Chapter Four

‘The Point of No Return’: Africa as a Site of Traumatized Pasts and Dispossession

I

This chapter explores narratives by black British women writers that reject the representation of Africa as a safe space or a 'promised land', and depict physical 'returns' to such places as evoking a sense of dispossession. Unlike the previous chapter, here, visits to the 'homeland' are seen as a traumatizing event, and in certain cases, triggering a disturbing past that precludes the journey. This chapter will examine Joan Riley's *Unbelonging* (1984) and *A Kindness to the Children* (1992), Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994), Diana Evans' *26a* (2005), Delia Jarrett-Macaulay's *Moses, Citizen & Me* (2005), and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House* (2007). The chapter uses the term 'visit' to denote a temporary travel to the homeland and the sudden change of events that proceed later. In this chapter, the study also specifically examines narratives that represent Africa as lacking its healing properties. As stated in the previous chapter, black British writing incorporates the trauma of displacement and leaving their homeland as one of the major factors haunting black diasporic individuals and inciting in them the desire for reconciliation. However, what differentiates the 'returns' discussed in this chapter is that a physical visit to the homeland and the actual perception of reality have their destabilising effect on imaginary constructions of 'home' and eventually on "migratory subjectivities" (Davies 1). Hence, the chapter argues firstly that an underlying idea of 'rejection of home' dominates the narratives on homesickness and unbelonging, wherein a rejection of 'home' is translated to a rejection of the homeland i.e., Africa. In the case of Caribbean migrants, a detour from the myth of origins in Africa ensues a similarly disturbing experience. This chapter explores how these writers engage with recent debates on the rhetoric of race by reconstituting it with economies of gender. In *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994), Carol Boyce Davis posits that while migration, nostalgia, and a rejection of home incites a desire and a "rewriting of home" – a place that remains a "contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation" – it "doubly disrupts the seamless narrative of home and so of nation" (113). The association of home and 'alienation', as conflicting as it might seem, is certainly a material fact and has been explored by contemporary black British women writers. Narrating stories of home, then, becomes a political statement, as the construction of the idea of a nation and who belongs in it, are both intrinsically related.

Secondly, the political upheavals, social disintegration, and economic recession in the 'homeland' are intensely described as interrupting the characters' chances of reconciling with their unhealed past and unpleasant present. In the novels, it is seen that the idealised and romanticised images of 'home' are shattered during physical visits to the geographical space. Hence, the chapter also argues that by presenting the cultural, social, political, and psychological conflicts in the homeland, the quest for 'return' in black British women's writing suggests a withdrawal or a confrontation, both without means of reconciliation. Here, the role of the narrative voice in projecting this sense of rejection is crucial as it determines the characters' imminent triumph or adversity in their search for 'home' and belonging. The rejection, as will be evident in the chapter, is not a forthright denial of Africa as a geographical space but the ideological constructions of Africa as an ancestral homeland and the nationalist ideals created by male-dominant Afrocentric and nationalist movements.

The discernible effects of diasporic dislocations demand a more nuanced debate on such myths of 'return' that goes beyond merely representing the oppressor-oppressed dynamic. How do black women negotiate with their race, gender, and class, when they occupy positions of power? Under what conditions or at what cost do black women venture to achieve their goals? How black women as embodied in their maternal roles seek to redefine spaces of belonging for themselves and their children? These are some of the questions addressed in black British women's writings that distinguish them from those of black British male writers. For instance, the storyline of both Caryl Philip's *Strange Fruit* (2019) and Bola Agbaje' *Belong* (2012) revolves around similar projections of the homeland as a space defined by fragmentation and contradictions while dealing with family conflicts and generational trauma at the same time, yet the difference between them lies in their treatment of women in the endeavour to revisit and critique post-colonial construction of 'home'. In Philips' play, two black brothers, Alvin and Errol in their twenties simultaneously hold conflicting and idealised pictures of their homeland. While Alvin is a liberalist, Errol is a radical black nationalist and perceives Africa as a mystical entity, largely represented by Haile Selassie. On Alvin's return to Jamaica, to perform their father's last rites, he is faced with denunciation from his family members. Errol expects him to come back with an enriching experience of 'African unity', to be disseminated to their diasporic brothers but is rather disappointed at his arrival. In his imagining of a 'return', Phillips presents their single mother and

schoolteacher, Vivien Marshall, as crippled by hypocritical black nationalist ideologies characterised by her sons. Perceived from the dominant patriarchal lens, Vivien is seen as a failure for restraining from speaking about the past, and as a consequence, adding to both her sons' disconnect from their roots. However, what is neglected here is the fact that a victim of the system herself, Vivian is even unable to help Errol's white girlfriend when he abuses her. The issue of oppressive patriarchal tendencies in black men like Errol, further destabilise black women's struggle for liberation. In *Belong*, Agbaje rather seems to target the foundational principles of African and black cultural or political nationalist ideologies, that are based on certain essentialised concepts and, which eventually lead to the failure of the men. The women characters, particularly Kayode's Mama and Rita, act as financial and emotional support systems for the male characters but also crucially break from the conventional image of women as insignificant in the patriarchal family setup and lacking any agency. Unlike in Phillips' play, Agbaje stresses the fact that Kayode's failures are typically a cause of his egoistic whims rather than the larger social and political project he seems to display in London. In both representations, black men are commonly seen working for the liberation of their race and Africa from Eurocentric characterisations but at the same time also maintaining an authoritative role in personal affairs.

In terms of rejection, this chapter observes different ways in which black British women writers express their relationship with their homeland and their past. The rejection of Africa as 'the myth of origins', particularly by black women writers of Caribbean descent, is one of the most prominent. This is portrayed by focusing on the cultural and political differences between the African and the Caribbean people. In this regard, black cultural expressions sometimes act as divisive factors instead of fostering a sense of solidarity. Separatism, based on religion and place of origin, has perceptively been considered a setback in the progression of the 'Back to Africa' project. Tidjani-Alou points out that "Back to Africa" indicated one way through which the conflict between an African and a Caribbean or a West Indian identity seemed to be "resolved" by "claiming the legacy of Africa in our phenotype, language, and culture" but it designated "*Africa itself* a valorized shelf in the past" (150). An instance of a political approach stating a rejection of Africa is Malcolm X's advocacy of the Islamic faith and his rejection of black theology. Unlike the Pan-Africanists and Rastafarian believers, Malcolm X's politics involved the formation of a 'black unity' in America instead of

Africa, though he did draw religious references from Africa's history and conceptual genesis. Similarly, literary suggestions of differences between Caribbean and African people are mentioned in opposition to the idea of Africa as a place of origin for all black people and the homogenous projection of black popular culture. The dominance of Caribbean culture in Britain, including reggae music, Rastafarianism, and shebeens, has been noted to play a hegemonic effect over a variety of black ethnic groups. However, an attempt to express difference, as Bibi Bakare-Yusuf argues, "always threatens to disrupt any effort to construct a notion of the 'black community' or a uniformed 'black experience'" (81). Despite the consequences, black women writers have repeatedly sought to articulate their differences to focus on the aspect of multiple subjectivities. For example, Louise Bennet's poem "Back to Africa" elaborates on the complex identification of the Caribbeans with Africa. Being a black woman from the Caribbean, Bennet refuses to 'go back to Africa' by asserting Jamaica as her homeland. In the poem, she uses syncretized Creole to state that, "You haf fe come from somewhe fus/ Before you go back deh", which shows her rejection of Africa as her place of origin. Hyacinth in *The Unbelonging* engages with similar debates surrounding the West Indian identity, which is simultaneously weighed alongside her friend, Perlene's opinions regarding black politics and Pan-African nationalism. The protagonist, Hyacinth's idolization of male political figures of the Caribbean and her fear of black men in reality offers a critique of the romanticized visions of her homeland. However, the Caribbean region's complex political connections with Britain and France and its alternatives for resistance augment the formation of a distinct Caribbean identity with its creolized cultural roots. In *Rewriting the Return to Africa: Voices of Francophone Caribbean Women Writers* (2011), Anne François also examines novels like Maryse Conde's *Heremakhonon* (1976) and *Traversee de la Mangrove* (1989) where the protagonists, Veronica Mercier and Francis Sancher respectively, reject the idea of historical and cultural reclamation and after a failed return to Africa, accepts Guadeloupe as their home. Guadeloupe, an island group in the South Caribbean Sea, is a French overseas region and has the predominance of creolized culture. Maryse Conde, a French novelist from Guadeloupe who situates her works amidst the prevailing male writing tradition in Francophone Caribbean literature, presents creolization, which originated in the Caribbean setting, as a space for alternative creative resistance. Like Riley and Nichols, however, Conde too perceives Creole itself as problematic and proving disadvantageous for a black female returnee's journey of self-discovery.

Other than the cultural differences, black British women writers have also articulated their rejection of the homeland/ native land by emphasizing the generational differences between the migrant characters. Joan Riley's depiction of Hyacinth in *The Unbelonging* (1985), particularly puts focus on the experiences of the first and 1.5 generation of black women migrants. As Andrea A. Davis points out in her article "Un/belonging in Diasporic Cities: A Literary History of First-generation Caribbean Women in London and Toronto" (2019), these writers represent "a narrative of un/belonging, marking their distinctive relationship to the settler colonial state and the British empire as an ongoing search for independent self-actualization" (18). Though Davis's observation concerns only writers with Caribbean origins, the chapter states a similar bearing for writers with African origins too. The unique position of these writers, of having personal memories of their homeland and being displaced from it, allocates them the ability to both "critique colonial imperialism and the family as the bedrock" of the Caribbean/African nation, and find alternatives to counter racialised and gendered dynamics in the host land (18).

In addition to this, since writers like Joan Riley and Delia Jarrett-Macaulay spent the early years of their childhood in their respective homelands, Jamaica and Sierra Leone respectively, their imaginary reference to Africa is seen to begin from a place of familiarity, unlike in the previous chapter. However, the point of departure in their novels lie in the sense of unbelonging and dispossession present in Joan Riley's. The protagonist, Julia in Jarrett-Macaulay's *Moses, Citizen & Me* is distanced from her place of origin, but acknowledges her Afro-British identity and England as her home, unlike Hyacinth. Such 'return' narratives specifically point to the present-absent state of the ancestral homeland and consequently, the fact that it is unattainable. This is to mean that the idyllic conception of the imaginary space is substituted by the reality of the geographical space. In the same way, traumatic and violent incidents from the past, that remain either consciously or unconsciously suppressed, are replaced by an extreme sense of alienation in the host land.

David Borman in his dissertation, *Literature of Return: Back to Africa, Belonging and Modernity* (2014), specifically examines diasporic writers' rejection of Paul Gilroy's assertion of "diasporic modernity" that "relies on Africa remaining atavistic and out of the realm of modern" (4). These representations of rejection are also essentially centred

on breaking the mythic conceptions of Africa as possessing an ancestral astuteness that usually relegates Africa's past as frozen in a primordial state. In Borman's terms then, Jean in *A Kindness to the Children* also rejects Africa by describing the figure of her dead grandmother "like an ancient piece of history" or an "old Ife sculpture… lost to Africa as those long dead sculptors of the bronze… at the museum in London" (Riley 29). Though this imagery constitutes a measure of glorification, it takes a somewhat pessimistic turn in second-generation black women's writings where Africa is epitomised by the figure of the old grandfather in Diana Evan's *26a* and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*, representing a primordial Africa exhibiting obsolete cultural traditions like considering the birth of twins as an omen and, therefore, killing them. Such narratives subsequently "detach from the pervasive logic that Africa – as a cultural and narrative signifier – remains a powerful yet obscure cultural origin forever in the past" (Borman ii). Likewise, in *Moses, Citizen & Me*, Moses' photographs of Africa include "ladies in bustles leaning against Grecian urns", "prosperous turn-of-the-century costumes", "centuries-old Freetown, buildings that now had lost its glamour", and basically images that were a "world away from the chaotic Freetown of today" (Jarrett-Macaulay 44). In these images, there is an evident difference between the existing reality and the imaginary idea of the past, which appears more real than the present. Jamaica Kincaid also articulates the consequences of such a rift in the 'idea' and the reality of a space, in her essay "On Seeing England for the First Time" by stating that:

> The space between the idea of something and its reality is always wide and deep and dark. The longer they are kept apart – idea of thing, reality of thing – the wider the width, the deeper the depth, the thicker and darker the darkness. This space starts out empty, there is nothing in it, but it rapidly becomes filled up with obsession or desire or hatred, or love… (37)

In the case of Hyacinth too, the delay of her 'return' to the reality of Jamaica obfuscates her sense of belonging either to her native land or Britain. In context to this, Borman states that "while going 'back' to Africa initially encodes return as a trip to a previous time, the actual encounters with Africa… engender… often ambivalent recognitions of African modernity" (9). In novels like Andrea Levy's *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1997), Diana Evans' *26a*, and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*, the myth of a physical return to origins itself is considered inconsequential. In these narratives, the host

land where the black migrant characters have settled is favoured over the ancestral homeland. In Levy's *Every Light*, the rejection of roots is portrayed through the perspective of a second-generation black female character who makes an effort to assimilate into the British social fabric by erasing ancestral bearings. While this is mostly seen among first-generation migrant parents of the protagonist, Angela herself shows no intention to reclaim her cultural identity either. Angela tries to lose her "cockney twang" and expresses aversion towards "black food" (Levy 88). In fact, like her parents, she too adopts silence as a defence mechanism to avoid unnecessary attention from the hostile British society. However, she realises that she "knew this society better than my parents…I had grown up in its English ways. I could confront it, rail against it because it was mine – a birthright" (Levy 88). Despite possessing more rights as a British citizen than her parents, Angela fails to gain access to proper health facilities for her father when he is terminally ill. Similar to Levy's affiliation to Britain, Caryl Phillips' reference to T. S. Eliot's *Little Gidding* in the epilogue of *The Final Passage*, which states that: "History is now and England", reflects Phillips' observation of his past and present by positioning himself within England.

In Levy's novel, Angela's light-skinned complexion heightens her longing for the white Other, but these efforts to assimilate create in her a false sense of self. Angela's condition can be described as common to 'pass for whites', who live in a state of self-denial. Rebecca Hall's 2021 film, *Passing*, is set in 1920s Harlem and revolves around the life of a mixed-race woman named, Clare, who disguises herself as white and marries a white man. Such narratives problematize the concept of racial purity and defy the idea of authentic blackness, concerning black women's bodies as vulnerable and subject to change. Clare's ability to 'pass' is an indication of the liminal space that she occupies. Instead of being part of an either/or dichotomy, she achieves a sense of belonging among both black and white circles of acquaintances, dominated mostly by men. Her 'pass for white' body, exoticized as desirable and unachievable at the same, is placed against the discourse of racial-sexual politics in America. In the case of Angela, her 'pass for white' state leads her to question her blackness as Andrea Levy remarks in her essay, "Back to my Own Country". Levy questions, "Didn't you have to have grown up in a 'black community'? Didn't you need to go to the Caribbean a lot? Didn't your parents need to be proud of being black? Didn't my friends need to be black?", to justify her lack of identification with the idea of blackness as a social reality (10). For her, the political

signification of being black and its social meaning differ from each other and, therefore, complicate a black individual's understanding of it.

Unlike in *Every Light*, though the narrative in *26a* shows a temporary visit instead of a 'return', it is enveloped by a repressed cultural past which acts as an impediment to the protagonists' acceptance of their multicultural identifications. However, similar to *Every Light*, *26a* presents Britain as 'home', viable particularly for second-generation migrants who are twice displaced from their ancestral pasts. Oyeyemi goes forward to revisit the history of the enslavement of black people in Cuba and further obfuscate the recovery of Africa's cultural memory through a black female protagonist whose past and present are enmeshed with multiple cultural metaphors and historical details. First-generation writers like Buchi Emecheta, Beryl Gilroy, and Grace Nichols write narratives that are less ambivalent in their rejection of Africa, but second-generation writers' expression of this rejection involves the use of dreams, 'otherworldly' visitations and tropes that suggest their perpetual sense of rootlessness and an attempt to create alternate spaces of belonging.

Similarly, writers like Sharon Dodua Otto, whose ancestral origin is in Ghana but was born and brought up in London and presently settled in Berlin, represent in her novella *the things I am thinking while smiling politely* (2019), the rejection of Africa not only as a physical space but also Afro-centrism as a means to negotiate her hyphenated Black-British identity. The narrator in this novel disregard the significance of her maiden name, not only because she does not know how to "bend and squash" it "to suit English tongues", but also because, according to her, "leaving it to freely expand across my lips in its full tonal glory would simply underline even more how much I do not belong" (Otoo 10). Quite conveniently, when she leaves England for Berlin, she marries a white German named Till Peters to make the surname, "so unambiguously of the country he was born, raised and lived in", her own (10). She is eventually trapped in the whole dynamics of being betrayed by her partner and the inability to perceive her husband's lover as anything beyond an "illegal immigrant" (90). The ambiguous nature of the narrator's political standpoints and self-identification, insinuates Otoo's position as a black British female writer who chose to live in Germany, despite obvious racial and sexual discrimination[1]. Like the narrator, who feels "caught between the names of two men who have abandoned her", Otoo's attempt at dealing with these two racially hostile

places, is equally disorienting (11). Moreover, unlike Conde, Riley, and Nichols, Otoo does not have the choice of a Caribbean space to translate the contradictions and heterogeneity in a second-generation black woman writer's subjective experience.

Including the stated representations of rejecting Africa, in the following three sections, the chapter will explore other specific ways by which black British women writers reject the construction of Africa or the Caribbean as a possible place for 'return'. Accordingly, in the first section, the chapter will discuss how black British women writers have used political satire and social commentary as a tool to justify their disturbing and destabilising reflection of the past. The visits to the homeland in association with identity politics are problematised in the novels through a return to a specific time frame when Africa and the Caribbean began to form itself as political nation-states.

Again, the mythical image of Africa is often associated with national rhetoric that is gendered. Hence, in the second section, the chapter will elaborate on how Black British women writers challenge the gendered allegorization of Africa by problematising the role and representation of mothers as eternal godmothers or the 'superwoman', of silenced or absent mothers, and the pathologizing of deviant mothers as bad mothers. The chapter argues that, instead of a subversion of the gendered imagery, the writers re-examine and contextualise these imageries based on the specific social/communal and familial norms. In fact, the disrupted longing for maternal bonding is represented through a failed return to the homeland. The concepts of motherhood, 'othermothers', and mother-daughter relationships are therefore seen as the primary elements that make up these complex stories of migration and diasporic connections of the writers. Besides, even the idea of "othermothers" or the "Afrocentric ideology of motherhood", which according to Patricia H. Collins exists in African American communities, is denied in Black British women's writings (326). The socio-political transformation in Africa and the Caribbean reinvigorated an oppressive model of gender biases that substituted the Eurocentric idea of black womanhood as 'jezebels'. The failure of returning 'home', thus, demystifies the presumed expectation of a therapeutic revival for dislocated migrants. This is because going back to the ancestral homeland or native land means going back to the regressive social and cultural order, in which the identity and social meanings of women are determined in relation to men.

Despite, the eschewal of the reality of a "violent, abrupt, ruptural break" from history, the black British characters show a constant desire to go back to an unchanged, idealised past. This disregards the presence of a hybrid existence in the homelands (Hall 49). On the concept of cultural hybridity, Homi Bhabha asserts that though hybridity had its successes, it still remains an "ambiguous, anxious moment of transition that accompanies any mode of social transformation without the promise of celebratory closure or transcendence" (Bhabha 14). The reason lies in the fact that it "insists on displaying... the dissonances of power or position that have to be confronted; the values, ethical and aesthetic, that have to be translated, but will not seamlessly transcend the process of their transfer" (14). Such an inconsistent transfer of values and tradition is the ground under which black British writing's rupture from the ancestral past is mostly exaggerated, as evidenced in recent scholarships like Leila Kamali's *Spectres of the Shore*: *Cultural Memory of Africa in African-American and Black British Literature* (2017). However, except for mentioning the absence of a potent vodoun tradition in black British fiction in comparison to African American fiction, Kamali hardly elaborates on the temporal frame and the waves of voluntary and involuntary immigration patterns that might be pertinently rooted in this absence. Unlike the black settlers in America, African and Caribbean people's massive influx to Britain only began in the late 1940s, a time when both places had already undergone a hybrid change in their traditional practices and social systems. The cross-cultural exchanges with the coming of Asians have greatly altered the socio-cultural scene of these regions, particularly the Caribbean islands. To assume that a return to roots will be accompanied by purity and authenticity without contradictions is a fallacy in itself. Hence, the third section of this chapter examines how hybridity, as one of the by-products of modernization, fails to provide grounds for identification in black British women's writings, and a possibility for negotiation of identities despite their cross-cultural experiences. Along with it, there are instances of black women practicing New World religions, particularly Obeah and Vodoun, in the host land that challenge Kamali's claim of its peripheral implication in black British literature. The relevance and meaning of these practices, performed by black mothers in the novels, do not translate in the same way for their mixed-race daughters, particularly in the latter's journey of acknowledging their hybrid connections. In context to this, the chapter observes the use of mixed-race twins and an 'otherworldly' manifestation of cultural and historical trauma as a consistent trope to justify the writers' rejection of a simplistic understanding of racial

mixing. The 'otherwordly', demonstrated through possession, "inhabitation" and visitations, is a reflection of "repressed African pasts" or "suppressed Africanness" (Borman 57, 60). S.I. Martin's *Incomparable World* (1996) and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) also deal with the historical trauma as a collective memory, but explicitly resonates with Paul Gilroy's institution of Africa in a nexus between traditional and modern. For black British women novelists, the chapter argues, the centralised subject position of Africa engenders multiple readings of the geographical space as well as its relation to diasporic subjectivities. The haunting presence of historical and cultural trauma, including the trauma of patriarchal oppression and abuse not only as personal encounters but also transferred through their mothers, is displayed in the emotional and physical experience of the weaker twin. As evidenced in *26a*, the weight of the trauma affecting Georgia, both physically and psychologically, demands a transgression. Thus, in this section, the chapter will also explore how the thematic application of a failed return further opens up possibilities for alternative images of the homeland, other than the misogynist kind, and enables the writers to negotiate with their multifaceted and fragmented hybrid identities.

II

Home as a physical space and its imaginary constructions function as a primary subject for black British women writers, who grapple with issues of displacement and, thereby, a sense of homelessness. When 'returns' back to the homeland are attached to unpleasant episodic encounters, the definitions of home as a safe space itself become convoluted. Likewise, Stuart Hall states in opposition to the idea of Africa as sacred, by remarking that Africa has been "violated: not empty but emptied…. Far from being continuous with our pasts, our histories are marked by violent, abrupt, ruptural break…our 'civil association' was inaugurated by a brutal act of imperial will… the legacy of life lived in a remorselessly racialized world" (49-50). Thus, tracing back the history of their homelands, black British women writers of both African and Caribbean descent, commonly refer to the decade of the 1960s and the 1970s to justify their present state of contradictory identifications and disregarded existences. The use of political satire and social commentary as a tool allows the writers to challenge the hierarchal setup of Caribbean and African societies that is regulated by the oppressive patriarchal legacy, mainly benefitting its active agencies. Here, this chapter perceives the common

focus on this time frame as intentional because it has been the transformative decades for countries in Africa and the Caribbean and their changing geo-political relationship with Britain. The tussle between cultural, nationalist groups and political leaders to form a viable system of governance, including the neo-colonial influence of Europe, alternatively resulted in disrupting the consciousness of a collective struggle against imperialism. At the same time, black British women writers have also attempted to display the parallel socio-cultural developments taking place in London during the same period. Instances can be cited from Donna-Daley Clarke's *Lazy Eye* (2005) which gives reference to the upcoming Notting Hill Carnival, Thatcher's governance, Diana Ross's songs, and soundproof shebeens, along with the personal tribulations of the characters. In the novel, Clarke also symbolically attempts to portray the interconnectedness between personal and the political when a black, female character named Harriet arranges her dining table using "Welcome to London placemats", in which Buckingham Palace has a place at the head of the table and the Houses of Parliament on the right.

The social and political issues pointed out by these writers have been discussed separately based on the regions concerned. For this purpose, the section first analyses novels that are set in the Caribbean and then goes on to examine novels set in Africa. The chapter observes that black British women writers tend to look back at their native land as a place of contradiction and conflict. For example, Grace Nichols' *A Whole of a Morning Sky* (1984) represents Guyana as a place dealing with such political and administrative chaos. Amidst the chaos, the everyday lives and struggles of the womenfolk take a backseat. All politically inclined male characters are projected as caricatures of the political leaders of Guyana, who led to the country's independence and its first free elections in 1964. The novel takes a satirical approach to re-writing the political history of the country but presents the role of women characters as circumscribed. A clear distinction is made between the patriarchal Britishness that is upheld by Guyanese men and the domestic Caribbeanness represented by the women. In context to this, it can be stated that social systems that are patriarchal in nature, not only oppress women but also exclude them from taking an active involvement in socio-political engagements.

In Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985), the political and social chaos is portrayed as a distant memory of the protagonist, Hyacinth, who left Jamaica for

England when she was at a young age. Set in the 1980s, the narrative provides details of the political scene in Jamaica since its independence in 1962. The reference to the Independence Day celebrations in Hyacinth's dreams speaks of the contrasting political and social environment in reality. The work is a coming-of-age novel that also represents the rise of national consciousness in Jamaica. However, the references to Manley, Seaga, and Dr. Walter Rodney, again draw allusions to the complicated relationship of the Caribbean islands with Britain and Europe at large. The novel provides a glimpse of the conflicting political ideologies shared by the major characters, particularly during a heated argument between Hyacinth and her university friend, Perlene. Hyacinth's lack of political consciousness is displayed in various instances. While Perlene supports a pan-African ideology by seeking solidarity with Africans, Hyacinth rejects it. In fact, instead of reviewing Manley based on his political activities, Hyacinth assumes that he is a good man because "he had beautiful skin and the sort of 'pass for white' colour she had always wanted" (Riley 111). Not only does she dismiss her African origins, but also consciously avoids her association with Africans. She wishes that Perlene's friend, Tom, was at least West Indian, though "she hated his accent, the way he always seems to dress like an exaggerated English gentleman… sipping gin and tonic and talking about the African revolution" (113). In fact, she considers herself a West Indian instead of an African and detests Afrocentric movements that, according to her, turn back to the "primitiveness" of the continent (113). Gradually, she accepts the fact that "her people" originally came from Africa yet cannot accept them as equals (113). Her superiority stems from the idea that she undoubtedly belongs to the West Indies and its culture.

In her naivety, Hyacinth ignores the presence of racism in Jamaica and therefore, is unable to relate to Walter Rodney's lecture when he states the reality. To state in David Ellis' words, "Hyacinth's unwillingness to accept a real and changing Jamaica is at the same time an unwillingness to accept her real self" (155). The bullying and racist remarks by her schoolmates, the grey weather, the concrete surroundings, her father's physical abuse, and his sexual advances – altogether accumulate to generate a deep-seated apprehension and dread towards white people (both men and women) and black men (especially from Africa). The anguish that she goes through is materialised by the "constant burning itch in her toes…the discomfort and pain an ever-present thing" (Riley 37). Hyacinth expresses an ambivalent sense of self-loathing in her, wherein she is repulsed at the sight of black people but longs to be a part of their community at the

same time. In context to this, Anh Hua is of the view that "when black communities adopt two dangerous Western notions – physical beauty and romantic love – without taking blackness into account, we are faced with the traumatic effects and danger of all-encompassing assimilation and integration" (37). Experiencing abuse even at the hands of blacks in the children's home heightens Hyacinth's desire for whiteness as she goes to Highfields to get a makeover. Again, a sense of alienation is manifested through the "permanent chill" that she feels and her movement from the "grey", and "dingy" rooms of the children's home to the university hostels, which she tries to scrub off clean but in vain (Riley 95). It is only after she physically returns to Jamaica, she realises that it takes more than one's skin colour and birth right to belong to a place. When she reaches the shabby house of her aunt, she is immediately met with a feeling of remorse and a sense of unbelonging. Her childhood friend, Cynthia, now weak and sickly, states in a reprimanding tone: "'Yu Auntie doan have long, an is bes she noh know what a dawg yu tun. A tel yu dis as good advice Hyacinth, true we was fren one time. Go back whey u come fram. We noh like farigners ina J.A.'" (142). In this moment of dejection, as Hyacinth goes back to her room in the hotel and sees that the foreign tourists seem to 'belong' in Jamaica more than her, she realises her irretrievable state of rejection from her homeland. Joan Riley, in her novels, represents her homeland from the perspective of being both an insider and an outsider, of being 'othered' and falling into the trap of 'othering'. Her oeuvre critically comments on the hostile spaces of both England and the Caribbean, while stripping the latter of its restorative agencies. Thus, in Joan Riley's other novel, *A Kindness to the Children*, Sylvia, a second-generation and self-determined black migrant, feels liberated during her return to England, in contradiction to Jean, a 1.5 generation migrant like Hyacinth, for whom the "romance of return" itself is denied (Ellis 152). It needs to be mentioned here that the experiences of the 1.5-generation migrants are particularly different because they came with their parents to Britain. They not only experienced the rupture from their islands and the dwindling traces of their parent's generation but also witnessed the germination of a culturally and politically conscious demography in Britain.

Black British writers directly critiqued African politics and its socio-cultural setup too. Buchi Emecheta, who has been publishing novels since the 1970s, often centre staged Africa and particularly Nigeria as the setting and exposed the corrupt governance and bureaucratic system. During the decade of the 1960s, the country became a

Republic, withstood a military coup, and consequently faced a civil war for three years. Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) is based on these events. In terms of economy, the oil boom transformed the entire agriculture-dependent society into a global phenomenon. Contextualised in such a setting, novels like *In the Ditch* (1972), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *Double Yoke* (1982), and *The Rape of Shavi* (1983), all deal with Nigerian women struggling to assert their individuality while negotiating with newly formed patriarchal structures that were induced by nationalist paradigms. Traditional cultural practices like child marriage, bride price, female circumcision, etc., and social issues such as domestic violence, are themes that Emecheta's works criticize in parallel terms with her assessment of men's role in perpetuating them. Again, the constant clash between tradition and modernity experienced by these women is symbolised by the simultaneous change happening in the country. Therefore, education as the primary aspect necessary for the liberation of women is stressed in Emecheta's work. *Second-Class Citizen* (1976) delivers a semi-autobiographical account of Emecheta's life in Britain, her writing career, and her relationship with her husband. The protagonist, Adah's struggle to establish her individual and financial independence stands against both the racist structures of the British publishing industry and the misogynist morals of her husband who draw influence from a man's dominant role in an African/Nigerian society. Though Adah escapes from the marriage and seeks to establish her independent life, the story ends with an ambivalent tone without much optimism.

Unlike Adah, Buchi Emecheta's eponymous protagonist in the novel *Kehinde* (1994), does attain a sense of self-determination and establishes her Afro-British identity, but achieves it only at the expense of leaving her homeland and settling permanently in England. The novel is set in London and Nigeria during the 1960s, a crucial period in the history of black power movements in Britain. There was also a boom in black women's organisations from the 1960s to the 1980s, mostly as a reaction to the supposed chauvinism and lack of gender sensitivity among black males and the middle-class focus of white feminism. Therefore, Emecheta's focus on this period and her insistence on Kehinde returning to Nigeria during this time highlights the conflicting positions Emecheta holds while attempting to project black subject positions in a true light. Kehinde initially tries to be an example of a "good Nigerian woman" by boasting of the elaborate culture of Africa in her husband, Albert's, send-off party (Emecheta 4). She upholds her values by avoiding anything "un-African" and performing her submissive

role, despite earning more than her husband (56). However, the apprehension of leaving the life of social and economic freedom she enjoys in England and returning to the patriarchal society of Nigeria often troubled her. The letter that Albert Okolo receives from his sisters in Nigeria symbolises for Kehinde a life of submissiveness, and therefore she feels an "uneasiness" at the sight of it (6). Despite these specific concerns, Kehinde imagines Nigeria as a country like England that has seen a transformation in gender norms and practices, considering Nigeria's political and economic development. Like Hyacinth in *The Unbelonging*, Kehinde's inability to come to terms with the duality of tradition versus modernity and individuality versus community forced her to create such idyllic spaces. In the process, the disturbing moments from their past are selectively erased to momentarily draw a sense of belonging with their homeland. For instance, Hyacinth unconsciously erases the disturbing memory of another childhood friend, Florence being abused by her father and killed in a fire accident. In the same way, when Kehinde recalls childhood memories of home, she excludes the death of her twin and the threat to her life posed by cultural beliefs. Kehinde's recollections therefore consist of a pervading sense of fear and insecurity of being unaccepted when she 'returns' even after years passed since that incident.

True to her fears, on Kehinde's return when she does not receive the kind of homecoming she had imagined as a "been-to" madam, she realises that the "Africa of her dreams" no longer exists (Emecheta 97). Her image of Africa "had been one of parties and endless celebrations, in which she, too, would enjoy the status and respect of a been-to. Instead, she found herself once more relegated to the margins" (97). In Emecheta's description, the Igbo society is patriarchal in nature and seeks to suppress women in subordinate positions, despite some acquiring economic independence. Nigeria, as a whole, is represented as steeped in neo-colonial principles and the Western idea of materialism. In contrast, England is represented as relatively progressive, or as Kehinde's daughter, Bimpe and her African friends in the novel imagine, "a gateway to Heaven" (Emecheta 121).

Kehinde's travel to Nigeria gives her a first-hand experience of discriminatory practices and urges her to interrogate hierarchal family structures and negotiate gender roles. Carol B. Davies points out that, "home is a place of disorientation and social conformity", and this "problematic space" of a home is rejected by Kehinde (45, 48).

Albert and his mother, as the matriarchal head, are vested with powers to perpetuate and disseminate the patriarchal system in the Nigerian household. For Albert, Nigeria is a place with promises of material achievements and masculine privileges. The patriarchal codes and cultural values benefit him with power over a section of the gendered society. Therefore, even though he had taken Christian vows while marrying Kehinde, he re-marriages immediately after returning to Nigeria.

Lauretta Ngcobo believes that "for most women of Africa, however, the deepest hurt remains polygamy…. African wives are not expected to feel jealous. If they do, they must not acknowledge it or let anyone know" (7). Kehinde is humiliated by these expectations, therefore she resolves to return. Kehinde has the option of choosing a better life because she is educated and monetarily self-sufficient, unlike her cousin Ifeyinwa. As a result of being estranged from her extended family, she decides to go back to London. Her second visit to this location is enriched by a deeper understanding of who she is. She is aware of the racial tensions in London, but she is glad that she is no longer constrained by customs that limit her independence. The moment she reaches London, she "felt a surge of elation. Only a few hours before, still in Nigeria, she had thought the whole world was collapsing" (Emecheta 107). In her analysis of *Kehinde*, Lauretta Ngcobo comments:

> what she (the author) is doing for African women is breaking the taboo, the pretence that they are secure and contended. She denounces this fallacy loudly, and openly shows the social injustices against women and girls, while exposing the complicity of womanhood in the perpetuation of the system. (6)

Kehinde too perpetuates the 'system' until she becomes a victim. In one episode, Kehinde and her black Muslim friend, Moriammo, mock at the strange composure of a bachelor from Jamaica who lodges in the former's house. Additionally, they privately share indecent jokes about him. Kehinde considers herself superior to the lodger's Caribbeanness, which is in contrast to her African glory and splendour. However, after returning to England from her native land, Kehinde marries him. When Kehinde discovers that he perception of Africa as 'home' is flawed, she loses the flimsy sense of commitment to her roots and modifies her traditional approach to the Caribbean. This makes her reverse journey to her former life in London an enlightening experience.

Unlike Kehinde's disillusioned visit to Nigeria, Jarrett-Macaulay's efforts to delineate the history of a war-torn country in *Moses, Citizen & Me* are discernible, but both ultimately culminate in constructing their homelands as a man's land. In the novel, the protagonist Julia observes that her homeland, which should have been a "new Jerusalem" for "descendants of struggle, free and freed, settlers and migrants", now has a history of "belittled ancestors" buried under "bullet-splattered rubbish" (Jarrett-Macaulay 15, 16). Based on the Sierra Leone Civil War of 1991 -2002, the story reminiscences the socio-political period of the 1960s in Sierra Leone and in Britain parallelly, while dealing with the subjective experiences of Julia's family, including her mother and her maternal uncle. In the year 1961, when Sierra Leone gained independence from being a Crown Colony and a Protectorate, Milton Margai was declared the prime minister, but Queen Elizabeth II of England remained the head of the country till it became a republic in 1971. Published posthumously, Thomas Decker's *Julios Siza*, a Krio adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, addresses the need for a democratic form of governance in a newly independent Sierra Leone. A well-known nationalist and advocator of the Krio language during the 1960s, Thomas Decker expressed an anti-colonial stance in his play and appropriated the ideals upheld by British citizens during Roman rule, in the context of British imperialism. Hence, Jarrett-Macaulay's intertextual allusion to Decker's work suggests the former's vision for a possible political approach that the country can adopt to reconcile with its disturbed history. The emphasis on Krio, in a culturally hybrid society, is seen as an important radicalism in both Decker and Jarrett-Macaulay's works. In *Moses, Citizen & Me*, there are also repeated glimpses of newspapers, photographs, and mention of acclaimed Sierra Leonean artists from the 1960s and 70s that reveal the author's attempt at commemorating their work as part of the cultural achievements made during a difficult time.

The novel opens with a Prologue and a cataclysmic depiction of Freetown with "chapels looted, icons destroyed, imam burnt alive, loss of reason, loss of life" setting a grim tone for the story (2). This is the reason why the protagonist, Julia, who is prompted by her uncle's neighbour to visit her homeland, states before beginning her "own journey" that she has been purposely eluding it for a long time (3). The reason for this delay is both the socio-political conflict happening in Sierra Leone and the rift between her and Uncle Moses that has increased with years of separation. Almost reaching

Moses' house, Julia feels an unusual independence as she walks barefoot for nearly a mile, unaware of the foreboding news awaiting her in Moses' decrepit wooded house and its surroundings. The news is that her nephew, Citizen, has become a child soldier of a rebel group and in one of their rampages killed her aunt and Moses' wife, Adele. Citizen, who was initially named George by his parents, was adopted by Adele and Moses when his mother passed away.

Now, Julia identifies as having an Afro-British identity but acknowledges that her physical distance from her ancestral land constrained her from a comprehensive understanding of West African politics. From her childhood memory, Julia recalls African students visiting her house in London and discussing politics, most of them also suggesting a 'return'. Julia's mother, however, reminds Julia to "make things work" in England because it is her home (17). The fact that Julia's affiliation to England is more distinct than her parents or Moses' is stressed by the categorical designation of her childhood pictures in Moses' photo album as 'England'. Perceived through Julia's narration, she is found equally enticed by the stories of "magic, buttercups and flying pig's foot" from Africa that Moses introduces to her (27). On her physical return to Sierra Leone after twenty years, however, she feels a sense of loss, which is epitomised by her strained relationship with her uncle. As she grows up, Julia neither maintains contact with her uncle nor enhances her knowledge about her homeland other than the incidents of war. Therefore, her negotiation with the brutal reality of her homeland is placed opposite her attempt at re-building their relationship, as Moses and Julia both deal with the grief of losing a wife and an aunt respectively. The familial tension can be interpreted as a microcosm of the socio-political conflict encountered by the Sierra Leonean society at large.

Photographs play a vital role in the novel in establishing this imagery of Africa as a failed continent. When Moses is recruited by the civil services to document the socio-economic achievements of the existing government in Sierra Leone, his printed pictures surprisingly capture the looming shadow of a "faintly sketched figure hovering over the head of the president. It was the figure of a small boy holding a gun. In each print the figure appeared – distinct but soft like a breath" (118). Despite consciously choosing to photograph only a pleasant portrait of the country, he is unable to escape reality, just as he fails in safeguarding Citizen from becoming a child soldier and eventually killing

Adele. Citizen's name itself seeks to represent children like him, whose bodies bear the mark of history: "his upper back was covered in marks: his mocha skin…had been cut by beatings and wounded with a knife…I saw the number 439K cut into his back" (46). In Newton I. Aduaka's *Ezra* (2007), the focus on the Sierra Leonean Civil War and the consequent trauma is also witnessed through the life of a teenage boy. In contrast to Edward Zwick's *Blood Diamond* (2006), which reiterates the white saviour logic, Aduaka provides an insight into the psychological and physical effects of the war on an individual level and explores the possibilities of healing within the community. Aduaka achieves this without much exaggeration of on-screen violence and bloodshed, unlike Zwick's film. Like Jarrett-Macaulay's novel and Aduaka's film, Ishmael Beah's memoir *A Long Way Gone* (2007) also gives a first-hand account of the war through a child soldier. Mariatu Kamara's memoir *The Bite of the Mango* (2008) is different from these narratives considering its focus on a female victim, who had been raped and both hands amputated. Though based on the same subject of war, the memoir reflects on Mariatu's struggles and her resilience to lead a meaningful life. With the publication of China Keitetsi's *Child Soldier: Fighting for Life* (2002) and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* in the same year as Jarrett Macaulay's novel, the child-soldier became a recurrent trope used to represent West Africa's social, economic, and political failure and the consequences of this failure on the lives of its inhabitants, mostly villagers. In *Moses, Citizen & Me*, the reference to the war is mostly metaphorical, without an actual description of the incidents of violence, and draws more attention towards the aspect of recuperation for the protagonist, the child soldier, and her uncle.

Jarrett-Macaulay further elaborates on the theme of war and trauma by alluding to a photographic memory of personal and collective histories. Both these histories are enmeshed in an attempt to project the complex relationship between Africa and Britain. Moses, who is a professional photographer, document glimpses of black British people's domestic life by capturing pictures of his niece and the protagonist, Julia's house in London. The photographs, however, from the perspective of Julia, seem to belong to a distant past symbolising an idea of stagnancy compared to Julia's reality in England. The imagery of her dead father's tie that is still hung in the wardrobe, the "bone china and upright piano", and "even the crayon drawings" amongst other objects in her ancestral home that date back to her "parent's time" and her childhood, hint at the "sense of permanence" that Julia experiences in Moses' house and Freetown at large (94, 93).

While being delighted at the sight of familiarity, Julia expresses a desire for a movement that the space of England induces on migrants, which is why she states that "the idea of London was always there in the war-torn yard, like a ticking of a clock" (21). Julia also realises that there was a feeling of stillness and a "permanent tension, which engulfed [her] too along with the encroaching darkness" (18). Yet, she decides to explore the Doria camp in the Gola Forest to understand a child soldier's psyche. Julia discovers that the camp is for rescued child soldiers and is run by an old man and a storyteller named Bemba G. The camp is a part of the Gola Forest which is almost like a magical world in contrast to the reality of her uncle's home. The central sections of the narrative are set in this magical/fantasy world instead of Freetown, as Allison Mackey too observes, which defies the purpose of the narrative's political objective.

Moreover, in the novel, there is an absence of women involved in rituals and communal traditional practices unlike in the novels discussed in the previous chapter. Here, Jarrett-Macaulay highlights the involvement of marginal characters who enable Citizen to experience a sense of healing in different ways. Grandmother Sara's therapy through gardening can be cited as a first instance. Second, is the act of kindness that Citizen received from an ex-army man named Olu. Third and the most significant is Bemba G's attempt at training Citizen and the other children to perform Thomas Decker's *Juliohs Siza*, a Krio translation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The everyday practice of the play itself is therapeutic in the way that it relieves the children from the burden of a difficult past that is borne by their bodies. They gradually begin to narrate their stories as part of their healing. In this process, a forced external intrusion can be disastrous and this is seen in the novel when Julia asks the child soldiers to speak of their experiences. Instead of harmony, the recollection of their past instigates a "web of chaos" where they begin to perceive Julia with suspicion (127). It is Bemba G and his restorative methods like using games, music, dance, performance, and telling stories of the forest, of shape-shifters, and myths, that lead to the child soldiers' acceptance of the violent past that is engraved in their bodies through wounds and military markings. The mark 439K means for Citizen "the mystery of his time in the war", so in order to get rid of it he carves the mark on a "block of wood" and buries it in the ground (162). After the final performance of the play, "peacekeeper trucks" from the UN wait to take the children away with the promise of safety (211). Though there is a sense of reconciliation among the children, their homeland still remains an unsafe place.

Besides dealing with the journey of healing for Citizen and the other child soldiers, the narrative allows itself to "speak the unspeakable" by its allusion to photographs and objects from the past (Jarrett-Macaulay 1). The memories associated with these things translate into emotions for Julia and thereby enable her to empathize with the grief engulfing her uncle's household and the entire nation as a whole. In this sense, the journey to Sierra Leone and then to the Doria camp leads to Julia's recuperation of her memories of her homeland and simultaneously with Moses. Julia's alteration is emphasized through the corn rows Moses' neighbour, a Jamaican woman named Anita, styles on her head. As she gets the new hairdo, Julia engages in an act of re-mapping her homeland and creates an imaginary world of her own. She states that while she was "using this hairdressing ritual to push African 'bush' images in those spaces", fighting back and "gathering memories of London", she was failing (51). Instead, her head transformed into "a map of Sierra Leone, its farmland, diamond mines, mountains, ridges, people, soldiers, fighters, leaders" (51). Julia, a diasporic daughter with an Afro-British identity, performs a potent part in encouraging the change and healing process needed for Sierra Leone. When Isata, another victim of the war, gives birth to a daughter, the child is named after Citizen's grandmother, Adele, and the eternal figure is invoked for her blessings so that "Citizen, Isata and Baby Adele" become her descendants to form a family beyond their bloodline (189). The birth of the child in the middle of the Gola Forest amidst a transitional period of war and change, itself suggests the mark of a new beginning. However, by entrusting Julia with the naming of the newborn baby as Adele, the narrative subjects the future of Sierra Leone to the hands of a diasporic daughter, who has no desire to settle in her homeland.

Towards the end of the story, Julia dreams of taking Citizen back to England and engaging in daily activities like a family. She also helps Moses in restoring their old ancestral house with photographs and new paint but specifically points to the fact that she is involved in the journey of her own self-discovery. Her ambivalence regarding the play and her connection with the rescued war children becomes explicit when she states that "the truth about my other life in Sierra Leone is written on my face" (Jarrett-Macaulay 214). Moreover, despite Jarrett-Macaulay's attempts at representing an Africa where peace is restored, through enactment, story-telling, archiving, and humanitarian activities, the figure of the war-child/child soldier remains voiceless. Citizen's silence, for the major part of the novel, is to be noted here. Being told through the perspective of

a temporary returnee, i.e. Julia, the reality of their myriad stories continues to be untold. Allison Mackey critiques that texts like Macaulay's, "troubles the already troubled relationship between the spaces where child soldiers are being used and those where narratives about them are being consumed" (4). It reiterates the popular image of Africa as a place of "violence, displacement and lost childhood" (Mackey 5). In this regard, William Safran, in "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" (1991), comments that "returnees, particularly from host countries that are more advanced than the homeland might unsettle its political, social and economic equilibrium" (93-4). The setting in the novel is not in a state of equilibrium, but the whole narrative disavows the responsibility of a diasporic returnee for her homeland. It rather concentrates on an individualised journey of self-determinism at the cost of the lives of these child soldiers and the citizens of Sierra Leone who have a first-hand experience of the war and are dealing with the trauma on a daily basis. Julia's conscious venture "to press my Afro-Brit nose into Gola Forest business and discover whether other multidimensional events might occur there" to experience "what does a London-Freetown-Gola Forest adventure look like", speaks of her self-acknowledged sense of privilege that she enjoys (Jarrett-Macaulay 93). When she states that "perhaps something of the war spirit had entered me, a belligerent vitality I did not own in London", Julia's entire stance on her homeland's violent history appears misleading (93). Her ambivalent stance and "conflicted loyalties" are a result of her double consciousness though it is clear that she affiliates more with her British identity than her Africanness, even though the latter is "imprinted on her life, war or not" (Mackey 113, Macaulay 5).

Nevertheless, Jarrett-Macaulay, Buchi Emecheta, and Joan Riley's return to the 1960s and 1970s Africa and the Caribbean respectively, is a political act and hints at their intention to accentuate the anti-colonial mode of resistance adopted during that time. With independence came the hope of democratic ideals and equity among all citizens, despite differences, but it rather led to newer forms of oppression and exploitation, especially for African and Caribbean women. Therefore, black British women writers perceive that, while visits to the homeland at times generate a feeling of dislocation and unbelonging, it is most importantly caused by a long period of gendered and racial discrimination experienced both in the native land and the host land. To add further, the documentation of the political and socio-economic transformations enables the writers to present the ensuing rupture of social and familial networks in both Africa

and the Caribbean. For these writers, the chapter argues, the role of mothers remains significant in exemplifying this rupture because they are the most affected due to displacement and separation of families. The next section will then elaborate on the representation of mothers and how it relates to the writers' perception of their homeland.

III

The cultural devaluation of black people and constant intervention by British structural policies in their daily lives have affected kinship patterns and subsequently, the black family structure. As mentioned in Chapter One, individuals incarcerated in Britain's prisons are mostly black people of African and/or Caribbean descent. As a consequence of the racialised logic pervading criminality and disorder, black families are often led by single parents and comprised of members who have experienced the trauma of police brutality or racial discrimination. The result of this trauma affects family relationships and the novels project characters who have fractured relationships with family members and most of the time, also fail to build meaningful bonds outside. The fracture is most evidently generational; wherein first-generation migrants are unable to continue the tradition of creating "strong female networks" in their process of migration (Carby 52). The reason is primarily due to displacement, along with years of historical amnesia and systemic racism, and this has resulted in causing an impediment to self-identification for black British women of both generations. The idea of adopting "new survival strategies", that dominated "cultures of resistance" during times of slavery, seems impractical in the post-Windrush era, considering the social, political, and economic transformations their countries of origin underwent before their dislocations (Carby 51). To add to it, the absence of a collective consciousness and a re-discovery of the past with the active involvement of the preceding generation also justify the chapter's claims of black British women writers' narratives of rejecting the homeland. The succeeding section marks this peculiar generational detachment in extensive terms, which also explains the fragile nature of the protagonists. Suzanne Scafe, who also comments on such "fragility", perceives this as the reason for the psychological breakdown of the characters (222). Here, black British women characters' disconnect with their roots is emphasised through their preoccupation with the representative lives of their mothers as intermingled with their own, because the transfer of the generational trauma offers them no source of healing.

The violation of land, as mentioned in Hall's quote, can be seen in association with the violation of black women's bodies too, which has roots in Eurocentric conceptions of beauty and 'English' moral codes. bell hooks states in *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1982) how the representation of black bodies, from the time of slavery, as objects of exhibition and scrutiny have continued to devalue their sense of self-determination, especially, a black woman. The close association of Africa, as ancestral land and black women, means that the 'violent, abrupt, ruptural break' of the past from the present, has affected women's unique methods of maintaining kinship patterns and transferring traditional practices through generations. Black British women writers are therefore found demystifying the idea of home, by parallelly alluding to the image of dysfunctional families in host land and critiquing hierarchal structures within communities in the homeland. The chapter observes that an absence of strong maternal/sororal connections and the 'violation' of the ancestral homeland disables recent generations from establishing their diasporic sensibilities. The mystification of the land with a woman's body, not only manipulates women's idea of liberation but also multiplies the factors for the realisation of self-worth. For instance, most protagonists in Joan Riley's novels express a feeling of self-loathing and a desire for beauty that is based on male-oriented Western conceptions. In the case of Hyacinth and Verona in Riley's *The Unbelonging* and *Romance* respectively, the obsession for whiteness arises from the fear of black men. Hyacinth and Verona not only experience abuse by these men but are also aware of the patriarchal underpinnings in these men's discussions on black radical politics. Riley's narratives depict black women and their opinions as silenced both in the public and domestic spaces. In the case of black female subjects, the experience of racial and sexual oppression faced by them is expressed through an acute sense of self-denial.

At a young age, Hyacinth is separated from her aunt and sent to England to stay with her stepmother and father, whom she hardly knows. The marked absence of Hyacinth's biological mother is to be noted here. Hence, when she leaves Jamaica, the separation from the maternal security provided by her aunt incites a longing for home. Hyacinth confronts her state of homesickness by creating an imaginary idyllic Jamaica, in contrast to the dreary, concrete setting of England. Hyacinth's memory and nostalgia for her homeland are equated with her longing for maternal affection, which in the story is represented by her Aunt Joyce. Hence, in her imagination, she sees herself "lying on the side of the long, deep gully, behind the tenement *where her aunt lived*, the long grass

tickling her nose in the warm breeze, the clammy red and milk-white cherries rustling in the high trees above her head" (emphasis added, Riley 19). Hyacinth associates the maternal presence as a source of healing, and consecutively a desire to return to Jamaica. As stated by Patricia H. Collins as well, "the presence of othermothers in Black extended families… offer powerful support for the task of teaching girls to resist white perceptions of Black womanhood while appearing to conform to them" (335). For Hyacinth, however, the figure of the othermother does not materialise during an actual journey to her childhood home. She thus realises that the failure of the social and economic system has shattered the foundations through which women resist. Traditional family networks and social systems gave way to disjunction and corruption, instead of coherence, and robbed women of their agency as part of the larger milieu. Delia Jarrett-Macaulay too refers to the collapse of state order and social breakdown in association with anti-nationalist forces. Yet, her allusion to the decade of the 1960s and Thomas Dekker's *Julioh Siza* parallelly draws another imagery, and that is of the eternal, ever-sacrificing grandmother/mother/guardian epitomised by the character of Adele, who is killed by her adopted grandson, Citizen. By venerating her character, who has already become a victim of the war when the story begins, the narrative seems to perpetuate the image of Mother Africa that absolves her children from all mistakes and restores them to health. The glorification of Adele's character reifies the image of the 'mammy' and the 'superwoman' who signify endurance and resilience against all odds of life. The figure of the black mother, as Michele Wallace also asserts, becomes "less of a woman in that she is less 'feminine' and helpless, she is really *more* of a woman in that she is the embodiment of Mother Earth, the quintessential mother with infinite sexual, life-giving, and nurturing reserves. In other words, she is a superwoman" (emphasis original, 107). Tracey Reynolds, who deconstructs the image of the black 'superwoman' by examining how it has been popularised by British media, states that the construct is not only a result of a "biological…essentialist paradigm", but also the "reductionist account of historical struggle" (98). Based on the "white oppressive standards of servitude", these images have aided in marginalising and regulating black women's bodies (Carter and Rossi 291). Again, in the novel, Julia remarks on the "distressing images" of the Sierra Leonean Civil War (1996-2002) as "Citizen's war" (Jarrett-Macaulay 67). Hence, if Citizen's character and the enactment of Dekker's play is a metaphor for Sierra Leone's disintegration as a nation, then the sudden takeover of the narrative voice imagining dead Adele claiming "*I am your strong and ancient grandmother. Let me wrap you in my*

arms", suggests a longing for a maternal source of healing like Hyacinth (190). The longing for Africa as a motherland, providing reassurance and security is again emphasized when Julia finds Moses sleeping in the shape of a foetus.

Right from the beginning of the story, it is made clear that the intention of calling Julia back to her native land is to provide Citizen with maternal support. However, Julia realises that she is ill-equipped to provide him the foster care considering her lack of comprehension regarding West African politics. Hence, story-telling and performance are used as other forms of healing for child soldiers. In some ways, the novel does indicate the scope of alternate mothering by citing the compassion of the ex-army man, Olu, who offers milk to Citizen and sings him lullaby when the latter escapes from the rebel camp. The narrative, however, correlates Olu's perceptive kindness with a mother's "longed-for nipple", which again is problematic because it idealizes mothering as a selfless act that is natural to all women (219). Ironically, most women characters that are discussed in the novel either have no influence in the story or are dead. Julia's aunt Adele, her grandmother, and her mother are referred to in times long gone. For women like Moses' neighbour, Elizabeth, and Isata, who had been kidnaped and raped by rebels, memories as a form of resistance fail to provide a "means of becoming or coming into voice" (Imma 131). These women are not only unable to reconcile with their pasts but also do not bring any significant change in Citizen's character despite their evident attempts at fostering him back to "normal childhood" (Jarrett-Macaulay 15). Instead, it is the male characters like Moses and their struggles that are highlighted as "in need to reckon with the haunting legacy of the war" (Imma 131). Though this aspect of the war is also significant and needs examination, the chapter contends that a narrow focus on specific subjects and valuing one over the other defeats the novel's purpose of countering West-induced homogenised representations of Africa.

Black British women writers, particularly of Caribbean descent, present in their novels that while oppositions rise against the neo-colonial tendency of governance and conflicts occur between different political and ethnic factions, women's issues take a backseat. Rather, a gendered symbolism is attached to the nationalist ideals as a means to tackle the Caribbean islands' complex geo-political ties with Britain. In different ways, women writers not only reject but also problematize the symbolism by alluding to the socio-political contexts that lead to the degeneration of women's communal networks

and traditional means of sustenance. Anne François in *Rewriting the Return* examines how Franco-Anglophone black women writers divert from the myth of origins in Africa by positioning women in the predominantly "male Caribbean discourse" (xi). François' rejects this discourse for it involves "female allegorization of the land that is reminiscent of a colonial and nationalist project" (x). She elaborates on this by stating that for these male writers:

> . . . allegorizing Africa as a woman and a mother specifically represented the best strategy to re-empower themselves by evoking what they had lost: the place of origin and a body of land. It also enabled them to explore a whole array of emotions, most notably the desire to recover the protection of the womb, the sanctity of the pure origin. With this allegory, Africa appears as the female entity that was violated by European colonial "penetration". (xxii)

In the same way, Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe critiques the idea of "Mama Africa" as "an imaginary construction" by "Africa's displaced daughters and sons", epitomized by the Pan-African movement, the Negritude movement, Rastafarianism and Garveyism (146). She calls them an "orphan consciousness" for overlooking the "significant influences of multiple lineages" and failing to "differentiate between the real and the authentic" (146). In context to this, Joan Riley's depiction of Jean in *A Kindness to the Children*, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, states a lucid instance of a black female character becoming both a victim and a critic of the 'colonial and nationalist project' and the 'orphan consciousness'. The novel represents the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, as a place that deprives women of their freedom and relegates them to positions of insignificant second-class citizens. In the novel, the first glimpse of the Jamaican landscape is as deceptive as the focaliser, Sylvia's perception of Port Juanero's inhabitants as a community. As soon as she relates Jamaica's familiarity to her "tight-knit childhood on Mostyn Road in the heart of Brixton, London", she also expresses her discomfort at how the place "had the effect of stripping things back to basics" (Riley, *A Kindness* 1, 10). The sense of uneasiness she feels in her homeland and with its people is also an effect of the apparent indifference of Jamaican people towards her as a mixed-race woman who has assimilated into English society, a trait that is treated with honour when upheld by a black man. The story involves Sylvia and her sister, Jean's travel to Jamaica to heal from their respective emotional disturbances. After the death of her

husband, Sylvia is prompted to go to his birthplace i.e., Jamaica, in order to deal with her grief. Jean, on the other hand, suffers from an identity crisis in London being subjected solely to the role of motherhood. She is constantly bothered by the "voices in her head" which she traces back to her traumatic childhood in Port Juanero, Jamaica (233).

Born in a family of men, Jean is vested with the responsibility of fulfilling household duties from a very young age. Her father upholds Pan-Africanist views and idolizes Marcus Garvey, but contrastingly also considers the social role of women to be limited to teaching. On one occasion, when Jean gathers courage and vocalises her desire to pursue a career in mathematics, her father employs a patronising vocabulary by telling her that "You going grow up to something fitting – teacher even, then you can married, and raise African children to the glory of the race…you have to learn to support the race" (Riley 31). Here, Jean's father refers to Garvey's political endeavour that is supposedly also meant to empower women. Again, Jean's recollection of childhood memories also reveals that she had been sexually abused by a church pastor. To deal with these traumatizing memories, she turns to alcoholism and later is forced by Jimmy, her husband, to go to Jamaica to reconcile with the unresolved issues from her past on her own. However, on her reaching the place, the tormenting image of "a child in the shadow of a blood-red cross, groaning in pain, the seep of blood and tears mingling with grey concrete dust", aggravates her condition (22). Jean momentarily finds respite in religion, but even this is depicted as a hypocritical way to mask her gradual retreat to insanity. As the narrative reveals:

> *Jean had found the Lord!*... one minute the woman was beating up her children, cursing and swearing on the street and going up the Mountain District church so drunk she could barely walk. Then literally overnight all that stopped, replaced by caring and love for almost everyone. (emphasis original, 77)

Finding no solace in religion too, Jean elopes with a Rastafarian man who leaves her and her children under unsafe conditions in a dilapidated house. The trajectories of Jean's life state that she has not only been violated but also been estranged from protective maternal surroundings. Therefore, she defies the notion of an ideal mother by confessing that motherhood did not come to her naturally. Her cousin, Sylvia, on the other hand, is portrayed as possessing nurturing qualities. Having no children of her own, Sylvia expresses her motherly care by looking after Jean's children. Due to these apparent

differences, there are conflicts in opinion regarding family values in the novel. Sylvia, who was born and brought up in England, has little knowledge of the community life in Port Juanero, Jamaica. When Jean takes away her children from her brother, George's house, Sylvia reports it to the police and asks them to investigate. The policeman is surprised at the manner of the report because he thinks since the children are with their mother, there is nothing to be afraid of. Child protection rights in England, which Sylvia boasts of, are absent in Jamaica and the people do not necessarily feel its need because according to them only a family member knows what is best for their child. For them, such rights interfere with personal family matters and are therefore unnecessary. By alluding to such instances, the novel attempts to show a contrast in family values and childcare between England and Jamaica. However, the novel simultaneously also questions Jean's attempts at disciplining her children, Aleesa and Davian, in the "ways of old Jamaica" (Riley 146). Unlike Sylvia, Jean's idea of mothering is pathologized in the novel as a cause of deviant behaviour but is also seen as a consequence of the oppressive nature of patriarchal societies. This is a form of 'othering' too and, as Carter and Rossie state, "the complex embodiment" of black women as enduring and selfless, has "internal and societal consequences" (294). In this respect, sometimes the family and the community are equally responsible for the 'othering' of a black woman. Likewise, Jean is questioned for disregarding the expected norms of the family and community and instead focusing on her "boundaries" and personal growth (Carter and Rossi 294). However, the inability to recover from her trauma disables Jean's chances of reconciliation with Africa/Caribbean, through which to recreate new spaces of belonging and address her diasporic condition. Furthermore, her role as a mother incapacitates her sense of value judgment and in turn her ability to chart a journey of self-discovery. This is not to state that she did not harbour emotional attachment with her children. It is rather the unacknowledged state of the psychological ailment of her childhood trauma and the death of her mother at an early age, that causes Jean to disassociate with feelings of trust and compassion. Mothering itself is seen as lacking in providing emotional sustenance, and by extension Africa or the Caribbean as home/motherland. Towards the end of Riley's novel, Jean seeks maternal solace in her aunt, which briefly suggests the presence of the 'other mother', but even this cannot prevent the protagonist from retreating to madness.

As the narrative suggests, Jean's condition is symptomatic of the social disintegration of Port Juanero, which is a place swamped by stories of other madwomen too. Jean's mental disorder can also be viewed as "resistance, a refusal of assimilation to the order/sanity/control of a system of oppression" and indicative of "Caribbean's radical, unpredictable otherness" instead of pathological behaviour (Ledent 3). However, the incomprehensible street Creole that Jean uses towards the end and her supposed death on the streets of Port Juanero point to the failure of Jamaican society at large. Jean's death turns into another statistic of madwomen who meet such a fate when they challenge social norms. In the novel, there are instances of women in Port Juanero helping each other during times of adversity, but it does not lead to a sustained communal bond. Moreover, the corrupt nature of Jamaican society and civil order that leads to the oppression and miserable conditions of women is accentuated in ways that eclipse the modest, but significant, achievements of women like Pearl, Jean's sister-in-law, who challenges her husband's control over her and achieves financial independence. Pearl's insider status in Jamaica allows her access to the nitty gritty of Caribbean life and possesses a command over her identity that Sylvia and Jean, being partially connected to England, do not.

In regard to this it can be stated that for some black women, it is the inability to deal with the trauma of displacement that disables them from voicing out the lived experience of oppression on a daily basis. Andrea Levy highlights this aspect in *Every Light* and portrays Angela's mother, Beryl as silenced and trapped in enclosed spaces throughout her life. Similarly, Momma in Donna Daley-Clarke's *Lazy Eye* (2005), as her daughter Harriet observes, is only restricted to spaces such as the "walled-in cinema or food stores or other people's front rooms" (98). In the novel, Momma continues to look "tired and cold" since "she stepped the platform at Liverpool Street Station" (Daley-Clarke 97). In contrast, their father, whom Hilda and Harriet address as "Fardder", expresses aggression out of the bitter experiences in London. Thus, this shows how racial and sexual violations turn mothers into inexpressive beings and limit them from forming healthy connections with their daughters, thereby providing the latter no alternative to deal with contemporary issues in Britain.

The eponymous protagonist in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*, unlike these first-generation and 1.5-generation black female characters, develops her individuality and

challenges the idea of an "Ibusa village mother" (Emecheta 138). Taking advantage of her position as the owner of their "typical East London mid-terrace house", Kehinde transgresses the patriarchal norm of transferring her materialistic possessions to her son Joshua, by keeping them for herself till deems it necessary (2). However, she achieves this confidence only by rejecting her roots. In Diana Evans' *26a* and Jenny McLeod's *Stuck up a Tree*, the first-generation migrant mothers Ida and Brownie respectively, are represented as stuck in the past and unable to either adapt or resist the hostile environment of England. The second-generation black daughters too have to "confront their feelings about the difference between the idealized versions of the maternal love extant in popular culture" and the silent, absent, or deviant mothers "so central to their lives" (Collins 336). On the aspect of black motherhood, there are stereotypical assumptions existing in British society that devalue the status and aspirations of black women as individuals. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta adopts an ironic tone and elaborately describes how black women are forced to keep their children under foster care in order to pursue higher studies and work over time. The socio-economic condition of blacks in Britain is reflected here but a racialised interpretation of this act by social welfare and child-care facilities focuses on the negligent and imprudent behaviour of black mothers. In such assumptions, the position of young black mothers is pathologized and is projected as a problem. The idea of unmindful breeding and irresponsibility draws references from the Scarman Report which reasoned that the cause for increasing social disorder lies in black family structures. The existence of these narratives affects black women's daily struggle against racist and gendered biases.

An illustration can be cited from Diana Evans' *26a* which depicts the disjointed state of the Hunter family living at 26th Waifer Avenue in the Neasden area of London. The novel uses a bildungsroman form tracing the lives of the mixed-race twins, Bessie and Georgia, including their elder sister Bel, and their younger brother, Kenny. In the novel, their mother Ida is constantly attempting to connect with her ancestral roots. She has a world of her own, a spiritual and mystical space, which her family members view as something foreign. During long hours of bathing and cooking food, Ida reconnects with the spirits of her ancestors and reconciles with the sense of loss from her homeland. The odd combination of food items that Ida eats is an example of this disjointedness. Ida warms every food item before consuming it, even ice cream, declaring an element of unfamiliarity and unacceptance to the host culture. Ida's evident alienation in England is

juxtaposed in the novel with the twins' devoted involvement in the ritual of apple picking to make pies every season. The imagery of apples in congruence with hyphenated identities is also invoked in Jarrett-Macaulay's *Moses, Citizen &* Me. Towards the end of the story, when Julia dreams of taking Citizen with her to London, she disapprovingly reflects on apples in England and decides to savour the apples of Sierra Leone. Her symbolic inclination towards Sierra Leone, in the closing lines, indicates her willingness to "surrender" and comprehend the country's past memories or collective memories of trauma and displacement (Jarrett-Macaulay 226). In *26a*, however, there is a disconnect between Ida's contact with the spiritual realm and her emotional connection with her children. For Ida, Nigeria and her memory of it assign her the power to maintain her ties with her homeland, though she has physically lost contact with it since 1964. But her "fragility", as pointed out by Suzanne Scafe, stems from the fact that she had to leave her motherland and follow her white husband to England (222). Years after settling in the host country, she still struggles to acclimatise to its socio-cultural milieu. Caught up in her dilemma of adjusting to the hostility of Neasden and the apparent 'whiteness' of her husband, Ida distances herself from her husband and neglects motherly duties towards her children. The children, on the other hand, sensing the tension between their parents seek for possible alternatives to stop them from divorcing. The disconnect between family members is seen as a failure of the maternal heritage, which has already faced alienation through racial biases. Ida's situation can be seen in similar terms with Beryl in *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and Momma in *Lazy Eye*.

Similar to these mothers, the protagonist's mother Brownie, in Jenny McLeod's *Stuck up a Tree*, also remains relatively voiceless even though the whole novel revolves around her and her relationship with the Brightwells family, particularly the protagonist. For most of her life, Brownie spends her time in the kitchen cooking with her special spice ingredients locked up in a cupboard. Her presence, which seems to be more alive only after she dies, is reflected by the third-person narrator as monstrous. She is described as an "extraordinary" woman who has "forearms that looked like freshly dug yams and huge breasts… Head coming out of a pot of steam… she looked like a monster rising from the bowels of something somewhere" (McLeod, *Stuck Up* 8-9). In *26a*, Georgie depicts her mother Ida as "a woman of whispers in a hair net", giving her the aura of a woman possessing magical powers (Evans 4). Brownie's description also hints at the Obeah which, Ella learns from the gossips of 'Back Home', is a practice women

play to lure rich, white men or to get anything they desire (McLeod, *Stuck Up* 37). The outlines of a baby's hand in dried blood and a tuff of baby hair that Ella finds in Brownie's "tatty old yellowing book" is another suggestion of the latter's involvement in Obeah (180). Donna Daley-Clarke's *Lazy Eye*, which deals with the lives of the twins Hilda and Harriet, also refers to practices of the Vodoun and traditional medicinal practices. Harriet's potion of "bush tea with twigs" for constipation, and her ability to tell people's age from their teeth or to "call rainfall before the rainbirds flew", are evidence of traditional knowledge imparted from her native land, epitomised by her Grandmother Evadnee (Daley-Clarke 68, 101). She continues practicing these spells even when she migrates to London. The second-generation migrants, who are unaware of the significance of such beliefs and practices, disassociate from it because they are unconsciously conditioned by Eurocentric constructions of black culture as barbaric. The involvement of black mothers in these practices lends them a deviant characteristic to the already existing notions of black motherhood as problematic. The reference to Vodou and Obeah in the novels is to emphasize the continuity of traditions, but, though the presence of the Vodou and Obeah is verified, the chapter does not observe a positive reclamation of roots as a consequence of the practice. Instead, the focus is on the hybrid syncretism of these cultures that has further complicated a black female migrant's route to identification. This is to mean that black migrants can no longer go back to an uncorrupted past to heal their present traumas. The fact that ancestral lands were already diluted before their establishment as nation-states, lends another dimension to the concept of hybridity. At a similar pretext, it can also be stated that though the vodoun tradition has a dominant presence and influence even in the host land, its very existence without a shared mode of practice within the community speaks of its contradictions. The recovery of past memories evades deriving from the collective consciousness. It is rather individualistic in nature, which in one way explains the varied subjectivities and nuanced levels of looking back at the homeland, but also hinders black migrant bodies from possible opportunities for resistance. Along with this, the very individualised traditional practice of these religions by black women is sometimes represented as deviant behaviour which again directs the discussion towards specific cultural and gendered assumptions. Thus, some black British women writers are also found using the trope of the madwoman and dealing with the mental health issues of black female characters. Other than Evan's *26a* and Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*, novels like

Leone Ross' *Orange Laughter* (2000), Jacqueline Roy's *The Fat Lady Sings* (2000), and Joanna Traynor's *Sister Josephine* (2000) also deal with similar themes.

It is the prevalent imagery of black women as strong, nurturing, and self-sacrificing that also disregards their mental health because, in an attempt at continuing that role, they suffer from extreme psychological trauma and emotional stress that again may lead to deteriorating physical health. In reference to this, Katie Danaher in her thesis "Mapping and Re-Mapping the City: Representations of London in Black British Women's Writing" (2018), examines the role of black mothers in grappling with the hostile system that is insensitive to women's needs and prefers to endow the responsibility of family integrity at the hands of the mother at all costs. Focusing particularly on domestic spaces, Danaher comments about Beryl, in Andrea Levy's *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, and the reason for her supposed silence against the injustices experienced by her and her family. Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), which discusses how the British nation and its citizen's happiness lie in the spread of multiculturalism both institutionally and socially, functions as a significant point of reference for Danaher's critical observation. In such a context, the black women characters discussed above are also unable to express their tribulations for fear of being blamed for not being able to maintain a happy family. Expressing discontent is seen as an attempt to target the social setup. Therefore, the mothers seemingly carry on with their mechanical, routine domestic duties. The ubiquitous image of Princess Diana and Prince Charles's wedding, ironically portrayed in Evans' *26a* to depict the strained relationship between Ida and her husband, states how multiculturalism and interracial relationships create a false sense of harmony and equality in society. Danaher points out that despite being circumscribed by the system, these mothers direct their agency through the preparation and consumption of food that is typical of Caribbean and Nigerian cuisine. The chapter does not agree with Danaher's perception of these mothers' characters gaining empowerment because their attempts do not entail a redemptive ending for their daughters, who are twice displaced from their ancestral homelands from which to draw a source of resistance like their mothers. For second-generation black female migrants, their identification with cultural roots limits their journey of self-discovery, and therefore, the next section will explore how they express their dilemma of feeling a sense of disconnect with their past and the unwillingness to associate with their traumatic experiences.

IV

Katie Danaher, in another work titled "Belonging and Un-belonging in London: Representations of Home in *26a*" (2018), observes with scepticism the postcolonial critical discourses as limiting black British writing within the purview of belonging/unbelonging, displacement, and their alterity. Within this frame of reference, works that deal with the experiences of second-generation migrants, greatly allude to the wider social and cultural milieu and redefine racialised spaces of England. The writings enable displaced mixed-race characters to navigate the historical and cultural trauma of Jamaica, Nigeria, and Britain, in different ways. In such novels, the figure of a mixed-race twin daughter functions as a trope to "engender new expressions of self" (Borman ii). The trope enables women writers to articulate "the inherent tensions between being and becoming Black, being and becoming continental African or African Caribbean, and being English as opposed to British" (Ifekwunigwe 127). The narratives also specifically re-count and disrupt "distinct temporalities of belonging and affiliation with Africa" by tracing it through a matrilineal descent (Borman ii). Both in Diana Evans' *26a* and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*, the mothers draw their lineage to Africa. In the case of *The Opposite House*, though both of Maja's parents are Afro-Cuban, her husband is white and the novel puts focus on the multiple pasts and existing allegiances Maja needs to negotiate to deal with her irregularities. Moreover, the use of the twin trope problematise a simplistic understanding of cultural diversity as part of a new race discourse. It interrogates the assumption whether blackness, as an embodiment of diversity, is merely "what gets added on" to whiteness (Ahmed 41). Thus, in this section, the chapter seeks to argue that through a 'return' to a past that is "atavistic", the narratives resuscitate the haunting effect of that past in the present time and complicate mixed-race twins from addressing their hybrid identities, "which are necessarily contradictory, socioculturally constructed and essentialized" (Ifekwunigwe 127).

In certain circumstances, black British women writers have attempted to incorporate the world of the pre-symbolic and the pre-natal stage to grapple with the nuances of being mixed-race. This is a recurrent image used by black British women writers to emphasize the alienation of the characters and their sense of loss as migrant bodies. Evans' *26a* begins with the twins, Georgie and Bessie's strange experience of their birth in a place that is alien to them. Thus, from the beginning itself, the idea of an

unbelonging in the public, outside space but belonging to each other is established. Irene Perez Fernandes describes this as their embodiment of "twoness in oneness", which John McLeod also states is a "significant structural and conceptual device" in black British women's writing (292, "Extra Dimensions" 48). Their sense of belonging, particularly with each other, is elaborated through the depiction of their bedroom in the loft of 26 Waiver Avenue. The twins carve 'G+B' in front of the loft, declaring it as their private space, where they discuss entrepreneurship, gossip about their elder sister's adolescent tantrums, or ponder upon important family issues like their parent's impending divorce. The room exists as an "extra dimension", distancing and correspondingly protecting them from their family's sense of aloofness with each other (Evans 5). Evans' play with 'G+B' as an acronym for 'Great Britain' in direct connection to Georgie and Bessie as individuals and as children with Nigerian and British origins, incorporate the possibility of constructing spaces that stand for the intermingling of diverse cultural influences.

Concerning this, the twins' 'twoness' is metaphorically transferred to twin objects in their room, geographical places, and also the spirit realm. The twin beds, twin strawberry bean bags, twin apple trees, ripe apples in two pairs, Neasden and Nigeria, Aubrey and Ida, and William Gladstone and Nne Nne, are some of the examples that explain the biparous linking of the personal and/or emotional and the social/nationalist aspects. Their place of birth, i.e., Neasden, is placed in a parallel plane with Nigeria or the place of their ancestral origins. By presenting these 'twinnings', the chapter seeks to establish that Evans not only depicts the identity politics of second-generation black female migrants in Britain but also rejects "the model of diversity" that "reifies difference as something that already exists 'in' the bodies of others" (Ahmed 43). Along with it, John McLeod's suggestion of a "cultural zygoticism" through a parallel allusion to African and British mythologies, conveniently seeks to overlook the existence of the Caribbean as a significant part of Bessie's self-identification (48). This is specifically noticed when the twins re-create their Neasdenian loft in the "triangular room" of their maternal grandfather's house in Aruwa, Nigeria (Evans 58). The triangle, here, signifies the Middle Passage and the link between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. It is important to note that Bessie's retreat to the Windward Islands of the West Indies, as her reason to explore the world, leads to the creation of separate journeys for the twins. Their sense of self, however, begins to develop after their family visit to Aruwa, their ancestral village.

Georgie and Bessie weigh Nigerian people in contrast to themselves as inhabitants of the Neasden neighbourhood in London. The twins even attempt to adapt to the physical space of Africa, by replacing it with objects they are closely associated with in London. Consequently, guavas and hibiscuses replaced apples and roses. They also attempt to assimilate with their African origins by deciding to learn Edo, the language of an indigenous tribe in Nigeria. Here, the narrative seems to indicate a naïve realisation of hybrid existence, that is aided by a physical visit to the natural landscape. It describes how "the sun had made coffee of them and against their skin white was blinding" (Evans 58). Bessie instinctively asks her mother if they have now become "proper Nigerians" and her mother replies, "half your blood is proper Nigerian, and blood is more than skin" (58). Ida's statement reflects Evans' ideological change on the rhetoric of race and colour that has been put forward by Paul Gilroy. The present debates on raciology involve genetics and further penetration of the body. Evans' use of these discussions is complicated by the varied meanings of gender and embodiment explored in the narrative. Besides, race and class dynamics among Nigerians are exemplified through Baba's innocuous defence against the "Tokhokok's runaway daughter" residing in London (Evans 58). The former takes pride in having "exotic oyinbo children" and "golden grandsons in a distant land" (59). Moreover, the figure of the grandfather as the storyteller of the twins' journey back to Africa turns into a misadventure. Evans' novel employs the African folklore of twins, namely Ode and Onia, as a potent but threatening aspect from the past by showing its influence on the protagonists even in a contemporary racist and misogynist setting of London. Since twins were considered to be an evil omen in Nigeria, they were expected to be burnt to death. On their visit to Nigeria, when their maternal grandfather, Baba narrates this supposedly obsolete tradition, the twins are terrified, but he assures them that it is a story from a "long time ago", which again situates Africa culturally behind the times (Evans 61). The twins' personal experience and the traumatic cultural memory together align to displace Georgia from the real world of both Nigeria and England and consequently, subject herself to imaginary realms and imaginary friends.

Like Ida, Georgia too re-creates a mythical world of her own, through which she communicates with the spirits of popular figures of England, like William Gladstone. William Gladstone believed in liberalism and according to her was politically more judicious, in contrast to Benjamin Disraeli. Georgia escapes to this realm in her dreams

and communicates with him the everyday events of her real world. Her invocation of these two figures and a re-enactment of the controversies between them can be seen as an attempt to redefine Britishness and a new take on the lives of these figures diverting from Robert Blake's *Disraeli and Gladstone* (1969). In addition to this strong affiliation with her birthplace, Georgia, particularly remembers Nigeria through her experience of sexual abuse inflicted upon her by their gardener during a visit to their ancestral Aruwa village. To go back to that place and time is not only traumatising but also a cause for her self-alienation. Therefore, during their last day of summer holidays in Nigeria, when Bessie exclaims that she will miss their time in the place, Georgie reverts to her thoughts and realises that "she would not miss here…there was something lost. The now-ness of things. It was not pretty" (Evans 71). In contrast, "her twin Bessie and the narrative itself privilege 'homelessness' which… is a creative space and a means by which time and space can be collapsed and borders transgressed" (Scafe 222) From the outset, it is evident that Georgia's out of place state is in contrast to Bessie's representation of the world outside. After her birth, Georgie shows signs of eating disorders like pica and is taken to St Luke's Hospital with "dishcloth, carpet dust, half her afro and tassels off the bottom of the sofa clinging to her intestines" (4). The disorder, that is associated with her feeling of loneliness, despite having a twin sister, is demonstrated through "the scar" caused by the surgery that grew up with her and "widened like a pale smile and split her in two" (4). The split, again, indicates the early symptoms of separation from Bessie. In the case of Bessie too, there are instances where she desires to chart her individuality without any connection with Georgie. This is because people do not recognise their individual differences. At school, their friend Renee scrutinise their body and tries to list out specific bodily traits like "1. Georgie's mouth is biggist 2. Georgie has big ears, Bessie doesn't…" (42). To assert their distinct identities, the twins also decide to wear clothes of different colours, "so that they could be whole people inside themselves" (42). However, the disintegration of their twinship that occurs after their visit to Nigeria leads Bessie to seek opportunities in the music industry. Later, Bessie is also seen opening a map, tracing different geographical places, and finally deciding to begin her discovery of the world. Bessie's obvious appetite for life is displayed when she spreads the map on the floor and revels at the places as the "Nations bulged. Oceans waited. She walked up along the coast of Brazil and divided into the Caribbean Sea. She advances towards the edge of Senegal, across Ghana and back into Nigeria…then onwards to the Atlantic coast" (131-32).

Bessie's symbolic travel across continents to some extent indicates the possibilities of creating transnational spaces of belonging. However, this journey, along with Bessie's route to self-discovery remains unfulfilled, with her twin's death. Unlike Bessie, Georgia's body, carrying the burden of the childhood memory and the fear of the African myth, finally succumbs to fatality as it is unable to associate itself with the outside world. An independent negotiation with her Nigerian and British cultural and historical legacies becomes a difficult task for Georgia, mostly arising due to intergenerational differences and the lack of maternal support in bridging the rupture from the past. This is particularly articulated through Ida's inability to deal with the influence of the haunting ancestral past on her daughters. In the context of these differences, Myriam J. A. Chancy explains as follows:

> …the particular and short-term consequences of emigration have resulted in the physical, psychological, and emotional alienation of young girls from older women. Such alienation is compounded by the mistreatment that both groups endure in societies, which openly advocate their denigration through the trivialization and oversexualization of the Black female body. (32)

Like the folktale, Georgia burns herself with an electric wire that hangs from her house's ceiling. It is almost as if her spirit, which is trapped in her defiled body, wants to escape from the haunting memories of a traumatic childhood. After Georgia's death, Bessie's "homelessness" is substituted by a "homing desire" that is manifested through the constant presence of Georgia's spirit in Bessie's body. Irene Perez-Fernandez examines in *26a* the use of the body as the "primary space of interaction" (292). While taking into consideration Perez-Fernandez's observation, the chapter considers the representation of the body in the novel as a site for 'homing':

> … (when) trauma evades conscious understanding, memory becomes encoded on a bodily level and resurfaces as possession… the survivor relives the original experience through body memory yet struggles to find words for an experience that exceeds representation. A kind of break between body and language occurs that… only a connection to another body can bridge. (Griffiths 1)

Thus, returning to the body indicates the possibility of an unstratified shared belonging. To justify her statement, Griffiths quotes from Dori Laub's "Truth and Testimony: The

Process and the Struggle" (1995), where Laub points out that the "absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an 'other' who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story" (Griffiths 2). In Georgia's case too, there is an absence of that 'listener' which forces her to imagine daily conversations with William Gladstone. Despite the supposedly mystic capabilities of her elder sister and their mother, her testimony of experiencing the trauma remains unheard, and therefore her inability to initiate her journey of healing. With Georgie's possession of Bessie, the former's childhood fantasy of establishing "twoness in oneness" is fulfilled, rather in a disturbing manner (Evans 42). The existing instances of 'twinnings' even before their visit to Nigeria defy Borman's claim that "the ability to inhabit one another was implanted within them as the Nigerian heritage" (57). However, the 'inhabitation' does foreground a cultural past that is devastative in nature, and thereby leads to Georgia's act of self-harm.

It is also to be noted that the term 'possession' includes a moment of withdrawal and regeneration into the original self. For instance, in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005), when Jessamy is possessed by the evil spirit of a slave girl named Tilly Tilly, the former is healed and brought back to reality only after her parents craft a sculpture of her dead twin. In *26a*, however, there exists no impression of Georgia's spirit leaving Bessi's body, which suggests that it is more of an 'inhabitation' than possession. Bessie's body, which is chosen over the material space of the 'extra dimension' i.e., *26a*, thus becomes a passage for Georgia to enter the realm of the 'otherworldly'. The hybridity that arises out of this "twinhood/twinship", as Perez-Fernandez claims, finds more resonance with J.O. Ifekwunigwe's idea of cultural *métisse*, where individuals "situate themselves within at least two specific and yet over-lapping historical narratives" (292, 127). Thus, it is seen that transcultural references in *26a* are drawn not only from Nigeria and Britain but also from the Caribbean and America. The novel seems to indicate the fact that this 'twinhood' resulting from bodily transgression is something that already existed in the troubled cultural past of the homeland. This is specifically observed when the narrator feels the presence of Ode and Onia, "one inside the other", in the living room where Georgie and Bessie slept right after they listened to the twins' story (Evans 64). However, since these complex pasts remain unresolved, the transgression offers little recovery.

Similarly, in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*, transnational historical legacies connect black diasporic migrants to a larger frame of reference. The subject of the novel seems to respond to Laursen's suggestion that if "families are made up of supposed different races, family narratives must rely on two or more overlapping histories" (119). The story draws allusions to Africa's history of enslavement in Cuba and the migration of black Cubans to London. In the novel, two narratives move simultaneously depicting two different worlds – one, is the real world of Maja, and the other, is the subconscious/supernatural world of the Yoruba goddess Yemaya. In addition to this, the narrative insists on the heterogeneous existence of black diasporic individuals. To begin with, Maja's husband, Aaron, is white and half-Jew and was born and raised in Ghana. Again, her white friend Amy Eleni has origins in Cypriot. However, Helen Cousins comprehends the evident erasure of white signifiers as Oyeyemi looks at "whiteness as invisibility" rather than a norm (4). An assertion of this invisibility is also evident when Maja's brother Thomas, smears white paint on his face during a race and exclaims: "I run almost twice as fast with this stuff you know. I run like no one knows me" (Oyeyemi 209). With such a complex background, Oyeyemi sets the novel in two spatial planes that implicate the possible establishment of a multifaceted cultural identity. But the novel, Helen Cousins too observes, does not project an unchallenged acceptance of a multicultural Britain. Instead, "it leaves the notion of a black essentialist subject disintegrating in the absence of its binary opposite" (Cousins 4). Alternatively, Oyeyemi expresses how differences created by the discourse of blackness collapse any chance of common identification with cultural and historical ties. For instance, in her school, both Maja and a Trinidadian girl named Dominique are considered in the same group and separated from black girls coming directly from Africa. This difference is juxtaposed with Maja's mother, Mami's supposition of universal sisterhood among black girls.

The fantastical world of the Orishas is filled with cultural symbols and traditions directly influenced by Yoruba culture and religion. Represented by the mother goddess of the ocean, the Yoruba religion is seen to have a dominant presence over others in Europe. The goddess Yemaya has a world of her own, but there are many instances when it seems to overlap with Maja's world. For example, when Maja's mother shares memories of her past, "Mami became Yemaya Saramagua, a sure, slow swell in her arms and her hips like water after a long thirst, her arms calling down rain, her hands making secret signs, snatching hearts" (Oyeyemi 108-9). Maja's mother Mami/Chabella is a

Santera who worships Yemaya. Maja and her father clearly state a disregard for identification with this part of black Cuba, which makes it difficult for the former to determine her self-identity. On one hand, the narrative suggests attempts at assimilation and integration that occupy discourses on multiculturalist politics, and on the other, depicts possibilities of cultural dissent and disquieting forces. Maja's rejection of her unborn child and her irritation at the constant dripping of water from their house's ceiling parallels her failed attempts at remembering aspects of "my Cuba", which is often overshadowed by the image of the "singing woman" (Oyeyemi 44, 87). The visitation of this woman is substituted in her adulthood with the twin girls – "One is a West African girl, the other vaguely Jamaican-looking with that chill cast of the lips", who follow her while she is sleepwalking (53). Like in Diana Evans' *26a* and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*, the archetype of the lost or dead twin is to be noted. At one level, these visitations enable Maja to restore some of her Cuban memories, but it is only momentary. During attempts at grappling with both notions of motherhood and her Afro-Cuban-British identity, Maja even imagines a bodily transgression wherein she thinks she has become both Chabella and the singing woman. By imagining it, she tries to gather the collective memories of historical, cultural, generational, and gendered trauma. In short, Maja attempts an intersectional experience through this transgression, but is hardly successful because of her unacknowledged understanding of blackness and 'otherness'. According to Cousins, "Maja's isolation…has a gendered dimension through its association with her pregnancy, which is also implied to be a possession of the female body" (13). In this sense, 'possession' or 'inhabitation, becomes a gendered experience available only to embodied subjects. Besides, the manifestation of twoness enables the writer to represent the manifold ways of reading into black women's resistance.

Helen Oyeyemi effectively strives to show how black diasporic women strategize their agency in multiculturalist politics, which seeks to eradicate specific differences and homogenize cultures, including black women's experiences. The hegemonic endeavours of integration lead to disintegration of communities and in *The Opposite House* even Yoruba gods and goddesses are unable to escape from it. The narrative also shows through the family of Kayodes, how an adamant unacceptance to assimilate can lead to destruction. In the novel, the Kayodes die of premediated starvation while Yemaya is routinely seen preparing delectable cuisines at the backdrop. In the end, however, there is a positive reclamation of the Orishas and a denunciation of negative bearings,

characterised by the visitations of the twins, in Mami's house. When Maja asserts "what warms us is the way the light stays and stays, dances limbo, touches the bottom of the glass then shimmies up again", the novel ends with the hopeful note that gestures towards a re-definition of the black subject position in relation to its multiple diasporic connections (Oyeyemi 259). Despite the failed returns, the fact that the above narratives represent women's direct or indirect defiance against the control of their bodies hint at the writers' ideological movement toward a positive change. The reference to a past that is disrupting, creates the possibility of imagining alternate modernities. In fact, by alluding to New World religions – like Obeah, Santeria, Vodoun, and Shango – and creolization as a mode of 'return', directs the varied contexts of migration towards a "transnational poetics" in the context of new gendered meanings (Ramzani 29). Thus, it can be said that the struggle between diverse cultural heritages – the Caribbean, English, and African notably the primary ones – in the narratives perhaps seeks to evoke the figure of the female 'méstissage' that will re-define black women's "place and function in a globalised patriarchal world" (François xxxi).

Thus, the idea of Africa then forms part of a fractured sense of self that defies being subjected to unreasonable cultural affiliations, suggesting black diasporic women to discard aspects of their ancestral history in order to belong in the host land. This disallows black women as embodied beings to completely acknowledge their presence and agency. Black British women's writings discussed here present an impediment in the process of transgression due to the failure of a successful 'return'. Hence, it is important to explore how 'return' to other geographical spaces, than their native land or ancestral homeland, helps writers to challenge and re-work the boundaries of black British writing. In the succeeding chapter, the attempt will thus be to examine how performance and 'translocal' explorations enable black women's subject positions to delineate intersectional issues and re-determine "locations of Englishness" with black diasporic 'presences' (Baucom 21). By doing so, black women writers in Britain are not only integrating migratory subjectivities into the larger spectrum of British writing but also re-building strategies to interrogate evolving debates on race and gender.

Endnotes:

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[1] Sharon Dodua Otoo, in an interview with Ella Lebeau published in *The Oxonian Review*, comments on the unpretentious social environment of Germany, unlike Britain, despite the existence of racial biasness in both.

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