of identity available to her.

At this point, Lara’s cousin Beatrice has a pompous entry with the aura of American black politics reflecting from her appearance – an Angela Davis wig, “lime green flares draped over pink suede platforms” and a “map-of-Africa lighter” (Evaristo 127). Lara, who is grappling with her sense of identity as a mixed-race female teenager in the southeast of London, engages in a verbal spat with Beatrice where they both attempt to verify each other’s familiarity with black history and culture. Lara rejects the term ‘black’, calls herself a “half-caste” and taunts Beatrice by addressing her as “Mrs Mandela” and “Mama Kunta Kinte” (128-29). The narrative makes it evident that Lara’s rejection is directed toward the American idea of blackness that dominates popular black culture in the African diaspora. Beatrice, on the other hand, gives Lara an insight on the ‘one-drop rule’ where she states that, “so long as you’re of Negroid stock, diluted or not, you’re black” (130). Beatrice also brings a distinction between the black politics of Southerners and Northerners in Britain, in which the “high-falutin education” of the former has led them to neglect their “African ways” and the purpose of uplifting their race (129-30). The ambiguity of Beatrice’s political ideas is reflected when she asks Lara and her siblings to apply a “dollop of grease and a hot iron comb to straighten out their kinks” (130). Lara evidently eliminates these ideas because of their superficiality. Therefore, when she meets Josh in her swimming class, with his “open Ibo vowels squeezed into nasal tubes, staccato consonants”, she is instantly captivated by him (141). Gradually, even Josh’s notion of an authentic African and a typical Nigerian wife frustrates her. In fact, Josh ridicules her lack of knowledge of Nigerian culture by stating that she will make a “sorry wife” because she does not know how to cook jollof rice (143). Both Beatrice and Josh are significant characters invoking a feeling of self-awareness for Lara, but she dismisses both their representations as distorted versions of Africanness. Echoing the ideas of black feminists and black British feminists, Lara too rejects the patriarchal versions of Africanity and blackness because they seek to submit

black women under a specific category with a particular set of characteristics defining womanhood.

Frustrated at being unable to find her 'self', Lara dismisses every social structure and escapes on a road trip across Europe with an artist named Trish. The journey allows Lara to see herself beyond the restricted national identities, as "border fly into blurs" (149). As a matter of fact, she realises that both she and Trish were identified as the same i.e., "Inglitere", as they crossed the boundary of Turkey (150). Finally, she stops at an "old hippy beach" for a year and returns to London (150). It is then that her paternal grandmother, Nana, dies and her spirit visits Lara, asking her to bring her son back home to Lagos. In one of her teenage outbursts, when Lara states that she "longed for an image, a story, to speak to me, describe me, birth me whole", it is almost as if she summons Nana's spirit, just like she beckoned the Daddy People on her birthday (123). She then finally begins her journey of discovering her personal and social history. Lara and her father return to Lagos to find that his childhood 'home' has now changed, but Lara discovers the history of her grandparents, Zenobia and Gregario in Ibosere. On the last day in Nigeria, Lara decides to cross over the Atlantic and reach Brazil, "completing her own three-point turn" (160).

Both Faith and Lara return to a past that has transnational connections and hints at syncretism and hybridity. These two processes reflect the complex cultural interactions and exchanges that occur in diverse societies which enable cultures to evolve, and consequently, help shape new identities and expressions of self. However, the debates between disparate discourses regarding hyphenated interactions calls for diasporic identities and communities to take action because it is the diasporic consciousness that challenges the notion of exclusive affiliation with a single country or nationality. As evident in the analysis, Faith and Lara identify as diasporic characters, who attempt to reconstruct and interrogate homogeneous constructions of Englishness and Britishness by stressing on their multiple cultural and historical connections and linking it with the multicultural character of Britain. While for Lara the presence of transnational ancestry is partially evident to her even before she embarks on a physical travel to Lagos, for Faith, the discovery of her multiple affiliations on her travel to the Caribbean, is a revelation. Faith learns that she has Scottish (Campbell family), English (Livingstone and Jackson family), and Irish (Hilton family) origins. In a family wedding

ceremony, she meets an aunt named Constance, who has a mixed-parentage namely half-Scottish, half-English, and half-West Indian, but names her son Kofi and starts calling herself 'Afria' after a visit to Africa. Though people describe her as a hysterical woman, Faith resonates with her sense of estrangement from her roots and accepts her aunt as part of her family history. Consequently, a sense of recuperation and reconciliation is attained at the end of both Faith and Lara's journeys, and the aspect of multicultural Britain that is portrayed broadly redefines the idea of 'return' for black diasporic individuals.

Irenosen Okojie's *Butterfly Fish* also includes a metaphorical and a physical 'return', but it is juxtaposed with a series of events wherein the protagonist, Joy Omoregbe Lowon is possessed and haunted by the past. Moving back and forth through different eras and topographic planes, Okojie suggests a 'return' through the metaphysical realm as well, where the past displays a 'homing desire', rather than the present. Through the diasporic protagonist's act of physical travel and burial of the material manifestation of a cursed past, both she and her ancestors are salvaged from future adversities. Okojie, a fairly recent (not part of the *Windrush*) first-generation British migrant from Benin, offers a fresh perspective to the 'return' narrative and, in all probability, also suggests how diasporic daughters can be a source of reconciliation for the homeland, rather than merely the other way round. The fact that Joy's life is determined by the past is attested at the beginning of her narrative when she states that her story did not start with her but a long time ago that was centuries old. In fact, in the end, Mervyn, her mother's friend and a father figure to her, reveal that Joy used to sleepwalk as a child and when she came back to her senses, it seemed like she came back from somewhere far. Here, the narrative hints at 19th-century Benin and the kingdom of Oba Odion. Okojie has parallelly placed the events of 19th-century Benin with Joy's personal history, justifying the concept of interconnectedness between individual and collective histories. At the same time, Joy's grandfather's life in Lagos in the 1950s and her mother's life in England in the 1970s is also portrayed, which means that the novel employs four narrative voices and timeframes to depict the story of a cursed past affecting multiple generations. As the story in Benin kingdom unfolds, the readers get a glimpse of Joy's psychosis and strange events occurring to her, such as the incident where a butterfly fish emerges from a swimming pool and spews an old key on her hand. The key helps her travel back to Oba Odion's palace in Benin. From the start of the

story, Joy is depicted as a melancholic individual who is seeking medical assistance. The novel opens with her attempted suicide by drowning in a bathtub that follows her mother, Queenie Lowon's death. Later, it is known that Joy's sense of melancholy stems from a curse that befell the Benin kingdom during Oba Odion's governance.

When the narrative begins, a green glass bottle of palm wine trundles along the street of London. Inside the bottle, an image of a man and a woman in a court appears, who is then dragged along by soldiers. The image depicted here and its connection to Joy's story is significant because she is constantly followed and later even possessed by a mysterious entity. It is made evident later that the woman's spirit carries the curse laid on Oba Odion's kingdom and physically manifests her presence through the brass head of Ogiso. Oba Odion, who was the befallen king of the Benin kingdom in the 19th century, had mistrusted his childhood friend Ogiso as a rival and subjected the latter to public execution. Ogiso, on the other hand, was the abandoned child of Oba Odion's father and a maidservant of the palace. Following Ogiso's death, his mother curses Oba Odion, which results not only in his gradual descent from intoxication to insanity but affects the lives of his wives as well. His third wife, Omotole, gives birth to a faceless boy. His fifth wife, Filo, escapes the Palace. Adesua, his ninth wife, has an affair with a Portuguese man and is buried alive by the administrators for committing adultery. It is presumed that the woman's spirit Joy encounters is Adesua's, who has come to redress the legacy of curses laid on Benin's descendants. The brass head, which is mysteriously under General Akhtar's ownership, is gifted to Peter Lowon, Joy's grandfather, for following the General's orders to murder a fellow sergeant. Peter leaves his family and escapes from Lagos to London when his secret is known to a journalist. Years later, his daughter Queenie goes to London in search of him, and they finally meet each other. Their meeting, however, turns out to be a fateful event as Peter, who has a delusional disorder, rapes his daughter mistaking her to be his wife, Felicia. The curse of the brass head is seen as a cause of this incident, after which Peter commits suicide by drowning. The sadness of missing her father, along with the disturbing memory of their incestuous encounter, prevents Queenie from accepting her daughter Joy, who she even tries to kill by pushing into the water in a bathtub. Therefore, as a child, Joy experiences a sense of incompleteness with no knowledge of her father or other relatives. However, when she learns of her mother's tragedy from her grandfather's diary, she returns to Africa seeking a tripartite reconciliation for herself, Adesua's spirit, and her mother. Belonging to

different temporal and spatial frames, these women are bound together in an attempt to be relieved from the traumatic past, and it is finally achieved only with Joy's 'return' to Africa. Kelsey Ann Mcfaul states that Okojie's novel mainly focuses on "female and non-gendered African bodies that exist outside the categories constructed by universal humanism and its idea of the human built on the negation of gendered, raced, and differently abled bodies" (50). This ideology defines the concept of humanity based on the exclusion of individuals with gender, racial, and physical differences. The current classification of the human species, Man, is heavily influenced by the Western bourgeois biocentric description of the human, namely the White bourgeois subject, generally male. Put simply, the theories need fresh approaches and narratives to redefine the concept of humanity outside the knowledge systems and philosophical frameworks of Western biology and colonial understandings of gender. In context to this, we can refer to Oyéronké Oyěwùmí's exploration of the "constructedness of the social categories" like women, as discussed in Chapter Two, who are largely defined by their body and the "gendered gaze" (16, 2). Thus, Joy's return to Africa, linking a generational reconciliation of trauma is important because it challenges the exclusion and categorization of "female and non-gendered African bodies within African social and spiritual settings" (McFaul 50)".

The novels of Levy, Evaristo, and Okojie therefore attest to the fact that the "power of the 'return' myth" works beyond the aspect of racial hostility in the host land. In addition to the racialised prejudices, the absence of an ancestral past through which they need to trace their history disallows them from the process of self-actualisation. In this regard, along with a physical journey to Africa and receiving the cultural memory, the manifestation of the past through spirit possession or visitation comes into play. Moreover, the existing narratives of 'return' expressed through Pan-Africanism, Garveyism, Afrocentricism, and Black Power politics, have been projected from the male point of view, which again disregards the experiences of black women. Black British women writers subvert the prevailing male-centric ideologies and narratives of 'return' by introducing black women characters who initiate the return journeys to their homeland. These characters, as diasporic individuals, assume the responsibility of envisioning a cultural and geographical sense of belonging that extends beyond the confines of the nation-state, while also engaging with the politics of 'return'. The succeeding section will, hence, deal with black British women writers' attempt at

dismantling these pre-existing patterns of 'return' and re-visioning Africa, as Dave Gunning states, "as indispensable to any coherent politics of black liberation" but *not* "keeping with the past tradition" predominated by black men's ideologies (22, 21).

III

The phrases like 'going back to Africa', 'the return myth', and 'back-to-roots' has often been used while discussing migration patterns of blacks in the African diaspora, by focusing mainly on the idea of 'return' in association with modern Pan-Africanist ideology. The manifestation of pan-African ideologies can be traced back to the early black writings of Q. Ottobah Coguano, Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, and Ignatius Sancho. Coguano often championed an anti-racist agenda during the 19th century and wrote of his experience of places across the Atlantic. Similarly, Olaudah Equiano advocated against the slave trade in his autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789). The work is one of the early recorded literary compositions on the brutality meted out towards enslaved people from Africa. Equiano worked with the Abolitionists and was made the chairman of the Sierra Leone experiment despite his reluctance, but he rather expresses a desire to civilise the 'natives' or 'negroes' of Africa– terms he repeatedly uses in his autobiography. Unlike James A. U. Gronniosaw, who "was very desirous to go home; to my own country", Equiano does not explicitly express an intention for 'return' (Andrews and Gates Jr. 19). Rather, in a letter to the Bishop of London, Equiano writes, "your memorialist is desirous of returning to Africa as a *missionary*…in hopes of being able to prevail upon his countrymen to become Christians" (emphasis added, Andrew and Gates Jr. 173). In addition to this, despite being aware of the injustices met by the 'black poor', he perceived the Sierra Leone expedition as a mere "mismanagement" rather than a strategic undertaking by the government (178). In his words, the expedition, "however unfortunate in the event, was humane and politic in its design" (178). His writings portray a clear inclination toward Enlightenment and modernism as facets of Western civilisation and a marked distinction from the natives of his homeland. It is to be mentioned that Marcus Garvey too uses the term 'negro' to define himself and the people of West Indies and Africa, but only to subvert the white ideology associated with it. However, like A. Sivanandan and Frederick Douglass, his criticisms are particularly directed towards "representative and educated Negroes", who have "failed to do their

duty by the race in promoting a civilised imperialism that would meet the approval of established ideals" (Garvey, "A Talk"). Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave* (1688) is also one among the early slave narratives that perpetuate the idea of salvaging Africans from 'darkness'. Set in the British colony of Surinam in the 15th century, the story deals with the life of a royal prince named Oroonoko, from the Coramantien region of West Africa, and how he was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Though the narrator strives to stress the struggles of Oroonoko, it unequivocally echoes the popular images of Africa and African people by perceiving them through the Orient/Occident binary division. In congruence with it, the figure of a black messiah, who is typically Catholic and Western-educated, features as the sole agent of the neo-colonial civilising mission. Such texts can be said to be replicating the images of "charismatic preachers" and "consummate orators in the historical tradition" like Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and the like (Asante 32). In the case of early slave narratives, the writers saw "themselves" as the "embodiment of the rhetoric", proved by names like Olaudah which means "having a loud voice or well-spoken" (Asante 101, Olaudah 54).

Alex Haley's *Roots*: *The Saga of an American Family* (1976), which became a ground-breaking novel during the era, re-visits such rhetoric by stressing cultural memory as a return to roots through the journey of a common man. The story revolves around the life and travails of an 18th-century African man named Kunta Kinte, who hails from a village named Juffure in Gambia, West Africa, and is kidnapped and transported to America as a slave. Kunta Kinte, a proud Mandrika who has been severed from his homeland, strives to preserve his legacy by ritualising the cultural memory of Africans like him. With the birth of every child in his enslaved family, he conducts a naming ceremony followed by a narration of his journey across the Atlantic to the plantation. As evident from the beginning of the story, Kunta Kinte adopts this practice from his *Omoro* (father), who eloquently functions the role of a patriarch in a highly gendered social and power structure of Africa. The practice is later carried out by his succeeding generations which becomes a ritual initiation necessary for every member of the family in reverence of their African origins. There is no doubt that Haley's undertaking of tracing and archiving this gigantic oral family history has been noteworthy, but in his representations of the women's condition, he reveals the misogynistic characteristics of Juffure's traditional administrative corpus that comprised mainly of older men. Ironically, the revered ancestor seems to have carried the same ideals and transferred them to his

subsequent male descendants, including Haley. Therefore, even when women like Kunta Kinte's grandmother, old Nyo Boto spoke up against the tradition of women showing unwavering respect to men, the narrative does not proceed further with developing the image of this strong matriarch. Instead, most women appear as wives and mistresses in a polygamous structure, or as a woman involved in 'teriya friendship'[2], though a sympathetic rendering exists for women exploited by the 'toubabs' or white men.

Haley's evident marginalisation of women from the central position of re-discovering history is influenced by the gendered 'national allegory' echoed in the works of contemporary African male writers. Citing Ogundipe Lesli's observations on the marginal status of African women in political roles, Florence Stratton in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994) points out that African society operates both on the level of racial and sexual allegory. The subversive presence of African men over colonial representations is dependent on either directly delimiting women's agencies or valorising the 'mother Africa' trope. Within this frame of reference, Stratton argues that:

> This essentially nonparodic reiteration in African men's writing of the conventional colonial trope of Africa as Female can best be understood as an expression or function of that writing's change in status from a nonhegemonic literature in its relation to colonial discourse to a hegemonic literature in its relation to women's writings. (18)

While Stratton examines the dialogic of intertextuality in men's and women's writings, the chapter primarily draws from the nature of emergent gendered discourses evident in black male writers as discussed in her work. Chinua Achebe's response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is a re-writing of pre-colonial Africa in *Things Fall Apart* as politically conscious and highly institutionalised, where women, except priestess Cheilo, are merely represented as prized possessions obtained through patrilineal inheritance. Stratton observes that while Chielo does possess power in relative terms, her image and her dwelling are not only exoticized but are also portrayed as having shamanic connections. Unlike the *ndichie* or *egwugwu* community of powerful male elders, her power has no association with political or administrative discourses in Umuofia.

Again, Stratton comments that the figure of the black woman embodying Africa as a nation became a recurrent literary trope for male writers of the Negritude movement in the 1930s. In context to this, Senghor's "Black Woman"/ "Femme noir" and "Night in Sine"/ "Nuit de Sine" have received much critical attention for comparing women's bodies to "African landscapes meant for men to explore and discover" (Stratton 40). David Diop in "Africa: To my Mother", personifies Africa as an ancestral mother, whom the diasporic narrator "have never known", but shares the same heritage. Through the use of images from the landscape vis a vis savannahs, rivers, and fields, Diop suggests the fertility of the mother, who "irrigates" the land of Africa with her "beautiful black blood". The fact that there exists an overpowering male gaze and masculine voice in the poem is indicated when the narrator shifts its empathetic glance to a "grave" tone. The imagery of white flowers in the end again goes back to the idea of representing women as an "embodiment of the nation both as it has been degraded, tainted, corrupted – prostituted – down through the ages, and as it is re-visioned by man…a kind of virgin land" (Stratton, "Periodic Embodiments" 111).

Similarly, Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* (2004), can also be critiqued for re-assigning to male characters, "the role of regaining control over the historical development in their societies" (Stratton, *Contemporary* 8). The narrative depicts the journey of a couple, Leila and Michael, from the Caribbean to England during the 1950s. Divided into five parts, namely- 'The End', 'Home', 'England', 'The Passage', and 'Winter', the novel begins and ends by focalising on Leila Preston and her desire for 'home'. However, a major part of the story shifts its focus on Michael's childhood, his parents and grandparents, and his ambition to prove himself different from fellow black Caribbeans, who, according to him, have chosen to live a life of misery. Though a large section of the story is focalised through Leila, her character hardly has the agency to revert the course of events in the narrative. It is Michael and his dream of future aspirations that are highlighted, and Leila, with her mixed-race status and lighter complexion, only acts as a medium for Michael to fulfil that dream.

In contrast, this chapter argues that black British women's fiction evokes a feminized, domestic idea of Africa where women are involved not only in contemporary politics but also challenge discourses that seek to subjugate them. The focus in the novels is the transfer of culture, tradition, and memories through a "female-centred genealogy"

(Wilentz 394). The matrilineal family tree and the presence of only women narrators in Aminatta Forna's *Ancestor Stones* can be cited as one of the many instances. Before the story begins, there is an elaborate illustration of Gibril Umaru Kolifa's family tree, traced through Kolifa's wives and his daughters. In the novel, Hawa, Serah, Mariama, and Asana, figure as the major narrators who give a glimpse of their lives and their mothers and grandmothers. Most importantly, the past that black British women writers refer to is not a pre-colonial, harmonised, or idealised maternal image typically illustrated in African and black men's writings but is rather one that has already been mediated by external forces[3]. In short, they re-visit the feminised image of Africa and replace the silenced, ineffectual roles of women with subversive ones. The chapter also observes that their writings span across a vast period of time, giving the impression of an epic narrative, but dealing with a wide range of subjects and characters instead of a singular heroic persona.

One of the connections shared between the novels selected in this chapter is that it is the metaphorical absence/silence of the father or the protagonists' paternal ancestral history that instigates the 'return' for these female black diasporic writers. Forna's memoir, *The Devil that Danced in the Water* (2002), which provides a detailed record of her father's political struggle and later his execution, is sub-titled "A daughter's quest" in the 2003 Grove Press edition. Her writing revolves around reclaiming memories of her father, a doctor and an activist in Sierra Leone in the 1960s and exposing events that led up to his death. A semi-autobiographical reference to such incidents can be seen in *Ancestor Stones* too. Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* is a part-archival, part-oral history of her father's journey from Aden Protectorate in the 1930s to Wales in the late 1940s. Lara in Bernardine Evaristo's eponymous novel-in-verse, is visited by 'Daddy people' and later mystically beckoned by her Nana to take her father to Lagos and revisit the memories of his repressed past. Similarly, in the case of Joy in *Butterfly Fish*, her journey of self-discovery involves finding out the truth behind her biological father. The diary that she inherits after her mother's death becomes a totemistic symbol in initiating that search which eventually leads her to Africa. Nevertheless, though the vantage point of 'return' for most of these writers are men, essentially fathers, they locate profoundly feminised aspects, including the presence of materfamilias and matriarchs (also heads of local administrative bodies), in the changing dynamics of patriarchal African and Caribbean societies. For instance, though Lara's journey of self-discovery is traced

through her paternal lineage, for instance, the stories of Taiwo's parents in Lagos, his grandparents, and his great-grandparents in Brazil during the time of slavery, in the end, the figure of their "mystical memory grandmother" is recalled who "spoke from the deepest part of she-she-self" (Evaristo 174). At the same time, male-orchestrated violence and chaos are markedly substituted by women's attempts at reparation and reform.

To elaborate on this, instances can be cited from Simi Bedford's *Not with Silver* (2007), Simi Bedford, which demonstrates an alternative perspective to the history of slavery and the 'return' of freed slaves to Sierra Leone. Divided into three books, the central foci of the novel revolve around disparate perceived ideas of Africa as a homeland and a place of belonging. Effectively, three distinct images appear which is dependent on how characters in the novel seek to identify themselves with their ancestral roots. The story begins with Abiola, a young prince and a warrior of the kingdom of Oyo in 17th-century West Africa. A detailed description is presented of a highly organised court life in the Oyo kingdom with a superior connection to and knowledge of spirituality. However, contrasting scenes of a royal wedding and ceremonial proceedings of suicide occur in succession. With the establishment of a new Bashorun or administrative or military council of the Oyo kingdom, the preceding King, Princes, and their wives, along with their maidservants, are meant to poison themselves and begin their "journey to join the ancestors in the next world" (Bedford 64). Abiola's cousin sister Oluremi, with whom he shares the closest bond, also dies in this ceremonial ritual.

The customs in the kingdom are patriarchal in nature, where the birth of a son is favoured since they suffice the need for warriors. Abiola too is trained to be one since the time of his birth. After being kidnapped by the people of his kingdom and sold to a French harpsichord seller, Abiola undergoes a shift away from his warrior background to the passive position of a domestic servant. His name is changed to Cornelius and he is taken to Fairlawn's plantation in the American South, where he disseminates ideas of Pan-Africanism. Cornelius's repeated articulation of the statement – 'We are the children of the same mother' – locates the author's ideological stance in Marcus Garvey's notion of Pan-Africanism which contributed to the development of the idea 'Africa for Africans', self-determination of Africa and African nationalism. Consequently, the narrative finds the noble African mobilising a group of enslaved blacks to escape the

drudgery and initially settling in Nova Scotia before the final return to their native land. But after Abiola's death, it is his and Delilah's daughter, Epiphany, who continues to uphold his ideology. For Abiola, Oluremi remains his only spiritual connection with his homeland which he considers, has been re-born and emulated by his daughter. By subverting the presence of a dominant male orator present in the writings by men, Bedford mainly draws the readers' attention to the female protagonist, Epiphany, who later becomes the source of vision for others and succeeds in returning with her enslaved family to Africa. Bedford's rejection of Garvey's ideologies is made evident when she equates his proposals for the 'return' of Africans to their homeland with that of the Sierra Leone Company, who assure the enslaved blacks in Nova Scotia that if "*they are honest, sober and industrious, they will be transported free to Sierra Leone, where they will receive grants of not less than twenty acres for a man, ten for his wife and five for each child*" (emphasis original, Bedford 214).

In the novel, Epiphany is often found quoting her father and passing on the knowledge she received from him to her son, who is also named Abiola. However, contrary to Cornelius and Epiphany, Delilah, who is a home-born slave and has had no prior connection with Africans, rejects the formers' standpoints completely. Delilah separates herself from the rest of the Africans as West-influenced free individuals. Her idea of Africa is one where black settlers dominate both native Africans and white settlers. In one instance, she states, "My heart is rejoicing at the prospect of seeing a white man flogged by a black one. Although I can't decide which I'll enjoy the more, the sight of them screaming…or of them squirming with the shame and humiliation of it all" (Bedford 246). Enticed by entrepreneurial designs, she gets involved in the slave trade and becomes one of the most famous peddlers with the Europeans. Ironically, Epiphany runs a school with Delilah's earnings and seeks to achieve her father's dream of liberating Africans from intellectual 'darkness'. Epiphany and her father's views are problematic too, but Delilah defies the very spirit of emancipation. Though the consequence of Delilah's acts is to be later compensated by her family members, her sudden death marks the end of the inhumane trade.

When Epiphany's black settler family arrives in Sierra Leone, the images of grandeur that Cornelius had described, seem like an illusion. They envisage Africans to be exotically dressed in "flowing robes and elaborate headdresses. Instead, the women

and girls were bare-breasted…while the children ran naked save for the bead necklaces and waistbands" (Bedford 230). Even Aunt Jane, the eldest member of the settler family recalls, "My home is not here. It was a big city with courtyards open to the sky and surrounded by high walls" (235). Here, Aunt Jane and Cornelius' memory of their homeland becomes part of a distant, almost unreal past. An indication of their recollections as faraway stories is emphasized by Aunt Jane's arduous journey of struggle and resistance that finally leads her back to her motherland: "She had survived kidnapping, the Middle Passage, decades of slavery, the hazardous escape, the civil war and nine years of freezing winter in Nova Scotia, all to make a second journey across the Atlantic to reach home at the age of a hundred and three" (236). Not only that, after the rude awakening, Epiphany's husband, Johnson, exclaims that "'Sierra Leone isn't Africa. It's a white man's ship moored at the coast'" (281). He is later seen joining the native Africans and aspiring to become chief of one of their tribes.

Abiola, Epiphany's son, and a third-generation returnee does not believe in African spiritualism like his mother and his grandfather but seeks a complete liberation. Therefore, when his wife is kidnapped by slave traders, he goes back to England to free her, despite the threat of himself becoming enslaved. Epiphany perceives that she, her father, and her son are a "link in a chain of destiny" and for Bedford, the tripartite journey between Africa, America, and England that the characters have undertaken is essential for the construction of the image of Africa as a sanctuary (Bedford 324). Nevertheless, all these journeys back are induced by the common need for emancipation, but more importantly, they focus on constructing history through female subjectivities, that in a way also challenge the earlier descriptions of gendered practices in the Oyo kingdom.

Other than depicting a nuanced version of Pan-Africanism, Bedford's novel also seeks to counter the patrilineal mode of the traditional African naming ceremony as seen in Haley's *Roots*. Moreover, Bedford perceives the ritual as a communal performance rather than assigning it to a single patriarchal head. Elizabeth Okoh's *The Returnees* (2020) begins with a reference to this ceremony, but the narrative does not fasten itself to such practices with the motive to venerate ancestral roots. In *Not with Silver*, the naming ceremony is seen as the only semblance of traditional African practice carried on by the enslaved black family. After fleeing from the white master's plantation, the family

decides to restore an integral connection with their homeland by resuming the performance of such practices. Therefore, with an auspicious note, the family begins their journey back to Africa with the naming ceremony of Epiphany's daughter. Big Mo presides over the ceremony because she is the only member who has not been baptised a Christian and therefore, as her companions believe, the only person who can appease their ancestors. Before the ceremony is held, an atmosphere resembling an African setting is created by the women, where "the whole family had gathered among the summer fragrance of Tabitha's herbs and lifted the child to the sky, slowly turning to the four corners of the earth: north; west; south and lastly east, home of the rising sun and Africa" (Bedford 207). All members give a new name to the baby stating its significance and recite chants that express reverence for their ancestors. Johnson names the baby "Africa" in memory of "her grandfather Cornelius" and Elizabeth calls her a "warrior" (208).

Similar to Bedford's approach, Aminatta Forna's narrative largely centre stages women's responses to the socio-political and religious changes affecting Sierra Leone. Her insistence on demythologising the Mother Africa trope involves documenting women's efforts in developing political consciousness and the idea of nationhood, in contrast to male-oriented nationalistic ideals. An instance can be cited of the fictional Rofathane village, which is named by Gibril Umaru Kholifa, but created by the hands of women. The women characters in the novel are portrayed as strong matriarchs, entrepreneurs, and political activists who are part of a polygynous family. The novel begins with Abie's 'return' to Sierra Leone to inherit the last trace of her ancestral coffee plantation in Rofathane. Her 'return' is the beginning of her search for her past history, and it is revealed to her through the stories of Abie's aunts, namely Asana, Hawa, Serah, and Mariama, and the stories of their mothers and grandmothers. The narrative embodies multi-layered stories in the voices of these four major characters, who take Abie back a few generations to the African female ancestors of her family in order to create a space that links the past with the present. The women that Forna portrays are denied agency, power, security, love, and even basic amenities such as food. They are mostly women who are clumped within the traditional African setup as co-wives, widows, and single mothers. However, there are also stories of women like Asana, who take a decisive step to remarry after her first marriage fails, become a famous businesswoman dealing in clothes, and finally join the secret society of the *mambores*.

Besides, as the political upheavals in Sierra Leone unfold, women are seen taking a primary role in striving to organise a peaceful polling session. Four years prior to the independence of the country, Serah presides over the first ballot elections held in their region, but the surprising win of Sulaiman Bio, a representative of the People's Progress Party, reveals the façade of democratic ideals and fair public election propagated by the government. The narrative expresses this through Serah's realisation, who had filled up the ballot box "creating signatures" and "fictional thumb prints" because nobody came to vote for fear of being killed by rebel soldiers (174). Again, in 1996 the Presidential elections are held during a curfew, but Serah and other women volunteers are posted to supervise the session. Similar to the earlier episode, at first no one arrives to exercise their political right. As polling officers, this time the women are determined to undermine the threats of the armed soldiers of the One-party state. Hence, Serah and the women started humming a woman's song, "one that we were taught by our elders, we used to sing it on the way to the river with our water jars and again on the way back when they were full and heavy" (272). Once the humming reaches the women waiting outside, they join in the song and walk inside to give their votes. Gradually, other people too participate, quiet and scared in the beginning, but "when they saw us going about our business, when they saw how our will had triumphed over the soldiers who now stood uselessly to one side…they took their voting slips and pushed their thumbs into the ink pad with a flourish" (273). The narrative's reference to women's involvement in politics is indicated to demonstrate their circumscribed position in a society that predominantly exercises patriarchal domination. However, the women's attempt at resisting the military forces and successfully conducting the Parliamentary elections in Rofathane, suggests a positive move towards change which was witnessed in the eventual end of the decade long Civil War in 2002. A reference to these significant political events where African women plays a major role, is deliberate on the part of black British writers, who seek to highlight the work, thoughts, and conversations of women, rather than limiting them to the symbolic role of representing the nation. They strive to bring attention to women's contributions, challenges, authority, organisational roles, and everyday interactions. These narratives not only empower black women, but also expose alternative dreams and methods of understanding that challenge dominant systems of knowledge creation.

The novel also describes the rise of rebel soldiers and rebellious workers which ensues a harrowing violence and destruction of shops, small-scale factories, and even the

Kholifa estate, leading to the dispersal of families to different places. Hawa finds herself amidst such violence during the 1991 Civil War and ends up in a rescue camp for soldiers. There she meets emaciated women who are offered boxes of cosmetics instead of food. Kept as prostitutes for the soldiers, these women receive differential treatment in contrast to Hawa, who occupies a financially privileged status and used to enjoy the benefits of post-colonial transformation in Sierra Leone. An evidence of this is the existence of a sugar cube in her bag that she offers to one of those women. Again, among the four aunts, Serah and Mariama gets the opportunity to travel to America and England, respectively. While they both narrate stories of hostility, Abie resonates with Mariama's state of unbelonging when the latter expresses, "I know what it is to forget who you are. To feel the pieces falling away. To look for yourself and see only the stares of strangers. To search for yourself in circles until you're exhausted. And I wonder if my story means something to you" (213). Unlike Serah, Mariama does not have the company of familiar faces from home to connect with in London. Therefore, Abie relates with Mariama's experience of alienation that is caused by displacement. As already stated in the study, a recurrent theme in black British women's writings is the depiction of black migrants and their descendants experiencing a psychosis, which emphasizes their distinct characteristics of isolation, loneliness, self-criticism, denial, and self-doubt. These migrants are seen as being in a state of perpetual exile due to the strong sense of unbelonging that they feel in the host land. It is this feeling of discomfort caused by their relocation that ignites a desire for self-exploration and a reclamation of one's roots or past.

Serah, on the other hand, projects the radical black politics in America that stands as a contrast to the neo-colonialist stance of black people. Serah's husband and a would-be barrister, Ambrose is a literal demonstration of the 'coloured' intellectual that Ambalavaner Sivanandan discusses in his book, *Catching History on the Wing* (2008): "an artefact of colonial history, a marginal man par excellence. He is a creature of two worlds, and of none…. At the height of colonial rule, he is the servitor of those in power... Outwardly, he favours that part of him which is turned towards his native land" (3). When in England, Ambrose critiques the attitudes of ordinary African people and their cultural values and maintains the principles of a Westernised individual. However, when he is forced to return to Sierra Leone because of the lack of financial support from the British educational system to continue his studies, he readily assumes the role of a

neo-colonial "African man" choosing infidelity over his committed relationship, and drafting new authoritarian laws in the Attorney's office, which Serah comments was meant "to take away our freedom little by little" (Forna 233).

It is evident here that men mostly figure in Forna's novel as religious fanatics, dominating husbands, neo-colonialists, nationalists, or military pawns of the dictatorial regime who attempt to impose "oppressive rule in the garb of tradition" (Harsch 136). Afrocentrists like Mudimbe have critiqued such influences and linked them to nationalists like Hountondji, Cheikh Anta Diop, and Amady Ali Dieng for adhering to "colonially inspired ideologies" like Marxism (Harsch 137). Mudimbe holds that metaphors of an egalitarian society that form the basis of Marxist theories are a myth. Forna's novel breaks this myth by portraying the class distinctions between the Kholifa family and the indentured labourers, who were debtors and were hired to work for the family till their debts were cleared. Again, the polygynous family structure, prevalent in African societies, is also not a simple and egalitarian one. Hierarchies existing between the husband and the wives were evident not only from the gender roles in the family but also from the structure of the houses. For instance, as mentioned in Serah's narrative, her father lived in a square-shaped house, and his wives, including her mother, in round houses. Likewise, even the wives and the co-wives had a hierarchical position depending on the roles they were assigned in the household. The senior wives had important decision-making roles like paying wages to the workers, holding the key to the store, hiring servants, and deciding who would travel or stay with her husband when he went on business trips. However, women also seem to defy hierarchal systems existing in an African polygynous family structure by supporting each other. There are instances where senior wives share experiences with younger wives, and spend a vibrant life of their own at the back of the house – "the secret place where women meet" (Forna 35). In her narrative, Asana too recalls "the back-of-house laughter, different from the submerged giggles and half-smiles hidden behind hands at the front of the house" (22). In Hawa's description, co-wives were "women with whom you take turns to cook. The women you give whatever is leftover in your own pot. The women who are the other mothers of your children, who suckle your baby when your milk has dried up unexpectedly soured" (65). Such instances signify that though these women were not as politically literate or opinionated as men, the fact that they prefer to operate amidst a harmonious closed community, states their rejection of corrupted and dictatorial state apparatuses which

disturb that harmony. The community spirit among women in Africa, which is firmly ingrained in tradition and cultural values, highlights a shared responsibility in the distribution of resources and responsibilities. Moreover, these ideals transcend beyond the immediate family to cover broader networks of women in communities, where they engage in economic operations, social gatherings, and decision-making processes via collaboration. The concept of solidarity is of utmost importance in the process of empowering women, promoting resilience, and safeguarding cultural legacy in many African communities. They also help to preserve cultural memory and significant historical events that diverge from male-centric records. Black British women authors emphasize the collective spirit of African women, since it allows black women migrants to establish a connection with their country and come to terms with the collective trauma of enslavement, socio-political cataclysms, and racial antagonisms. The lack of intergenerational transmission of values and solidarity among women results in a fragmented sense of identity, as discussed in Chapter 4 of the study.

Again, women in the novel defy the idea of tracing history through time by stating that they "remembered years by the things that happened. Important things" (Forna 37). The utilisation of myths and legends derived from folklore, as will be elucidated in the subsequent paragraphs, serves to illustrate the emphasis placed by black British women writers on reconfiguring their historical narrative. The act of chronicling and retracing history is pivotal in comprehending their past and shaping their future. It not only serves as a means of recording and safeguarding cultural heritage, but also unveils previously undiscovered connections between events and illustrates the evolution of societies over time. For black British women writers, these processes hold great significance as the struggles, contributions, and their overall experiences of black women have consistently been disregarded by presenting them in a context devoid of historical context. Consequently, through the use of a storytelling method, as evident in the selected novels, these writers endeavour to establish alternative ways of chronicling and retracing history. Since the process of documenting history is primarily male-centric, by making this statement Forna directly challenges the ahistorical identities usually assigned to women in men's writings. Besides, her novel also suggests the possibility of an alternate democracy that is already in continuance in traditional African practices. The secret society of the *mambores* among indigenous communities of Sierra Leone, where women control and dictate statutory issues, can be cited here as an instance. In *Ancestor*

Stones, Forna's reference to the *mambores* shows her attempt at destabilising the patrilineal mode of an administrative order that pervades most writings authored by men. The narrative describes the *mambores* as:

> …these women who had already married and borne their children, women of age and wisdom, who had earned a kind of respect and whom the society honoured with their title…*mambore*…From the day a woman joined the men's society she would be called Pa, give up her creel and learn to use a line and hook, exchange the stool at the back of the house for the hammock at the front, swap her snuff for a pipe. And she relinquished her place in the society of women…[they] lived as men. (246-7)

It is to be stated that the point of mentioning this traditional administration is not to be seen as providing women with substitutive positions of power. It rather seeks to state that women's centralised subject positions, that has been suppressed by patriarchal systems, have re-gained their focus through an alternate use of Ali Mazrui's 're-traditionalization'. The narratives indicate that this has been made possible by a conscious allusion to nativism and specific indigenous practices. As active builders of the nation, African and Caribbean women seem to sustain a sacred and organic Africa that incites the 'return' for black British migrants. Altogether, attempts are made also to transmit practices needed for the sustenance of the same.

Such practices are evident in Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* too. The novel is a recollection of Jama's memories of a young boy in Somalia, who travels from East Africa to Britain, first in search of his father and eventually for his own fortune. Tracing back to the 1930s, the plot recounts the horrific results of the war between Britain, France, and Italy for the scramble of Africa. Through Jama's recollections, we witness the presence of strong women characters: "Jama's favourite stories were about his grandmother Ubah, who travelled on her own as far as the Ogaden desert to trade skins, incense, and other luxuries despite having a rich husband" (Mohamed 53-4). The memories of his grandmother portray her exploratory and enterprising spirit that defies categorical perceptions of women dependent on male members. Some of these women also possess shamanic powers through which they exorcise women afflicted by "saar" (63). In the novel, women who have been cheated and abandoned by their husbands are thought to be under the possession of evil and therefore exorcised and cleansed of their

past. Jama's experience of the war at such proximity and the gratitude of the women that he meets despite the crisis, led him to realise how "strong women were better leaders than strong men. With the Italians he had learnt how to destroy but the women of Gerset had taught him how to create and sustain life" (254). By narrating the history of conflicts and colonial conquests through Jama's perspective, the writer subverts the general representation of women in simplistic maternal roles. Instead, Mohamed hints at the "regenerative force of women" in these war-torn spaces (Wisker 30). The existence of the village of Gerset seems like a faraway land untouched by the brutality of the colonial forces. This is particularly made possible by Nadifa Mohamed's reference to Amazonian women who are the sole inhabitants of the village. Struggling through unpredictable natural disasters and the unavailability of resources, the women have learned to create a community, where kinship ties and social cohesion work parallelly.

African women also repeatedly figure in the novels as storytellers and testimonials of history. As stated in *Not with Silver*, Elizabeth's stories have been "handed down from her grandmother's grandmother" and talk about a past that "conjured worlds of mystery and magic, where spirits could be summoned, where people changed their shapes at will and animals could speak" (Bedford 208). The personal accounts and the socio-political history of Sierra Leone told by Abie's aunts in *Ancestor Stones* incorporate stories of oppression and resilience they had inherited from their mothers and grandmothers. Likewise, in the prologue of Evaristo's *Lara,* the narrator Servina, who is enslaved in a sugar plantation in Brazil in 1849, recounts the events of her tragic death and how her "raptured body" transformed from the fire to a spider, a bird, a tree, a seed and then "was carried over the ocean" (Evaristo 17). The reference to these myths and stories from African folklore amidst contemporary struggles draws attention to black British women writers' attempts at historical and political revisionism. In the case of Bedford and Evaristo, it also suggests tracing the trajectories of historical and cultural traditions through African women. As mentioned in *Lara,* it is Servina who protected and "watched over" her later generations till their time on earth (17). Likewise in *Butterfly Fish,* it is the masterfully crafted brass head, which possessed the power to wield the curse of death and destruction on the lives of three generations, that holds "sacred representations of ways of life long gone. They held within them tales of war and combat, tales of love, of fertility and prosperity and more" (Williams 90). It speaks of the

craftsmanship of the artist, who imbibed those skills handed down from his ancestors to reproduce such icons and "symbols of worlds of meaning" (90).

In other words, black British women writers demonstrate how "the retrieval of counter memories, of subjugated knowledge, which are thought to lack a history, functions as a challenge to the taken-for-granted normative assumptions of prevailing discourses" such as colonial, postcolonial, and even black nationalism (Mirza 5). For these writers, storytelling as part of retaining the cultural memory of Africa indicates a generational continuity and "keeping women's memories of the nation's histories alive" (Gagiano 53). Hence, by emphasizing "women's *work*, thoughts, and discourse and not confining women to the symbolic role of carriers of nationhood", these women writers attempt to "'presencing' women in their labour, their achievements, their struggles, their authority, their organisational roles, and daily dealings", and consequently, in re-writing male-driven, racialist narratives (Gagiano 50). These narratives, in a way, along with giving agency to the black female subject also reveal "other kinds of dreams" and "ways of knowing" that distort hegemonic forms of knowledge production (Sudbury 1, Mirza 5). Through such forms of writing, the idea of collaborating African mysticism with feminine ideals is consciously transferred through generations and along diverse geographical spaces. In the words of Gay Wilentz:

> Throughout the African diaspora, women writers are in the process of unscrambling the letters and (re) naming her story; their work gives utterance to the formerly voiceless members of their communities – the wife, the barren woman, the young child, the mother, the grandmother, women friends, female ancestors. They see their existence as a continuum from their ancestors to their descendants. Their aim is to find a usable past… based in the oral tradition of their foremothers. (389)

The phrase 'usable past' draws attention to those historical moments in time to which black British women writers have referred in order to attest their belief in African mysticism. The writers have attempted to celebrate the simple, primitive, rural life, but particularly focus on the experiences of women. The picture of the village life and the household is not portrayed as egalitarian as a simple rural life is usually imagined, but it does suggest some sort of equanimity preserved and maintained by the women through a performance of ritual and religious duties. This means that while dealing with the pagan

and the pastoral, the writers seek to evoke feminine principles that are not mystical or abstract but definite. They try to trace and connect with the lived experiences of women, who "appropriate codes of the dominant culture and *creolizes* them, disarticulating the given signs and rearticulating their symbolic meanings otherwise" (emphasis original, Mercer 255). Thus, in the next section, the chapter will examine instances of traditional rituals and nativism practised by African women as a means of healing and recuperating for black British individuals.

IV

The term nativism has been used here to refer to traditional African religions whose beliefs and practices are either disassociated from established religions like Christianity or the Islamic religion or are an amalgamation of both. Here, the focus will be on how black British women writers strive to draw attention to the importance of traditional religions in Africa by emphasizing the everyday lives of the characters in the novels. This traditional religion involves the use of pagan symbols, totems, and references to spirit animals which the characters believe will rescue them from evil spirits. What these novels are trying to portray is that "African fetishism in its ultimate analysis is not such a debasing and degrading superstition as is generally believed by Christian thinking nations of the West" (Ellis 117). It was the manipulative strategy of the missionaries which depicted the African traditions in a degrading light. Countee Cullen's "Heritage" also gives a glimpse of such imaginations when the narrator states: "I belong to Jesus Christ, / Preacher of Humility;/ Heathen gods are naught to me". This again reiterates the representation of Africa's heathenism in contrast to Western civilisation. While the narrator is a product of the West, the inherent nativism that he draws from his ancestral origins, posits as an obstacle to his further development of character. However, the chapter observes that if Africa represents heathenism, then the African women portrayed in the novels of black British women writers advocate a different form of heathenism that not only rejects the autocratic, parochial dogmas epitomized by African men, particularly seen in the case of *Ancestor Stones* but also builds upon feminized and value-added beliefs. Beryl Gilroy in *Gather the Faces* extends this version of feminized heathenism in the Caribbean context with hybrid characteristics to exemplify the idea of continuity of traditions. Other than being entrepreneurs, political activists, and heads of administration, African women also figure as storytellers,

herbalists, seers, and fortune tellers through the traditional knowledge attained from their community of female ancestors. As seen in Forna's novel, the Christian missionaries spread out to Africa with the agenda of saving the dark souls of the indigenous people, who engaged themselves in pagan practices. Consequently, a ritual of baptism and re-naming the converted African or "pagan babies" takes place (Forna 132). In her dream, however, Mariama sees Kassila symbolically reminding her of her roots. The times were changing and the villagers who were initially unhappy with the advent of the nuns, start sending their children to the missionary school for education. Western education and Christianity are portrayed in contrast to traditional or indigenous beliefs of the different tribes in Sierra Leone, and by stressing the significance of the latter, Forna exposes the exploitative undertakings of Catholicism that were part of the colonial enterprise. Through Mariama's narrative storytelling, the Temne folktale of Kuru creating Heaven and Earth, and black people and white people, is re-told. The story also recounts the details of how black people led themselves to their downfall by falling into the trap of white people. During her stay in the missionary, Mariama is constantly found making comparisons between Kassila and Christian gods. Finally, she settles with St. Christopher and wears a medal of his image. However, in a moment of epiphany, Mariama foresees a disaster that will engulf her people. She sees images of dead bodies floating in the river and the graveyard of her ancestors opening up. As an act of surrender, Mariama throws her medal towards Kassila, who emerges from the river to take the medal and protect the people from the forthcoming catastrophe. Annie Gagiano remarks on Mariama's state as a "mythical-cultural awareness" as she perceives the betrayal of Africa and its mysticism by its own people (53). Like Forna's reference to West African mythology and folktales, Evaristo too mentions the Afro-Brazillian religion, Candomble, to suggest the hybrid syncretism of different West African religions that happened during the time of slavery. In *Lara*, Taiwo's grandfather, Baba who is enslaved in Brazil, meets an old man named Agostinho who calls himself "babalao", a Caribbean and Brazilian Portuguese term meaning the 'father of mystery' (Evaristo 178). Agostinho performs the role of a healer, seeking knowledge from the African deities and conveying messages from 'home' to migrants like Baba. In context to this, Baba's identification as a "Catolico" stands as an incongruous aspect draining away the strength of the slaves even as they spoke about it (178). The effect of Islamic dogmas had a similar impact on indigenous African people, particularly women.

African societies had already been influenced by the Islamic religion before the scramble for Africa in the nineteenth century took place. According to George W. Ellis, "Many of the African races accepted the tenets of Muhammad during the reign of Usif Iben Tashfin, the founder of Morocco, as early as 1062 A.D." (105). Again, V. Y. Mudimbe states that from the "sixteenth to the eighteenth century, missionaries were, all through the new worlds, part of the political process of creating and extending the European sovereignty over newly discovered lands" (152). Africa was, thus, a battleground not only for various countries but also for different religions. The followers of these religions sought the conversion of the Africans because they believed that "African paganism teaches many superstitious beliefs and is founded upon the false hypothesis that man is surrounded by malignant and invisible spirits and that he must make regular sacrifices to them so that his life and fortune may be secure from their injury and revenge" (Ellis 116). For instance, in *Ancestor Stones*, traditional African religion and its practices are shown as superstitious and therefore forbidden by Islam. Mariama's mother practicing pagan rituals is juxtaposed with the Islamic traditions practiced by her husband, Gibril Umaru Kholifa, and the society at large. There are references to Haidera Konterfili, the religious fanatic, whose dictates bring drastic changes to the Rofathane village.

> No more drinking palm wine in the village. *Haram*. Instead, the old men sat out near the fields late at night passing the gourd from one to the other… all matters connected with the old religion: charms, even the beads mothers hung around the waists of little children. *Haram*. Offerings of cakes and kola nuts at the graves of the dead. *Haram*. Dancing, drumming. *Haram*. The secret gatherings of women. *Haram*! (Forna 54)

These restrictions affected the women in a more extensive way because it withdrew whatever discreet ways of resistance they devised against the regressive, gendered practices. One such practice is female circumcision, which is described by one of Abie's aunts, Serah, as a moment of initiation when they became a woman (Forna 111). While extreme Islamic ideologies restrained their daily traditional practices, such atrocity against women was not considered so much as a social issue to be called *haram* or prohibited. Even the British, who are termed as 'pothos' in the novel, bring in new laws against the superstitions or pagan practices the villagers followed. As a result, male

herbalists like Pa Yamaba are seen relegating their pagan objects in their "back room" and readily converting to an established religion like Islam to maintain their spiritualism (71).

The trope of 'possession' states the significance of African mysticism alluded to in the novels. In Simi Bedford's *Not with Silver*, Epiphany has a "gift of 'sight'" that she inherits from her paternal aunt, Oluremi (Bedford 149). Despite being born away from her ancestral homeland and never having met her father's family, Epiphany possesses the unique ability to 'see' things, which can be associated with both the ancestral and cultural inheritance of traditional knowledge. When she is eight years old, she tells her father that "she had 'seen' the ships – 'sea coffins'… the people buried in the darkness…captives chained together in a line that stretched back across the ocean all the way to Africa…" (148). Reporting for her first day of work at the big house, Epiphany "refuses to enter, declaring she 'saw' flames. The fright this gave the mistress, and the uproar caused among the house servants, had prompted the child's immediate banishment to the fields" (149). The fear of the white mistress denotes the absence of such knowledge in traditional beliefs of the West and therefore its relegation to demonic qualities. Here, Bedford seeks to reappropriate traditional knowledge that is generally devalued in Eurocentric discourses.

> It was not the Devil, Delilah thought. She saw once more in her mind's eye the image of Epiphany dancing, and remembered what Cornelius had said at her birth. The child was his cousin come back. It had not been Epiphany dancing at all. Delilah searched her memory and found the name – Oluremi. With delayed insight, she realised it was the ancestors who had manifested themselves, come to reclaim the sacred rites. (182)

The transformation and possession of Epiphany determine the beginning of her journey as the preacher/orator in mobilising the enslaved blacks to return to their homeland. This is to mean that it is this power of transcendence that aids Epiphany in producing a *nommo*. Epiphany's possession by her past continues till they begin their journey to Africa. She is aware that through that ancestral knowledge mysteriously transferred to her since the event of 'possession', she will lead her people to their homeland and narrate an alternate story of freedom, instead of the white man's story of slavery. Thus, when they finally board the ship, after her father's sudden death, she sings a eulogy she never

heard before, but had been "hidden in her memory. She spun the verses of her father's oriki into shining loops that spanned the widening distance into the shore. Epiphany sang and sang, weaving line by line, strand by strand, a shroud fit for the body of a fallen warrior" (Bedford 204).

Similar to Epiphany's experience Joy in *Butterfly Fish* is also possessed by the past, but in a more literal than a metaphorical sense. Okojie uses the magic realist form to amplify the trope of 'possession' and to portray how it shapes black diasporic characters' idea of one's origins. After her mother's death, when Joy inherits an amount of eight thousand pounds, a house at 89 Windamere Avenue, a brass head carving and the diary of Peter Lowon, her grandfather, she is overwhelmed by the discovery of facts she did not know about her mother. Immediately after her inheritance of these objects, Joy is followed by a woman wearing an old, African wrapper, who then haunts her house and gradually even possesses her. The woman's outlines also appear in her photographs, in such a way that gradually even erases Joy from some of her pictures. Joy is unfamiliar with the woman's presence and her connection to it, and therefore, she initially describes it as a 'strange infiltration', 'uninvited guest', 'intruder', and 'mysterious entity' at different times. Here, a direct connection can be drawn to Paul Gilroy's notion of 'new racism', where a language of war/violence stimulated by xenophobia is instilled in race discourses. In Okojie's novel, Joy, a black British woman describes the spirit from Africa as an outsider due to her apparent disconnection from the past and the impossibility of finding it after the loss of her mother. The generational gap materialises through Joy's psychological issues, and, therefore, a return is necessitated, to an Africa comprising of resilient women sharing a communal spirit, so that Joy can reclaim her history and also resolve the trauma of her past generations. However, as the 'entity' becomes a constant presence, Joy accepts it as a part of her 'self' and even names her Anon. Anon's sporadic possession of Joy, transports the latter to Oba Odion's palace in 19th-century Benin. During one episode of being possessed, Joy finds herself barefooted walking along a long dusty road and reaching a huge compound gate, where guards look at her as someone they already know. She also asserts that she feels familiar with this place though she does not remember visiting it before. In another episode of possession, Joy escapes a near-death accident but loses her right arm. Lying in the hospital bed, she is possessed again to witness the brutal death of one of her ancestors. She is suddenly transported to a different temporal and spatial frame and finds herself trapped in a kind

of procession, where an African woman and a white man are being dragged by men wearing traditional attire. This knowledge of Benin's history is placed parallel to Joy's personal history. Like in *Lara*, the past, through the manifestation of Anon, occupies a compelling presence in the life of Joy, revealing repressed memories. Joy's 'possession' by Anon from the past reminds her of the gruesome fact that her mother tried to kill her and that she had already travelled to the traumatic past of Benin, as a child, in one of her sleepwalks. Nevertheless, being almost sinisterly summoned by the past to redress the cursed legacy, Joy finally 'returns' to Benin and buries the brass head in the abandoned place where Oba Odion's palace once existed. After the burial, the burden of the curse is released as Joy heals from her sleeping disorder and feels like herself again. She stays in Mama Carol's boarding house, apprentices as a tailor under a woman, and assembles an odd combination of embroidered images into art. Her creation of those artistic pieces despite her physical disability, becomes an example of wonder for the local people. Even then, Joy is still reminded of her impulse to continue her strange habit of ingesting stones as a voice in her head tells her that they tasted different in Africa. Yet, the fact that she prepares a wholesome meal of lamb soup, a recipe that she learns from the African woman, Mama Carol, states that Joy has not only reconciled with her personal past but also appeased the spirits of her female ancestors of Benin.

Contradictory to Joy's experience, however, in *Ancestor Stones* when Abie meets with her past, she undergoes an emancipatory feeling, particularly when she inhales the coffee berries on the plantation. She learns from her aunts that the feeling is described as the 'Rothoron' where she is transported to a place that is "neither the past nor the present, neither real nor unreal…the gossamer bridge suspended between sleep and wakefulness" (Forna 10). A wholesome experience of the Rothoron is only completed when Abie understands the significance of her aunt's stories, which are infused with traditional maxims, analogies distinctive to the Africans, their rituals, and community life, particularly the solidarity of the women. In the novel, women's involvement in rituals delegates a potent source of value to Africa. For instance, Serah performs a ritual of pouring "a libation over the first seedling" and chants a "short impromptu prayer" during the coffee planting season (316). The practice signifies the idea of Rofathane as a sacred place, appropriating the biblical image of Eden. The sacredness of 'origins' is also emphasized through the ritual practice of invoking ancestors through the use of totems

and pagan symbols. In Forna's novel, one of Abie's aunts, Mariama notices her mother murmuring chants:

> The name of my mother's mother. Of my grandmother. Of my great-grandmother and her mother. The women who went before. The women who made me. Each stone chosen and given in memory of a woman to her daughter. So that their spirits would be recalled each time the stone was held, warmed by human hand, and cast on the ground to ask for help. (56)

Forna refers to the ritual of invoking as an act of chronicling history through women's lineage. For Mariama's mother, this ritual is as important as her existence because when her husband seizes the stones and forbids her to continue with the practice, it devastates her. The imagery of stones, that Mariama's mother collects, is significant here. Prince Sorie Conteh, in his thesis "The Place of African Traditional Religion in Interreligious Encounters in Sierra Leone Since the Advent of Islam and Christianity" (2008), mentions that among indigenous communities like Mende, Temne, and Limba of Sierra Leone:

> The spirits of the dead are represented by stones placed at each burial in a shrine…. a closest surviving family member later inherits each stone. This tradition is meant to ensure that the spirit of the deceased is visited and that timely offerings are made to him/her. Also, it is to prevent the stones in any given receptacle from losing their significance on account of the inability of any living member to identify them. (54)

The inheritance of ancestral stones, P. S. Conteh points out, also continues along patrilineal lines. Hence, Forna's particular focus on matrilineal descent and the transfer of stones to a second-generation British migrant asserts her Afro-diasporic feminist positioning. Again, in *Black Mamba Boy*, the reference to Jama as 'Goode' by his mother, which means 'black mamba', draws attention to paganism. Jama's mother, Ambaro recollects: "Your father just laughed at me, but when you slithered out with your beautiful dark skin and you smell of earth, I knew what your name was meant to be" (Mohamed 13). The black mamba can be seen in the novel as the spirit animal, which protects Jama and guides him throughout his journey within the war-torn continent and across the Atlantic. In addition to this, the amulet Jama receives at the time of his

mother's death also functions as a source of hope to help him in his search for his father. Pagan practices and beliefs were a significant aspect of Somali people, even those who had migrated to different parts of Africa, particularly Aden. This is made evident when Jama recalls how "his ancestors had been crow-worshippers and sorcerers before the time of the prophet, and the people still kept tokens of their paganism. Precious frankincense and myrrh still smouldered in the same ornate white clay urns; black leather amulets hung from the chubby wrists of infants" (Mohamed 49). Interestingly, Jama, who had been spiritually and mysteriously protected from the violence and atrocity, himself becomes a "totem of former hope" for the people of Gerset (199).

One of the most significant pagan symbols repeatedly alluded to by black British women writers is the imagery of water and its symbolic healing properties. In Evaristo's *Lara*, on one hand, water symbolises fear and manipulation when Taiwo warns Ellen that her mother will douse her "with water/ then run a live electric wire over your body" (Evaristo, 95). On the other, it symbolises innocence when Taiwo says that "You do not see evil in this world/ That is why I love you. You are spring water" (95). The imagery of water is also used here to refer to a sense of home, belongingness, and therefore a safe, protected space. For instance, when Lara's great-grandfather Baba recalls Mae's comforting presence after being sold to slavery, he uses the imagery of a river and states that "Mae had been the river I swam in. The river held me, kept me buoyant. I trusted the river" (172). Again, after Kehinde dies, Taiwo wishes to go "back to the water"/womb of his mother in order to unite with his twin sister umbilically (64). Taiwo's desire, as Stuart Hall states, to "'return to the beginning' is like the imaginary in Lacan – it can neither be fulfilled nor requited, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery" ("Cultural Identity" 236). His longing for his "lost origins" also seems to allude to the gendered symbolism of Africa, but Evaristo revises it by incapacitating the character of Taiwo and instead initiating his literal 'return' through his diasporic daughter, Lara Da Costa (Evaristo 236). The figurative role of Lara as a descendent of African matriarchs and her 'return' journey, also suggested through her ancestral name 'Omolara' which means "family flows like river", is to be noted here. The fact that Lara and her family are intrinsically connected to the sea, river, or the Atlantic is made clear in the Prologue itself when their ancestral grandmother, Servina dies. After her brutal murder by an overseer, she is metamorphosed into a spider and then into a seed and is

"carried over the ocean, burst into life" (17). Lara, who is presumably birthed out of that seed, is "grieving the sea she had left behind" (98). As a result, during her grandmother's death, as "the sea began to surge, rushed into my ears…words formed by waves and wind", Lara senses the sea gesturing her to 'return' to it (154). The waterbody functions as an integral aspect of a character's birth and death, and thereby, a means to trace history. In contrast to these instances, Okojie applies the water imagery to denote a source of a disturbing memory. As pointed out by Kelsey Ann McFaul, in *Butterfly Fish* water initially operates as "the conductor of the curse's repetitive violence", seen through the episodes of suicide by drowning, but when Joy buries the brass head and holds her father's diary seated underwater, the violent signification turns into a protective surrounding allowing her to accept the personal and collective memories of her past and to formulate a diasporic subjectivity of her own (52).

In the novels, the imagery of sea/Atlantic/river is also used to emphasize the sacredness of sharing a collective past and cultural memory. For mothers, the sea reminds of separation from their sons, and for migrant individuals, it functions as a messenger that binds their link with their roots and the past. In *Lara*, for example, when Taiwo receives his mother's letter, he remarks that "the sea carried it here" and his mother, Zenobia, is often found looking towards the sea waiting for his return (112). The chapter argues that the trope of water significantly enables character development and re-negotiation of the characters' national and cultural identities. In *Ancestor Stones*, Forna emphasizes this through the bathing place, where Abie's aunts and the women of the village partake in a communal sharing of space. This place has a special significance in the novel because it acts as a catalyst for transforming characters into self-conscious individuals. Most turning points in the narrator's life occur in the bathing place; Serah's mother, while bathing, is seen by the villagers fixed eye to eye with the young unmarried man and this changes her destiny. Asana meets a woman from the *mambore* bathing alone and being addressed with respect as 'Pa' and this starts her journey of becoming one. Through Mariama's narrative, there is a reference to an African mythical character named Kassila, also known as the sea god, which has a potent influence on her in delivering a renewed sense of identity. The figure of Kassila is seen as the protector, reminding the people of Africa of the essence that lies in indigenous values and beliefs.

Again, Abie at the end of the novel bathes in the same river partaking in the ritual that her aunts have been doing for years. The river as a sacred place for the women transforms Abie. At the beginning of the novel Abie expresses a feeling of disconnectedness or a "drifting melancholy", which made her strain her ears for the voices of her ancestors, but after listening to the stories of her aunts, her experience of her native land turns into a "treasure trove of memories" (Forna 10, 315). Therefore, for Abie, the first bath in the sacred river signifies a sort of baptism, giving her a new insight into her black identity that she possesses as a British citizen. This chapter differentiates this sort of baptism from the one Ellen undergoes in *Lara* before marrying her Nigerian boyfriend, Taiwo. During the ritual, as the "baptismal water fills her head" she "feels pure once more, her resolve is born" (Evaristo 67). Ellen's resolve to marry Taiwo comes from the prejudiced Catholic ideology of absolving African souls from darkness, therefore, it is distinguished from Abie's experience. Moreover, the river mentioned in *Ancestor Stones* is not associated with a particular religion or God per se. It is used to concentrate on the feministic principles of solidarity and sisterhood which are passed down through generations just like the sacred ancestral stones that Asana's mother inherited. The reason for this is that the imagery of water draws references to one of the four pagan symbols, which suggests feminine energy and the ability to unite and share ancestral stories like the women in Rofathane. Towards the end of the novel, Abie even imagines her four aunts bathing in the same river and transforming into "water maidens" (Forna 316). Here, Forna probably alludes to Mami Wata, a water deity, widely venerated by people of West Africa and the diaspora. Associated with Western images of a mermaid-like figure, this water deity derives its power both from the healing and destructive potential of the river. Allusions to Mami Wata suggest Forna's conscious attempt at drawing from African nativism and indigenous beliefs and practices of communities in Sierra Leone. As suggested by Brenda Cooper, the half-human, half-fish figure of Mami Wata "occupies a suggestive crossroads between rewritten African myth, the material and mutation" (152). This idea can also be associated with the shape-shifting ability of Lara's ancestral grandmother, Servina. Moreover, the old babalao's mention of the sea goddess Yemanja in the context of Afro-Brazilian religion indicates the allusion to multiple histories of slavery, along with the infusion of diverse cultures and practices. Thus, black British women writers' reference to water in relation to women constructing congruent black diasporic identities hints at the idea of fluidity and mutability that goes beyond the concept of hybridity in cultures.

In *Lara*, Evaristo demystifies the idea of the margin and the centre and shows the other picture of racism outside Europe. This phase, as Kamali states, is "emancipatory" for Lara for she is now able to accept her mixed-race identity (233). The chapter contends that this emancipatory phase is intrinsically associated with the episode of bathing/swimming in the sea or river that occurs multiple times both literally and metaphorically. Lara describes her relationship with Josh through the imagery of swimming in the sea, where Josh's limbs are waves, but when she is cheated by him, she sees a nightmare that she is "stoned into rivers" (Evaristo 147). In another episode, when Lara escapes on a road trip to Turkey, she goes for a "midnight dip" to the sea and watches her old 'self' "fall off in bits" and "swept out by the tide" like debris. With the reassurance of the creation of a new 'self', she emerges from the sea with "the sum of all [her] parts" (150). Again, after travelling to Lagos and then to Brazil to re-visit the stories of her ancestors, she takes a shower in the "brown river water" of the Amazon and instantly feels a connection to her roots, as she "becomes [her] parents, [her] ancestors, [her] gods" (187). For Lara, it is not merely finding her 'self' in Africa but the cultural memory of Africa buried in the metaphor of the river/sea/Atlantic that is important. Therefore, the imagery of the river or the sea act as a catalyst in giving both Lara and Abie a sense of fulfilment and transfigure into individuals conversant with their hybrid identities.

In *Black Mamba Boy*, though there is no ritualistic revival of bathing in a sacred river, Jama's first travel across the Atlantic on Runnymede Park is portrayed as a defining moment for him. His encounter with the refugees from Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Treblinka and how they recall Palestine "as a kind of paradise where orange trees grew and birds sang", make him reflect on his homeland and his people (Mohamed 252). The closer he goes to Britain, the intensity of remembering his past, his mother, and his wife, grows. Jama believes that as he "devoured all the seeds that the pomegranate world would offer", he is prepared to father his son and pass on his experiences and the stories of his ancestors (278). In *Fruit of the Lemon* too, instead of one moment of a rite of passage, Faith encounters a series of psychologically and culturally enriching experiences, by listening to the stories of her maternal heritage, travelling in and around the confined settlements of Jamaica and, most importantly, honouring the graveyard of her ancestors. Like Marvella in Beryl A. Gilroy's *Gather the Faces* (1994), who perceives certain aspects of her ancestral homeland sceptically but is

also content with the fact that "we were immigrants no longer. Outsiders no longer. This was home, where my children would be born", Faith too feels confident after the discovery of her complex Caribbean history and its relation to her British identity (110). Faith realises that her awareness of her heritage and identity is not a shared moment of celebration for Britain when she sees fireworks on her return to London on the eventful Guy Fawkes Night, but she is determined to face the hostilities by filling the historical silences through the stories of her ancestral past. Her acceptance of the past not only includes the fact that she has ancestors who were enslaved but also the fact that some of them were slave owners. The completion of Faith's journey is symbolised by the completion of the complex family tree at the end of the novel, and the assertion of her desire to replace her childhood memories with an alternative story, where young Faith is more self-assured and well-informed of her origins. The story ends with Faith achieving a sense of liberation, where she succeeds in comprehending the complex relation of her cultural identity in Jamaica to her British national identity. Thus, in the novels, the physical travel and cultural memory of Africa, the notion of crossing the Atlantic, and the ritual of bathing in a sacred river act as a healing process for the characters through which they not only connect to the past but come back whole.

The idea of beginning the journey from a place of the unknown is a common feature in black British women's fiction. Along with it, Africa is not only unfamiliar but also, sometimes subtly, detested. The sudden 'tightening in the gut' Abie feels at the thought of Africa, Faith's unwillingness to listen to her parents' stories of the past and Joy's perception of Adesua's spirit as a foreign object, are all examples of Africa or the Caribbean being regarded as strange, due to prevalent misrepresentations by media and mainstream society. These characters therefore can be seen as prodigal daughters who go back to their homelands seeking to reclaim their cultural identities. The fact that lineage, and the transfer of myths and traditions through it, hold substance is repeatedly established by these writers, and as Stuart Hall claims, their work too seems to advocate the fact that:

> …cultural identity is after all fixed by birth, inscribed in our racial being, transmitted through kinship and lineage. Slavery, colonization, poverty and underdevelopment may force people to migrate, but each dissemination, we believe in our hearts, carries the promise of a redemptive return. ("Diaspora" 49)

Like Joy's jumble of images, Faith piecing together "little scraps of her past", and the idea of weaving patterns from diverse histories mentioned at the end of Bedford's novel, not only provide a therapeutic ending to the protagonists but also evokes the idea of 'patchwork' in Lubaina Himid's artwork as mentioned in Chapter Two of our study (Levy 4). Fragmented stories form an essential feature of rediscovering history and in the novels of black British women writers, it is reflected through the use of multiple narrative voices and subjectivities.

Thus, to sum up, Black British women writers seek the need to re-create the past lived experiences of African women because portraying the glories and achievements tag along with it the iniquities of "centralised state apparatuses", which has been a matter of critique and fear when discussing the future of the continent (Derricourt 136). However, they do not envision a pre-history that hinges on "tribalism and tribal identity" – a corollary Derricourt suggests in his critique of Basil Davidson's work on the African past and the failure of modern nation-states. The point of departure that these writers suggest, other than the old/new mythic/modern dichotomy, is an assimilation of traditional practices (which are already hybridised by multiple interventions) into modern nation-states for a stable form of governance. The transitions from pre-colonial to post-colonial have been drastic and over-simplified explanations such as failure of liberalism or democratic form of government should be re-visited. The writings of black British women are significant because they imagine an African past beyond the one of "centralised power, wealthy trade routes dominated by powerful potentates and symbolic architecture that could only emerge through the centralised state" (Derricourt 130). Instead, it is nativism and traditional African practices, as a potent source of community-building, that offer women writers an alternate way to negotiate their sense of 'crisis' as socially and politically marginalised individuals in Britain. In the same way, the use of that traditional knowledge to restore younger generations from their prevailing ailments is communally shared. The primary objective then, of the black British writers, is to dismantle polarised representations of Africa and embrace an inclusive idea that dismantles border-oriented discourses of modernity. Along with this, these writers are also concerned with how "women have passed on their cultural heritage to future generations" by emphasizing "folk roots, collective experience, and oral traditions" (Wilentz 389). Abie's daughter listening to the "talking" ancestor stones, Joy's creation of transformative art in Benin, Lara's decision to symbolically paint "Daddy People onto

canvas with rich-colour strokes", Epiphany's "swift vision" at the end assuring her of her son's future- are examples that state the potent presence of an African past in the lives of these black female migrants (Forna 320, Evaristo 188, Bedford 356). Besides, these black female returnees also inherit the memory, endurance, and resistance of their ancestors by documenting and passing on their stories. As black diaspora feminists, black British women writers, therefore, can be said to have formulated "a new humanism for gendered black subjects nationally and globally" (Hua 35). They question and cross-examine aspects of "humaneness" in relation to black women as racialized, sexualized beings, and in this way, through the novels, "rethink the meanings of emancipation" (35).

The chapter concludes by stating that, it is the physical and metaphorical 'return' to the geographical space and cultural memories of Africa that aids in recuperative measures and present new perceptions of a "global hybrid identity and the future of multicultural Britishness" (Toplu 12). The 'returns' to Africa may have been mediated by external forces but are sustained by women's inherent capabilities of recreation. In cases where limitations are present in the form of patriarchal, capitalist, or Eurocentric agencies, black women's journeys back to the homeland are robbed off their healing properties, and consequently a sense of belonging. Thus, in the succeeding chapter, our study will explore how a 'return' to Africa is rooted in the rhetoric of rejection.

Endnotes:

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[1] The dictionary meaning of the term 'ragamuffin' is a street urchin. However, in Jamaica, the term denotes the music of 'ghetto dwellers'. It is considered to be a subgenre of dancehall and reggae. In the novel, Ambaro remembers her husband, Guure as a musician, and before beginning the story Jama too asserts that his father was a raga-muffin. This is an indication of cultural transmissions that come with migration.

[2] For communities in West Africa, 'teriya friendship' means a relationship where younger men take responsibility for widowed women.

[3] Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and Stuart Hall in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1994) discussed this in detail.

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