

2014-06-13

Literature of Return: Back to Africa, Belonging, and Modernity

David Michael Borman

University of Miami, dmborman@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations

Recommended Citation

Borman, David Michael, "Literature of Return: Back to Africa, Belonging, and Modernity" (2014). *Open Access Dissertations*. 1226.
https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/1226

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

LITERATURE OF RETURN: BACK TO AFRICA, BELONGING AND MODERNITY

By

David Borman

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

August 2014

©2014
David Borman
All Rights Reserved

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

LITERATURE OF RETURN: BACK TO AFRICA, BELONGING AND MODERNITY

David Borman

Approved:

Brenna Munro, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English

Tim Watson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English

John Funchion, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of English

M. Brian Blake, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Jennifer Wenzel, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English
University of Michigan

BORMAN, DAVID

(Ph.D., English)

Literature of Return: Back to Africa, Belonging and
Modernity

(August 2014)

Abstract of a dissertation at the University of Miami.

Dissertation supervised by Professor Brenna Munro.

No. of pages in text. (235)

This dissertation claims that narratives of return to Africa act as powerful tools for rethinking the contemporary neoliberal moment and the terms upon which African-based affiliations are formed. “The African diaspora” has been a powerful governing principle for explaining the cultural connections among people of African descent around the globe. But the narratives of return in this dissertation speak to the limits of a diaspora concept, which often frames the African continent as a place of cultural origins and templates that exists firmly in the past. I read fiction and life writing from Africa, North America, and Great Britain alongside one another, showing how these contemporary writers use “return” to narrate distinct temporalities of belonging and affiliation with Africa. I argue that these works disorganize the accepted flows of culture and exchange of the African diaspora and treat Africa as a modern world space in itself. Furthermore, each author uses the journey to and from the continent to rethink his or her chosen national and global affiliations. Thus, by generating new narrative terms for seeing the continent, these returns engender new expressions of the self that detach from the pervasive logic that Africa—as a cultural and narrative signifier—remains a powerful yet obscure cultural origin forever in the past.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation surely would not have happened without the support and guidance of many, and I owe them more than I can possibly repay. The University of Miami has been fully supportive of the project from the beginning and provided material support that enabled me to finish. I was able to visit the Alex Haley Papers at the University of Tennessee thanks to an archival research grant through the English Department. The Graduate School's University Fellowship as well as a Dean's Summer Research Fellowship through the College of Arts and Sciences ensured that I finish the project on time. The University of Miami has provided a wonderful intellectual home, and I want to thank the faculty and my graduate student colleagues for their support and guidance: Pam Hammons, Subha Xavier, and Ashli White all pushed and directed me in ways they may never know, while Stephanie Selvick and Kurt Voss-Hoynes knew exactly when to have a Yuengling.

To my advisors and committee: your generous support of me has been astonishing. Without the comments and guidance of Tim Watson and John Funchion, this project would still be an idea, and a much less interesting one at that. Brenna Munro served as my dissertation director, and I cannot imagine a more generous and welcoming environment for new and sometimes shaky ideas. Her belief in me and her willingness to guide me through this process with grace and humor have meant the world to me.

During the writing of this project, I moved back to Louisville, Kentucky, experiencing a "return" of my own. I have benefitted from the generous support of many here. Special thanks go to my former teachers, now friends, at Bellarmine University: Kathryn West, Tony O'Keeffe, Carole Pfeffer, and John Gatton, all of whom first

instilled in me a love for this kind of work and a desire to continue doing it. I want to also thank two former advisors from the University of Louisville—Beth Willey and Aaron Jaffe—without whom I would have no concept of how to use the words “Africa” or “modernity.” I also want to thank my first advisor, from the age of sixteen, John Williamson. I would not know how to read or write in a meaningful way without his initial interest in and support of me.

I owe everything to my family for their generous love and support. To my parents, Ted and Debbie, and my sister, Kelly, I can only say thank you for believing in what I do, even if it was never quite clear what that was. I could not have done this without your patience and support. Thanks also go to Kirk and Tammy Berlin, who have been supportive in all sorts of ways large and small. Finally, to Ashley and Chelsea: you have unconditionally supported me through every part of this project, and for that I cannot thank you both enough. Your love overwhelms me, and you have brought to my life a sense of joy that I did not know existed.

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter	
Introduction: Literature of Return and the Neoliberal Moment	1
1 Passages Home: Alex Haley's <i>Roots</i> and Its Literary Afterlives	21
2 Epic Journeys of Freedom: Contemporary Fiction and the Founding of Sierra Leone	80
3 Revenant Citizenship: Family and Belonging in Aminatta Forna and Helene Cooper	130
4 Bearing Witness and White African Affiliation	165
Conclusion: Literature of Return and the Global Future	217
Works Cited	224

Introduction
Literature of Return and the Neoliberal Moment

In July 2009, Barack Obama made his first trip to sub-Saharan Africa as the President of the United States—to Ghana. Although he had traveled to Kenya in 1988 to visit his paternal family—a journey featured in his 1995 memoir *Dreams from My Father*—this trip as President was seen as significant because of Obama’s African heritage and his unique political position. In Ghana, and around the world, the trip was seen as something between a celebratory homecoming and a strategic visit to an African democracy.¹ In his speech to the Ghanaian Parliament, Obama noted Africa’s very real diversity, the violence that has resulted from such difference, and how a fuller appreciation of a liberal worldview can secure lasting peace:

Let me be clear: Africa is not the crude caricature of a continent at perpetual war. But if we are honest, for far too many Africans, conflict is a part of life, as constant as the sun. [...] These conflicts are a millstone around Africa's neck. Now, we all have many identities—of tribe and ethnicity; of religion and nationality. But defining oneself in opposition to someone who belongs to a different tribe, or who worships a different prophet, has no place in the 21st century. Africa's diversity should be a source of strength, not a cause for division. We are all God's children. We all share common aspirations—to live in peace and security; to access education and opportunity; to love our families and our communities and our faith. That is our common humanity. That is why we must stand up to inhumanity in our midst. It is never justified—never justifiable to target innocents in the name of ideology. (“Remarks”)

Obama’s words interestingly link some important global perceptions about contemporary Africa: the negative global image of Africans as violent; the “tribal” nature of life there; the saturation of society by culture and tradition; the uneven deployment of liberal, rights-based discourse in government; the common humanity that binds Africa to the rest

¹ Mac-Jordan Degadjor, a Ghanaian blogger, characterized Obama’s visit as “a great tribute to freedom fighters all over the world,” and Ghanaian enthusiasm for the visit resulted in self-printed clothing bearing the president’s image and a general sentiment of U.S.-Ghanaian connection because of Obama’s African heritage (“Obama’s Ghana trip”).

of the world. While Obama is certainly invested—both politically and personally—in Africa’s global connections, he subtly reinforces the notion that contemporary Africa and Africans remain behind the rest of the globe. Governed by “ideology” and tribal identification, the Africans Obama denounces—like the violence he criticizes—have “no place in the 21st century”; they are, he implies, far from the modern, liberal subjects of a globalized present who can rationally detach from ideological or cultural identifications and assert their autonomy.²

I begin with Obama’s Ghanaian address not as a critique of his particular politics, but as an indicator of the ways that liberal ideals—of freedom, rights, and individualism—are tied together with a rational, secular political modernity, neither of which is customarily accorded to contemporary Africans living in African nations.³ Even when disavowing the “crude caricature” of Africa as perpetually violent, Obama’s characterization of ideologically and culturally driven Africans reinforces the notion that those living on the continent remain on the margins of a modernity. Similar logic governs many popular portrayals of Africa, from Oscar-winning films to pop-science accounts of the “cradle of humanity,” all of which assert that Africa, as a whole, has more in common with historically outmoded ways of life than with the contemporary world.⁴ In many

² Obama’s characterization is akin to Wendy Brown’s notion of the “organicist creature” who stands outside the confines of liberalism. She notes the difference between individuated subjects of modern liberalism and this supposedly non-individuated, irrational creature: “For the organicist creature, considered to lack rationality and will, culture and religion (culture *as* religion, and religion *as* culture—equations that work only for this creature) are saturating and authoritative; for the liberal one, in contrast, culture and religion become ‘background,’ can be ‘entered’ and ‘exited,’ and are thus rendered extrinsic to rather than constitutive of the subject” (“Subjects of Tolerance” 153).

³As outlined below, neoliberalism is equally invested in these Enlightenment ideals—especially in theory—and in practice is particularly insistent that “developing” spaces of the globe do not have the capacity to assert such modernity.

⁴ See, for instance, Sidney Pollack’s 1985 film *Out of Africa*, in which Kenyan laborers are depicted as simplistic set pieces for cathartic or comedic effect. They are both the object of Karen’s pity and the targets of situational humor, such as when they are continually surprised and impressed by a cuckoo clock. In anthropological sciences, the “Out of Africa” theory asserts that humankind has its origins in Africa, and

ways, contemporary citizens of Africa have not yet been let out of what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls liberalism's "waiting room of history," as their capacity for full political modernity is still broadly questioned (8).

Meanwhile, as Western representations portray those in Africa proper as waiting for their modernity, the work of cultural theorists like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy has reinvigorated the African diaspora as a structure of feeling, inaugurated with Atlantic slavery, that exists at the margins of Enlightenment modernity. Yet, as a cultural formation that explains global black identifications, diaspora as a concept is limited by its assumption of the Atlantic slave trade as the basis for transnational connections. In establishing what Michelle Wright calls the "Middle Passage Epistemology," Gilroy in particular automatically occludes experiences and identities that are not organized around the Atlantic slave trade, such as "African-American" experiences like Obama's (whose father was Kenyan and came to the United States in 1959, during Kenya's war of independence, only to return to Kenya in 1964). Just as problematically, Charles Piot notes, a black Atlantic diaspora assumes that Africa plays no active role in the dynamic "counterculture of modernity" that Gilroy outlines. Piot claims that Gilroy characterizes Africa in one role, "as provider of raw materials—bodies and cultural templates/origins—that were then processed or elaborated upon by the improvisational cultures of the Americas" ("Atlantic Aporias" 156). Gilroy asserts that, for blacks in the West, "slavery itself and then their memory of it" allowed for a critical rethinking of "the foundational moves of modern philosophy and social thought" and thus demands "that bourgeois civil

while this may be true in a scientific sense, the continued push to see the continent as the birthplace of humanity only reasserts its antiquity rather than its contemporariness (see Meredith). Less subtly, contemporary thrillers like Michael Crichton's *Congo* (1980) take up the "lost world" tradition of Rider Haggard, depicting the African jungle as a space that is inhabited entirely by ancient cities (in Crichton's case, Zinj) and ruthless, violent animals.

society live up to the promises of its own rhetoric” (Gilroy 39, 37). While Gilroy calls this formation a “counterculture of modernity,” it is clear that “black Atlantic people simultaneously reside both inside and outside the modern and thus inhabit a space that gives them a critical purchase on modernity itself” (Piot, “Atlantic” 159). I would characterize this as “diaspora modernity,” a cultural affiliation with a particularly critical relationship to modern “rationality” that nevertheless is associated—even obliquely—with the liberal and modern ideals of civility, individualism, and the notion of freedom.

My concept of diaspora modernity stems from Gilroy’s insight that Enlightenment discourse was bound together with racial slavery, with a particular focus on the temporal placement of Africa. Gilroy claims that the position of the plantation slave fosters practices of resistance that “articulate a memory of pre-slave history that can, in turn, operate as a mechanism to distil and focus the counter-power of those held in bondage and their descendants” (58). Gilroy characterizes this memory of a time before slavery as patently outside modernity, giving diasporic subjects “a measure of autonomy from the modern” while remaining inescapably inside “an ungentle modernity” that has racial terror at its center (58). With double consciousness and diasporic experience required for engaged participation in Gilroy’s modernity, it is no wonder that Africa is conceptualized almost entirely in the past. Diaspora modernity thus relies on Africa remaining atavistic and out of the realm of the modern.

It is hard to overstate the importance of Gilroy’s insight that racial terror was at the heart of Enlightenment “rationality” and that transnational cultures of affiliation constitute an effective “counterculture” of the modernity built upon such rationality. My project is an attempt to understand the significant ways in which contemporary fiction

and life writing traversing the globe map new critiques of the concept of an ever-atavistic Africa, a worldview inherited from Enlightenment rationality, liberal political ideals, *and* the discourse of diaspora. As such, I claim that “return”—conceived broadly and often metaphorically—needs to be understood as an important motif for African and diasporic writing as it runs counter to the accepted flow of diasporic exchange and critiques the relationship between the African continent, liberal modernity, and the global political and social projects attendant to the (neo)liberal present by suggesting new African-based collectivities. I organize my analysis around four key terms of the global, liberal (or neoliberal) present: cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, citizenship, and witnessing. Individually and collectively, these terms reflect some of the major assumptions of liberalism and its latter-day cousin neoliberalism, as they assert an ideal individual, rights-bearing self that expresses rationality, civility and a sense of freedom in a global moment.

In many respects, the narratives I examine defy typical temporal and geographical field boundaries, as I consider African, African American, and black British literature together as mutually sustaining interrogations of Africa’s place within modernity. Although the term “Atlantic” addresses some of the geographical range of this study—such as returns to West Africa from the US and Great Britain—the maps of return that I chart span across the continent to Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. While not a revision of the Atlantic paradigm, this project does place typically Atlantic issues—such as the slave trade and its diaspora—in conversation with particulars of a variety of sub-Saharan national and transnational currents. Similarly, this project’s charting of transnational movement sits alongside specific national histories and attitudes towards

slavery, colonization, and postcolonial independence. There is a constant tension in these works, and my analysis of them, between a vague—but politically and socially relevant—space called “Africa,”⁵ a global audience that is primed to read about a generalized and often already knowable Africa,⁶ and the impulse to be nationally and culturally specific.⁷ A brief example would be Ghanaian Kofi Awoonor’s novel *Comes the Voyager At Last* (1992), a novel I consider in chapter one as textually conversant with Alex Haley’s *Roots*—a central text in my archive of return literature. Although *Comes the Voyager* is specifically set in post-Nkrumah Ghana and suggests the cultural importance of specific Ewe ceremonies and ways of knowing the world, the novel also engages Africa at large as a global signifier and registers the uses and limits of thinking of the continent as one unified idea.

In terms of periodization, the works are all contemporary, ranging from Alex Haley’s 1976 *Roots* to Peter Godwin’s memoir *The Fear*, first published in 2011; yet I want to offer a more specific—and political—timeline for this study. These works all coincide with a progressively more fervent neoliberal global order, in which the political ideals of liberalism—individual freedom and the dignity of humanity—are politically and globally deployed as the basis of “civilization” in general. As David Harvey convincingly shows, the neoliberal project that has its roots in the immediate aftermath of World War II becomes more clearly articulated and adopted with the 1960s and 70s economic

⁵ To the notion of Africa as a “place-in-the-world,” anthropologist James Ferguson rightly notes that “Africa” is “a category through which a ‘world’ is structured—a category that (like all categories) is historically and socially constructed (indeed, in some sense arbitrary), but also a category that is ‘real,’ that is imposed with force, that has a mandatory quality; a category within which, and according to which, people must live” (5). He claims that it is “at once dubiously artificial and powerfully real” (6).

⁶ Ferguson, again, is helpful here: “[T]he world is (perhaps now more than ever) full of talk, not of specific African nations, societies, or localities, but of ‘Africa’ itself” (1-2).

⁷ Ferguson notes this desire, especially in anthropology’s “disciplinary commitment to the detailed observation of spatially delimited areas through local fieldwork” (3).

abandonment of “embedded liberalism” and Keynesian policies that accepted freely deployed state power in the name of economic growth and employment.⁸ Neoliberalism, in contrast to post-World War II embedded liberalism, foregrounds free trade, strong individual rights, and “the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade” (Harvey, *Brief History* 7).

Harvey clearly outlines the origins and proliferation of neoliberal economic and social policies, noting that, above all, the neoliberal moment that extends to the present is one that is deeply invested in globalization and transnational connections, especially with its nominal adherence to universal freedom as a global ideal.⁹ Neoliberalism, in fact, could be construed as “a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism” (19). In practice, however, it has become a deeply exploitative project in which the effect, according to former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, “has all too often been to benefit the few at the expense of the many, the well-off at the expense of the poor” (20). Such restoration of class power, according to Harvey, is done under the convenient justification “that American neoliberal values of freedom are universal and supreme” (*Brief History* 206).

These concerns may seem far from the domain of literary travels “back” to Africa, but part of this project’s premise is that the international dimensions of neoliberalism’s political exploitation are connected to the cultural abandonment of Africa as part of the

⁸ See chapter one of *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, in which Harvey clearly draws a line from the establishment of Bretton Woods institutions after World War II—and the Keynesian embedded liberalism that developed from it—to the contemporary moment. For Harvey, the most important factor in the change has to do with a shift in the politics of capital distribution, as ending inflation in the late 1970s became more important than maintaining full employment domestically in the U.S. and Great Britain, and the IMF shifted its policies to put the burden of repayment on the debtor nation no matter what the cost for the local population.

⁹ Harvey’s history of the theory behind these policies goes back to its formulation as early as 1947, with the Mont Pelerin Society, a group that remained well funded but academically and politically marginal until the 1970s.

modern world. The restoration of economic division through neoliberal “deregulation” is culturally reflected in the further entrenchment of a global division between the developed Western world—supposedly governed by rationality, secularism, and freedom—and a “backward” or “developing” one. One need look no further than the patronizing and devastating “structural adjustment” demands of the IMF in exchange for debt rescheduling, a process that began in the early 1980s. As part of a “one size fits all” approach to development, the IMF—and, to a lesser extent, the World Bank—required privatization and neoliberal reforms in the name of individualism, freedom, and the autonomy of these developing societies. In practice, however, such adjustments made repayment of debts of paramount importance, often at the expense of development and well-being in the debtor nation. As Michael Denning argues, a host of uprisings since the 1970s has taken aim at globalization. In contrast to what Denning calls 1968 liberation movements focused on “identity politics,” these uprisings are in response to the systemic inequalities of a nominally liberal new world order.¹⁰

I see these literary works of return loosely in the spirit of the IMF protests and what Denning calls a contemporary “antisystemic tendency,” as these return narratives speak back to neoliberalism’s positioning of Africa as materially and temporally marginal (45).¹¹ Far from unified as a critique of global neoliberalism, I see these works engaging the key terms of this moment via the motif of return. If global neoliberalism nominally

¹⁰ Denning cites IMF protests in the 1970s and the 1999 “battle in Seattle” WTO protest as examples of this new kind of antisystemic uprising that has not yet been charted but which differs radically from the “liberation movements of 1968” (45). In an African context, Malian filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako’s 2006 *Bamako* dramatizes a trial in which the IMF and World Bank are taken to task for their roles in creating and maintaining the “developing” status of many sub-Saharan African economies. For an alternative reading of *Bamako*, see Spivak.

¹¹ Denning refers to the global movements after 1968’s “identity politics” liberation movements so vaguely because they are “apparently unconnected uprisings against recolonization, globalization, neoliberalism, the global assembly line, and the new enclosures” (49). He notes that this “antisystemic tendency does not yet have a name, nor a recognized chronology” (45).

promotes liberal ideals and practically re-entrenches unequal divisions of capital, these works rethink such systemic inequalities by staging journeys to the seemingly marginal zones of modernity. In these various African locales, notions of cosmopolitanism multiculturalism citizenship, and witnessing—all of which are underpinned by liberal modernity’s understanding of the self and are deployed by neoliberalism in the names of freedom and autonomy—are staged and assessed. I use return as the critical paradigm because of its power to reorganize the systemic givens of this moment.

At its most basic level, the journey of return shifts these African locations from the periphery—or “developing” world—to the narrative center. While going “back” to Africa initially encodes return as a trip to a previous time, the actual encounters with Africa in these works engender distinct temporalities and often ambivalent recognitions of African modernity. What liberalism—according to Uday Mehta—excludes as either too savage or too infantile for self-government, acts of return work to include and examine as critical pieces of contemporary modernity. Return is thus a powerful agent in delivering supposedly “not-yet-ready” cultures from Chakrabarty’s “waiting room.”

In another sense, my emphasis on return enables a fresh perspective on what has become an orthodox, racialized critique of Enlightenment modernity—the African diaspora. The diaspora itself encodes Africa as peripheral and non-modern, but the reversal of accepted diasporic flows of culture and exchange at stake in these works critiques that underlying strain of diaspora work. My analysis of these works positions their returns as African-based alternatives to the affiliations engendered by diaspora modernity and allows for a range of African modernities to emerge as contemporary responses to the global order.

The first chapter uses archival research to reevaluate the paradigmatic contemporary back-to-Africa narrative, Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976). Drawing from Haley's papers, including multiple drafts of *Roots* and the unpublished volume "Search for Roots," I argue that the book's commitment to Africa as a land of "tradition" challenges accepted narratives of Africa but does not fully commit to Africa's modernity. In Haley, I identify a form of cosmopolitanism designed to affiliate outwardly from the United States during the nation's bicentennial year, and I see his work expressing some of cosmopolitanism's most generative and limiting aspects. Cosmopolitanism is one of the key terms analyzed here because of its relationship to liberal discourses of citizenship and inclusion. As Craig Calhoun notes, cosmopolitanism's recent revitalization is a productive attempt to look across borders and forge international democratic solidarity, but it also offers "a vision of political reform attractive to elites partly because it promises to find virtue without radical redistribution of wealth or power" (893). I see Haley and these related works engaging cosmopolitanism in a similar light. Although it productively looks across national borders for its affiliative structure, Haley's form of cosmopolitanism troublingly posits Haley the traveler as one who is fully included in the modern world, while the Gambians he meets remain frozen in the past.

From the book's conception, Haley saw his work as a symbolic story of reparative return for African Americans in general. His moment of return to Juffure, Gambia is motivated by the desire to represent Africa differently, and he does so by foregrounding the "tradition" he finds in Juffure. Although this contests the continent's popular portrayal as a space of sheer barbarism, it also leaves Africa in the past. One of the most suggestive limiting factors is Haley's stylistic commitment to the linearity of a progress

narrative that does not allow him to conceive of African modernity more broadly. The remainder of this chapter looks to literary uses of Haley from around the Atlantic and their revisions of his diasporic cosmopolitanism.

In *Lose Your Mother* (2007), Saidiya Hartman similarly narrates a personal return to Africa with the slave trade at the forefront, but her travels to Ghana notably diverge from Haley's desire to find a heritage because she seeks to understand the dispossessed and their experiences in themselves. For Hartman, the possibility of finding a more complete family portrait or an ancestral village is comparatively less important than understanding the process by which African people became Atlantic commodities. In general, her revision of Haley's "return" reaches away from the nation to embrace both diasporic and Ghanaian histories of slavery, and her form of cosmopolitanism is marked by its open-ended temporality, where the Ghanaian slave-trading past and a diasporic narrative of rupture are unevenly integrated.

The remainder of the chapter shifts to an analysis of fiction, beginning with three contemporary black British novels of return. Aminatta Forna (*Ancestor Stones*, 2006), Diana Evans (*26a*, 2005), and Helen Oyeyemi (*The Icarus Girl*, 2005) each present fictional accounts of return to family villages in Sierra Leone and Nigeria, and in each novel, specific African pasts linger into the diasporic present. As with Hartman's memoir, these novels develop a form of cosmopolitanism that relates to Haley's but complicates his temporality. As fiction, especially, they are more generically free to portray specifically overlapping temporalities, and I argue that this sense of the past inserting itself into the present is a fictional strategy that ultimately allows for African pasts to actively make a difference in a cosmopolitan present. While Forna's novel

collects the narrator's family's stories from rural Sierra Leone and shows those tales positively enriching her life in London, the novels by Evans and Oyeyemi present diasporic Londoners enduring sinister hauntings and displacements by Nigerian spirits. Although their tones differ greatly, I argue that in each case a specific past from Africa lingers and disrupts present notions of self and that this overlapping temporality critically revises Haley's cosmopolitanism.

The final fictional inheritor to Haley I consider is Ghanaian Kofi Awoonor's *Comes the Voyager At Last* (1992), which overlays a story of African American "return" onto Ghana, a specifically diasporic experience of racism in the United States, the historical experience of capture and transportation, and highly specific Ewe ceremonies and ways of knowing the world. Awoonor's work clearly questions the Haley-esque return for its narrative abandonment of lived African experience, but he does so by suggesting an alternative form of cosmopolitanism that embraces multi-temporal understandings of the world and the individual's place within it. I argue that the cosmopolitanism in Awoonor's novel is built on these competing notions of the self, as local, regional, and international commitments are all broadly questioned and unevenly deployed in the novel's stance towards African-based affiliation. Like the other textual afterlives of *Roots*, Awoonor's novel is both indebted to and temporally breaking away from Haley's work, ultimately reflecting globally resonant and place-specific histories and experiences.

Chapter two looks to contemporary fictional accounts of a moment of mass return in 1792, when the Black Loyalists sailed from Canada to found Freetown, Sierra Leone. I contend that Lawrence Hill's *Someone Knows My Name* (2007) and Syl Cheney-Coker's

The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar (1990) both relate this moment of mass return in a manner that destabilizes the contemporary notion of multiculturalism. Typically, the Black Loyalists are portrayed as minority subjects who demand for recognition of their rights and privileges. As such, they strongly resonate with the multicultural present, which is built upon the collective duty to recognize the value and worth of different cultures. This demand, as Will Kymlicka notes, is always in dialogue with “liberal principles of individual freedom and social justice” (193). The two novels I examine, however, form a critique of this multiculturalism by narrating the Black Loyalists differently. They propose the alternative need to think of this moment multihistorically—by embracing the many overlapping histories as simultaneously influential for Sierra Leonean identification—and to recognize the uneven international connections that are integral to contemporary collective identification.

Hill’s novel is narrated by its protagonist, Aminata Diallo, as her autobiography. In the work, she details her capture and transportation, slavery on an indigo plantation in South Carolina, bookkeeping as a slave for an indigo inspector, running away in New York City at the beginning of the American Revolution, emigration to Nova Scotia after the war, sailing to Sierra Leone with the founding of Freetown, and eventually writing her commissioned autobiography in London for a group of abolitionists. Her narrative clearly involves a number of national, regional, and international histories, and as the story progresses, she develops a sense of self in which she continually identifies with a wider community and simultaneously recognizes the importance of individuals and local affiliations. Throughout, she maintains active ties to her homeland as a complex and modern space, and her commitment to her entire story of transportation, return, and

eventual public prominence as a writer foregrounds the need to think of the Black Loyalists as representatives of multiple histories rather than as set pieces in a multicultural version of Canadian history. Hill's novel invites its readers to consider many histories of Africa and diaspora as overlapping sources for identification with Africa rather than a simplistic view of African-based cultures and a demand for recognition.

Cheney-Coker's novel rethinks the Black Loyalists differently, as it narrates an epic tale of Malagueta—a thinly veiled substitute for Sierra Leone—as a story of magical connections between the settler population and the area they come to call home. Magic is the primary narrative device that Cheney-Coker uses to characterize the settlers' methods for identifying with Malagueta as a homeland. In general, Cheney-Coker mystifies the workings of time in Malagueta, so that people long dead come back to affect the present, and the postcolonial nation is one of many transhistorical connections encouraged throughout the novel. By confusing time in the novel, Cheney-Coker makes his most suggestive statement about the relationship between a contemporary multiculturalism and the Black Loyalists, as readers are invited to think through Sierra Leone's multiple histories that overlap in interesting ways that cannot be separated from one another. Likewise, the overlapping temporalities of Cheney-Coker's novel reorganize the notion of "return" as a trip back in time, as such temporal stability is simply disavowed in the narrative. If the impulse of multiculturalism is to divide a society into discrete and knowable entities, and then to recognize the value of each individual culture, these novels suggest that such division and granting of value is impossible in light of the complex and different histories at play in return.

In the third chapter, I explore the intersection of citizenship and the seductive appeal of finding an “African family” by reading two memoirs of return to West Africa that engage postcolonial national politics. I argue that these works—Helene Cooper’s *The House at Sugar Beach* (2008) and Aminatta Forna’s *The Devil That Danced On the Water* (2002)—overtly construct a family structure through their narratives of “return” and use that family to substitute for the citizenship that is curtailed in their respective nations. These alternative family structures are clearly in dialogue with the notion of a liberal citizenship, where inclusion as a citizen is understood as a legal status given by a rights-granting community. The families are deliberately structured and offer a particular form of postcolonial belonging, what I call “revenant citizenship,” that can fill in for more conventional models of national belonging. Revenant citizenship articulates a particularly difficult feeling of belonging, as Forna and Cooper both figure themselves as somehow connected to dead ancestors in ways that complicate notions of family and nation. Rather than depict their families as synecdoches for the nation or as scattered in diaspora and reunited in return, these authors think through a form of family belonging in which a seemingly “dead” past refuses to remain there. Thus, they eerily double national histories of return as they attempt to forge belonging in their contemporary West African nations. The concept of a revenant citizen, I argue, highlights the vexed temporalities of belonging in these memoirs and ultimately provides a foundation for affiliation amidst political turmoil.

I focus on two contemporary narratives of return by those who were born in Africa: Helene Cooper’s return from the U.S. to Liberia and Aminatta Forna’s memoir of postcolonial Sierra Leone. Both are memoirs of reuniting families during and after civil

wars in their home countries. Cooper looks to reunite with her lost adopted sister, Eunice, who stayed in Liberia during the war as the rest of the family fled, while Forna combs through the oral and written archives of Sierra Leone to find the truth about her father's 1975 execution. Forna looks to Sierra Leone's past to make a claim for the nation's present—run by the same people who unjustly executed her father, the country cannot offer her the rights of citizenship. Yet, in resurrecting the past in her memoir, Forna invents her own family connections and grounds for affiliation. Cooper similarly brings the past back to life, and her moment of revenant citizenship comes in the family's cemetery plot. Fully participating in the nation at the time of her return is impossible for Cooper, as she does not identify with those who drove her family out of the country. However, she symbolically reclaims her family and ancestors in the nation in the midst of post-Civil War struggle, and in this way she can claim some sense of Liberian affiliation.

I argue that when the mechanics of return intersect with the politics of family and racial belonging in these works, contemporary African locations—rather than the fantasy of distant origins—are the primary avenues for affiliation. These memoirs thus narrate temporal continuity in times of political and social disruption, and I see such narratives as ultimately suggesting a working through of modern West African national histories rather than the more common returnee desire to find ancient cultural roots in an ancestral village.

The fourth chapter explores how return to Africa cuts across racial lines by arguing that contemporary white African works that hybridize journalism and memoir constitute a new form of writing about African conflict, a position I call the yearning witness. In this chapter, I rework theories of witnessing that foreground the witness's

enunciating position both inside and outside what is being testified to, by claiming that the white African yearning witness is both inside and outside in terms of identity and citizenship as well as in ethical relation to traumatic events. These works capture the difficult negotiation of forging belonging in a homeland where conventional methods of postcolonial belonging for white Africans are not possible. As Kelly Oliver notes, bearing witness is a key term for contemporary notions of subjectivity, especially ethical projects of relation. I see these testimonies of yearning—all of which are rooted in narratives of return to a home country—as both contributing to the temporal placement of Africa in the past by focusing on historical moments of struggle, but using these pasts to position these African nations as globally resonant in the contemporary world.

I begin with the works of Peter Godwin and Alexandra Fuller, who have gained international prominence for their life writing that covers the very recent African pasts of the Rhodesian War and its political aftereffects. Although they are typically seen as either “insider accounts” or white confessionals, I position these works as primarily memoirs of return. Fuller, I claim, enacts return by narratively returning to the moment of conflict and its immediacy in her account of the Rhodesian War. This sense of return is extended through the multiple travels she makes to Southern Africa in her subsequent works. Godwin similarly foregrounds return in his works, as he consistently travels between Britain, the US and Zimbabwe as part of his professional duties and to visit his aging parents in Harare. Both authors combine these returns with their witnessed accounts of war, and I argue that these acts of witnessing produce a form of confessional that defers absolution in favor of complex and specific war narratives.

I then shift to two accounts that are more concerned with a longer colonial past, claiming that Aidan Hartley (2003) and Rian Malan (1990) critically use histories of Empire to generate their witnessed narratives. Hartley combines his family's history of settlement in East Africa with historically informed accounts of contemporary African violence. Thus, his account of the Somali conflict of the early 1990s is informed by a longer colonial past than journalistic accounts typically afford it, and his witnessing of this violence takes on a new sense of historicity. Rian Malan makes a similar move in his memoir of return to South Africa. Written to explain South African violence, *My Traitor's Heart* strangely juxtaposes alternative, non-apartheid explanations of this violence with colonial narrative staples about inscrutability, darkness, and an African landscape that seems outside of history. Malan is the most glaring example of these returnees replicating the narrative colonialism of white writing on Africa. But, taken as a whole, these narratives also attempt to separate from the global authority white African memoirs are often afforded. Rather than rely on journalistic tropes that merely make a spectacle of black violence in Africa, these reporters/memoirists take the colonial past, contemporary politics, and their own experiences into account, resulting in revised narratives of postcolonial African conflict and postcolonial white African belonging that hinge upon an understanding of witnessing that enables a sense of identity that can never quite be incorporated in conventional postcolonial national terms.

Given the complex relationships between return and modernity that I plot here, some explanation of "modernity" itself seems relevant. Modernity is a highly contested and rapidly proliferating concept. As James Ferguson outlines it, the concept of alternative or multiple modernities in anthropology and the humanities, specifically in

accounts of Africa, is an understandable method for emphasizing African coevalness with the West and conventionally “modern” societies. Yet, Ferguson also highlights how “modernity” is often politically and popularly conceived as “a global status and a political-economic condition” rather than a set of cultural practices (187). This is undoubtedly an important distinction between academic celebrations of creative culture that write against a “traditional” continent and the experience of being marginalized from the modern world politically and economically. Ferguson implies that academic and political discourses both evade questions of real socioeconomic disparity by focusing on cultural production and “development” respectively. In plotting these return narratives as critiques of global liberal discourse, I am arguing that they negotiate both of these conceptions of modernity. As a kind of “fresh” encounter with African culture and lived reality, the journey of return starkly explores Africa’s variously modern cultural forms and the socioeconomic inequality that often governs everyday life. Africa’s marginalization—economically, socially, temporally—is rethought in these returns, as they depict encounters across classes, borders, and times.

In conclusion, then, I’d like to reconsider Obama’s Presidential “return” to Ghana. Obama is certainly interested and invested in seeing Africa differently. In his speech, he maintained that the entire continent is important for contemporary global prosperity: “I do not see the countries and peoples of Africa as a world apart; I see Africa as a fundamental part of our interconnected world.” Yet, in the same speech, he also asserted the primacy of “faith” and “culture” to violent, and specifically “African,” ways of life. While Obama subtly reinforced the cultural marginalization of Africa as saturated by ideology and culture, the texts in this project work differently. They use return as a

moment to reconceive ties to the continent and what it means to reorganize contemporary narratives of Africa in the world.

[Afterlives are about practices of reading, questions of interpretation, and the exigencies of disparate historical contexts.
—Jennifer Wenzel, *Bulletproof*

Chapter One
Passages Home: Alex Haley's Roots and Its Literary Afterlives

In 1967, Alex Haley traveled from New York City to Juffure, Gambia for the second time in a matter of months. It was one of many trips to Africa that Haley would make while writing his highly acclaimed *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), and it was certainly the most important moment of his life. In Juffure, Haley confirmed the details of his family's oral history, adding one key element: the name of the African ancestor who had originally been captured in slavery. In his multiple returns to Africa, Haley felt immeasurably enriched—his sense of personal, family and racial identity had come to include Africa as more than a distant, symbolic homeland. The continent now held a place in his everyday life, and he recognized that his story could hold the same power for those unable to find their specific roots.

Published in 1976, *Roots* is popularly considered to be the paradigmatic text of “return to Africa.” The book covers two hundred years of diasporic history from an African boy's capture into slavery to his seventh-generation descendant returning to that original village to discover where he “came from.” In finding his specific African ancestor, Haley claimed to have reversed the Middle Passage and given African Americans a symbolic story of genealogical recovery, and Haley's journey “back” to Africa took on its own form of cosmopolitanism amidst the mostly celebratory Bicentennial United States. *Roots* is one of the most successful novels and television events of all time, and it still stands as a defining narrative of diasporic journeys “home.” It is also a work against which contemporary narratives of return position themselves, and

in this chapter I argue that contemporary diasporic literature—by Saidiya Hartman, Aminatta Forna, Diana Evans, and Helen Oyeyemi—and African writing—by Kofi Awoonor—has worked within the return paradigm that Haley established in his family saga to critique Haley’s particular form of cosmopolitanism and propose their own versions that disorganize the temporalities of diaspora and “return” to Africa.

Haley’s particular form of return fully embraces the notion that African Americans have particular histories that have been either willfully forgotten or unjustly omitted from American popular history. He researched his family through oral history, archival records, and eventually experiencing West Africa for himself. His desire to reach away from a specifically national history makes Haley an interesting early example of contemporary cosmopolitanism. In fact, the book’s dedication to Bicentennial America positions *Roots* as connecting Haley’s national filiation with a willed transnational affiliation.¹² The resulting narrative, then, is a story of return told in a direct—and largely unreflective—manner, a stylistic feature that is generally used to critique Haley as “middlebrow” but which I see as reflective of the largely reactionary cosmopolitanism Haley’s 1976 return exhibits.

Due to its enormous success as a miniseries and book, *Roots* became virtually synonymous with “return to Africa” narratives the contemporary U.S., despite many

¹² The distinction between the two is outlined in Edward Said’s formulation of “secular criticism.” Said distinguishes between filiation and affiliation, where the former indicates a seemingly natural or instinctive mode of knowledge and the latter is an intellectual connection resulting from “voluntary effort and willed deliberation” (25). The concept has been adapted in various disciplinary turns (such as by Marianne Hirsch in her notion of postmemory) and has recently been used by Annie Gagiano’s concept of “affiliative critique” to indicate a transnational connection from diaspora to Africa that can both critique a particular nation while also fostering allegiance to it. My use of affiliation is meant to indicate the kinds of connections that are enabled by return that do not necessarily rely upon known blood ties to a specific spot in Africa or the “natural” allegiance that comes with a sense of nationality. As Hirsch notes, Said’s original formulation of affiliation is “horizontal” and “acknowledges the breaks in authorial transmission that challenge authority and direct transfer” (114, n. 9). I see Haley, as well as the other authors in this chapter, as engaging the kind of horizontal challenge that Hirsch describes.

earlier forms of this genre.¹³ The miniseries almost immediately inspired a wave of genealogical research, but the literary legacy of Haley is more difficult to gauge. Because it was so popular, contemporary authors who similarly explore return for understanding the self do so in shadow of Haley's particular cosmopolitanism. Specifically, it is Haley's implication about Africa's temporality that these authors position themselves against. Working from a variety of Atlantic locations, the authors I examine here all depart from Haley's form of cosmopolitanism, which embraces West Africa as a meaningful site of symbolic origin and ambivalently considers African modernity. Rather, these Atlantic afterlives of *Roots* chart new temporalities of African-based cosmopolitanism, so that Africa need not remain in the past and can be more fully incorporated into the modern world.

Alex Haley's Bicentennial Cosmopolitanism

The initial publication of *Roots* was met with unprecedented enthusiasm, as the work received glowing reviews from nearly every major publication in the United States and was awarded a Special Prize from the 1977 Pulitzer Board. The text follows Kunta Kinte—a sixteen-year-old from Juffure, Gambia—from his capture by slavers in 1750 through the Middle Passage and into enslavement in Virginia. After multiple attempts at escape, he is maimed with an axe to the foot, and at this point he accepts his physical displacement into America. Eventually, Kunta and the house cook, Bell, have a daughter named Kizzy, who is sold after trying to help another slave escape the Waller plantation.

¹³ Earlier manifestations of the “return” narrative can be seen in nineteenth century African American accounts of Liberia, such as the letters collected in Wiley or Martin Delany's *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1861). James Campbell outlines the rich historical and literary archive of going “back” to Africa, including many well-known pre-Haley narratives such as Langston Hughes' *The Big Sea* (1940) and Richard Wright's *Black Power* (1954).

Her new master, Tom Lea, rapes her almost immediately after purchase, and Kizzy has his child, named George and later referred to as Chicken George because of his involvement in cockfighting. Chicken George has eight children, one of whom is Tom, who in turn has eight children, including Cynthia. Cynthia marries Will Palmer, owner of a lumber company, and they have a child named Bertha George Palmer. When Bertha marries Simon Alexander Haley, they name their first child Alex, eventual author of *Roots*.

Early reviewers were particularly astonished at Haley's professed ability to find a specific ancestor in Africa, a task that seemed virtually impossible. And while many were moved by the narrative's routes from Africa to America and through slavery, by far the most lasting effects of the book come from the final thirty pages, in which Haley describes his quest to find his family's history. Beginning with the stories he heard on his grandmother's front porch, Haley reaches back into his memory for any information about his ancestors. It so happens that a family story survived over the centuries, a legend about "the African" who the women call "Kin-tay." This ancestor passed along some of his West African cultural heritage, as he would tell his daughter the Mandinka names for what surrounded them in Virginia: "He would point at a guitar, for example, and say something that sounded like 'ko.' Or he would point at the river that ran near the plantation—actually the Mattaponi River—and say what sounded like 'Kamby Bolongo'" (705). In *Roots*, Haley narrates the way he did archival research on his family's American past before then consulting an African linguist, Jan Vansina, who guessed that the words were Mandinka and that "Kamby Bolongo" probably referred to the Gambia River. Multiple trips to Gambia followed this revelation, and in Haley's

second trip, he was able to meet with a griot—Kebba Kanji Fofana—who recited the history of Juffure, including when Kunta Kinte had been taken from the village while searching for wood to make a drum. The story corresponded exactly with those that he heard on his grandmother’s porch, and the revelation led Haley to check more archival records. In Lloyds of London, he found one slave ship that left Gambia for Annapolis at about the time Kebba Fofana identified Kunta Kinte’s capture. In the Maryland Hall of Records, he then confirmed that the *Lord Ligonier* sailed from Gambia to Annapolis in 1767, and subsequent checking of Waller plantation records revealed the transfer of a slave, Toby, between John and William Waller—exactly as the family’s oral history had explained for generations.

While this final section is certainly one of the most emotional, it is also the subject of the book’s earliest and most enduring criticisms. Haley claimed his book represented empirical fact, but many have rightly questioned the story’s truth. Mark Ottaway, a journalist for London’s *Sunday Times*, critiqued Haley’s presentation of Juffure as a remote village in Gambia. Ottaway indicated that Juffure was a thriving center for slave trading, where Africans would have been very familiar with Europeans and would have participated in the gathering and loading of captured slaves.¹⁴ He further charged that Kebba Fofana was not a griot at all but an entertainer who knew in advance what Haley wanted to hear. Genealogists Gary Mills and Elizabeth Shown Mills investigated the plantation records of the Wallers, concluding that “Toby” could not have come on the *Lord Ligonier*, as he had been in the Waller records for many years before

¹⁴ Ottaway’s critique is certainly enhanced by the miniseries’ portrayal of Juffure as well. On film, Africa appears as “an exotic, Edenic interlude, an excursion into an explicitly primitive world to which we, like Kunta Kinte, can never return” (Fishbein 280). While this chapter does not directly address the miniseries, several of the literary critiques are at least partially based on that extremely popular film version. For example, see Fishbein, Williams, and Cartwright.

1767. Possibly the most damning critique came after Haley's death, from journalist Philip Nobile, who accused Haley of plagiarism and of intentionally hoaxing the public with his genealogy.¹⁵ Nobile concludes that Haley's method was one designed to give a false sense of ethnic and cultural stability: "Haley invented 200 years of family history. All of Haley's ripping yarns about his search for Kunta Kinte and his 10-year struggle to write *Roots* were part of an elegant and complex make-it-up-as-you-go-along scam" (32).

These questions of truth have haunted *Roots* since its publication, and David Chioni Moore sees the truth claims as one of many reasons for the book's erasure from academic curricula and publications: "[T]he silence over *Roots* has resulted from a tangle of factors: the fact-fiction uncertainty, the middlebrow burden, the political objections, the unsettling plagiarism and historical fabrication charges, and the sense of 'betrayal' surrounding the text" (198). Cumulatively, these burdens mean *Roots* is usually studied as a cultural phenomenon rather than a work of literary value. At the aesthetic level, it is widely acknowledged that *Roots* is "middlebrow," that it caters to a non-literary audience. Russell Adams summarizes the un-literary qualities of the novel:

The narrative is simplistically linear, literally going from one thing to the next in a non-reflecting manner. This contributes greatly to its literary accessibility for the technically marginal reader. The gain in sheer readability is purchased at the cost of the richer texturing and denser compressing which could be expected from a James Baldwin or a Ralph Ellison, or even an Ishmael Reed. Haley is a master of the simple declarative sentence. (132)

¹⁵ Although it would be impossible to prove that Haley knowingly duped the American reading public, Nobile's assertions of plagiarism were far from novel in 1993. In 1976, Harold Courlander sued Haley for copying 81 passages from his novel, *The African*; the matter was settled out of court for \$650,000, and Haley acknowledged that some parts of the book made their way into *Roots*. His defense—that many unsolicited bits of research were given to him at speaking engagements and made their way into the novel—seems to have never been taken very seriously. Haley was sued twice more for plagiarism, by Margaret Walker Alexander and Leonard S. Brown, Jr. Both lawsuits were dismissed.

In catering to a larger reading public, the same public he had written for in *Reader's Digest* and *Playboy*, Haley's work never gained much ground as serious literature. The sheer lack of narrative reflection in *Roots* is remarkable, and the linear narrative aids a conservative story of social progress, from slavery to middle-class modernity.¹⁶ Indeed, Arlene Keizer characterizes *Roots* as one of the "progressive visions of African American history as a relatively simple, though hard-fought movement 'up from slavery' to black middle-class life" (10). Leslie Fishbein identifies conservatism, too, in Haley's emphasis on the nuclear family as the primary form of identification, where characters develop an all-American sense of self-reliance.

These political, historical, and stylistic criticisms have become orthodox and have largely defined the discourse surrounding *Roots*. While they are important factors in evaluating the work, these critical perspectives overlook the generative, if problematic, transnational connections that Haley's "return" enabled. At its core, *Roots* is profoundly ambivalent about Africa's place in the modern world, for Haley's return is clearly a response to anachronistic and racist portrayals of the continent, but he also uses these conventions in his own depictions of Africa. He trades in some stock depictions of the continent, sometimes implying that Africa has more in common with premodern ways of life than the contemporary world. *Roots* was conceived and narrated in such a way as to posit Haley as a cosmopolitan traveler, as one who productively thinks outside the nation for his affiliations, yet also asserts a privileged Western point of view as universally

¹⁶ The conservative politics of *Roots* are extended in *Alex Haley's Queen*, a work about Haley's paternal ancestry that extends back to Ireland. The work was largely completed by David Stevens after Haley's death in 1992 and was another successful miniseries. The title character is the daughter of a slave and her owner, and depictions of Queen have been criticized for conforming to the "tragic mulatto" stereotype. Mark Orbe and Karen Strother note that *Queen*, "[R]eiterates the traditional stereotyping of other bi-ethnic characters as (a) beautiful, yet threatening, (b) inherently problematic, and (c) destined for insanity" (117).

moral. I see Haley's cosmopolitanism as embodying the term's most generative and limiting aspects, as he can think outside of and counter to the national and local as a method for resisting some common depictions of Africa as infantile or backwards. He uses this less racist Africa as a springboard for collective African American identification that accommodates transnational affiliation. I call this strand of Haley's project "bicentennial cosmopolitanism," as it is specifically directed towards the United States at a time when two hundred years of national history were being assessed and generally celebrated. On the other hand, Haley's transnational feelings were certainly influenced by his relatively classed position as a genealogical visitor to Juffure, and his depictions of the Gambia—and the composite Africa he produces in the early sections of *Roots*—are firmly rooted in a cultural past that predates modernity. For Haley, the West Africa of Kunta Kinte is largely the same as 1970s Gambia.

Before looking to the limits of Haley's transnational project—and the terms of his work that have been most heavily revised since 1976—I want to focus on the productive transnationalism of *Roots* and its bicentennial cosmopolitanism. On his dedication page, Haley offered *Roots* to the United States as a whole: "Just by chance, it is being published in the Bicentennial Year of the United States. So I dedicate *Roots* as a birthday offering to my country within which most of *Roots* happened." In a national frame, as William Huntzicker notes, this makes slavery a crucial part of the nation's first two hundred years; yet the book's dedication to the United States also highlights the transnational nature of *Roots*, as it shows the generative ways that looking across the Atlantic has enabled a sense of self denied to Haley in his home country. I see Haley's cosmopolitan travel as a response to the nation's position as the primary avenue for

identification, and his narrative of return and the Africa he produces speak to productively identifying beyond the nation and giving Africa a new place in American popular culture. He does so, I suggest, by writing a composite version of Africa based on deep research and a desire to project culture and tradition to a place commonly thought to have none.

It is significant that Haley vaguely defined Africa by the narrative terms given to him in American popular culture, where Africa was generally portrayed in stereotypical and trivial ways. Although he identifies his grandmother's stories about "Kin-tay" the African, there is little else to suggest that Haley spent much time thinking about Africa until his genealogical investigation. In the unpublished manuscript for a book describing his research and compositional methods, *Search for Roots*, Haley comments that the most significant exposure to Africa he had as a child came in the form of Tarzan, Jungle Jim, and *National Geographic*, all of which offered a portrait of an entire continent that had little to do with Africa in any real sense (Box 34, Folder 23, p. 10).¹⁷ If his only previous knowledge of Africa was largely based on these popularly received narratives, it is not surprising that his initial meeting with the griot Fofana is accompanied by expectations of antiquity. This is not to say that Haley believed Africans were all like Tarzan, or that *Tarzan* was about Africa in any meaningful sense, but that his imagined Africa was in touch with a vague sense of atavism and primal life rather than the modern world. Of course, this is the image of an entire continent that Haley seeks to correct in *Roots* itself.

¹⁷ This and many subsequent examples come from the Alex Haley Papers, MS.1888 in the Special Collections at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The unpublished material in the archives has informed my thinking about Haley and his work. Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain permission to quote from those works here, but I have tried to represent his thoughts and words as accurately as possible, given the restrictions on use. Where I refer to these texts in this chapter, I have included the archival box and folder as well as page number when available.

While his own vision of Africa was largely influenced by popular culture, he also realized that Africa was an empty signifier for many (Box 34, Folder 55). In composing *Roots*, then, Haley understood that he needed to not only write against negative perceptions of Africa but also to suggest an alternative.¹⁸ His solution is to write of the continent as cultured and immersed in tradition, a tactic that reproduces some of the fantasy-driven depictions he writes against but ultimately delivers a new portrait of Africa for his imagined African American readership. For Haley, the much-maligned middlebrow tone is a strategy for delivering this alternative vision. As he notes in *Search for Roots*, the work's pace and tone were meant to instruct the reader in West African cultural practices and would, with hope, result in the reader having assimilated a new vision of Africa and African heritage (Box 34, Folder 46, p. 6-7). The key concept for Haley is to deliver a vision of Africa that is cultured and can neatly project a non-national culture that has meaning for contemporary African Americans. In writing the early parts of *Roots* that are based in West Africa and his return, he stresses the notion that the African continent is full of tradition that continues into the present moment and can be incorporated into contemporary diasporic narratives of affiliation.

The initial sections of *Roots*, before Kunta is captured and transported to the American colonies, are governed by the need to represent Africa as having culture and for the narrative to progress chronologically, a tactic Haley noted in a letter, likely to his editor Murray Fisher, while drafting *Roots* Haley (Box 29, Folder 35). It is important to note here that the Juffure of Kunta's youth does not reflect the specifics of 1750s Juffure,

¹⁸ This sentiment is again expressed in the final lines of *Roots*. After describing his father's death and funeral, Haley writes, "So Dad has joined the others [in the family story] up there. I feel that they *do* watch and guide, and I also feel that they join me in the hope that this story of our people can help alleviate the legacies of the fact that preponderantly the histories have been written by the winners" (729).

but this is not necessarily an oversight on Haley's part. While Ottaway and others may find Haley's Juffure "inauthentic," the African town featured in *Roots* actually serves a different purpose, speaking to the symbolic history of slavery and African capture Haley originally conceived and presenting that composite Africa as a space with its own culture. In that note to Fisher, Haley presented his logic for what cultural material he wanted to include in the Africa sections of the book, noting that his research on Mandinka culture was supposed to be authentic and to represent a symbolic place of origin for those taken into slavery and their descendants (Box 29, Folder 35). His short note is followed by over fifty pages of research on the cultural practices of West Africans, including some of the common instruments and rituals of the area, which Haley gleans from anthropological, sociological, and historical works as well as personal accounts and his own observations in the Gambia. In subsequent drafts of early chapters, Haley's edits consistently focus on adding this cultural material, from the rationale for certain agricultural practices to the sounds of certain types of drum. The gradual inclusion of so many cultural facts about West Africa is only one instance of how Haley began the process of composing a symbolic story about his specific family members. It is also one indicator of the extent to which he wrote *Roots* to fill a void in knowledge as well as misrepresentation of the African past. Rather than a "make-it-up as you go along scam," the book presents Juffure as a composite picture of West Africa.

The composite continent that Haley writes is invested in providing a stable sense of cultural roots for those in the diaspora, and he carries this commitment further when conceiving of the book's entire plot as primarily symbolic. More than the story of one particular slave and one particular family, *Roots* aims to stand in for diasporic families

who have lost a sense of African heritage. In *Search for Roots*, when describing his efforts to secure advanced travel and research funding from *Reader's Digest*, Haley used his story's affective potential to make his pitch, noting that the book had the potential to give African Americans—collectively—a sense of heritage (Box 34, Folder 8, p. 27). In order to produce a true heritage for African Americans, it was important for Haley to present a relatable story that could offer a vision of cultural continuity. He thus proposed *Roots* as a symbolic saga that could help a race begin to define itself. Near the beginning of the writing process, Haley's agent, Paul Reynolds, suggested focusing on the American side of the genealogy. But as Haley relates in *Search for Roots*, writing this story was not enough: as a story that began in Spotsylvania County, Virginia could not deliver the symbolic heritage he set out to write. At the *Reader's Digest* pitch, Haley described that the conceptual and aesthetic whole is dependent upon representing the collective African American story, claiming that his family's story was also the symbolic story of millions of African Americans (Box 34, Folder 8, p. 29-30). At this point, most of the book was yet to be written. In fact, almost none of the research Haley describes with such emotion in *Roots* had even happened yet. The entire work only existed in theory, as an idea discussed in letters and at family gatherings. But it could already give cultural stability to millions, according to Haley.

I see these symbolic and composite approaches to Africa and African cultural history as indicative of the non-national approach to collective identity Haley's cosmopolitanism embodies. He certainly embraces the globe in a way that aligns with earlier versions of cosmopolitan thinking, where adopting a form of global—as opposed to local or national—citizenship can bring about loyalty to humanity and a more just

world.¹⁹ This comes through in the corrective impulse behind both the composite and symbolic Africas, as Haley directs these narrative tactics toward revising given notions of Africa in American popular culture. By identifying across national borders and presenting a vibrant cultural heritage that enriches his sense of self, Haley productively thinks outside of the narrower confines of national, local, or racial identification as an African American. In a startlingly practical way, Haley was able to engender a novel vision of Africa that built non-national structures of feeling for those who formerly felt as if they were from nowhere.

This non-national framework is also troublingly predicated upon Africa remaining statically in the collective diasporic past rather than as a full-fledged space in the modern world. Despite his desire to paint a more complex portrait of Africa, the commitment to symbolism and the flattening of West Africa into one cultural expression reveals Haley's ambivalence about how the continent fits within modernity. So while his cosmopolitan embrace of Kunta Kinte genuinely reflects generative, non-national feelings of belonging, it also dangerously separates Haley as a modern, detached Westerner from the atavistic Africa that enriches his sense of self. Although thinking across national borders may be productive in a diasporic sense, Haley's symbolic narrative of capture and redemptive return leaves Africa behind as a static piece in a flattened, unidirectional narrative of cultural progress. This kind of detached cosmopolitanism has been thoroughly critiqued for the ways it normalizes Western, middle class values as universal.²⁰ While Haley's

¹⁹ The kind of cosmopolitanism I am suggesting here stems from the Stoics, and, later, Immanuel Kant, and has been embraced contemporarily in Martha Nussbaum's revival of Kantian cosmopolitanism in the mid-1990s. These thinkers project a view of international affiliation that is moral by nature and opposes local loyalties in favor of loyalty to humanity as a whole. See Kant, Nussbaum.

²⁰ The idea, most associated with Nussbaum, that "humanity" can provide a stable category for individual identification is what has been most heavily revised in contemporary debates in the field. David Harvey aptly situates a number of theoretical nuances: "Against this universal vision [associated with Nussbaum]

“return” certainly paints Gambians as different, exotic, and frequently unknowable, the most stringent dividing line between the returnee and Juffure has to do with time. Both the Juffure to which he travels and the composite Africa Haley narrates are forever stuck in a pre-modern past.

Haley’s focus on the “traditional” African character is ultimately what causes this temporal abandonment of the continent. The trip to Juffure is introduced as a journey back in time to a village life that is secluded from the trappings of modernity. Upon first seeing Juffure, Haley notes, “Like most back-country villages, it was still very much as it was two hundred years ago, with its circular mud houses and their conical thatched roofs” (*Roots* 717). Such cultural purity extends to skin color as well, as the Africans who live in Juffure are noticeably darker than the African Americans Haley encountered his entire life. Looking at his own lighter skin, he feels a sense of shame: “I felt myself some variety of a hybrid...I felt somehow impure among the pure” (717). Such moments, however brief, indicate the extent to which Haley had already invested Africa with timeless “tradition” and cultural and racial purity. Indeed, writing Juffure as tradition-bound also implies that the griot’s eventual recitation is more authentically representative of historical fact.

Before meeting Fofana, Haley is astonished to learn of griots and the centuries of oral histories they are able to recite. When he expresses his wonder to his Gambian hosts, their response only reinforces Haley’s assumption that the interior of Africa is defined by

are ranged all manner of hyphenated versions of cosmopolitanism, variously described as ‘rooted,’ ‘situated,’ ‘actually existing,’ ‘discrepant,’ ‘vernacular,’ ‘Christian,’ ‘bourgeois,’ ‘liberal,’ ‘postcolonial,’ ‘feminist,’ ‘proletarian,’ ‘subaltern,’ ‘ecological,’ ‘socialist,’ and so forth. Cosmopolitanism here gets particularized and pluralized in the belief that detached loyalty to the abstract category of ‘the human’ is incapable in theory, let alone in practice, of providing any kind of political purchase on the strong currents of globalization and international interventionism that swirl around us” (*Cosmopolitanism* 79).

its long-established ways of life: “[T]hese Gambian men reminded me that every living person ancestrally goes back to some time and some place where no writing existed; and then human memories and mouths and ears were the only ways those human beings could store and relay information” (715). In linking his present quest for identity with a long family history that predates orthography, Haley reinforces the assumption that present-day Gambians can tell him more about his ancestors’ lives than his own. He also presents himself as the Westerner who must willingly suspend his modernity to get in touch with Fofana and others in Juffure.

Haley is so invested in African tradition that moments of modernity are almost entirely unacknowledged in *Roots*. From the beginning, Haley understands his village encounter to be with people who have long been globally connected, beginning with the slave trade and continuing to the present moment. His first moment of contact with Fofana concerns the legacy of slavery, as the griot tells Haley that the village is all-too-aware that so many Africans are now living away from the continent. Yet this brief—and largely unacknowledged—moment of African historicity is immediately balanced by an ancient village ritual. After the griot’s recitation and Haley’s moment of epiphany, the villagers almost spontaneously begin a collective ceremony of belonging, in which the entire village surrounds him and begins to chant: “I don’t remember hearing anyone give an order, I only recall becoming aware that those seventy-odd people had formed a wide human ring around me, moving counter-clockwise, chanting softly, loudly, softly” (720). Suddenly, around a dozen women have Haley embrace their infant children in a ceremony he identifies as “one of the oldest ceremonies of humankind, called ‘The laying on of hands’” (720). This initially appears as another moment in which Africa asserts its

antiquity and “inalienable connection to the past”—a remote village of jet-black people dances and performs an ancient ceremony of kinship (Piot, *Nostalgia* 20). However, the dance and ceremony are immediately followed by a trip to the village mosque, where Haley notes, “[T]hey prayed around me in Arabic. [...] Later, the crux of their prayer was translated for me: ‘Praise be to Allah for one long lost from us whom Allah has returned’” (720). Shortly thereafter, Haley begins his return to Banjul via Land-Rover. Far from the pillar of unchanging tradition, the African village Haley presents maintains a connection to the modern world, but the “ancient” traditions are consistently put in the forefront. The Juffure Haley writes is certainly not from Tarzan, but it remains more in touch with earlier time periods than the modern.

Such a portrait of Juffure in the present offers the comfort of being “from somewhere” because it stays consistent with Haley’s portrait of Juffure from the earlier, Kunta Kinte sections of *Roots*. In short, these sections rely on some of the accepted narratives that Haley implicitly challenges in his depiction of Africa. In a draft for the final portion of *Roots*, Haley explains his rationale for depicting his ancestral village as a composite of many cultures rather than the specific culture of eighteenth-century Juffure, claiming very explicitly that his version of Juffure is a symbolic composite of West African villages of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not the authoritative account of one particular Gambian village (Box 34, Folder 55, p. 94). By creating a thoroughly researched yet generic Africa, *Roots* promotes the fantasy of African origins that can complete the African American collective identity. And this fantasy continues into Haley’s present moment of return as well.

I see the differences between Haley and Gambians as chiefly expressed through his position as a cosmopolitan traveler. The divide that results when he takes an interest in Juffure is one of time. As a response to the celebratory nationalism of Bicentennial United States, Haley looks outside the nation for his affiliation and thus productively reveals cosmopolitan links abroad that enrich his sense of self. However, these links require seeing Juffure and its inhabitants as primarily traditional. The portrait he gives of contemporary Gambia, then, is largely the same as the one of 1750s Gambia. Cumulatively, Gambia remains temporally flat, a place where pre-modern ways of life have always held purchase and will continue to do so. And because Haley committed himself to writing a story of African American struggle to endure slavery and become citizens, Juffure does not narratively emerge into the modern world (Box 34, Folder 8, p. 29). That task remains for Kunta Kinte and his diasporic family in America.

Alex Haley was certainly no renegade who racialized conceptions of modernity.²¹ If Haley's non-national expression of belonging is indeed a kind of cosmopolitanism, it is one that unevenly embraces national and transnational modes of affiliation. It is certainly tied to a temporal division between the returnee and Juffure. Part of the issue is Haley's commitment to time as unidirectional for diasporic subjects. As they march boldly into a future of progress and modernity, Juffure—and Africa more generally for Haley—

²¹ In fact, to call him anything other than faintly conservative would be a misnomer. As an indicator of his conservative politics, see Haley's Afterword to his collaborative work with Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. In the book's final seventy pages, Haley works hard to firmly position Malcolm as part of mainstream U.S. civil rights discourse, perhaps as a defense against some of Malcolm's more radical political stances during and after his time with the Nation of Islam. Manning Marable, Malcolm's Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer, writes: "Few of the book's reviewers appreciated that it was actually a joint endeavor—and particularly that Alex Haley, a retired twenty-year veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, had an agenda of his own. A liberal Republican, Haley held the Nation of Islam's racial separatism and religious extremism in contempt, but he was fascinated by the tortured tale of Malcolm's personal life. [...] [F]or [Haley], the autobiography was a cautionary tale about human waste and the tragedies produced by racial segregation" (location 223).

remains in the past as a vaguely knowable homeland. But his challenge to the accepted narratives of African heritage, a challenge found especially in his return to the continent, does serve as a starting point for similar contemporary literary projects. In the remainder of this chapter, I trace some literary afterlives of Haley's return narrative, focusing on the way these later works shift away from a linear concept of diasporic time and comment differently on Africa's modernity. Interestingly, while these texts break from traditional narrative plotting, Africa remains plagued with temporality problems. Diasporic and African authors alike struggle with how to incorporate a modern African continent into an affective search for diasporic genealogical and cultural roots. I argue that these afterlives of *Roots* do so by revising the time of Haley's return and project a polytempic cosmopolitanism that injects new temporalities into this mode of return.

Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* (2007), an account of her travels from the United States to Ghana, is a direct response to *Roots*, composed thirty years later. Hartman's experiences as an African American in the post-civil rights, post-decolonization era lend the return narrative an air of disenchantment. She focuses on the slave trade as a cornerstone for a collective past that has not yet ended. Novels by Aminatta Forna (2006), Diana Evans (2005), and Helen Oyeyemi (2005) also adopt Haley's model of return, but the past they must negotiate is overwhelmingly dictated by colonialism and its aftereffects. Forna's *Ancestor Stones* narrates a return from Britain to Sierra Leone, where the protagonist, Abie, listens to and records her aunts' stories of colonial and postcolonial Sierra Leone. Evans, likewise, filters her novel *26a* through colonial legacy, as a central story told to the novel's twin protagonists in their mother's Nigerian village, comes to haunt their lives in London and the Hunter family's

negotiation of a dual British and Nigerian heritage. Oyeyemi similarly has her protagonist return to Nigeria from Britain only to be haunted by an African history of slavery—and its contemporary cultural repression—that has been neglected in her diasporic rendering of herself. Finally, Ghanaian Kofi Awoonor blends multiple historical experiences in his novel *Comes the Voyager At Last* (1992), resulting in a distinct relationship to both the slave trade and the colonial experience in Ghana. In his tale of return, Awoonor alternates between an historical narrative of captured slaves being marched to the coast and a story of a 1960s U.S. radical traveling to Ghana and discovering a specific kin group. Written in 1992, the novel reflects the politics of Nkrumah-era Ghana as well as the more contemporary Ghanaian emphasis on “return” as a type of tourism.

“Not yet over”: Saidiya Hartman’s *Lose Your Mother*

Roots inspired an entire generation to research their pasts, with a special emphasis on finding an ancestral village. For these amateur genealogists, Africa served as a homeland that could be recovered despite a history of capture and slavery. Return to Africa was largely understood in this context, even if finding an ancestral village encouraged the memory (or invention) of pre-slavery African cultures. Finding such cultures is not the goal for Saidiya Hartman’s memoir and historical investigation, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, for she travels to Ghana in order to analyze the slave trade itself. Her African ancestors may well have come from Ghana, but her interest in the country has to do with the many remnants of the slave trade, including the famous castles at Elmina and Cape Coast. To emphasize this, Hartman notes from the outset, “I wasn’t seeking the ancestral village but the barracoon” (6). A search for the barracoon

injects Hartman's return with a temporality distinct from Haley's, as slave trading becomes a past to critically work through rather than heal via return. Hartman's reach away from the nation is certainly inspired by Haley, but the cosmopolitanism of *Lose Your Mother* embraces both diasporic and Ghanaian histories of slavery, enabling a form of affiliation in which sometimes competing histories and temporalities can be integrated. Rather than leave her African affiliations in the past, Hartman approaches them in an open-ended temporality, where Africa has as much to say about the future as the past.

Focusing on the barracoon is the first of many moments in which Hartman positions her project as an alternative—if not outright rebuttal—to Haley's 1976 work. In a later interview, she notes the generational differences, especially between herself and Haley, especially in their relationship to Africa:

My book was written as an anti-*Roots* narrative, which means that *Roots* was the ur-text. *Lose Your Mother* was both indebted to Haley's magnum opus and written against it. [...] [W]hat distinguished my journey was stepping into the path of dislocated and disposable persons, so there was no ancestral village or kin group that dictated/directed my search. In this regard, I also wanted to shift the terms of a larger set of discussions about diasporic identity. (Miller 112-13)

In looking to the dispossessed, Hartman asserts a different relationship to the African past. Haley's insistence on the value of African culture becomes Hartman's focus on how that culture turned strangers into commodities, and as a consequence *Lose Your Mother* searches for transnational attachment in an informed present rather than a traditional past. Hartman cannot map Haley's project onto her contemporary moment, but her work's return still operates within the terms established by *Roots*. Hartman understandably resists affiliation with Haley because of the fantasy Africa *Roots* so readily projects as well as the way his work so cleanly incorporates Africa into its narrative of diasporic

progress. But both authors imagine their texts as important placeholders in an African American cultural narrative in which the African continent is an important point of affiliation.

To begin with, both Haley and Hartman present themselves as the products of a specifically African American cultural past. Both equally invest themselves with symbolically important functions in their returns to Africa. While Haley saw his family's story as the basic template for any African American family, Hartman's focus on the social effects of slavery make her a physical embodiment of that cultural past: "I am a reminder that twelve million crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the past is not yet over. I am the progeny of the captives. I am the vestige of the dead. And history is how the secular world attends to the dead" (18). As symbols of these different legacies of contemporary African America, their returns to Africa take on drastically divergent significance. Whereas Haley could invent an Africa that spoke to ethnic wholeness, Hartman's return focuses entirely on understanding the unbridgeable cleavages, both past and present, between Africa and the diaspora.

If Haley was chiefly interested in inspiring alternative perspectives on Africa—especially the African past—the same could be said for Hartman. Haley's challenge to the Tarzan myths of the continent responded to the culturally accepted narratives of the late 1960s and early 1970s United States. At the end of the twentieth century, such images had lost their staying power, but other sets of assumptions about Africa and African America had gained traction. As Jemima Pierre notes, the Cold War era ushered in significant changes in the study of Africa, one of which has been "a shift in the treatment of Africa in which 'culture'—against 'structure'—becomes the primary lens

through which the continent is apprehended” (197). In rethinking Africa on cultural terms, international ties to the continent became more specific to different cultural experiences, and popular imagination and scholarship saw “the isolated treatment of the transatlantic slave trade and hemispheric colonialism and slavery, on the one hand, and European colonialism of the African continent, on the other” (197). In many ways, works like *Roots* probably aided this transformation by portraying Africa as a place of “civilization” and African America as the primary inheritors of transatlantic slavery. In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman’s return challenges this separation by looking to Africa’s involvement in, and memory of, the slave system. With such a starting point, she necessarily conflicts with Haley’s account. However, it is important to note the similar impulse that guides these works. Both narrate return to Africa as a challenge to accepted knowledges of the continent, but when Hartman performs this mode of return, she does so without the linear narrative constraints of Haley’s text. The past need not remain there. Indeed, for Hartman, it has yet to end.

Hartman challenges the accepted myth that a return to Africa can offer meaningful comfort in the face of transatlantic slavery, a myth essentially popularized by Haley and *Roots*. In this regard, the terms of diasporic identity are those established by Haley’s book, where an original village gives a sense of being “from somewhere” that slavery denied African Americans. Her own feelings of alienation in the United States propel her travel to Ghana, but she recognizes that feeling accepted in Ghana requires willfully forgetting the slave trade altogether in favor of a “fiction of origins” (5). Rather than deny her longing for feelings of belonging, Hartman freely admits, “I wanted to belong somewhere or, at least, I wanted a convenient explanation of why I felt like a

stranger” (4). But the language of kinship or racial solidarity only invents a solution to the problem, and Hartman acknowledges that her travels to Ghana—and being treated like a stranger there—“allowed for no such fiction” (5). Despite her attempts to feel connected to contemporary Ghana and Ghanaians, Hartman’s relationship to the past changes the meaning of the present, where slave trading accounts for an essential yet often ignored portion of African history rather than an exclusively diasporic narrative.

Much of *Lose Your Mother* is spent historicizing the capture and sale of Africans as a common practice in Africa when Europeans first established themselves on the continent. Slaves were, at the most elementary level, strangers. Most were prisoners of war or those captured in slave raids, and African merchants consistently sold people from outside their own groups. Europeans inserted themselves into this market, eventually shipping the Africans across the Atlantic as plantation labor. Hartman stresses how connected this process was as a system of selling strangers to strangers in exchange for material goods:

African traders had no incentives to “maximize value,” since the plundered societies bearing the losses were not the same societies profiting from the trade, which only serves to demonstrate the emptiness and irrelevance of an “African identity” in making sense of the Atlantic slave trade. Simply put, slaves were stolen from one group, exchanged by a second group, and then shipped across the Atlantic and exploited in the Americas by a third group. (208)

Such stark portrayals of African involvement in the slave trade stand against the rhetoric of kinship so prominent throughout Hartman’s travels as well as in *Roots*’ narrative of return. While many Ghanaians treat her as a stranger, others strategically deploy the language of diaspora and stress historical connection in their interactions. This is most evident in the letters handed to her by schoolboys outside Elmina castle: “I want you to

know that you are my sister and I am your brother according to the history of our ancestors and Africa is both of us motherland so you are welcome back home (Akwaaba)” (84). The strategic kinship of these letters implies that the slave trade is exclusively diasporic by nature, and Hartman thinks through her return as a challenge to that very notion. Her focus on slave-trading Africa resists the fantasy of a “motherland” that can be found outside the Atlantic slave system.

Although her return is influenced by Haley and his original challenge to common understandings of Africa, Hartman drastically revises the terms of this challenge and the cosmopolitanism of Haley’s return. To begin with, imparting the idea of a civilized Africa—one of the imperatives of Haley’s return—no longer does the same cultural work at the end of the twentieth century. For Hartman, the celebratory return of *Roots* must be filtered through a more general feeling of disenchantment, as she recognizes that the promises held in Haley’s return are no longer available to her generation. Haley’s return to Africa offered the potential for a positive and definable sense of self, achieved by locating a definite past in a definite African location. From Hartman’s perspective, attaining this wholeness has to come from a fuller understanding of slavery as an African and diasporic historical experience: “Mine was an age not of dreaming but of disenchantment. I grew up in the aftermath of African independence and the civil rights and Black Power struggles, and like many of my generation I was pessimistic about my prospects at home and abroad” (38-39). Interestingly, the history of the slave trade and plantation slavery in the Americas leads to Hartman’s return, just as in Haley’s case. But whereas Haley’s return was the symbolic homecoming ending his family’s saga,

Hartman's generates a new future. In turn, the forms of internationalization she engages do not relegate Africa to the past.

This is the fundamental difference between the two works, but it also indicates the ways in which Haley has been especially useful for the contemporary critical moment. He locates the potential for understanding his affiliations in the process of return, as experiencing modern-day Gambia and the village itself gave him an "African" sense of self. Although he ultimately remained ambivalent about the Gambians he met, physically returning to Africa and writing that encounter allowed him to theorize his relationship to the continent. Hartman's focus on "the dispossessed" engenders its own form of solidarity that takes a less fantastic view of the losses experienced in slavery. Thus, for Hartman, return is always a story about disenchantment and loss rather than the triumph of recovery: "Loss remakes you. Return is as much about the world to which you no longer belong as it is about the one in which you have yet to make a home" (100). These effects of return rely on the understanding that the past is most useful as a challenge only when the future is at stake. Not coincidentally, they also imply that the relevance of Haley's project is severely limited three decades later, because his cosmopolitanism fails to acknowledge Africa's modernity. By contrast, Hartman's feelings suggest cooperation between returnee and African culture, as both work productively towards "a future in which the longings and disappointed hopes of captives, slaves, and fugitives might be realized" (234).

Lose Your Mother most clearly gestures towards this open-ended future in the final pages, with the author's recollections of Gwolu, a town founded by those who had escaped a slave raid on their original village. She observes children jumping rope and

singing: “Gwolu is a town of gold / When you enter the circle / You will be protected / You will be safe” (235). A man from Gwolu translates: “The girls are singing about those taken from Gwolu and sold into slavery in the Americas. They are singing about the diaspora” (235). The book ends on an unsettling note, characteristic of Hartman’s account as a whole: “Here it was—my song, the song of the lost tribe. I closed my eyes and I listened” (235). Given its placement at the book’s conclusion, just after a gesture towards understanding the political “fugitive dreams” that connect diasporic and continental Africans, the song indicates the importance of thinking about and shaping a future that locates the slave trade as salient moment for collective identification rather than as a temporal stepping stone to Western modernity. Elsewhere, Hartman describes this collectivity in temporal terms:

For me, it’s about the kind of possibility of political connections that are vital, that are real, and not about some fanciful notion of who we once were (for a \$50 ritual you can regain your Asante heritage). But it’s really about trying to find points of crossing that are related to a future that might be different from the present on both sides of the Atlantic. And I think that that’s why I revere the Pan-Africanist generation and that moment when they held sway on the world stage; it was a moment in which it seemed like a radical Black global politics was destined to be triumphant. (Saunders)

She further comments that ending *Lose Your Mother* with a children’s song in Gwolu is a vehicle for representing a potential political collective in the future, noting that she is still waiting for “that song that might engender a new form of radical black politics. [...] [I]t wasn’t only that I was trying to underwrite closure but also the politics that’s animating this meditation on the path we are on in this moment of waiting, of anticipation, of not knowing” (Saunders).

Her final turn toward the future is a reminder of the political ends to which Hartman puts her journey to Ghana, and this moment stresses the temporal limitations Haley's internationalism. In her estimation, Haley fails to see slavery as a present day political issue. Like his generalized African culture, Haley relegates slavery to the past, as a temporal precursor to his contemporary moment. In many ways, Hartman longs for this moment, when slavery and racial injustice seemed on the edge of collapse: "I would love for the past to be the past. [...] However, my book ends on an expectant note, in which the time of slavery is still open, and the question remains when will this become the past?" (Miller 121-22). For Hartman, there cannot simply be a past that has ceased existing, for the historical events of the slave trade continue to shape "the future that we inhabit" today (Saunders). As a revision of *Roots*, conceived and written in a time when "the narrative of liberation had ceased to be a blueprint for the future" (Hartman 39), Hartman's more contemporary return necessarily filters longing for identity through a disenchantment with "the world order engendered by the Atlantic slave trade" (Miller 113).

Return of the West African Past: Aminatta Forna, Diana Evans, and Helen Oyeyemi

On the surface, British literary production may not lend itself to the kind of return found in *Roots*, which was particularized to a U.S. experience of learning about an African heritage that has been denied through slavery and systematic racism. Yet, the larger aims of *Roots*, to challenge previously understood notions of Africa, actually complement the literarily imagined practice of return from Britain. Just as Hartman addresses persistent racism in the United States, Aminatta Forna, Diana Evans and Helen Oyeyemi negotiate the difficult histories of European contact with Africa—including that

of the slave trade—in their novels of return. These authors imagine the kind of affective return that marked Haley’s text as a method for inserting a “traditional” African past into the British present. In all three novels, African “tradition”—represented by inherited stories and historical experience—is grafted onto a global present, suggesting that using African stories of the past can inspire a present-day cosmopolitanism with a less teleological temporality. Like *Roots*, this body of contemporary black British fiction cannot resist seeing return as a journey to a more complete understanding of the self. Yet, these novels do so outside the linear, realist conventions of Haley’s work and suggest multiple returns to Africa across history.

Just as Haley’s linear narrative reflected his “cosmopolitan style,” to use Rebecca Walkowitz’s term, these works are able to question his temporality and revise it because they are explicitly fictional accounts of return. These three novels are free to re-imagine Haley’s cosmopolitanism in temporally disparate ways, as they imagine varieties of African tradition to be parts of contemporary and fully modern societies. The temporality problems that plague Haley’s depictions of Juffure remain in these works, as they often posit a static African culture firmly rooted in the past. Unlike Haley, however, the pasts that Forna, Evans and Oyeyemi write spill over into the present moment, actively shaping and defining the contemporary protagonists that fill their pages.

As novels produced for and consumed by a global audience, these fictional works and—to a lesser extent—the Kofi Awoonor novel I examine later, are especially vulnerable to the tensions between representing a unified space called “Africa” and specific national and cultural formations. Whereas Haley consciously wrote a saga that could instill stability to African Americans with origins not necessarily in the Gambia,

these novelists negotiate specific sites of memory in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Ghana. Part of their revisionary cosmopolitanism is in the specificity of certain national and cultural histories that revisit present-day diasporic subjects. Whereas Haley's transnational feelings deeply reinforced a sense of diaspora modernity while remaining ambivalent about Africa's place in the modern world, these novels more clearly incorporate specific African pasts into a cosmopolitan present. This point of view has as much to do with the works' fictional status as their cultural position from Britain. They are generically free to portray overlapping temporalities, and they navigate a cultural rupture of postcolonial migration to the UK rather than the transatlantic slave trade.

Although it begins with a letter, the majority of *Ancestor Stones*, Aminatta Forna's first novel, is concerned with the oral histories that define the protagonist's extended family. The letter, inviting Abie Kholifa to return from London to the family's Sierra Leone coffee plantation, brings her back, but the stories Abie gathers from four of her aunts—Asana, Mariama, Hawa, and Serah—allow her to keep her heritage even while physically away from West Africa. In London, as she writes her aunts' stories, a bowl of stones sits on her desk, representing the family's collected memories. The stones' very presence comforts Abie while writing, and the stories she writes are full of the complexities inherent to life in colonial and postcolonial Sierra Leone.

The novel's frame story—of Abie returning to Sierra Leone and collecting her aunts' tales—takes place after the country's decade-long civil war.²² The plantation to

²² The Sierra Leone Civil War was one of the bloodiest conflicts in recent West African history. It was closely related to the conflict in neighboring Liberia, and Liberian warlord Charles Taylor supported the rebel groups from the earliest moments. In 1991, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attempted to overthrow the government of Joseph Momoh, Sierra Leone's leader since Siaka Stevens stepped down in 1985. Aided by Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the RUF began their fighting in the alluvial diamond fields in the south of the country, near the Liberian border. In May 1997, a faction of the country's armed forces rebelled as well, forming the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), and

which she returns has been badly damaged by fire and neglect; it is hers because she is the only family member with the money and power to do anything with it. So the novel begins with a journey to literally re-plant roots—those of the coffee trees’ cuttings—in Rofathane, the agricultural town her grandfather founded in the early twentieth century. This physical act of restoration accompanies the cultural transfer of stories from one generation to the next. Abie’s method for presenting these stories, as part of her own narrative of return, indicates the power of them for her own global identifications as well as her perspective on how Sierra Leone is portrayed and received as part of the modern world. Like Haley’s return to Juffure, the Sierra Leonean town Abie finds possesses the power to stabilize her personal sense of belonging, and her transfer of these stories into writing is her particular method of disorganizing the accepted wisdom about modern Africa.

Ancestor Stones tells the narrative of Abie’s family, from the founding of Rofathane through the contemporary civil war, as a succession of narratives by her four aunts. As she writes her family’s story, Abie gains inspiration from a bowl of stones, given to her by Mariama. The stones are symbolic of her aunts’ collected memories.²³ That the stones sit on Abie’s writing desk shows exactly how affecting their presence is, as they represent a lively cache of inherited stories, and also allow her to understand her

helped the RUF to capture Freetown. This was the first moment that most Western media began to cover the war at all. Forces from ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) intervened and negotiated the Lome Peace Accords, leaving RUF commander Foday Sankoh as the country’s vice president and in charge of the alluvial diamonds. Sankoh continued the fighting, and the RUF attempted to retake Freetown in 2000. A failing UN peacekeeping force—deployed in 1999 after Lome—was aided by UK military forces, and the war was officially declared over in 2002. It is largely imagined in the West based on the heavy use of child soldiers and the extreme brutality waged by those with almost nothing against those with nothing at all. See Kandeh, chapter seven; Hoffman; Gberie; and Beah.

²³ This is a tradition Forna later describes in an interview: “[E]ach woman would choose a stone from the river and would give it to her daughter. The stone represented the collected memories of the mother. Gradually you collected a group of stones you carried with you” (Forna and Nicolae 80).

heritage as an active presence in her London life that can adapt to her changing circumstances. For Abie, they are far from mute, inanimate symbols of an historical past: “Vibrant and noisy, tumbling through time, jostling for my attention, and always with something new to say about whatever it is I am doing. Superior by far to any box of disintegrating diaries and lifeless letters” (315). As Abie composes her family’s stories, her daughter plays with the bowl of stones, finding favorites among the bunch. The novel ends with mother and daughter recognizing the stones’ place in their lives, as the young girl places the stones to her ear: “Then she gathered up all the stones, bent her head down over her cupped hands. [...] ‘Listen to the noise they make,’ she replied. ‘It sounds like they’re talking’” (317). Such an active heritage is comforting for Abie and her daughter, and the ways in which the stones influence the present speak to Forna’s narrative departure from Haley. Unconstrained by *Roots*’ linearity, the novel is free to combine the past and present in meaningful and contemporarily important ways. Unlike Haley’s griot, who recites the annals of a Juffure that ceases to exist, Abie’s stones continue to speak of a cosmopolitan affiliation with Rofathane that is rooted as much in stories of the present as those of the distant past.

This use of the ancestor stones also reorganizes the terms of Mariama’s first story, where the histories of colonialism, traditional culture, and Islam clash. “Stones” takes place in 1931, as a more rigid brand of Islam begins to take hold throughout Sierra Leone. Haidera Kontorfilo, a dynamic preacher of Islamic purity, captures the imagination of men around the area, including Mariama’s father.²⁴ After attending a prayer meeting,

²⁴ Haidera Kontorfilo (variously known as Idara and Haidara) was an Islamic leader who crossed into Sierra Leone from Guinea in 1930. He reportedly could cure illnesses and perform miracles, and he began preaching for strict Islamic reform while also encouraging anti-colonial struggle and non-payment of taxes.

her father suddenly becomes more devout and demands the same of his wives—any act Haidera had declared sinful is suddenly strictly forbidden in Rofathane. Inspired by his newly found devotion, Mariama’s father interrupts her mother’s fortune-reading session with her stones, demanding that she throw them into the river. The action ruins her mother’s life, and she soon leaves the village, only to return as a ghost months later. Mariama’s story of uncanny return is interestingly situated, temporally speaking. Her mother’s use of the stones, as a medium for seeing into the future, suggests a kind of cultural agency that defies linearity. That such work represents a kind of female agency also speaks back to the masculine chain of cultural transmission that Haley relates throughout *Roots*, especially in his interactions with Gambian oral tradition. As she tells her story, Mariama also narrates how she found the stones after this incident and recognized them for what they were. The chant she so often heard in their home was her mother’s recitation of women’s names:

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

In scattering her stones around the river basin, her father also forces a new kind of memory onto Mariama’s mother and effectively causes her to lose meaningful connections to a living past. The novel takes its title from this story, and Forna notes that this particular story—based on one she recorded within her own family—resonated with her in a profound way, as “a wonderful allegory for what happens to memory when you force people to lose it” (Forna and Nicolae 80).

He was killed in a standoff with British colonial forces in 1931. “Kontorfilii” is a Soso term meaning “a thorn in the side” or “an enigma” (Fyle 64). See Fyle; Fyfe, *A Short History*.

However tragic the loss of the stones, the novel's most suggestive move is in its reworking of the tale in the present day at Abie's desk. Here, Rofathane's past is regained and adapted to contemporary Britain, where the collected memories of her community live on. Through Abie's return to Sierra Leone, the ancestor stones doubly signify as symbols of the family's past in Sierra Leone and a newly developed diasporic present. As in *Roots*, this family story places Sierra Leone in the past, even suggesting that the fabric of life there is located in the oral and must translated into writing by the diasporic returnee. But the afterlife of Mariama's story also breaks from the kind of progress narrative that Haley used to remain at a distance from his Gambian relatives. The stones—and the voices they represent—continue to assert themselves in meaningful and complex ways in accordance with Abie's diasporic circumstances. As the primary vehicle for representing her connection to Rofathane, the stones suggest a cosmopolitan outlook in which the past and present sustain one another in lively and evolving ways. Although they represent a past, it is one that comes alive when “warmed by a human hand” (56).

As she reflects on the collected stories, Abie understands that their power largely lies in the collective comfort they offer, a comfort that also comes from the village itself. Near the end of her brief return to Rofathane, she walks through the village and is overcome by the sense of stability it lends:

[T]here is nothing here that could not be a hundred years old, that could not have been exactly the same on the day Asana arrived here as a girl riding on her father's shoulders. [...] I was no longer a stranger. I knew just where into all of this I fitted. Because in this small world, everybody had a place, meaning they all knew how they came to be here. A story of which every detail was cherished. And I had mine. (314)

In these final moments of reflection, Abie combines her own narrative of return with her aunts' local narratives, and the result is a level of comfort with her heritage and how it

informs her life in London. In this sense, her return engenders the kind of ancestral village fantasy that Saidiya Hartman so thoroughly critiques, as the village life that offers such stability depends on remaining unchanged and in the past. Given the nature of Abie's past—which is associated with a sense of culture lost in the family's postcolonial immigration to the UK—it is unsurprising that her return can engage this fantasy in ways that Hartman's search for the dispossessed cannot. While the portrait of Rofathane that Abie leaves her reader privileges the roots that she gains as a member of the community, her affective ties to Sierra Leone are as much about the journey to Rofathane as life there in itself. Abie's travel to the village is one arm of its collective story, as are each of her aunts' narratives, and together they give Abie a sense of belonging in Sierra Leone and reaffirm her place in the world. That she lives in London does not necessarily prohibit her connection to Rofathane; in fact, the novel suggests that her return is an association of its own, one that can offer a distinct sense of affiliation. So even while engaging the fantasy of an unchanging ancestral village, Forna's novel reveals the various migrations, movements, and returns that make up the essence of the village. In addition, the novel's narrative structure implies that the village's collective past endlessly spills into the present, ultimately refusing to remain entirely in the past.

Like the concern for collecting and repeating family stories from Rofathane in *Ancestor Stones*, Diana Evans' *26a* and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* also look to West African oral tradition as a meaningful guidepost for contemporary London life. They do so by using return to Nigeria as a vehicle for otherworldly narratives of inhabitation. In both novels, the Nigeria they encounter haunts the protagonists after they resume their lives in London. Oyeyemi's Jessamy is slowly displaced by the ghost of a

girl sold into slavery, while Evans' Georgia is subsumed into a village tale of witchcraft. Georgia's depressive states are marked by an attachment to their maternal grandfather's tale of one twin, Ode, who inhabited her sister, Onia, after being sacrificed in accordance with a Nigerian village custom. Georgia's depressive episodes lead to suicide, but after her death, she begins to climb into the body of her twin sister Bessi and explains, "Inhabitation is not an easy thing" (252). In describing the technical complexities of this otherworldly scenario, Georgia also hints at the difficulties of simultaneously negotiating British and Nigerian heritages, a conflict at the heart of Evans's novel. In her story of the twins, their dual cultural inheritance, and the remainders of village tradition in the Hunter family life, Evans portrays a London family always in flux. The twins, especially, suggest that their heritage—encountered upon a three-year stay in Nigeria—is always a factor in shaping their identities in the present. In fact, by returning to their mother's village and getting to know more about their ancestry, the twins gain a sense of self that can offer reassurance while also challenging more traditional ways of understanding themselves as residents of London's Neasden neighborhood.

The twins' parents Ida and Aubrey decide to return to Lagos, where they met, for a three-year term—Aubrey is auditing oil companies, and Ida sees this as a chance for her children to learn about the Nigerian side of their family. In the one and only trip they make to Aruwa, their mother's village, the twins spend a day listening to their grandfather's stories of village life, including the cultural attitude towards twins: "A long time ago, he told them, people believed that twins came from witches that lived in the forest. [...] They flew around the treetops on their brooms. They ate birds and made skirts from the feathers. And when they were at their most evil, they gave birth to twins"

(76).²⁵ In an effort to frighten the two, Baba tells them that the villagers used to burn the second twin, giving the example of Ode and Onia, twins who were best friends even before birth. Ode was burned following village custom, but she remained with Onia in death: “When Ode was burned [...] Onia got sick and wouldn’t eat at all until Ode’s ghost entered her body. The ghost came in, and Onia began to eat again from her cursed mother’s breast. But Ode could only stay for one year, because that was how long it took for the soul to be ready to leave the earth” (77). In that year, Onia began to have thoughts of burning down the village, and after Ode left her for good, Onia fulfilled these wishes. This, according to Baba, was what ended the practice of burning twins.

To this point in the novel, the twins’ predicaments are mostly about domestic matters: they wonder who will pick the apples in the backyard while they are in Nigeria, whether their rose garden will survive, or if their family would be better off with separated parents. But upon their family’s trip to Nigeria, issues of cultural heritage and belonging become a greater part of the twins’ daily lives. Two moments in Nigeria come to affect the rest of Georgia’s life: her molestation at the hands of their house guard Sedrick and the story of Ode inhabiting Onia after death. The incident with Sedrick is a key moment in Georgia’s transition towards depression, as it marks the first time that Bessi and Georgia are unable to communicate seamlessly with one another. The almost supernatural connection that previously defined their twinness ceases to operate on the same level during and after the Sedrick affair, and upon returning to London, the two drift apart.

²⁵ The twins and the primacy of oral storytelling also indicate the degree to which Evans self-consciously writes under the influence of Chinua Achebe, especially *Things Fall Apart*, a connection that Boehmer explores at length.

As the novel introduces Georgia's depressive state, it also begins to insert the Ode and Onia story as a haunting presence in her London life and explores the extent to which Nigerian culture plays a part in her life.²⁶ Up to this point, *26a* maintains a linear, if idiosyncratic, plot line. But, in a rare carefree moment for Georgia, on the twins' twenty-first birthday, the two celebrate by taking acid, and the visions that follow show the village story inserting itself into their senses of identity as well as the narrative structure of the novel. Georgia imagines climbing a tree and then seeing two little girls with "white dresses and the same face, holding hands. One of the hands was burned" (206). After witnessing the one girl inhabit the other, Georgia asks, "If I ever wanted to [...] could I learn it too?" (207). The two reply, "You already know" (207). So the inhabitation of Bessi at the novel's end does not necessarily come as a metaphysical statement about twinning—it is directly related to the stories that the two have inherited from Baba in Nigeria. In a sense, the ability to inhabit one another is implanted within them as the Nigerian heritage that the novel allows the twins; but the Nigeria rendered in this tale is still plagued by problems of temporality, where the village past appears in the present as a destructive force.

As Georgia prepares for her suicide on Valentine's Day, Ode and Onia become part of everyday activities, helping to plait her hair, or waiting for her at the top of the stairs. And finally, as she narrates her own death to Bessi after the inhabitation, Georgia asserts the story's significance yet again: "I was carried in the body of a child and her dress had to turned to rags and her name is Ode in Onia. There were birds crying in the

²⁶ Scenarios in the plot, such as the explorations of "twinness" or Georgia's molestation, importantly relate to other postcolonial narratives, especially Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. For my purposes, however, it is the effect of "return" to Nigeria that animates the plot.

trees above my head and howls of witches in feathered skirts. There was fire in the distance” (255). As Bessi hears this from her sister, she can only reply, “I remember that story” (255). The Nigerian culture into which Georgia is called is more akin to a gothic space of mysterious happenings than the actual Nigeria to which the family returned. In reproducing this version of the past as the one that lives on, the novel proposes that the Nigeria the twins left behind is one that remains temporally static.

Even family ties reproduce this anachronistic, tradition-bound Nigeria. After her death, Georgia also begins to see another family member who is not physically living with the Hunters. Ida’s mother, Nne-Nne, had always played an active role in their London lives, even if she still lived in rural Nigeria. Ida would imagine discussions of daily events with her and use Nne-Nne’s advice. But when Georgia comes home as part of Bessi, she can actually see Nne-Nne in the living room: “I can see Nne-Nne clearly now, sitting with Mum, virtually inside her. Nne-Nne is staring too, as if we are under a microscope. She squints at me again, then she turns to Ida and says, ‘All the stories Baba told were true. You see it’” (253). This side of the Hunter family is completed in Georgia’s death, for they are finally able to acknowledge the presence of a Nigerian heritage in their daily lives, even if that heritage comes at a very real human cost. Although it inhabits the Hunters in destructive ways, there is still some measure of comfort in having a more definite sense of who they are as people of African descent, and the twins specifically are able to find that in Baba’s story and the ways in which that story enriches their lives.

The Ode in Onia scenario, as played out by Georgia and Bessi, reveals the complex and interesting ways that Nigeria figures in the Hunters’ cultural affiliation.

Notably, it is in their “return”—a literal homecoming for Ida and cultural return of sorts for the children—that they discover this unstable heritage from Baba. Although they appear to be black Britons with diasporic ties to an Africa that remains vaguely in the family’s past, the return and its effect clearly place Nigeria as a generative space for identity formation in the present. In building a cosmopolitanism premised upon a past that lingers and haunts, *26a* diverges from the Haley model. The inhabitation, especially, indicates the limits of linear, teleological narrative for coming to terms with a heritage found in return. If Haley was intent on challenging the notion that African Americans seemingly came from nowhere, Evans is equally interested in making African cultural practices more than display pieces of “tradition.” By its nature, the story’s enduring presence decouples Nigerian oral tradition from an ambiguous, premodern past, but it is a troublesome method for asserting a space for Africa in the twins’ senses of self.

To begin with, the Nigeria that is reproduced in *26a*, by nature, can never be released from the past. Baba’s tale is about a time that no longer exists, as the story’s lesson concerns the end of the practice of burning twins as witches. That Georgia’s self-destruction is defined by this African culture—rather than, say, the urban Lagos where they spend every other day of their return—speaks to the affective appeal of a long cultural heritage for those in the diaspora. However, this heritage ultimately returns to haunt Georgia in ways that demand recognition. The family’s repressed Nigerian connections force their way into the narratives by which they live. Such a version of affiliation was narratively impossible for Alex Haley, but *26a* has no such narrative allegiance to symbolism, realism, or linearity. The heritage represented by Ode and Onia critically revises Haley’s rigid progress narrative by showing the destructive effects of

relegating Nigeria to the premodern past. Evans' novel operates in a liminal zone, in which Nigeria is circumscribed in the distant past yet must be actively engaged in the present. Indeed, inhabitation is not an easy thing, neither for Georgia nor for the Nigerian culture in her family's history. Notably, the past cannot easily inhabit the present for Evans' characters, just as her rendering of Africa only asserts itself in British culture with utmost difficulty.

The inhabitation at the heart of Helen Oyeyemi's novel *The Icarus Girl* similarly focuses on how a repressed African past reasserts itself in a contemporary diasporic narrative of return. As in *26a*, the protagonist of *The Icarus Girl*, Jessamy Harrison, returns to Africa with her Nigerian mother and English father only to discover a history that had not been fully reckoned with. Evans' novel posits this suppressed "Africanness" as something cultural, as Georgia and Bessi need to come to terms with the village culture that they encounter in their return. Jess, however, experiences a haunting that is historical by nature, as she meets and is slowly displaced by the ghost of a girl who had been sold into Portuguese slavery. Oyeyemi departs most radically from the narrative conventions of *Roots* in her story of return, and Jess' haunting by slavery specifically works through some of Haley's ambivalence about African modernity, as the African past coinhabits the diasporic present through the ghost. Yet, the destructive nature of this haunting in *The Icarus Girl* suggests an ambivalence about how Africa can meaningfully signify for the contemporary diasporic moment.²⁷

²⁷ The historical trauma of slavery, at the center of *The Icarus Girl*, is notable because it is specifically located in Africa—after all, the return to Nigeria is what begins the haunting. Yet this is also an historical experience of European complicity that has not been sufficiently dealt with and is haunting the present. In this sense, the novel echoes Toni Morrison's classic expression of the ghost of slavery haunting the present day—*Beloved*. Interestingly, *The Icarus Girl* combines two dominant methods of writing a slave past into the present: it explores the ways slavery's legacy haunts present-day cultural affiliations (in the vein of

In Oyeyemi's novel of return and haunting, the nature of the African past that haunts Jess is crucial for understanding the kinds of affiliations that are available to her through return. From the novel's beginning, Jess is presented as a sensitive and introspective child, and the return to Nigeria is partially to break the routine of her life in London. Jessamy's mother, who writes novels for a living, left Nigeria for university studies and has rarely returned to her father's home. The month-long trip to visit family is a chance to reconnect with her siblings and give Jess a notion of her Nigerian family. It is difficult to characterize the ambivalence with which Jess approaches her mother's family, as she is both thrilled by her experiences in Nigeria and frightened by the almost overwhelming difference of life there. Weeks into her trip, she has yet to feel comfortable. Yet, when exploring the abandoned servants' quarters on her grandfather's property, she receives a message written in dust: "HELLO JESSY" (38). The message comes from Titiola—whom Jess calls TillyTilly—a mysterious girl who begins to act as Jess' doppelganger and eventually follows her to England.

Tilly remains a mystery for much of the novel, especially because she has supernatural powers and frequently transports Jess into otherworldly scenarios. They experience being invisible, falling through an amorphous historical space, and even switching bodies. Although much about Tilly is impossible to understand, it is clear that Tilly is only visible to Jess and that she is not an imaginary friend. From the beginning of their relationship, TillyTilly appears as someone who belongs in another historical moment. Reading the Coleridge poem "Kubla Khan," Tilly calls it a "good poem" for its "ancestral voices and all that" (51). Later, when Jess asks about Tilly's presence in the

Morrison), while also thinking through the kind of African affiliation that works through colonialism and its own cultural legacy (in the same manner as Evans and Forna, discussed in this chapter).

servants' quarters, Tilly suggestively replies, "Can't you tell that I'm not supposed to *be* there?" (59, emphasis original). These moments, along with the book's refrain about "TillyTilly and time," give the effect that Tilly is certainly haunting Jess, but the reasons for her presence are entirely unclear. The reader receives a few clues throughout the novel, especially when Tilly exacts revenge on Jess' babysitter, whom she presumes to be Portuguese: "She nearly spat the word 'Portuguese' out, her accent becoming somewhat Yoruba as she did so" (138). In the novel's concluding scenes, Tilly presses Jess to switch bodies for good, suggesting that the only real form of belonging for a diasporic African like Jess is through a destructive embrace of slavery's history.

These final moments are some of the most important for Oyeyemi's narrative of return, as Tilly expresses her deeply felt emotions most clearly while berating Jess' reluctance to switch bodies. Tilly screeches:

"The whole world. We're twins, both of us, twins. Doesn't that mean something?" [...] "Land chopped in little pieces, and—ideas! These ideas! Disgusting ... shame, shame, shame. It's all been lost. Ashes. Nothing, now, there is no one. You understand?" [...] "There is no homeland."
(235)

In this climactic moment, Tilly's pain is almost palpable, and it becomes exceedingly clear that she represents a forgotten past of slavery. Her insistence on the lack of a "homeland" and the fundamental isolation she feels ("there is no one") imply the deep wounds that come from the capture and sale of slavery. Tilly's emotional purge echoes Saidiya Hartman's claim that "twelve million crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the past is not yet over" (18). While Hartman writes from the present with a long historical memory, Tilly's presence in *The Icarus Girl* resonates because of the temporal overlapping made possible by Oyeyemi's generic choice of fiction.

She is clearly a vestige of the past who appears in this present moment to intervene in Jess' conception of herself, and in this sense she echoes the uses of a specific African past in both Forna and Evans. But Tilly's status as a slave pushes this novel in a different direction, especially because Jess does not overtly recognize this fact: "I don't know what she is...she said that I do know! But I think she's wrong, because I have no idea" (245). When Jess admits her ignorance about Tilly's nature, she speaks to the gaps in the black British cultural narrative, where colonialism is often taken as the primary term upon which African affiliation is understood. Tilly's insertion into Jess' life suggests that Atlantic slavery is a context that has been unjustly ignored in black British conceptions of the self. And the method by which Oyeyemi inserts this narrative—as a gothic haunting—makes this particular narrative of return a cautionary tale about the need to deal with the history of slavery collectively.

Unlike Evans and Forna, African indigenous tradition is not at stake in Oyeyemi's return, as it is the history of slavery that comes from Jess' trip to Nigeria and affects her life in London. This is also one of the points in which *The Icarus Girl* serves as an interesting afterlife to Haley's text, because it locates the effects of slavery within the present moment. *Roots* worked chronologically through Kunta's capture and transportation in order to deliver the progress from slavery to freedom to homecoming. Because it makes no claims to be factual, Oyeyemi's novel can use TillyTilly to represent the difficult and detailed narratives of slavery that this kind of progress narrative overlooks. The novel builds the relationship between Jess and Tilly to maximize the reader's feelings for Tilly's pain. Although Jess clearly suffers from the haunting, Tilly's deeply emotional expressions of hurt—from her dialogue with Jess to her expressive

charcoal drawings—make the novel clearly about adequately acknowledging the history of pain that she represents. While Evans and Forna suggest that African oral tradition is a rich and ongoing context for understanding diasporic identity formation, *The Icarus Girl* works in other directions. Yet, by including the repressed narrative of slavery in Africa, the novel still places the burden of antiquity upon the African narrative. As in *26a*, the Nigeria that comes back to matter in Jess' diasporic life is more connected to the past than the present. Oyeyemi suggests that it is slavery, not simply colonialism, that cannot be carefully placed into the past. The recognition of slavery as salient to contemporary black British identity is a claim about history, not culture. When TillyTilly inhabits Jess, it is less a statement about a repressed and past African way of life than it is about the virtual erasure of this historical experience for diasporic Africans like Jess.

For both Evans and Oyeyemi, inhabitation is a powerful image of the ways in which the past and present—as well as Nigeria and Britain—coexist in the contemporary moment. And while this trope suggests a pressing need to rethink how the past can come to affect present-day affiliative processes, it still relies on some of the ambivalence of return that Haley found impossible to escape. It is notable that in both novels, those who represent Nigeria are primarily negative influences on the protagonists' lives. Although TillyTilly and Ode and Onia are evocative expressions of the complex and sometimes bewildering ways that Nigeria contributes to the building of a contemporary and transnational identity, Nigeria remains temporally out of joint. TillyTilly is the ghost of a slave; Ode and Onia are vestiges of a now abandoned Nigerian cultural practice. While their reappearance in contemporary London may speak to the lack of critical engagement

with such pasts, their gothic and essentially negative natures still project Nigeria as unevenly linked with Western modernity.

As TillyTilly begins to displace Jess for the final time in *The Icarus Girl*, Jess thinks about why Tilly appears with such urgency: “To be remembered. Tilly didn’t *need* to be remembered, but she wanted to be. Why? [...] But people forgot, they forgot, and it wasn’t her fault” (283). In this suggestive moment, the history of slavery that Tilly so powerfully represents takes on cultural agency in itself. Diasporic narratives of affiliation with Africa can, and do, exist without entirely reckoning with the difficult history of slavery as an experience that continues to matter into the present moment. The linear narrative of *Roots* does this in its own way, as Haley’s return asserts his modernity and circumscribes Africa in an indistinct past civilization. Yet when Oyeyemi claims that Tilly “wanted to be” remembered, the African past resists such temporal categorization. It continues to assert itself into contemporary narratives of diaspora in ways that cannot be ignored or safely stored away. Tilly, Ode, and Onia may all be representatives of a Nigerian past, but these novels do not allow such remnants to remain safely behind us.

Overlapping Temporalities and Return in Kofi Awoonor’s *Comes the Voyager At Last*

It is difficult to imagine a single novel as bound to Alex Haley’s work as Kofi Awoonor’s *Comes the Voyager At Last*. In a story of an African American who travels from Harlem to Ghana and back, Awoonor heavily reworks both *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Roots*. His protagonist, Marcus Garvey MacAndrews, follows the life example of Malcolm X, casting off his “slave name” in favor of what seems more authentic: Sheikh Mandela Lumumba. Roughly the first half of the novel recounts Brother Lumumba’s childhood and coming of age in the United States, with special focus

on his migration from Virginia to New York City after his father's death in 1955. The novel's second half takes place in 1970 and is narrated by an unnamed Ewe man, recently fired from his government job after a military coup in Ghana. At an Accra nightclub, he meets Brother Lumumba and helps the American escape from a deadly knife fight. The two travel north to the man's hometown, where Lumumba is recognized and welcomed home as a man captured into slavery centuries earlier. In the midst of these two stories, Awoonor intersperses a mythical tale of an African slave coffle destined to cross the Atlantic. The three narrative strands come together in the novel's final pages, as the recently recognized Lumumba recounts his spiritual homecoming in the mythical language of the slave caravan narrative.²⁸

With a narrative focused on the discovery of a kin group upon returning to Africa, Awoonor's book initially resonates with *Roots* on a very basic level. As in *Lose Your Mother*, the text navigates U.S. racism as a force behind the return to Africa and attempts to understand what a cultural return means in light of contemporary racism and the legacy of slavery. And in similar moves to Forna and Evans, *Comes the Voyager At Last* must reckon with the legacy of colonialism and postcolonial disenchantment, specifically the fall of Kwame Nkrumah's government. But while these African American and British authors treated such concepts more in isolation, the Ghanaian novel attempts to connect colonialism and New World slavery in the same narrative of return. While Awoonor may include more historical circumstances that bear weight in Lumumba's return, *Roots* and its back-to-Africa discourse are portrayed obviously and simplistically in *Voyager's*

²⁸ Best known for his poetry, Awoonor's two novels, *Voyager* and *This Earth, My Brother* (1971) frequently shuffle between dense poetic language and the generic conventions of a novel. As a whole, his body of work is invested in bringing Ewe cosmology, ancestry, and culture to contemporary poetics and the experience of decolonization. Sadly, while in Kenya for the Storymoja Hay Festival, Awoonor was shot and killed in a terrorist attack at Westgate Mall in Nairobi on September 21, 2013. See Cole.

narrative of return. Although on a plot level, the book seems to reproduce the kind of return that asserts the traveler's Western modernity, tonally, *Voyager* does not resolve some of the ideological contradictions of Haley-esque return to contemporary West Africa. As a result, the mystical note upon which the novel ends appears almost as a fictional complement to Haley, presenting a timeless and spiritual connection between Africa and the diaspora, while also failing to cohere entirely around such a connection. In the end, Awoonor's novel builds its cosmopolitanism by questioning the limits of local, regional, and international commitments and suggesting multiple temporalities for registering the modernities at play in return.

I see *Voyager* as reflecting its time and place through both the application of Haley-era diaspora concerns to Ghanaian society and politics—which was a hallmark of the 1990s Ghanaian state—and in its ambivalence towards how slavery ought to be embraced in postcolonial modernity. In 1992, the same year *Voyager* was published, the Ghanaian government officially adopted a proposal for the Pan-African Historical Festival (PANAFEST), a celebration of Pan-African unity that continues to take place biannually. The PANAFEST movement began in the 1980s with Efua Sutherland—a Ghanaian Pan-Africanist and dramatist—proposing a Pan-African festival of theater and arts. In 1992, the Jerry J. Rawlings government sponsored the event as part of the Organization for African Unity. As a state event, PANAFEST is related to a number of efforts to develop both a heritage tourism industry and local education on the Atlantic slave trade. In 1994, the United Nations launched its Slave Route Project, and Ghana was one of the first African countries to participate. This placed the country as a key site in commemorating the Slave Trade and aided in the development of many of the country's

heritage tourism sites, like the museum at Assin Manso (Pierre 145). Jemima Pierre argues that such government-sponsored projects produced local social meanings of slavery that focused on diasporic experience almost exclusively. Pierre takes the reenactments of enslavement at PANAFEST as her primary example:

The performances work to construct a particular narrative of slavery that reclaims racial affiliation through the convergence of continental African and diaspora experience around this historical phenomenon [of slavery]. For this to occur, however, the narrative that is told has had to shift Ghana's history of slavery toward the Atlantic in ways that actually give primacy to a distinctly *diaspora* experience, one that begins at the moment of capture and shipment and ends away from the African mainland. (143, emphasis original)

PANAFEST is one expression of this cultural framing of slavery for Ghana, and it became a government-sponsored event at the same historical moment as the publication of Awoonor's novel. As the state continued its efforts at "promoting the racial kinship of diaspora Blacks and Ghanaians," the state sponsored the broadcasting of *Roots*, the popular miniseries based on Haley's work (147).

Comes the Voyager At Last was finished and published within this social milieu, where diasporic experiences of slavery were presented as the only narrative of this historical experience that mattered for Ghana. Additionally, presenting slavery as an exclusively diasporic experience means that coming to terms with its very material effects on Ghanaian society—the enrichment of some families and the stigmatization of others—can be avoided almost entirely. As a novel about return to Africa, *Voyager* remains true to the vision of slavery and diaspora promoted by PANAFEST and other Ghanaian commemorative events. The separation of slavery and racism, on the one hand, and colonial and postcolonial exploitation on the other, create a past in which Africa still serves as a point of departure for the diaspora, and return can strengthen diasporic senses

of self without necessarily challenging the existing order of things. In 1992, characterizing Africa as a place of traditional “civilization” is hardly a challenge to the accepted narratives of the continent. Rather than using Haley and the process of return as a mode for considering African modernity outright, like the other adopters of *Roots* in this chapter, Awoonor’s novel complicates the idea of using a common cultural past as the basis for transnational and transcultural connection by including moments of conflictual modernity.

Such complication comes as a result of having spent the majority of the novel assessing commonplaces of West African and diasporic history as isolated experiences, as the novel’s chief stylistic feature is the separate treatment of the diaspora, African, and slave caravan narratives textually. For the most part, the mythical representation of the slave caravan articulates a particularly diasporic narrative of capture and transportation. The “poet” narrator emphasizes the break with traditional culture inherent to the experience of being captured. Those being led from the desert to the sea become a new kind of kin group, a “tribe,” according to the narrator, “for that was what we had become in the unity of spilt blood, the only tribe we shall ever know” (30). As these sections of the novel progress, the narrator assumes a brutal severance between the members of this tribe and the societies from which they had been taken.²⁹ The slave caravan sections are

²⁹ As they near the end of the desert, this sense of disconnect intensifies, with the narrator suggesting that the newly captured slaves have already lost the ability to connect meaningfully with a homeland: “We grimly went on towards the lustreless territories of our doom” (45). In these caravan sections, which are interspersed throughout the novel, Awoonor poetically considers the psychic distance that capture and enslavement necessitate. As they relate to the narrative as whole, these sections also imply a break between the historical experience of slavery and the more contemporary U.S. and Ghanaian societies depicted in the other sections of the novel. The slave caravan section’s language is steeped in mythology, and the narrative is saturated with images fusing the natural world with the slave condition. For instance, the narrator describes arriving in “the forest of our abandonment” or pushing onwards when “beneath our weary feet was a soft carpet of rotting leaves” (43). The daily trek is marked by a daily loss of cultural memory, where the slaves “could not even revive the parables of times long quashed in the blood knots of passion long

even marked off typographically, always written in italics rather than the plain text of the Lumumba and Ewe narratives. Such difference in tone, language, and even typeface signals a thematic separation between the narratives throughout. In terms of this mythical story of capture and transportation, the identities of those in the diaspora and their slavery experiences seem to be most at stake. Indeed, Africa is already left behind.

If the transportation that marks the beginning of diaspora is already diasporic property in Awoonor, the racism that leads Brother Lumumba back to Africa is equally separated from the continent. Lumumba's story of coming to racial consciousness is a narrative particularized to experiences of exclusion in the United States. Awoonor tells of seventeen year-old Lumumba (then known as Marcus Garvey MacAndrews) moving from Virginia to Harlem after his father's death, being wrongfully imprisoned at Riker's Island for six months, and finding meaningful affiliation with the Nation of Islam (NOI) and later the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). In his best imitation of Haley and Malcolm X, Awoonor's MacAndrews/Lumumba narrative articulates a particular relationship to the social order of the Civil Rights-era United States. During his wrongful imprisonment, Marcus is exposed to the NOI through "Brother Aboud," and he is drawn to the group's rhetoric of black determination in the face of systemic racism, a specific NOI appeal to African American experiences. The influence of Malcolm X and the NOI on young Marcus reinforces the absolute lines dividing this narrative from the novel's other stories, as do Marcus's early thoughts about Africa's place in his own life. After joining the NOI, he sheds his "slave name" in favor of an "African" one, Sheikh Mandela Lumumba, and invests his persona with an invented African identity: "My

dead in the reed valleys of the North" (45). The vivid imagery allows for a number of interpretive possibilities in any given statement, but what is most striking about these sections is the absolute narrative difference between them and the other stories of Lumumba and the Ewe man.

ancestors must have been one of the first batch of Africans to arrive in the New World,” he confidently states at the beginning of the novel, establishing a longstanding family endurance of racism and a special claim to the pre-slavery African past.³⁰ Notably, Lumumba’s language depicts Africa in a more general sense, often referring to the continent as a whole and investing in a global form of identification with the idea of a unified Africa rather than with a specific place or culture. In depicting Marcus/Lumumba as almost entirely defined by a particularly African American history and generically conceived Africa, Awoonor again suggests the distinctiveness of the historical experiences of slavery and lived West African life. If the only awareness of Africa is as a “fountain of manhood,” meaningful transnational connection seems unlikely, even in “return.”

The novel’s final story is again particularized and separated from these other threads, showing both a particular postcolonial experience and the degree to which Lumumba’s “Africa” is almost illegible in postcolonial Ghana. This section is narrated by an unnamed Ewe man who has recently lost his job after seven years in Ghana’s National Institute of Cultural Revival.³¹ The narrative begins in the Red Rose nightclub, in the Osu section of Accra, where the narrator and his friends meet for drinks after his firing. Although the Red Rose is a potentially cosmopolitan space—it is where he and Lumumba meet and begin their flight inland—the narrator’s background and government

³⁰ Brother Lumumba’s vision of the future equally invents Africa as a place of personal royal antiquity: “We would journey to the sacred homes of our real true selves, pure, elemental vessels for our African god who will restore us to our royal ancestry, wash and bathe us in his holy fire of eternal love and brotherhood” (60-61). Even after breaking with the NOI, following Malcolm’s establishment of the OAAU, Brother Lumumba’s vision of Africa changes little: “[Malcolm] gave us a vision of ourselves, of our true homeland Africa before he died. He showed us the way to the East where all good things spring from, the fountain of our manhood” (83-84).

³¹ While there was no historical National Institute of Cultural Revival, the narrator’s profession is suggestive, as Nkrumah’s politics heavily stressed Ghanaian-diasporic cooperation in building the nation. These politics make the narrator’s lack of comprehension with Lumumba all the more ironic.

service are portrayed as the property of postcolonial Ghanaian experience.³² Rather, the narrative reflects a particularly Ghanaian postcolonial society, where the democratic elections for the Progress Party ushered in Kofi Busia as Prime Minister and left anyone still affiliated with the Nkrumah era out of a job. In short, it is a time when the concerns of both the history of slavery and contemporary African Americans seem irrelevant to many Ghanaians.

While postcolonial Ghanaian politics, and the ethnic divisions within Ghana, provide a specific background for this narrator's section, he displays a deeply ironic stance towards the continental discourse that Lumumba so easily engages, calling himself "a product of the new Africa, a university graduate, and some sort of a writer, actor, broadcaster, and a tragic hero" (69). For the narrator, "the new Africa" is one largely defined by his colonial-style education and the political break with colonialism begun with Kwame Nkrumah. Despite his support for Nkrumah, as well as his employment in "Cultural Revival," the narrator has little interest in Ghanaian-diasporic interactions, except as a target for his jokes. In the Red Rose nightclub, this narrator and his friends overhear Brother Lumumba and the unnamed Ghanaian journalist discussing the plight of postcolonial Africa. The narrator's take on this conversation reveals the extent to which he considers life in Ghana to be the property of Ghanaians, not those in the diaspora, and further critiques the too-easy generalizations of "Africa." Brother Lumumba and the

³² The few references to any shared international sense of identity are passed off as jokes made at the expense of a Ghanaian writer educated in the United States (also referred to as a novelist, the Ghan-American, the Americo-Ghanaian, and "a pompous ass" [75]) who is espousing revolutionary Fanon with Brother Lumumba at the bar. This character, never named, is certainly a caricature of Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah, author of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), and *The Healers* (2000). Armah was educated at Harvard and Columbia and moved to Algeria in the early 1960s. Awoonor's attack on Armah is likely in response to Armah's unflattering portrayal of Awoonor through one of the characters in *Fragments* (1971).

journalist subject contemporary Ghana to a Fanonian critique, and the narrator understandably takes offense at the totalizing characterization of Ghanaian society:

I was sitting there listening to these two fellows as they solved all the problems of Africa that night. Especially the novelist chap. Everything that everyone had done since he left for America was bad, the people were evil for wanting to make their lives a little better, the leaders were crooks, everyone was a thief BECAUSE THEY HAD NOT READ FANON. (71)

This portion of the narrative begins with mutual misunderstanding marked by a lack of effort on both sides. The narrator has little interest in the ways that these two might diagnose the political ills of Ghana, and when Lumumba and the journalist join the narrator's group for more drinks, it becomes clear that these two have little interest in the particulars of the narrator's life. It is a scenario reminiscent of the contact between Haley and the Juffure villagers, played in a more satirical key, where each side sees the other as symbols of their cultures.

When the journalist and Lumumba join the other group, Lumumba begins a long monologue about his African American experience and his path to both the NOI and the OAAU. Like his earlier narration, Lumumba's monologue recycles many of the stock phrases of these movements, especially in its depiction of Africa as "the homeland, the spiritual birthplace of all black folk" (85). Lumumba's discourse has little effect on the Ghanaian group—one cannot speak English, one leaves for the restroom, and another falls asleep. Only the narrator expresses any interest in Lumumba's story, but he does so without considering it pertinent to his experience as a Ghanaian. The narrator clearly understands Lumumba's passion for his story, but cannot connect that with his own life: "Brother Lumumba was really moved by what he was saying. I just stared at him wondering what exactly was going on" (81). Whenever Lumumba begins inventing an

African homeland for himself, the narrator becomes agitated with the invention: “The man had started his thing about Africa again. My irritation came back. I wanted to tell him to shut up for a change. I remembered that I’d lost my job and my anger rose up like a cobra ready to strike” (84). The novel’s portrayal of Lumumba in the bar speaks to the paradoxically western-centric nature of this kind of discourse. The Ewe man’s resentment of being part of “a dream [Lumumba] once had,” is understandable, for it reduces Ghanaian lives to symbolic placeholders in an African American narrative of the self (89). In this narrator’s presentation, the African American and Ghanaian experiences are too different to be compatible. Until suddenly they’re not.

Near the end of the night at the Red Rose, Lumumba begins dancing with a young Ghanaian girl who has accompanied an Englishman, Thomas Rollston, who has remained in Ghana as a “consultant” after independence. Although it is unclear how, or exactly why, a fight breaks out between Lumumba and Rollston’s entourage, and Lumumba kills Rollston’s “boy” in a knife fight. Although Lumumba and the narrator have had no common points of identification to this juncture, they suddenly connect after the fight:

Cries were already going up over Mr. Rollston’s boy. They were saying in the Ga language that he was dead. I got hold of brother Lumumba’s raised arm. He swung around and aimed the knife at me. But in a split second he saw my face. He must have seen also the history of his sojourn and our common voyage in my eyes. He understood. There was no time to lose. We must leave, run at once, just run and keep on running. (103)

As Derek Wright notes, “There has been little to prepare the reader for this mystic rapport” (181). In fact, everything has prepared the reader for the opposite, as each narrative section is presented in historical isolation. The assertion of blood ties and brotherhood at this moment and in the concluding section in rural Ghana, is entirely preceded by separate narratives speaking to separate historical circumstances.

The connection between the Ewe man and Lumumba grows in the final pages of the novel, as they travel inland to the narrator's home village. In the unnamed Ghanaian village, *Voyager* takes on its most *Roots*-like qualities, as Lumumba is improbably recognized as a lost son of the village, with a definite ancestry and family group. Over a span of three days in the village, Lumumba "had undergone a transformation" from OAAU follower to African villager, and the narrator and his family note the ways in which Lumumba has rounded into someone they recognize:

I remembered who this was. There was a distant cousin of mine who years ago dropped out of school because he simply could not cope with mental arithmetic. His name was Bawa. If he were alive now, and you saw him together with brother Lumumba, you would think they were twins who had slept in one womb. (113)

Lumumba's welcome home as a lost son continues the longer he stays in the village. Notably, his actions change into the culturally accepted ways of being from this particular community, culminating with a ceremony that unites him with a village woman who claims to have lost her husband to slavery.

Sheila Smith McKoy relates this series of inclusions to a wider Ewe worldview espoused by the novel as a whole. She claims that Awoonor's text makes the case for a vision of return in which Lumumba is "the archetypal link to *Africanness*, superseding the misplaced primacy of the Western view of African culture" (201). In McKoy's reading, *Voyager* responds to Western discourses of Africa that pose as "truths" about blackness by offering a culturally specific homecoming rooted in Ewe tradition and values. Thus, the scenes in which Lumumba becomes a recognizable member of village society must be understood in terms of Ewe cosmology, where "the individual is a composite of different identity roots, many of which can be determined by ancestral

experience” (204). In this sense, the novel’s ending—when Lumumba is embraced by the unnamed woman as her husband “come home from the journey to the forest and desert land where he went to hunt”—locates Lumumba’s general desire for an African past in a specific Ewe culture of ritual with a specific relationship to the past (Awoonor 121).

McKoy is convincing when she claims that Awoonor stresses the Ewe specificity of Lumumba’s return, but there are limits to this interpretation. The novel too easily incorporates Lumumba into Ewe society, and shortly thereafter, he leaves for the United States. McKoy cannot find a space for this in Ewe cosmology, and she vaguely points to “the Akan concept of *sankofa*,” to prove that such cultural logic of return exists in Africa (207). Rather than suggesting a specifically Ewe concept to which Awoonor points his readers, McKoy relates this tale of return to the well-known iconography of another Ghanaian culture—the Akan *sankofa* symbol—which has been used as the unofficial icon for those promoting roots tourism to the slave forts and other heritage sites throughout the country.³³ McKoy’s recourse to a non-Ewe cultural reference to end her analysis shows that, for all its cultural specificity, *Voyager* registers the limits of Ewe-ness as the basis for cosmopolitan identification and the strategic need to think in broader regional terms. Although the novel is deeply entrenched in Ewe culture and its uses of the past, there is no indication that Brother Lumumba has accepted these particular perspectives on the

³³ The *sankofa* symbol is usually figured as a bird whose feet are forward and head is backward, with an egg—representing the delicate relationship between the past and present—in the bird’s beak. Katharina Schramm notes that the symbol is mostly “interpreted as a call to ‘recapture what you’ve lost’ or as a reminder to ‘undo mistakes of the past.’ ‘The past’ that featured in the multifarious applications of the *sankofa* symbolism encompassed a vast, almost endless repertoire of possible historical references, be it the glory of Egypt or ancient African kingdoms (from Songhai to Asante); the bucolic imagery of innocent village life with unselfish individuals and harmonious family structures; or African rhythms, standards of beauty, or traditional forms of governance. In the context of homecoming [...], all these characteristics fused in the affirmation of an essential racial identity and unity, an inherent ‘Africanness,’ shared by Black people all over the world, regardless of the concrete circumstances of their current situation” (187).

world, or that a non-Ghanaian reader would read them as anything other than “African” in a generalized sense.

In fact, for all of its stylistic departures from *Roots*, Awoonor’s novel often reinforces the kind of progress narrative that allows Africa to remain in the traditional past and the diaspora to assert its modernity. Lumumba’s opening section is narrated in retrospect, while he waits on the tarmac for his plane to leave Africa, after the village homecoming chronologically, but not narratively. As he begins telling the story of his life, he does not reflect on his new knowledge of the Ewe or having adopted their particular worldview. Rather, he discusses his time spent in a generalized Africa: “A year in Africa. And tonight I am going back to America” (7). It is the continent as a whole that matters for his concept of self, and the novel suggests that the Ewe cultural repertoire is the avenue through which he found a meaningful sense of identity in Africa. Yet this culture does not seem to register with him in a particularly nuanced way. That Lumumba returns to the United States—much like Alex Haley’s return from the Gambia—only underscores the fact that Lumumba’s “return” to Africa is still a narrative about diasporic modernity, despite its temporal complexity. Even after such a transformative experience, the novel allows Lumumba to keep his previous attitudes towards Africa and African Americans. There is no indication that he considers Africa any less a mysterious homeland than before, and his opening narrative on the airplane remains saturated with racist rhetoric about “the impotent myths of my land of sojourn” (8).

In a sense, Awoonor’s novel formally reorganizes the *Roots* paradigm to analyze the concept of “Africa” that Haley puts forward. Despite a seemingly transformative experience among the Ewe, Lumumba’s concept of self—and of Africa—changes little in

Voyager, suggesting the existence of a natural connection between Africa and the diaspora that can be found but needs little working through. Lumumba's encounter with African modernity is insufficient to revise his notion of Africa as mythical and mysterious place of origin, and the moment when the Ewe narrator sees their shared journey in his eyes and aids the *Roots* village fantasy marks the point when the novel turns from a potential critique of Lumumba to a narrative of comfort for both diasporic and Ghanaian readers. Yet, taken as a whole, the novel departs from Haley's progress narrative in some ideologically contradictory ways. The novel's shifting temporalities alternately locate Africa firmly within the slave trading past *and* the present, a stark contrast from the anachronistic village Haley seeks and finds in *Roots*. Brother Lumumba, after all, meets the Ewe narrator in an urban nightclub and then connects to people in a specific village through the experiences of capture and slavery. Haley's text heavily reflects its time and place—the United States in the 1970s—so that his mode of return can actually function as a challenge to popular conceptions of Africa as a lawless, perpetually ancient space with cultures more in sync with the animal world than the Western one. Awoonor's adoption of Haley's paradigm from Ghana in 1992 cannot work in the same manner, for slavery does not signify the same way in postcolonial Ghana. The terms to which Haley responded in his text were far from the cultural state of affairs when *Voyager* was written and published, and Awoonor's novel registers the discourses of slavery, colonialism and culture that compete in contemporary forms of return cosmopolitanism.

That Awoonor can adopt Haley in this manner speaks to the various ways in which *Roots* has been used to understand connections made to Africa from around the

Atlantic. At some points, Awoonor's overt use of Haley's return plot paradoxically keeps him from using *Roots* in the generative ways of Hartman, Forna, Evans, and Oyeyemi. These uses of Haley suggest a mode of return that challenges the accepted separation of ancient Africa and the modern West. However ambivalently, Haley consciously writes against the cultural wisdom of Africa that has been taken for granted, establishing an imaginative affiliation with Africa that countered American racism and its legacy of trauma. Thus, Haley stands as a cornerstone of my study because *Roots* engaged Africa through return, establishing a foundational approach to imagining Africa and meeting a cultural psychic and political need. Each of the authors in this chapter uses Haley's mode of return to reflect on the social circumstances of their composition, from Hartman's disenchantment with American racism to the counternarratives of tradition in Evans, Forna, and Oyeyemi. Like other modes of return, the *Roots*-inspired journey back to Africa says as much about the present moment as anything else, presenting an alternative to notions that so often pass as given.

The measure of genealogy's success is its disruption of conventional accounts of ourselves—our sentiments, bodies, origins, futures. It tells a story that disturbs our habits of self-recognition, posing an “us” that is foreign.
—Wendy Brown, “Politics without Banisters”

Chapter Two

Epic Journeys of Freedom: Contemporary Fiction and the Founding of Sierra Leone

From 1775 to 1783, the time of major conflict between Britain and its American colonies, the number of runaway slaves from southern plantations in the United States spiked dramatically. In 1792, over one thousand of those runaways—now free in British territory—were transported from Nova Scotia to the west coast of Africa. Before that migration, the former slaves had experienced discrimination in other, sometimes overlapping ways. They had served the British Army, lived in autonomous black communities around North America, and fought the British government for the land allotments they had been promised, and the final movement to Africa appeared as a solution to the problem of living as a former slave in a racially ordered world. For many, sailing to Sierra Leone offered the promise of a “homecoming,” even if they were born in the New World or originally transported from other parts of Africa. The story of the Black Loyalists who followed British proclamations at the outset of the American Revolution is one that dramatically affected three continents in the late eighteenth century, and it is still an historical moment that historians and fiction writers call upon as an early example of diasporic cultural exchange.³⁴

The Black Loyalists have largely been understood in terms of their service to the British and the promises never kept to them by the British government and the Sierra Leone Company. John Clarkson, the naval commander in charge of organizing the crossing from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone, saw how deceived so many former slaves had

³⁴ See Pybus, Schama, Walker, Wilson.

been, both by the promise of land in Canada as well as what kind of lives they might live after slavery:

I shall keep uppermost in my thoughts [...] that these poor unfortunate men have ever since Europe called herself enlightened experienced the greatest treachery, oppression, murder, and everything that is base, and that I cannot name an instance where a body of them collected together have ever had the promises made them performed in a conscientious way. (qtd. in Schama 279-80)

Indeed, the Black Loyalists had escaped *de jure* slavery only to enter into a system of *de facto* slavery amongst white loyalists in Nova Scotia and, arguably, Sierra Leone. The growing body of historical material on the Black Loyalists tends to focus on their escapes from slavery and attempts to find meaningful freedom amidst broken promises in a world permeated with racial prejudice. But historians are not the only writers interested in this story. And the quest for liberty is not its only plotline.

As a story of mass “return” to Africa that predates the better-known movement of Marcus Garvey, the Sierra Leonean Black Loyalists almost beg to be narrated, especially considering the underlying ironies of slaves escaping the Founding Fathers and the extreme passion that ignited these settlers around the Atlantic. African-Canadian Lawrence Hill’s novel *Someone Knows My Name* (2007) and Sierra Leonean Syl Cheney-Coker’s *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (1990) both recount stories of these returnees’ quests for individual and collective identities. Both also share a commitment to understanding affiliation as a process that requires looking beyond the nation-state, and in their treatments of the Black Loyalist narratives, they account for return as a critical practice in thinking globally about the process of identity formation. Although the two novels speak to specific national narratives—Canada, for Hill, and Sierra Leone for Cheney-Coker—these works of fiction stake a claim for global

affiliation with the idea of Africa, where the process of identity formation requires practices that disrupt notions of self and the world that are generally taken for granted in historical accounts of the Black Loyalists. For Hill and Cheney-Coker, this eighteenth-century mass return to Africa can also explain contemporary cultural identifications.

On November 14, 1775, the royal governor of Virginia, John Murray Earl of Dunmore, promised freedom to any slaves who were willing to bear arms in his service. In response, thousands of slaves ran away from their plantations and served the British in any number of capacities. Many were asked to serve as foot soldiers against the revolutionaries, while others became cooks, servants, and even river guides through the swamps of Georgia and South Carolina. The Loyalist forces accepted all runaways, not just men capable of serving on the front lines, resulting in large groups of women, children, and the elderly making their ways from the southern work fields to the camps of the British army.

The promise of freedom was most certainly made as a military expedient rather than as an act of humanitarianism, but in the immediate aftermath of the war, after British defeat, Commander Sir Guy Carleton kept the promise of freedom to any black who could prove to have been behind British lines for at least one year. Thousands of Loyalists, black and white, were transported to various parts of the British Atlantic world, including the West Indies, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and England itself.

Many of those sent to London soon became known as “the Black Poor,” a group that caused growing concern in London’s upper class citizens. Simon Schama has characterized the Black Poor as “truly on the [English] national conscience” because of the participation of many in the American Revolution (184). Jonas Hanway and other

philanthropists established the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor in 1786, and efforts by others, such as William and Granville Sharp, helped to alleviate some of the suffering. When Henry Smeathman, who had recently assessed Sierra Leone as a potential site for a penal colony, recommended West Africa as a possible spot to repatriate the Black Poor, Granville Sharp—one of eighteenth-century London’s leading abolitionists—used his incredible fundraising abilities to make it so. In 1787, around 250 emigrants sailed from London to the newly named Province of Freedom.

Meanwhile, the Loyalists who had been evacuated to Nova Scotia and British Columbia were experiencing poverty of another sort. Upon evacuation, they had been promised land by the British government, but there were innumerable delays in receiving it, especially for Black Loyalists. Whites were given the best pieces of property in the shortest amount of time, and the former slaves were given little, if any land to farm in Nova Scotia. Black emigrants were forced to take menial jobs, usually as laborers hired at a fraction of the wages of white workers. James Walker notes, “Loyalist Nova Scotia had a ‘place’ for black people, and though it was usually an improvement on the condition of slavery still it meant that a black’s true function was a lowly worker to serve the white establishment” (48). In an attempt to get answers from the British government, former slave Thomas Peters traveled to London with a petition, stating the grievances of the Black Loyalists. While in the city, he met Granville Sharp and was convinced that emigration to Sierra Leone was preferable to waiting for land in Nova Scotia. At the time, the Province of Freedom was struggling, and it would soon be attacked by native Africans; but Peters returned to Nova Scotia ready to convince his fellow Loyalists that African emigration was the most promising option.

Soon after Peters' return, John Clarkson, a British naval commander and brother of abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, sailed to Nova Scotia to begin gauging interest in emigration. Although they expected a few hundred, they received 1,200 "adventurers," as Clarkson called them, for the trip. In January of 1792, they sailed to Sierra Leone, naming the site of their landing Freetown. The initial years of the settlement were marked by struggles with the Sierra Leone Company, the group of investors who had paid for the emigration. The Company was interested in seeing African trade prosper without the use of slavery—the theory was that legitimate commerce would make the slave trade unnecessary for profitable enterprise. The Company and the settlers, however, clashed over how Freetown would be run, and whose interests their labor would serve.

At the beginning of 1808, Sierra Leone was formally transferred into the hands of the British government, and it would remain a Crown colony until independence in 1961, betraying emigrant expectations of autonomy in West Africa. The Black Loyalists would have a lasting impact on Sierra Leone and the communities existing around Freetown before their arrival. As Ellen Gibson Wilson has pointed out, many of the emigrants were either born in Africa or were one generation removed from the continent, but the experience of the Middle Passage and years of slave culture in the Americas affected their attitudes and cultures (69). Most notable was the influence of Christianity, which the Loyalists carried with them from slavery to Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone. While Christianity was not alien to West Africa in the eighteenth century, the settlers' enthusiasm for their religion, and their ways of using it to explain their differences from the local Temne, were some of the key obstacles in developing Sierra Leonean society. In

fact, the fervor for Christianity was so great that Anna Maria Falconbridge, wife of the Sierra Leone Company's commercial agent, wrote, "I do not remember, since they first landed here, my ever awakening (and I have awoken at every hour of the night), without hearing preachings from some quarter or other" (111). The religious enthusiasm, as well as many of the language, dress, and dietary habits of the settlers (especially the Nova Scotians) still resonate in Krio culture today in Sierra Leone.

Contemporary historical treatments of this revolutionary moment generally frame the Black Loyalists in two distinct manners. Some—like Sylvia Frey, Gary Nash, Simon Schama, and Benjamin Quarles—interpret this moment as an ironic counter-narrative to the "official" story of the American Revolution. Doing so involves narrating the Black Loyalists as missing pieces of the story, making these freed slaves into powerful actors in the emergence of revolutionary ideals. Other historians—notably Cassandra Pybus, James Walker, and Ellen Wilson—narrate this story as a collective quest for freedom denied to them. These authors locate the story as one in which the Black Loyalists fought for and then globally disseminated "the animating principles of the revolution that had so emphatically excluded them" (Pybus 205). This historiography performs what, in a Nietzschean and Foucauldian sense, might be called a history of constants, with all its "consoling play of recognitions" between historical event and the contemporary moment (Foucault 88). In this case, the Black Loyalists are recognizably modern, rights-bearing individuals that make up the heart of liberal politics.

As minority subjects who demand recognition in a democratic society, the Black Loyalists strongly resonate with the demands of a multicultural present, and the historical accounts of this group locate the story's import as a narrative of demanding recognition

in a culture of exclusion. This present-day multiculturalism is a discourse that, as Charles Taylor rightfully argues, hinges upon a collective duty “that we all *recognize* the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their *worth*” (64). Such a duty implies that these different cultures are all relatively static and knowable on a large scale, and the imperative of multiculturalism is to recognize that each cultural affiliation has equal merit in a nation’s collective sense of self. In this sense, the Black Loyalists—seen as those who “had asserted the humanity of blacks in an Atlantic world just awakening to their race and its rights”—are almost the perfect historical containers for multicultural narratives of democratic societies (Wilson 407).

The fictional accounts of this moment I examine here narrate the Black Loyalists in a manner more akin to a Nietzschean/Foucauldian genealogical history, as they use this historical moment to destabilize multiculturalism in the present day. Rather than present the Loyalists as recognizable representatives of a particular culture who demand acknowledgement, these novels depict an international story about multiple affiliations and multiple historical influences. In short, rather than see the Black Loyalists as an early moment of multicultural recognition, these novels propose the need to think multihistorically about contemporary affiliations. They recognize disparate historical experiences and uneven international connections as integral to contemporary collective identification. By extension, contemporary self-identification with Africa becomes a process of noting these multiple, dynamic histories rather than claiming a cultural affinity for Africa, a place that is typically seen as unchanging, epistemologically separated from modernity as a peripheral site of “tradition” and atavism (Piot, *Nostalgia* 8).

“What Happened In Between”: Lawrence Hill and *The Book of Negroes*

In many ways, Lawrence Hill has always been concerned with representing the route from Canada to Africa in his fiction. His first novel, *Some Great Thing* (1992), includes the protagonist's brief press visit to Cameroon. *Any Known Blood* (1998), Hill's follow-up, has a pivotal moment when the narrator's research trip to Mali proves disastrous for his marriage in Canada. But with *Someone Knows My Name* (published in Canada and the UK as *The Book of Negroes*), the links between Africa, North America, and Great Britain are the focus of the entire plot, as Hill presents the fictional autobiography of Aminata Diallo, an African woman who is enslaved, escapes, and returns to the continent with the founding of Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize Best Book in 2008, *Someone Knows My Name* (2007) is possibly the best-known fictional account of the Black Loyalists. In its concern with multiple migrations around the Atlantic, Hill's novel articulates a space for Africa as a site of collective affiliation that is less rigorously associated with the original transportation of the slave trade. To be sure, Aminata's capture and sale into the Atlantic slave system is one of the defining features of her life, but her insistence on her various movements around the world, especially her return to Africa as a self-identified Black Loyalist, suggests that the African continent holds an active presence in her life as well as in the cultural connections seen throughout the novel. Much of her time is spent in contact with the established and hybridized slave cultures of the American colonies, yet the cultural affiliation Aminata develops is distinct from the traditions of the low-country slaves or African American New Yorkers during the Revolution.

In Hill's novel, Aminata tells her narrative as a circum-Atlantic project of historical recovery that centers on the ever-changing nature of "the village" in her experience. As her sense of African-affiliated community expands throughout her narrative, Aminata also develops her capacity to give narrative shape to her community. Beginning with her earliest attempts at repeating the names of her slave ship captives, Aminata's life story is immersed in her attempts at understanding and defining her affiliations as they broaden.³⁵ In her ever-expanding village, Africa remains an enduring presence with the ability to enrich her collective affiliations. By maintaining active ties to her homeland as more than the provider of raw materials, especially in her return to the continent, Aminata's narrative carves out a space for African collective affiliation in which multiple histories are negotiated simultaneously.

Aminata is taken from her home in Bayo, Mali at the age of eleven. She is sold into slavery at Bance Island (Sierra Leone) and works in indigo production in South Carolina, where she learns to read and write. Eventually, Aminata is sold to the Jewish indigo inspector, Solomon Lindo, and works for him as an accountant. In an attempt to stabilize the indigo market through legislative channels, she and Lindo travel to New York City just before the American Revolution, and Aminata escapes into Canvas Town, where many other escaped slaves have set up crude shelters and begun a community. While teaching reading and writing at a local church, Aminata is hired by the British

³⁵ *Someone Knows My Name* is often commended as a work that asserts the presence and importance of African Canadians in the Canadian national story in more complicated ways than are typically seen. Hill's former slaves in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, struggle to survive amidst a society where slavery still thrives and heavy racial prejudice is a fact of life. Far from presenting Canada as an unproblematic haven for freed slaves—or, implicitly, as a happy, multicultural land in the present day—Hill gives a complex, often contradictory vision of black Canadian life. See Virgo, Krampe, and Yorke. By contrast, the novel itself reaches beyond national borders throughout. More specifically, *Someone Knows My Name* is a work about identity formation intimately linked to narratives of national belonging yet also freed from the constraints of personal identification based solely on one's citizenship.

government to record the names of Black Loyalists leaving New York for other points in the Commonwealth. In addition to having her write this fictional autobiography, Hill also situates Aminata as the anonymous author of the *Book of Negroes*.³⁶ When she departs from New York for Shelburne, Nova Scotia, Aminata experiences more of the same—she finds little work and less acceptance outside of the black community. After the African emigration movement is underway, Aminata’s literacy is again put to use coordinating the sailing to Sierra Leone. She ends the novel in London, writing her autobiography, after leaving the Freetown settlement in a failed attempt to return once more to her hometown of Bayo.

In the novel’s movement from Bayo to London, via Nova Scotia and Freetown, Aminata’s chosen collective identity—along with her awareness of it—branches outward. While the ten families in the Bayo of her childhood are the only community she can imagine at the beginning of the novel, in her final days in London, she translates her desire to rejoin the community into addressing an imagined community of readers in her autobiography. Such expansion of her sense of connection is based upon the totality of her story and her insistence that her identity is predicated upon more than the cultural identities she embodies. She demands to be known by multiple historical experiences, and the gradual expansion of her audience as well as “her people” indicates that connection across the globe is based upon understanding these histories as rich and

³⁶ The *Book of Negroes* is the longest document about African Americans written before the nineteenth century. It lists around 3,000 freed or escaped slaves who joined the ranks of the British Army and were evacuated at the end of the American Revolution. The book was compiled in 1783 as a record for Americans to calculate the value of former property that had been evacuated with the British. Authorship of the *Book of Negroes* is anonymous, although it was certainly compiled by a variety of British and American officers on board the departing ships. It can be found in its entirety in Hodges, and a digitized copy is available online through the Nova Scotia Archives (“African Nova Scotians”).

connected. Her sense of self is based upon the circuitous nature of her travel, yet it still maintains powerful roots in Africa.

The desire to understand these connections is consistently tied to Aminata's attempts at articulating her community, either orally or in print. From her earliest days in Bayo, Aminata's foremost desire is to become a *djeli*, the village storyteller, usually referred to as *griot* in Anglophone contexts. A *djeli* traditionally tells stories that recount the collective history and genealogies of those living in a village, and Aminata remarks that this form of oral history-keeping is revered throughout her homeland: "It was said that when a *djeli* passed away, the knowledge of one hundred men died with him" (55). Fulfilling such a role is impossible for Aminata, for she is doubly handicapped: she is both a woman and enslaved. Her desire to see, record, and recount the history that unfolds before her, however, is one of the reasons Aminata is able to survive various traumas. The first instance in which she performs this role is during her Atlantic crossing, as she learns the names and hometowns of a majority of slaves being transported below decks: "When I was carried up the ladder and dropped like a sack of meal on the deck of the toubabu's ship, I sought comfort by imagining that I had been made a *djeli*, and was required to see and remember everything. My purpose would be to witness, and to prepare to testify" (55-56). To witness and testify are impulses that Christian Krampe identifies as "externaliz[ing] and spread[ing]" the traumatic memories of abduction, the middle passage, and plantation slavery (71). Krampe is right to locate Aminata's agency in her role as witness, as is his reminder that "the collective voice embodied by Aminata is an important aspect of stressing collective rather than personal memory" (71, n.17). But, whereas Krampe sees the book's influence as chiefly responding to the Canadian

image of itself as a promised land, Aminata's own rhetoric pushes outward toward multiple black histories, fostering a sense of affiliation built upon the collective uses of these memories.

This expansive rhetoric continues in Aminata's narration of her Atlantic crossing in the book's frame story about Aminata's "autobiography" itself, a moment in which she begins to expand the *djeli* role to include a more global audience. She recalls, "In telling my story, I remember all those who never made it through the musket balls and the sharks and the nightmares, all those who never found a group of listeners, and all those who never touched a quill and an inkpot" (56-57). While Aminata imagines the group that experienced similar atrocities, this passage also implies the greater collective of readers and listeners that might gain from her story. To perform the role of *djeli* is, in many respects, to catalog and recite a community's history so that it can be remembered and celebrated by that community—it is to bear witness to the past so that it may inform the present. In some respects, her narrative is meant for her fellow sufferers, yet Aminata's impulse also seems directed toward another community, that of the "men, women and children walking about the streets without the faintest idea of our nightmares" (56). Seen as an expansive gesture, such authorship fosters an imagined community within her reading audience while narrating the historical experiences that forced the transported slaves to form their own collective.

That the Middle Passage would be a moment of collective formation amongst the slaves is not surprising; indeed, this is one of the central tenets of African American literature and Black Atlantic literary theory. However, this Middle Passage is noteworthy in that it is only the beginning in a process for Aminata: it is on the slave ship that her

notion of group identity begins to expand and where she first tries to articulate that community. Rather than see herself only as a child of Bayo, Aminata conceives of herself in relation to the other captives. In fact, her exchange with Biton, a captured chief who eventually leads a slave rebellion on board, causes Aminata to look outward. Although Fomba—a *woloso*, or second-generation slave, from her village—has lost his mind in captivity, Aminata still tries to get him privileges with the captains of the slave vessel. Biton, however, urges Aminata to use her influence with the white men in order to have other slaves useful to the rebellion put into positions of relative privilege. At this point, Aminata clings to traditional ties of kinship when she defends her position: “He is from my village.” Biton, however, can only respond, “We are all from a village, child” (70).

This initially seems to be a moment in which the slave ship takes primacy over the African village for identity formation, as Biton certainly tells Aminata that Bayo ceases to actively enrich her daily life after capture. However, Biton’s response hints at another possibility. Their exchange comes in the middle of Aminata’s growing awareness of the particular community forming on the slave ship, for she recognizes that with each dead slave thrown overboard those remaining are brought together by the fact of their survival. With the most recent body thrown overboard, Aminata “wondered how many of *us* would end up in the sea” (70, emphasis added). Biton’s assertion that “we are all from a village,” spoken as the surviving slaves continue to band together, would seem to be a statement that asserts a new collective identity rather than erasing the African village past. Although Biton’s remark is an understandably brutal severance from former ties, Aminata receives his sentiment differently. Rather than deny the importance of the village for an individual captive, Aminata uses Biton’s words to rethink a more expansive

notion of collectivity that makes the idea of the village more inclusive; indeed, the village is reworked on the slave ship's Atlantic crossing.

What Biton relates to Aminata is the beginning of a negotiation central to the progression of her narrative. In asserting the importance of the village for the slave ship, Biton's remarks speak to identity formation on both an individual and collective level. The captives will understandably identify with their villages of origin—as Aminata does Bayo—yet the experience of the Middle Passage is such that many disparate people and groups are inextricably bound together. The collective sense of identity will only expand throughout Aminata's account, and the process begins on the slave ship when the captives are made to dance for the white sailors. To make the experience less traumatic, Aminata begins to sing a song that weaves together the names and villages of each person on deck. As she sings out a name, the man or woman would “clap if I got it right, and the others would call it out, once. When I got a name wrong or didn't know it, the person would clap twice and dance a little with me and sing out his or her name and village” (80). Such clapping and dancing transforms the forced ritual into a community building exercise. Soon, the captives genuinely forge ties with one another: “Everybody took to this activity, and on other occasions when we were made to dance, homelander took turns calling out the names and villages of the people around them” (80). The experience of dancing over the slavers' whip thus becomes a moment in which the captives both band together as one and assert their individual identities and places of origin. For Aminata, who “could call out the names of almost every person,” this experience begins a lifetime of performing the role of a *djeli* and recognizing individual names and collective identities simultaneously (80).

Aminata barely survives her transport across the Atlantic and is so sickly that she is sold in Charleston, along with Fomba the *woloso*, as a refuse slave to Robinson Appleby, who intends for her to work his indigo plantation in the South Carolina Sea Islands. There, she learns to speak three languages—the vernacular English used by plantation slaves, the dialect used by the planters, and Gullah used by low-country slaves—as well as the customs of the South Carolina slave population. At the same time, under the tutelage of a slave overseer, Aminata secretly learns to read from planters’ almanacs. These two influences leave Aminata struggling to understand the new community into which she has been thrown as well as the place from which she was taken and with which she still strongly identifies.

Upon arriving at Appleby’s indigo plantation, Aminata is taken in by Georgia, an enslaved woman who works in the fields and as a midwife for the local slave population. She introduces Aminata to low-country customs and the Gullah language, and it is by traveling throughout the low-country with Georgia that Aminata gains a richer sense of the culture that exists all around her new home. From Georgia she learns practical medical advice, like how to cure particular ailments with herbs, but more importantly she begins to understand the network of information that travels between plantations all along the coast. They call it “the fishnet,” as Georgia explains: “Niggers got mouths like rivers. Our words swim the rivers, all the way from Savannah to St. Helena to Charles Town and farther up. [...] Our words swim farther than a man can walk. When we find someone, up he comes in the fishnet” (141). The fishnet proves to be the defining feature of this low-country slave community as well as a powerful tool for interpersonal connections in Aminata’s life. At the beginning of her enslavement to Appleby, Aminata immediately

looks for a boy named Chekura, who had become something like a brother to her on their Atlantic crossing and was sold to a different low-country planter. Nevertheless, it is Chekura who finds Aminata in the fishnet, as he is more intimately involved in the shadow economy of South Carolina slave culture: “During [the sick] season, Chekura said, dozens of Negroes could be found at night, roaming and boating, trading poultry for rice, vegetables for gourds, rabbits for rum, exchanging news of brothers and sisters and wives and children, sinking the fishnet and pulling it back up” (158). Constantly reaching for information creates a sense of community in the low-country that Aminata cannot help but become a part of, and when she and Chekura are eventually married on Appleby’s plantation, it is a community event, complete with food, gifts, music, and a long night of celebration.

As her awareness of and involvement in the slave community grows, so does Aminata’s personal sense of identity in relation to her home in Africa. Making sense of her social life in the colonies means “sinking the fishnet,” but understanding her place of birth, and what it means to be “African,” requires the ability to read European and American accounts of her homeland. Although she is far removed from Bayo and the customs of her childhood, Aminata’s developing literacy allows her to begin reading about where she comes from. She mostly searches for information about how to get back to Africa from the colonies, but none of the books at her disposal are very useful for this. However, reading almanacs, medicine guides, and the Bible does leave Aminata with a growing desire to understand and give an account of her place in the world.

Very early upon arriving in South Carolina, Aminata realizes that “Bayo” holds no meaning across the Atlantic—to slaves and owners alike—for she is African, a term

she had never heard until this point. Reading books, however, allows her to get a better sense of herself, even as she reads exclusively about the planter class and their concerns:

Books were all about the ways of the buckra, but soon I felt that I could not do without them. And I lived in hope that one day I would find a book that answered my questions. *Where was Africa, exactly, and how did you get there?* Sometimes I felt ashamed to have no answer. How could I come from a place but not know where it was? (165)

This individual quest for knowledge carries on throughout her life, and her search for information about her homeland always takes place parallel to her involvement in building, sustaining, and narrating a community. She most keenly feels the desire for information about Africa while in Charleston after being sold to Solomon Lindo, the indigo inspector.

Recognizing Aminata's intellectual abilities, Lindo purchases her to keep the ledgers of his indigo inspecting and consulting business, teaching her writing and arithmetic in the process. After her morning lessons, Lindo rewards Aminata with books by Jonathan Swift, Voltaire, and William Falconer to read in the evenings. The reading continues to inspire questions about the ways in which the world is run, and Aminata cannot escape the feeling that her own personal identity is tied together with the workings of the global markets: "How much had been paid for me, I wondered, and who had arranged to have me brought to this land? How were the black men who stole me from Bayo tied to the Christians and Jews who traded in slaves in South Carolina? [...] Answers only led to more questions" (205). While her personal and cultural connections to Georgia, Chekura, and others strengthen in South Carolina, Aminata continues to find her individual identity through memories of Bayo. As on the slave ship, community life both contracts and expands—she still considers Bayo her home, yet her identity continues

to be influenced by an expanding group consciousness that has little connection to that African village.

The course of her enslavement to Lindo coincides with the growing hostilities between the colonists and the British government, and Lindo eventually takes Aminata to New York City to help lobby for governmental policy that can stabilize the South Carolina indigo market. While the two are in the North, fighting breaks out in Lexington and Concord, and Aminata takes her opportunity to run away, eventually settling in the makeshift black neighborhood of Canvas Town. Her entry into a larger community in New York begins almost immediately upon fleeing Lindo and the slave system he represents, when Aminata walks through the city and into the burial ground for African Americans. A funeral for a child is taking place, and when she sees the mourning adults and listens to their songs, Aminata cannot help but join them in their grief:

They took me into their dancing, and did not ask where I came from, for all they had to do was look at me and hear my own sobs in my maternal tongue and they knew that I was one of them. The dead infant was [...] every person who had been tossed into the unforgiving sea on the endless journey across the big river. (256)

Although the infant's burial is a powerful moment of communal gathering and collective identity, it is one that takes place without comment from any of the participants, and it ends almost as suddenly as it begins. Aminata speaks to one woman after the ceremony, but their encounter ends quite abruptly: "She raised her fingers in salutation, and turned away. The Africans kept walking south through the woods, and none looked back at me" (257). Thus, Aminata has no personal connections to foster from this exchange, yet she is left with an entire African-based collective to imagine and identify with in the abstract. Much like the fishnet in South Carolina, the network of blacks in New York City is

extensive and has its own methods of connection. Yet, in contrast to the more direct exchange of information in the fishnet, the community Aminata finds in New York is largely imagined.

After gaining a stronger sense of ethnic identity and collectivity in New York, Aminata begins to foster personal connections in Canvas Town through acts of literacy. She teaches reading and writing to a handful of free blacks and runaways, and her lessons always begin with names: “In a private room lit with lamps and candles, they told me their names, huddled around me, put their hands on my shoulders and arms and back, and peered at the words taking shape under my hand” (259). In an echo of the song from the slave ship, and in anticipation of her employment writing the Book of Negroes, Aminata forges personal relationships through asking, repeating, and even writing the names of those she meets. This moment both continues and expands her role as a *djeli*, as she attests to her community but adds reading and writing to the oral recitation of names.

Her time teaching in New York spans the American Revolution, and when Loyalist New York finally needs to be evacuated, Aminata is known around the city as a well-connected and literate member of the black community. The British army then hires her to record the names and descriptions of each departing black in the Book of Negroes. It is notable that Aminata’s public writing—which culminates with her autobiography at the end of her life—begins in New York, with the Book of Negroes. In this moment, Aminata seems to take on the role of the *djeli* yet again. Indeed, listening to the emigrants and recording their names thus combines the written and oral traditions with which she is so familiar. The path to authorship, however, is yet another manifestation of the process Aminata negotiates throughout her life, as she must imagine and identify with a

community much larger than any she has ever known; yet the intimacy of the Book of Negroes requires knowing each individual's story and recording each one on its own.

As she listens to the stories of those wishing to emigrate for Nova Scotia, Aminata's sense of community and personal identity fuse together, and she develops an understanding of her own place within the world as embodying multiple histories simultaenously. While the questions of relation that lingered in Charleston remain unanswered, listening to the emigrants' accounts of "unexpected migrations" gives Aminata a sense of belonging: "I loved my new work. I felt that I was giving something special to the Negroes seeking asylum in Nova Scotia, and that they were giving something special to me. They were telling me that I was not alone" (291). At the same time, recording individual names of emigrants allows for Aminata to assert individual identity, and she is careful to give each former slave a moment of personal attention: "I showed them their tickets, read out their names and made sure they saw that their names had been recorded" (291).³⁷ The experience of hearing and recording so many stories leads to one of Aminata's refrains for the rest of the novel: "We are travelling peoples" (301). The "we" here is certainly inclusive of an African diasporic community, one in almost perpetual migration, but the formulation of "peoples" hints at the primacy of individuals to this collectivity—the "stout wenches" and "likely fellows" described in the Book of Negroes count, their histories matter in themselves and as part of the collective.

³⁷ The dynamic interplay between individual and collective is played out again in the composition of the historical Book of Negroes. Although most descriptions are short and lack much actual description (e.g. "stout wench," "worn out," "fine boy"), the collective power of the names, descriptions, and brief histories of these individuals is almost overwhelming. Hill himself described seeing the document as "a very rich experience" and as a great teaching tool (Sagawa 315): "Looking at 'The Book of Negroes' and learning to decipher it and take meaning from it, I think, could be a rich exercise for any enterprising university or senior high school student" (Sagawa 321).

At this point in the novel, Aminata rapidly gains two further claims upon her identity: she self-identifies as a Black Loyalist and joins the emigration to Shelburne, Nova Scotia, then joins the movement to Sierra Leone. A relatively small narrative space is actually given to the experience in Nova Scotia, as most of the events seem directed towards the mass exodus to Sierra Leone ten disappointing years later. For Aminata, Nova Scotia brings the birth of her daughter and the child's subsequent kidnapping by the white family for whom Aminata works. While in Nova Scotia, she also learns the news of Chekura's death at sea during the British evacuation. Organizing the mass return to Africa yet again requires Aminata's literacy, as she records names and testimonies of potential emigrants for the Sierra Leone Company's evaluation. The experience also propels her towards her dream of returning to Bayo, resurrecting her lifelong process of negotiating her personal experiences with the claims of community upon her identity. After aiding John Clarkson in the organization of the Sierra Leone emigration, Aminata arrives in Freetown with only one desire: to make the trip inland and settle in her childhood village. It takes many years and an unfavorable bargain with an African slaver before the opportunity to travel to Bayo arises. The Freetown settlement sees its share of problems in these years, and Hill includes the historically real controversies over land allotments and quitrents, bombardment by French warships in 1794, an armed settler rebellion over land ownership in 1800, and the influx of hundreds of Jamaican maroons who subsequently put down that rebellion. But amidst these community efforts at meaningful freedom and settler solidarity is Aminata's own struggle with how to identify with her homeland after a lifetime of migrations around the Atlantic.

At the forefront of this struggle is Aminata's partial self-identification as a diasporic African, alongside her strong desire to return to Bayo and live as she did before her capture four decades earlier. Returning to Africa provides Aminata with an undeniable lesson: although she may still consider herself connected to the region, the local Temne think of her as closer to white. Her notions of group belonging, which have expanded since her capture, must change again to encompass her African origins and her identification with the Black Loyalists and Nova Scotian returnees. In the beginning, the colony is built on a community ethic of hard work and Christianity, and Aminata joins in the spirit of this, even if she does not completely identify with Nova Scotian culture: "In South Carolina, I had been an African. In Nova Scotia, I had become known as a Loyalist or a Negro, or both. And now, finally back in Africa, I was seen as a Nova Scotian, and in some respects thought of myself that way too" (385). Yet, despite her uncertainty about what place Africa holds in her life, Aminata's strongest desire is to connect with the local Temne in the market and to eventually return to Bayo, to be home again: "[W]hat part of me was still African? I would never feel truly at home again until I found my way back to Bayo" (386).

Her return inland, back to Bayo, fails. She cannot keep up with the slave trading crew, and after about a month of walking, she overhears the leader's plans to sell her back into slavery at the next town. Near exhaustion, she runs away and is taken in at a small village and nursed back to health. The trip to Bayo fails on the most elementary level, as Aminata cannot complete the walk and will never see her hometown again. But the inability to return also removes the final barrier to Aminata's realization of a sense of belonging that combines multiple histories and continually evolving notions of the self.

From the moment she “returns” as part of the Sierra Leone settlement, she understands Freetown to be “nothing more than a stepping stone” (387). The lack of complete attachment to Nova Scotian and Freetown culture is only attributable to her insistence on returning to a home village. In a sense, the more circumscribed notions of village identity that occupied her childhood sense of self reappear in Freetown, and her obsession with returning “to the place where [her] life began” clouds any sense of collective identity she had developed in her life of migrations. Indeed, thinking of Bayo in this manner puts the notion of “return” in question, as it is most clearly a return to a place but not a way of life. The concept of Africa, after all, is one she only gains after living in the American colonies as a slave. Her month recuperating from this journey, however, puts Aminata into the position of *djeli* and reanimates the desire to understand her life and collective identity together as created by multiple historical experiences.

The final movement in Aminata’s progression involves her acceptance of the *djeli* role, both in an unnamed African village as well as in the abolitionist circle of London, where she sails at the request of the Sierra Leone Company leaders after escaping the slavers. In immediate terms, Aminata’s abandonment of her quest for return to Bayo, and her escape of a second enslavement, reinforces her commitment to an imagined community of listeners and readers, where her life’s story has the power to bring people together under a common commitment. Reaching this audience begins during her recovery, as she offers to “tell stories of all the places I have been and all that I have seen in the toubabu’s land” (446). As she stays for “one revolution of the moon,” Aminata becomes the *djeli* that she had always wanted to be as a child and fulfills the role she imagined for herself on the slave ship and enacted as a recorder for the Book of Negroes

decades earlier. Her story is a combination of the personal and the collective, a culmination of her individual journeys around the Atlantic and the collective black journeys to find meaningful freedom in the British world:

I told the story of my youth, the story of my trek to Bance Island and how I had caught babies along the way. Always, with each story, I was asked for names. [...] I told the story of the ship's passage, the revolt on the ocean, the conditions on board the ships, and of Sullivan's Island. I told of growing indigo, and harvesting it, and Negroes enslaved in America regardless of where they were born. [...] I told of the wars between the white men in America and our betrayal in Nova Scotia, and, ultimately, of our passage to Sierra Leone and my futile search for my home. (446-47)

The shifting subjects of Aminata's stories, from her individual capture to the collective betrayal in Nova Scotia, indicate the degree to which Aminata can finally integrate her personal sense of identity with a collective notion of belonging and the multiple histories that make up both. She is at home with her African audience and equally comfortable identifying herself as an African-born woman, a former slave, and a betrayed colonist. Such a composite worldview in Africa makes her trip to London almost superfluous, as she has already embraced her role as *djeli*—she can already understand herself and her people as globally relevant, even when enslaved.

Her time in London deepens both of Aminata's narrative roles: she continues to be an African oral historian when lecturing to the public and schoolchildren, and she expands her role as a published author through the completion of her memoir. As an author and testifier against the slave trade, she is able to reach an even wider imagined community of readers, and she is careful to teach this community about her entire life. Amidst the immediate political crusade against the slave trade, she once again asserts that her identity, and that of blacks worldwide, is not reducible to slavery or the Middle Passage. When addressing a group of British schoolchildren every Friday, Aminata once

again emphasizes that the importance of her story goes beyond her slave past, highlighting the totality of her lifelong journey: “I always began the same way. Unrolling a map of the world, I would put one finger on a dot I had drawn to represent my village of Bayo, put another finger on London and say: ‘I was born there, and we are here now, and I’m going to tell you all about what happened in between’” (469).

Someone Knows My Name is perpetually concerned with the in-between, all of it. Aminata demands that her readers and listeners understand her story, and the story of the Black Loyalists, in its totality. And by asking such complete vision of her audience, she asserts the need for understanding a way of belonging for blacks that is situated multihistorically. Hill addresses his own concerns about the problems of identity formation in Canada by looking to the Black Loyalist story as a whole, by understanding it as a circum-Atlantic narrative about more than slavery, more than racism, more than the Middle Passage. Indeed, Aminata consistently presents herself as the product of multiple histories, not as a representative of any stable culture. By extension, the novel itself comments on how African-Canadians are to make sense of themselves by affirming a place for Africa within their worldviews and noting the multiple histories that come with this recognition. The takeaway for contemporary readers is not that Canada lacks a place for blacks, but that Canada is not even the right place to look. Aminata is not Canadian, nor is she completely African either. And she certainly cannot stand in for a cultural identity in a multicultural society. Africa is her home, blacks around the globe are her people, and she is a *djeli* for anyone who will listen. *Someone Knows My Name* asks for these historical experiences to be heard in their entirety.

“Our Relationship to Spirits”: Syl Cheney-Coker’s *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*

Hill’s Aminata cannot escape the desire to tell her story, and in aspiring towards being a *djeli*, she links herself to both African storytelling traditions and a sense of linear, non-negotiable time. Her narrative begins around the time of her capture around 1755 and ends with her final days in London, in 1802. Sierra Leonean exile Syl Cheney-Coker’s use of the Black Loyalists’ story, however, does not rely on such a sense of time. In fact, his epic novel *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* foregrounds the importance of time and history as negotiable factors in the Black Loyalists’ affiliations with Africa. In Cheney-Coker’s novel, a mystical vision of history serves to link Africa and the Americas through the returnees’ sentiments of belonging. The returnees who are able to gain a sense of themselves in the novel do so by means of the magical—the settlers’ felt sense of belonging comes during moments when magic intervenes in reality. The novel uses this technique as a method for celebrating the deeply felt connection to “Malagueta”—a fictionalized version of Freetown—as well as to critique the returnees’ shameful ignorance of the people who actually inhabit this part of West Africa.

Because the novel so frequently shuffles between magic and reality as well as various time periods on multiple continents, *Alusine Dunbar* is nearly impossible to summarize. It begins with the original 1787 settlers, sailing from London to Malagueta and follows their families in subsequent generations, culminating with a failed postcolonial military coup by General Tamba Masimiara. The title character, Alusine Dunbar—known for most of the novel as Sulaiman the Nubian—is a seer from Mali, and before the settlers arrive, he projects a vision of their coming. He vanishes for a century,

only to return as inspiration for a poet named Garbage—and with the help of his glowing, giant, magical testicles, Alusine Dunbar helps Garbage navigate Malagueta’s history and understand the rise and eventual fall of the Krio ruling class. Like its more famous inspiration, Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Alusine Dunbar* is populated by many stories and characters, all of which serve to simultaneously mystify and bring clarity to this project of nation building in West Africa. Cheney-Coker’s novel is distinguished by its specific subject matter—it is primarily a story of mass return to Africa, and the subsequent building of community and nation stem from this re-crossing of the Atlantic and the multiple histories that overlap as part of this collectivity.

Syl Cheney-Coker’s affiliation with Sierra Leone is complex, especially in regards to his racial heritage as a descendant of the Black Loyalists. While the Canadian self-image to which Hill responds is largely constructed around race and its absence from the national narrative, Cheney-Coker’s vision of Sierra Leone’s national legacy is built upon class division, where the settlers and their descendants asserted their difference from native Africans based on supposedly enlightened attitudes inherited from the modern world. Rather than focus his work on the development of this separate Krio culture, Cheney-Coker emphasizes the untenability of seeing Sierra Leone as containing many harmonious cultural identities together.³⁸ Cheney-Coker’s earlier poems, in fact, stress multiple histories as more appropriate vehicles for thinking through contemporary Sierra Leone. The opening poem of *Concerto for an Exile*, “The Traveller,” speaks to the

³⁸ I use the term Krio here to mean those who are descended from and have inherited what James Walker calls a “synthesis of African and Western civilizations” begun with the Black Loyalists and “continued by other African groups displaced to Sierra Leone” (xxi). The older version, “Creole,” is Cheney-Coker’s terminology.

Portuguese naming of the area, the Middle Passage, as well as the Sierra Leone Company's emigration plan for Black Loyalists:

do not speak to me about my genealogy
 a slaver's knife chewed my umbilical cord
 twenty-five drops of my blood Pedro da Cinta
 1462 means nothing to me the sea to rock the belly
 was I captain of the ship William Wilberforce
 what monument shall I build to you inside my soul (22-27)

In a later poem, "Solitude," the poet asks, "Granville Sharpe [sic] have you come to plague this bleeding heart again" (9). The recourse to multiple, non-national histories of influence as a way of understanding Sierra Leone marks these poems as well as *Alusine Dunbar*.

In the novel, Cheney-Coker largely defines the cultural connections enabled by return through magical means, an appropriate vehicle for suggesting such multiple and extra-national histories as a basis for collective identification.³⁹ While the magical is the novel's vehicle for describing—and initially celebrating—the ways that these original settlers imagine their belonging in Africa, it also implies a critique of that imagined connection. In these moments of otherworldliness, the novel's characters inevitably feel a sense of collective affiliation, but they largely do so at the cost of everyday connections among the Africans already residing in Malagueta. Magic has the unique ability to simultaneously convey these ends at any given moment, a condition that reflects the complexities of Black Loyalist identification. Although many were originally captured and transported from Africa, their cultural status as returnees complicates individual

³⁹ Although I've used the term "magical" here, the novel itself has a tenuous relationship to the genre of "magical realism." It is more akin to what Kwame Anthony Appiah has termed "spiritual realism," to mark the specific African form of this genre. Cheney-Coker insists that his novel is influenced by, but not an imitation of, writers like Gabriel García Márquez: "I am really at a loss to understand how people can mistake all this as just a mere example of magical realism. It is a book to celebrate and to understand so much complexity in a world that, on one hand, is a very simple one to deal with, but yet at the same time contains possibilities for creative imaginative writing" (qtd. in Cooper, *Magical Realism* 142).

affiliation. Each returnee's sense of self is filtered through multiple cultures and experiences, and magic offers an aesthetic complement to these difficulties inherent to the act of return, conveying conflicting sentiments in the same moment. In narrating the Black Loyalists' story, Cheney-Coker accounts for the seemingly natural connection the returnees feel for Africa while also suggesting that this connection does not necessarily translate to the process of nation building. In the end, the poet Garbage comes to represent a model of affiliation that can hold. As the child of a settler and a native African, he maintains the connection to the magical so integral to the returnees, but he also lives with an awareness of alternative voices in Malagueta's history. In positing Garbage as both the heir to Alusine Dunbar and as the chronicler of the budding nation-state, Cheney-Coker presents the kind of returnee affiliation that can capitalize on a special connection to Africa while remaining attached to the practicalities of postcolonial citizenship.

The magical vision that characterizes the entire novel begins on board the *Belmont*, a ship carrying the original emigrants in 1787. The narrative follows Jeanette and Sebastian Cromantine from London—where they have resided since their evacuation from the American Revolution—to the Kasila coast, where they eventually settle the town of Malagueta.⁴⁰ Like the journey of Hill's narrator Aminata, Cheney-Coker's novel narrates a circum-Atlantic route from Africa to the Americas and back: Sebastian returns his father's remains to Africa while Jeanette is tasked with completing the circuit of another woman on board, Fatmatta the Bird-Woman. These two journeys characterize the original connections the novel's settler characters feel between Africa and the U.S. and

⁴⁰ Kasila is Cheney-Coker's invented name for the region of Africa most commonly referred to as the Grain Coast in Sierra Leone's early history.

Canada, and they both are heavily influenced by the presence of the dead and the magical. The connections these characters experience are largely felt through the otherworldly realm, and the novel suggests that magical elements actually enable these imagined links between the returnees and Africa. In many ways, these original associations are celebrated as moments of genuine connection that help lead the settlers to fuller senses of themselves as individuals and as part of the returning collective, and the presence of magic inserts multiple and overlapping histories into this crossing of the Atlantic.

Although the novel begins on the deck of the *Belmont*, it almost immediately reaches back to the slave past of the Cromantines.⁴¹ Both are born in the American colonies to slaves. Jeanette is described as the beautiful octoroon daughter of a house servant and the slave master's son, who sends her away from the plantation to live as a free black with an elderly preacher. Sebastian's slavery is largely in the service of an elderly white woman whom he deserts for the British lines in the Revolution. Although the Cromantines lived behind British lines during the war, it is their experience in London—seeing poverty among whites and blacks—as well as a spiritual connection to Sebastian's father in America that call them “back” to Africa in 1787.

Sebastian completes the first circum-Atlantic journey of the novel when he is called by his dead father, a former slave taken from the Kasila coast, “a rootless man burdened by his inability to find a resting place” (9). His father connects Sebastian to a

⁴¹ The choice of surname also hints at multiple histories in this epic novel, as variations on the name were standard in colonial accounts of African slavery. British colonial accounts generally referred to the Akan people from what is now Ghana as Coromantee, Coromantins, Coromanti, or Kormantine. The Coromantees were “often stereotyped as hard and loyal workers among English-speaking slaveholders” but were also “implicated in dozens of slave rebellions and plots” in the Caribbean (Thornton 182). I see Cheney-Coker's variation of this name as an indicator of the multiple histories at play in any given moment of the novel.

pre-slave past, one that is ultimately more meaningful and generative than any ties to the Americas. This supernatural encounter shows Sebastian that his father “was obeying the call from another world to which he had returned” (10). As they sail to Africa, Sebastian shows Jeanette the skull of his father, unearthed during the Revolution, which he is carrying across the ocean. He calls the skull “de Magic Lantern” and uses its spiritual and symbolic significance to give perspective to this return to “de place where our faders come from” (14-15). More than serving as a symbol of physical return to Africa, Sebastian’s father’s skull is a reminder of the kinds of connections to Africa that give meaning to Sebastian’s daily life. The skull allows him to gain awareness of a culture he has been severed from, and Africa becomes more than simply a place in his family’s past. By opening himself to the possibilities inherent to another worldview, Sebastian can see his own lineage as more than a family tree or line of descent, and he feels a strong sense of attachment to his pre-slave ancestors: “Now, he could evoke a lineage that was not defined by time, but by the spirit, by the force of all eternities and the running music of ancestral water that coursed through his blood” (14). Sebastian’s connection to Africa, rooted in the spiritual rather than the temporal, is helpful for understanding the ways in which a felt connection to Africa generates “African” sense of self for Cheney-Coker’s returnees. As Sebastian completes his father’s journey from Africa to America and back, the novel celebrates this moment of spirituality as a genuine connection that results in Sebastian’s fuller sense of self and belonging.

Sebastian seems to be constantly engaging questions of how to belong in Africa in a meaningful way, beginning with using his father’s skull as a “Magic Lantern” to guide his journey to Africa. But after the settlers’ exile and subsequent return to Malagueta—

when the second wave of emigrants, led by Thomas Bookerman, arrives—Sebastian takes this responsibility to the dead even further. When returning to Malagueta, he is overcome by “a disturbing ambiguity” about the relationship between past and present and vows to “renew the threads that had bound him to this place, in the name of his father, of his ancestors” (140, 141). Reasserting the histories of the dead leads Sebastian to one of his most important epiphanies: “Instead of going forward like everyone else, he was going forward with one foot and backward with the other” (142). At this point, he embraces a worldview akin to that of Sulaiman—the ancient seer from Mali later known as Alusine Dunbar—when he sees that the present is dependent upon those who are in “another realm of existence” and “that through the present dead, man was alive” (143). A direct result of this metaphysical revelation is the first act of settler community building in the new Malagueta: Sebastian hosts a feast to remember those who had been before, a feast attended by “the whole community” (144). In hosting this feast, the Cromantines successfully “reconcile people who had gone apart” while also building a shared sense of identity as Malaguetans, all of which is built upon a renewal of the magical connections that first attached Sebastian to West Africa. In a sense, he passes this spirituality on to the second wave of emigrants, teaching them to understand their own collective affiliations as anchored to a spiritual worldview and an ambiguous sense of historical time. Sebastian’s feast revels in such historical multiplicity, honoring the dead while celebrating the present.

On the *Belmont*’s route from London to Malagueta, another circum-Atlantic journey is also completed. This journey is, in some ways, more straightforward than Sebastian’s, as Fatmatta the Bird-Woman was herself taken from the continent and is

physically present for her return. She never sets foot on land alive, however, for Fatmatta dies as the ship comes within sight of the Kasila coast. Fatmatta's death inaugurates the returnees' settlement in Malagueta; their first official act is to bury her on African soil. Perhaps paradoxically, it is through death that Fatmatta connects to her African past and to her fellow settlers, as she passes much of her life's story to Jeanette Cromantine, arguably the most important settler for the founding and initial prosperity of Malagueta. In transmitting her story to Jeanette, Fatmatta initiates a non-biological female line of cultural continuity, a connection that reappears throughout the novel in various magical moments. Like Sebastian's devotion to his father, this association between Jeanette and Fatmatta is enabled by magical elements and is celebrated as a connection that fosters genuine links for the returnees. It is also through the narrative of Fatmatta's African childhood and early adulthood that the novel introduces the story of Sulaiman the Nubian as another salient history for this moment of return.

The story of Sulaiman and Fatmatta asserts a non-settler history of magic and helps to chart the ways that the magical transforms from part of pre-settler African life to the cultural property of returnees like the Cromantines. In fact, Sulaiman is Fatmatta's biological father, and she is the result of an affair with Mariamu, wife of the gold merchant who first brought Sulaiman from the deserts to Kasila. She grows up with magical abilities, including the power to speak to birds, and is reputed to have the look of the scorpion in her eyes. This look protects her from any forced sexual experiences, causing the aggressor to lose the ability for sexual penetration. Such power becomes especially important after her transport to America, where she successfully resists any slave owner's attempt at using her for breeding. Paolo Bertinetti understands Fatmatta's

symbolic importance in terms of this refusal to breed future slaves in America, and her return to Africa chiefly to adds to her symbolic function in the novel. He claims: “She is the incarnation of the survival of the African spirit in [...] the American colonies, and of the dream of returning to Mother Africa” (206). To be sure, she represents a refusal to assimilate to the hybridized slave cultures of the Americas, but Bertinetti’s formulation makes Fatmatta an exceptional example of an amorphous “African spirit.” Rather than see Fatmatta as a symbol of a knowable culture, I see the novel using her as a way to transmit this magic to the returnees as part of their collective identities. While these abilities may originally be coded as African, they are passed down to the Loyalists and consciously developed as part of their collective identity. The local non-returnees certainly have access to the magical, but their use of it is not one of the features they use to define themselves, as is the case with the Loyalists.

Fatmatta’s method of connecting to Africa, and extending that connection to the other settlers, shows the kinds of belonging associated with returnees in the novel. Her story is one that virtually erases the Middle Passage, focusing on moments of union instead. Rather than develop new ties in the American colonies, Fatmatta remains tied to her homeland as well as her ancestry, imagining “a long ancestral bridge with a lot of people crossing from one end to the other” (67). Fatmatta understands intuitively that she is destined to return to Africa, a destiny that is intricately tied to “an old animated life rhythm that went round the universe like a great flame” (67). Fatmatta’s vision of this “long ancestral bridge” is akin to Sebastian’s embrace of a spiritual lineage—indeed, both serve to show how the importance of the “return” to Africa that defines Sierra Leone’s founding is as a spiritual return to an African worldview as well as a physical

return of those removed by slavery. Both visions are indicative of the novel's treatment of settler belonging, for magic is the vehicle by which such return to Africa generates self-understanding amongst the returnees.

The development of this perceived sense of association in Malagueta, in fact, is itself a product of the community's adoption of Fatmatta the Bird-Woman's magical nature and the returnees use of that magic as a basis for collective identification. Although she dies before the founding of the town, her burial initiates the settlers' stay in Africa. Furthermore, Fatmatta reappears at key moments in the settlers' history, especially at births, deaths, and moments of political upheaval. Her reappearance at these moments measures the continuation of the 1787 settler connection to Africa, but it also underscores the magical presentation of settler belonging in the novel.

Rather than go to lengths to explicate bloodlines and family trees, the novel uses the memory and presence of Fatmatta as shorthand for an established settler genealogy, suggesting that the returnees belong in Africa by means of this spiritual connection rather than by specific family ties. What is initially narrated as one history of magical origins, slavery, and return becomes the primary story of returnee consciousness. After the native Africans destroy the original town—due to a potato plague that ruined a year's worth of crops—the Cromantines and the few remaining families live in exile in the mountains. It is here that Jeanette gives birth to her only child, Emmanuel, and the birth is accompanied by a visit from Fatmatta:

She held the hand of Jeanette Cromantine; then, as if she was transmitting her strength to the woman who was losing hers, Fatmatta the Bird-Woman began to rub the belly of the woman, who was thrashing on the bed. [...] They were two women who were completing a journey they had begun a long time ago. (109)

That Fatmatta appears throughout the novel at moments like these is evidence that this kind of connection is what makes the Black Loyalist story a powerful example of African belonging on a global scale. The moments of disconnect—whether the Middle Passage or settler-native hostilities—are elided in favor of these spiritual and magical moments of synchrony.⁴² Indeed, the novel asserts that a shared sense of community and belonging are largely imagined through visions of magic and alternative notions of time and history.

Fatmatta's appearance at these moments, or Sebastian's invocation of his father's voice, are individual histories that explain felt connections to Africa upon return. However, they are problematically used as the bases for an essential cultural trait of the returnees, as "a kind of blood knowledge, unmediated by experience or time" (Cooper, "Cultural Identity" 174). Cheney-Coker's novel shows this spirituality as part of the returnees' prioritization of a constructed returnee community ethos. His narrative must account for the strong sense of affiliation these former slaves feel for Africa, and the spiritual realm—however saturated with essentialist language—provides the kind of powerful association that the settlers feel for the continent itself. Taken as the collective inheritance of the returnees, the magical realm further forges collective consciousness among the settlers while ignoring the fact that these magical stories are pieces to settler history, not a natural, unmediated essence of return. At its most generative, the founding of Sierra Leone is a powerful story of worldly belonging, as in these early imaginings of Sebastian and Fatmatta.⁴³ But the novel itself critiques the settlers' priorities in the

⁴² Other such moments include Fatmatta's appearance at: the feast Sebastian holds to honor the dead which also marks the beginning of Captain Hammerstone's first attempt at colonizing Malagueta (143); Sebastian's death after the Emmanuel's return from exile (310); Emmanuel's death during the War of Independence (317); and Jeanette's death in bed in her old age (354).

⁴³ To a certain extent, Sebastian and Fatmatta share this general historical outlook with the second group's leader, Thomas Bookerman. After leading the group of settlers from Canada to Malagueta, Bookerman makes writing the history of Malagueta into one of his primary goals. Bookerman is aware of Sulaiman's

development of its plot. If the returnees see themselves as essentially, spiritually connected to Africa, the effects of detaching themselves from everyday Malagueta life are apparent when Malagueta becomes a colony and then an independent nation. While Fatmatta's ancestral bridge serves as an important moment for the collective attachment to Malagueta, Cheney-Coker's novel also reveals the distancing effect such visions have on the settlers. Non-returnees are routinely presented as less involved with the spiritual realm, as they do not organize their community around this in the way the returnees do. Thus, their interpretations of Malagueta history and culture are largely practical affairs. The imperial and postcolonial dynamics of the novel make a strong claim that the magical can provide a felt sense of settler belonging, but it cannot be an unproblematically celebrated cultural trait of returnees.

Malagueta's imperial moment begins with David Hammerstone, the novel's primary embodiment of colonization, who is driven to Africa by the desire to begin a mission of stability and progress brought about by the Bible and commerce. Significantly, Hammerstone's ideology of progress and development interrupts Sebastian Cromantine's feast honoring the dead, the feast that marks Sebastian's acceptance of a non-linear version of time. The cannon shot that rings upon the entrance of Hammerstone also sounds the imposition of a linear conception of temporality—rather than embracing any

prophecies, especially that Malagueta's history had the potential to repeat every fifty years, but Bookerman uses them to understand Malagueta in a much different way: "The knowledge that everything proceeding [sic] the founding of Malagueta was repeatable convinced Bookerman that he and other men were engaged in a task that was a farce, because life was circumscribed by pathos" (212). Bookerman's revelation leads to the breakthrough in his attempt to narrate Malagueta's history: "The real heroes and heroines, he concluded, were those not arrogant enough to see themselves as conquerors or builders, but who had been engaged in only one pursuit in life: making others happy" (212). These people populate his *Founding of Malagueta*, with special emphasis on "those who had made them laugh during the lugubrious afternoons in the new region" (212). Appropriately, Fatmatta the Bird-Woman appears as one of the region's heroines. Although it is not quite magical, his perception of history, in its embrace of Fatmatta and those like her, still operates on a level separate from a more direct, linear framing of events adopted by Captain Hammerstone and the corrupt postcolonial rulers who end the novel espousing a worldview that is most striking for its lack of magical connections.

magical notions of time, Hammerstone's troops attempt to subdue the Malaguetans to the forces of "progress." Although Sebastian "had been expecting his father to come and be present, cured of wandering through the forest," he receives Hammerstone and fifty armed men instead (157). Whereas Sebastian Cromantine looked to honor the dead as part of life, Hammerstone imposes a new way of seeing life in Malagueta as pointed towards the future, not those who had come before. He also ushers in an ethic of enlightenment "rationality," as he focuses on the development and maintenance of colonial authority and law. His chief aim is to run an efficient colony, speaking to a very different way of living from the returnees. By imposing his will, Hammerstone brings about two violent colonial wars as well as a final war of independence; he capitalizes on growing class divisions within Malagueta; and he personally encourages the development of a settler aristocracy. By asserting the absolute difference of returnees and others in Malagueta, he encourages the settlers to think of the magical as essential to their specific culture. The distinct lack of magic in descriptions of Hammerstone indicates how divergent these attitudes truly are, but it also suggests that the magical connections of the settlers are far removed from the kinds of practical decisions that govern a Western-style society and will ultimately drive the postcolonial Malaguetan government as well.

But Hammerstone's logic, especially in his focus on the present rather than the past, is taken to the extreme by the Malaguetan postcolonial rulers who populate the novel's concluding pages. What the Captain and Sanka Maru and Ali Baba share is the notion that magic is the collective property that sets settlers apart from the rest of Malagueta, and they react to this returnee difference by asserting their own cultural traits in the national sphere. Yet again, the novel separates the settlers' historical perspective

defined by magical connection from the postcolonial commitments that are more rooted in the present. Sanka Maru, Ali Baba, and the other ministers and military personnel that populate postcolonial Malagueta only see the legacy of returnee exceptionalism and the class divisions that arise from it, and they demand for their own cultural traits to be recognized. By this point in the novel, the multiple histories that constitute Malaguetan settler society are ignored in favor of the myth that returnees have an exclusive connection to the magical realm. In this sense, it is significant that Sanka Maru is eventually removed from his office and killed by Alusine Dunbar, with the help of his magical, glowing testicles: “The light of the testicles glowed with a fierce brilliance, and [Sanka Maru] felt himself lifted out of the grandiloquent illusion of power, borne into space as if he were a dwarf, by a force too terrible to contemplate” (397). Dunbar, flying on a magic carpet, sends Sanka Maru “crashing down in the middle of a street” to be put on public display in death (397). Such an ending to the postcolonial corruption—and the novel itself—asserts the value of the spiritual, non-linear worldview in ways that are not connected to settler collective identification. Brenda Cooper notes, “Sanka Maru [...] stands as a symbolic shorthand for the novel’s tensions between historical and mythical time” and is part of the larger “ambiguity surrounding time and space” in the novel (*Magical Realism* 142-43). Yet it seems entirely unambiguous that Dunbar’s ousting of Sanka Maru taps into a forgotten history of Malaguetan magic that predates the forging of settler consciousness.

While the novel’s magical ending undoubtedly critiques the postcolonial corruption of Malagueta, it equally comments upon the removed nature of the returnees, who have used magic as the foundation for their cultural identity rather than as one piece

of Malagueta's history. For the most part, there is little interaction between the settlers and native Africans, and the nature of the settlers' connections to Africa have little to do with an actually lived experience in Africa. Rather, their often powerful associations with the continent are largely imagined through the magical, and the novel clearly shows that such removal from the everyday—the refusal to negotiate this connection with the practicalities of West African life—is a looming factor in the postcolonial failure of Malagueta. One of the architects of a postcolonial coup in Malagueta, Colonel Lookdown Akongo, deeply resents the class division between Krios and native Africans, and cites this as one reason for his rebellion: “He laughed when he recalled that incongruously with their three-piece woollen suits and the Sunday charade of going to church, they were the biggest practitioners of sorcery, lost in the chimerical illusion of history that blinded them to the fact that their chickens were coming home to roost” (xv). However, Dunbar's magical triumph over the postcolonial corruption suggests that contemporary problems in Malagueta are not necessarily the results of returnee disconnect, but that sentiments the settlers attached to their spiritual feelings were used to establish a distinct cultural identity. Whereas such magical elements are originally presented as moments for returnees to work through the past and feel a connection to Malagueta through that history, this otherworldly activity becomes entrenched as a cultural trait as the settlers remain in Malagueta. Although the novel uses such imagined associations to show a lived difference between the former slaves and the native West Africans, the resulting disconnect and class disparity does not negate the returnees' felt sense of belonging or their potential for a collective affiliation with Africa. Alusine Dunbar's magical victory over Sanka Maru reasserts the spiritual into the realm of everyday national affairs,

creating a space in contemporary Malagueta that can encompass the practicalities of everyday political life as well as the felt connections that have long defined the returnee consciousness.

The novel's conclusion is not the only moment in which the spiritual settler point of view is resituated as one historical experience among many, rather than the exclusive property of returnee culture. In fact, it is Garbage Martins—the revolutionary poet—who both inherits Sulaiman's philosophies and immerses himself in the politics of contemporary Malagueta in ways that unsettle the perception that settler culture is magically inclined by nature. This lifelong process begins with the curious circumstances of his birth, which are dependent upon a liminal position. Unable to conceive a child in Malagueta, Isatu Martins—a native African—and her husband Gustavius—a 1787 settler—travel back to Isatu's hometown after a premonition about her father's death. It is here that they begin the process of cleansing themselves and returning to a simpler way of life, and in doing so, they prepare themselves for conception. It is also from this process that Garbage receives his strange name. However, what also lies within this story, a story positioned at the center of the novel itself, is the most generative moment of communication between the settlers and the African world to which they emigrate. In Garbage's birth, the novel suggests, is the model for collectivity that touches upon multiple histories rather than a variety of cultural traits.

Garbage's birth is the product of a long process that both Gustavius and Isatu have to endure. Isatu is driven home by the fear that something had happened to her father, Santigue Dambolla—her fears are correct, as he has recently died and his spirit still supposedly roams around the family home. Both Isatu and Gustavius engage in acts

of ritual purification to reconcile with his spirit, and for Gustavius, this means fully embracing the native African side of the marriage. When the seasons change, the two begin to plant and raise crops in the fields where Santigue had once worked, but such reconciliation is only the first step in conceiving Garbage. Isatu can bear a child only if she and Gustavius agree to “be washed with the sap of the leaves of the grove” in which her fetuses are supposedly trapped (206). The magical elements of these conditions are significant, for they link Gustavius—a returnee struggling to understand his place in Malagueta—with a more mystical worldview and the very elemental perspective that comes from Santigue’s death in the banana grove. This particular scene makes both preconditions for living a fulfilling, community-based life in the future, and both perspectives are ultimately passed down to Garbage. This washing is also the first and only way Gustavius is able to enter into Isatu’s family as an equal partner, for the ritual cleansing in dirt is part of a different understanding of the world, as her mother urges: “This is as it was before your time, because we are all segments of the dirt of the world, and an inescapable part of living is recognising our relationship to spirits, to nature and these creatures of the underworld” (206). Garbage’s birth, then, serves as a moment when the newborn takes on both the magical and earthly worlds, while also bringing Gustavius to a more assured embrace of the magical worldview by which Cheney-Coker defines the returnees.

Brenda Cooper finds Garbage’s birth, like Fatmatta’s ancestral bridge and Sebastian’s Magic Lantern, to be fundamentally tainted with essentialism. She claims, “The supernatural world is romanticised as spiritually superior, as that coalescence between mortals and spirits, as the spiritual life-blood of humanity, which is lost away

from Africa and can only be restored on returning and, more than that, by ritual cleansing of the impurities contracted in exile” (“Cultural Identity” 175). Cooper claims that Gustavius must be “cleansed of the contamination by the debris of an inferior foreign culture” in this moment of the novel, as a precondition for belonging in Africa (175). Cooper attributes the “dirt of the world” with the slave cultures Gustavius encountered in the United States, but the novel puts forth “dirt” as an elemental part of life to be seen as an addition to the spiritual rather than a blemish to be washed away. What stands out about Cheney-Coker’s characters is that in order to connect across borders and cultures, the kind of cognitive realignment that embraces the unexplainable as well as the ordinary is absolutely necessary. Being cleansed of the “dirt of the world” is a mental preparation for identifying collectively, for Gustavius must open himself to both the spiritual and earthly realms before he and Isatu can have a child. Becoming part of the Malaguetan collective does not require adopting a specific set of parameters; rather, it requires being open to the possibilities inherent to a complex world. Putting such “dirt” alongside the magical reaffirms the novel’s sense that Malagueta is a collection of multiple histories that have largely been ignored. And the openness embodied by Garbage Martins stands as the model for what Malaguetan collectivity can and should be.

Naming the newborn Garbage is less surprising than it might at first seem, given the circumstances that surround his birth. In the final moments of Book Two, Isatu Martins has a vision in which Garbage takes his place as the heir to Alusine Dunbar. He is thrown onto the garbage pile where Santigue Dambolla died only to be picked up and cleaned of his impurities magically by Santigue. After waking from her dream, Isatu immediately names the child Garbage, “so that he will not forget his roots” (208). While

the name certainly puzzles most of Malagueta, especially as his fame as a poet rises, it is an apt reminder of the very powerful connections made between Gustavius, Isatu, and the earthly past they had tried to ignore. Indeed, the novel suggests that the most generative form of belonging will have to be intimately connected to the filth of the world, not in spite of it. Much like Gustavius's "cleansing," Garbage's naming works through the complexities of Malaguetan life in order to identify collectively. Naming their child Garbage is somewhat akin to the prophecies of Sulaiman the Nubian, the calming presence of Fatmatta the Bird-Woman, or Sebastian Cromantine's feast of remembrance—all engender a sense of community rooted in the magical history that defines Cheney-Coker's Malagueta. But it also speaks to the need for a fundamental connection to African life and experience, embodied by Santigue Dambolla and his banana grove.

As he comes of age, Garbage is also revealed as the hero of the novel, for he presents the poetic possibility of being able to "continue the narrative line" begun by Sulaiman (Cooper, *Magical Realism* 143). As a young adult, just before he begins experimenting with poetry, Garbage encounters Sulaiman, now known as Alusine Dunbar, and his herniated, glowing testicles. For Garbage, Dunbar is primarily a medium for understanding Malagueta's history, as Garbage "had been waiting for [Dunbar] to come to lead him through the labyrinth of the past, now that many of the old people in Malagueta had been overcome by the persistence of death or had succumbed to the senile voracity of old age" (291). But, more than this, their initial meeting also shows Garbage that Alusine Dunbar's particular point of view is one that can speak to the magical as part of Malaguetan history, not returnee culture. Dunbar's testicles here stand in for the

worldview he so clearly represents—the testicles have the power to intervene in historical circumstances, and their magical abilities come forth at key moments in the novel. When Garbage sees these testicles for the first time, glowing in the dim light of the apothecary's shop, he understands that Dunbar represents one long historical perspective on Malagueta: “The florescence of his mind, now that it was exposed to the sun of Alusine Dunbar, needed pages of illumination for it to spread its petals in the turbulent journey towards knowledge” (295). This is almost a moment of revelation for Garbage, who was already open to many interpretations of reality from the time of his birth. What is significant about Garbage's meeting with Alusine Dunbar, however, is that he is finally able to see that the magical is not the exclusive property of returnees and can be used in poetry to comment upon the lived reality of Malaguetan history and culture. Garbage promises to return to see Dunbar again, and in subsequent visits, Garbage becomes more attuned to the lives of the living and the dead (296-97).

When he begins writing his politically charged poetry, Garbage's words are inspired by Malagueta's magical and multiply influenced history. He understands the magical connection felt by the returnees, critically narrates their history and legacy, but also writes of his personal experiences growing up without a father (329). There is a strong sense that Garbage is attuned to Malagueta's magical past, but Cheney-Coker's clearest suggestion is that these poems have a startling ability to affect Malagueta's political and social present. They are published to “a great public shock,” some even considering them “injudicious,” and Garbage enjoys fame as a maverick poet around Malagueta (331). For all of the magical elements associated with the poet, especially in the depiction of Garbage's birth, his poetry reflects a strong commitment to social and

political critique that cannot simply emanate from a spiritual sense of belonging. By giving Garbage this capacity, Cheney-Coker suggests that the most generative model for collective identification involves reframing magic as part of Malagueta's history, not as a special returnee attribute. The magical connections that characterize the settlers throughout the novel are not dismissed or made exceptional, but understood as one very powerful way of historically affiliating oneself with Africa; likewise, the non-returnee points of view affect Garbage as valuable, critical tools for understanding Malagueta's ills and potential. In a sense, Garbage is Cheney-Coker's most magical character, for he can understand why the return engenders such passionate feelings of belonging while critiquing the effects of return on the native Malaguetans who do not live by such spiritual feelings.

Conclusion

Whether Malagueta or Freetown, Cheney-Coker and Lawrence Hill both use the forum of fiction to craft a different set of meanings than the accepted historical narratives of the Black Loyalists. In these imaginative accounts, Sierra Leone—and Africa in general—is not merely the final stop for those runaway slaves in the Revolution. It is a place where identities are formed and developed, where a sense of community can be brought about in an increasingly global world. Hill's narrator ends *Someone Knows My Name* with an expansive vision of her imagined readers, a community that can potentially encompass the globe. In *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, Cheney-Coker does not explicitly invoke a global community, but the magical nature of Malaguetan history suggests that understanding the Black Loyalists and these efforts to connect across cultural divides is

full of possibilities for community development on an international scale. Both novels embrace the Revolutionary historical moment in order to find a method of identity formation rooted in multiple histories and freed from the constraints of—yet intimately tied to—the modern, multicultural nation-state.

In their uneven relationship to accepted narratives of African-based identity formation, these novels use return as the foundation for a positive claim for Africa as a space of global identification. Although these accounts are immersed in the particulars of Sierra Leone, both stories show that the Loyalists' emigration was not a specific desire to repatriate Sierra Leone. Rather, they were driven by a cultural and political need to return to Africa in general, and the implications of that desire are more wide reaching than the national story of Sierra Leone. I focus on this wider implication for the novels here in service of my larger claim about the ways in which the continent as a whole has been framed as an ancient and unchanging space with few lasting contributions to the modern world.⁴⁴ As a contrast to what Arlene Keizer calls “contemporary narratives of slavery”—fiction that produces destabilizing counterhistories of official narratives through stories of New World slavery—these narratives of return offer an alternative foundation upon which contemporary black identification with Africa can be based. This mass return makes Africa into a meaningful space in ways that disrupt the usual temporal understanding of the continent as more in touch with the ancient world of oral tradition and parochial tribalism. Although the Black Loyalist emigration occurred over two centuries ago, the novels articulate positions that are familiar to a contemporary audience of readers.

⁴⁴ For the most comprehensive accounts of Sierra Leone's national history, and the effects of the Freetown returnees, see Walker; and Fyfe, *A History*.

The novels' contemporary resonance is perhaps due to their sense that this historical moment speaks to present-day concerns of globalization and multiculturalism. The Black Loyalist emigration is a globalizing moment in the Revolutionary era, yet it remains tied to strongly independent national narratives of development and cultural recognition. Moreover, this mass return is mediated by a racialized understanding of the global order, where white supremacy and Euro-American politics are the norm. These contemporary fictional narrations of this historical experience suggest that the conditions of that moment have not yet passed, and that addressing these issues as essentially "cultural" is misguided. The problems that both Hill and Cheney-Coker outline for Sierra Leone's history are difficulties that extend into contemporary discussions of living as a multicultural.

Cheney-Coker makes this point by narrating through postcolonial political struggles for autonomy and national stabilization. From the outset of the book, a contemporary postcolonial coup—inspired by the exploitative Cold War alignment that allows the United States to dump its nuclear waste off Malagueta's coast—is presented as another episode in an historical movement begun with the Black Loyalists. The back-and-forth nature of Malaguetan history comments on the contemporary world order, as does Cheney-Coker's magical aesthetic. By disorganizing the workings of time or cause and effect, *The Last Harmattan* exists in a destabilized moment: by confusing time and encouraging transhistorical connections throughout the novel, Cheney-Coker gives his readership a model for understanding present-day political circumstances as the result of a national system based upon "cultures" demanding recognition rather than thinking through the multiple histories that define the country. In his general mystification of time,

Cheney-Coker gives a method for reflecting upon the contemporary moment while also complicating the idea of “return” to Africa as a journey into the past, where civilization and culture remain unchanged.

By contrast, Hill’s novel utilizes a familiar historical genre in order to comment on the contemporary political moment. Aminata’s story is clearly modeled on—and an extension of—the historical slave narratives from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is a genre with which many contemporary readers are familiar, and Hill’s revision of it indicates a shift from seeing slavery as the paradigmatic history for contemporary diasporic cultural affiliation. Stephanie Yorke comments on Hill’s use of this tradition, concluding that the power of *Someone Knows My Name* comes from the way it inhabits tropes of the slave narrative while creating a story that resonates on multiple contemporary political levels. In length and style, the book resembles contemporary fiction much more than Abolition-era slave narrative. Hill uses some stock literary moves—to effective ends—when crafting Aminata’s story. The reappearance of the frame story—when Aminata writes and comments upon writing her autobiography—as well as the pacing of her journeys speak to the expectations of a contemporary readership, and in writing towards these concerns, the novel implies a correlation between its narrator and audience and asks them to think about the order of liberal multicultural society today.

By inviting readers to reflect on the contemporary moment of multiculturalism, one still strongly tied to national development and a global racial order, these novels situate the Black Loyalists’ return as an important narrative of identity formation for black people globally. They ask readers to consider many African and diasporic histories

as the foundations for identifying with Africa in the present day. Rather than see African American, African Canadian, Krio, or traditional cultures vying for recognition, these Black Loyalist novels posit overlapping international histories as cornerstones for global affiliation. Moreover, in their concern for this historical mass return to Africa, they generate a space for Africa as more than the historical supplier of slaves. The narratives studied here share my larger concern with return as a practice that shapes and reorganizes the ways in which Africa is thought about and discussed, helping to provide a useful, positive position for the continent as an identity-bearing space in the modern world.

Invented histories, invented biologies, invented cultural affinities come with every identity; each is a kind of role that has to be scripted, structured by conventions of narrative to which the world never quite manages to conform.
—Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House*

Chapter Three

Revenant Citizenship: Family and Belonging in Aminatta Forna and Helene Cooper

The concept of the African diaspora—as amorphous as it seems at times—has largely been accounted for in terms of familial relations. Brothers, sisters, lost children, and unknown ancestors populate diaspora discourse in ways that suggest the existence of an elusive, yet highly meaningful global family. Narrating a family reconstruction as the reconstruction of a collective identity is thus a common trope in diasporic fiction. As Paul Gilroy notes in *The Black Atlantic*, Martin Delany's mid-nineteenth-century novel *Blake* was “a narrative of familial reconstruction [...] presented as absolutely homologous with both the liberation of slaves and the regeneration of Africa” (26). Key for Gilroy's point about this early model of diaspora—and Delany's novel—is that Africa here serves as a fatherland to be regenerated through uplift and that encounters with African cultures were in service of diasporic models of kinship. This is largely true for Alex Haley's attempt to find an originally enslaved ancestor—the “roots” of his family tree; when Lawrence Hill's Aminata connects with mourners in the New York City funeral, she does so as a member of a symbolic and distinctly African family, but not on specifically national grounds.

In this chapter, I look at the family trope in two postcolonial memoirs of return as a deliberately constructed form of belonging that specifically reroutes the concerns of postcolonial national belonging. The works I examine here have a similar, although alternatively directed, vision of family reconstruction to earlier narratives like Delany's and the returns examined in chapters one and two. They narrate a reconstituted family

network that suggests how to belong to specific, contemporary African nations rather than seeing family as a timeless synecdoche for racial identification. The two national spaces at stake here are interestingly associated with the idea of “return” already, as both Liberia and Sierra Leone were founded as colonies for those of liberated African descent—either freed slaves in the United States, Loyalists and London’s black poor, or those liberated from slave ships caught by the British after the 1807 Slave Trade Act. Thus, even after they became sovereign states rather than colonies, Liberia and Sierra Leone held on to a colonial tradition rooted in return. The name Liberia, for instance, suggests its original colonial foundations as a “land of liberty,” as does the country’s motto: “The love of liberty brought us here.”⁴⁵ In addition, the descendants of these original returnees largely maintained political power well into the postcolonial era, and they could establish political and social authority by tracing their ancestry to an original returnee. Both officially and unofficially, a sense of filiation—a definable lineage that seems “natural”—mattered for cultivating citizenship in these nations. And in the late twentieth century, these filiative ties were dramatically and violently cut by postcolonial politics and civil war.

In Helene Cooper’s *The House at Sugar Beach* (2008) and Aminatta Forna’s *The Devil That Danced on the Water* (2002)—both autobiographical texts—the authors look to the postcolonial era of each nation to rethink belonging after the filiative ties of citizenship have been cut off. Both of these works narrate returns to specific moments of political and social disarray in West Africa: Forna to Civil War Sierra Leone, and Cooper

⁴⁵ Interestingly, even after the nation spaces have been contested by multiple conflicts in both countries, the colonial names for cities and nations remain. It would be easy to imagine a reinvention of the national along the lines of Burkina Faso or Ghana, who changed from Upper Volta and the Gold Coast, respectively, or a complete overhaul of city names, as in the Congo’s transition to Zaire in 1971.

to post-Civil War Liberia. In their memoirs, they script a family narrative that is broadly inclusive; the dead are notably present in both accounts. Unlike other narratives of diasporic modernity, however—in which Africa is situated firmly in the past—these works feature unignorable postcolonial presents, and they ultimately account for their belonging by writing their families back from the dead. They do not engage Africa solely as their place of origin, nor do they neatly heal the wounds of the past in fantasies of wholeness. Rather, these family stories engage the “African” past as complex histories that explode into the postcolonial present, and writing a family articulates a mode of belonging that can partially heal past wounds and supply a sense of self unavailable in the national frame. The notion of family is directly related to the diaspora in these texts because the authors’ families have been scattered from Africa by historical circumstances. These works are the first in this dissertation, however, to address “returnees” who have been displaced from Africa themselves, and it is worth noting that the reunification of family that they seek is very tied to the idea of the nation. Unlike other stories of diaspora, then, these authors do not seek a familial reconstruction based around the amorphous notion of “Africa”; rather, they are invested in rebuilding a national family, specific to Sierra Leone and Liberia. For Forna and Cooper, this becomes a somewhat literal process, as they piece through the destruction of their countries to locate lost members of their family stories, or the stories of those who have lost their lives in the postcolonial era. I argue that this particular move of returning to reclaim a family is an exploration of alternative modes of belonging when citizenship is no longer available.

I use the idea of citizenship throughout this chapter as a critical term of belonging that is a mark of liberal rights from legal status as well as the responsibilities that such legal status implies of a “good citizenry.” The fragility of citizenship in these specific instances necessitates the search for other modes of belonging and connection. The notion of citizenship as a legal status is a staple of postwar political theory, beginning with T.H. Marshall’s “Citizenship and Social Class,” in which “citizenship is essentially a matter of ensuring that everyone is treated as a full and equal member of society. And the way to ensure this sense of membership is through according people an increasing number of citizenship rights” (Kymlicka and Norman 354).⁴⁶ Yet, theories of citizenship also encompass notions of “thick” citizenship in which one’s membership is expressed through activities that reflect responsibility and civic virtue. Between these two notions of citizenship is the shared idea that individuals, distinct cultural entities, and rights-bearing national governments all work together to produce a form of national belonging.

For contemporary Africa, however, belonging as a citizen often means negotiating one or all of a host of factors: a colonial past, an ethnic identity (often given in the colonial past), and a new sense of collectivity developed in independence. As Said Adejumobi argues, contemporary African nations have largely been invented by colonial powers who then unite often disparate groups, and the state lacks legitimacy for all of its members. Thus, many African nations “could neither provide a strong trans-ethnic or secular national identity for its citizens nor safeguard the values of citizenship” (163). These memoirs by Forna and Cooper attest to moments in which the values of citizenship

⁴⁶ The relationship between citizenship and the state dates to the earliest political theories of Aristotle and is a preoccupation of political philosophy in general, especially the social contract theorists like Rousseau, Hobbes, and Locke. For more current theories of citizenship that have taken on an increasingly international dimension, see Baubock (2010) and Habermas (2001).

have not been safeguarded, when even being a citizen in name only is difficult because the idea of the nation—and what it means to belong to it—is under contest. Both authors use familial reconstruction to reinvigorate the kinds of belonging that have been evacuated by their individual historical circumstances. These texts use the recovery of family lineage—including an embrace of a dispossessed ancestry—to model collective identification in the respective nations. These family ties do not replace citizenship as the mode for national collective identification, but their embrace of ancestry and lineage models an alternative form of belonging when citizenship lacks efficacy. To read the family as a synecdoche for the nation, or as a national allegory, is a normative postcolonial reading strategy.⁴⁷ While these works certainly engage the family as a sign for the nation, they do not just posit the family as an allegorical trope but as an alternative. The families that Forna and Cooper write into their works are not models for a budding nation that will emerge after a period of healing; they are alternatives for belonging when the nation has lost its ability to provide a sense of identity.

In *The Devil that Danced on the Water*, Forna writes of her return to Freetown during Sierra Leone's civil war: "Freetown was full of living ghosts: amputees, deranged rebels. And then there was me: I was beginning to feel like a revenant" (302). Ultimately, this is the kind of belonging that these family stories make room for: a revenant citizenship in contemporary Africa. The image of a revenant citizen accurately captures the vexed relationships these authors explore between nationality, African identity, and returning to contemporary West African disorder. Both engage the notion of coming back from the dead, or conversing with the dead, in order to inspire alternative forms of

⁴⁷ This is a dangerous reading strategy, to be sure, and the pitfalls of reading family and nation together are outlined eloquently in McClintock.

belonging. The nation itself cannot provide stable affiliative ground, yet in their memoirs, these authors “return” to find belonging within the postcolonial nation. In terms of temporality, then, the figure of the revenant is strangely situated, and its implications for the nation and a global vision of West Africa are complex. A revenant belonging suggests that the past refuses to remain dead or in the past, and it is important to note that these undead pasts are integral to contemporary belonging. Even when engaging long national histories that were at stake in the civil wars of Sierra Leone and Liberia, these works assert that those pasts importantly comment upon the present. They return from oblivion and demand that their contemporary importance be recognized.

In using the concept of the “revenant citizen,” I thus make the claim that these returns contest the usual temporalization of Africa as a space that remains in the past. These two memoirs, especially, refuse to engage the pre-war past as somehow idyllic or as a prelude to their now-modern diasporic lives. Rather, they suggest just how complex the notion of an “African past” truly is—these works make the past strange when they reread Liberian and Sierra Leonean histories through their encounters with their post-war national spaces. Their acts of return make the realities of life in these contemporary West African nations—and questions of what it means to belong to this nation in the past and present—very public matters for a global reading audience. In short, history matters deeply in these narratives, but as a vital connection to the contemporary African space. As in chapters one and two, I argue that these two works in some ways speak back to a dominant global assumption of an atavistic Africa, as it is impossible to ignore the contemporariness of these nations in favor of an idyllic “African” past that signifies as somehow “timeless.”

Both Cooper and Forna explore multiple forms of kinship in contemporary West African war zones, where almost any sense of belonging that the nation can offer has been disrupted by civil war. The crises of temporality that these two writers feel upon return come with the particularities of their war zones. Cooper, returning to Liberia in 2003, witnesses the aftermath of the civil war, as she arrives just after the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, effectively the political end to the conflict and the beginning of Liberia's transition into democracy. The Monrovia to which she returns, however, is as broken as Cooper's sense of what it means to be Liberian in the first place. Forna similarly witnesses the effects of Sierra Leone's civil war—a conflict closely related to that in Liberia—when she returns to research her father's 1974 execution by then-head of state Siaka Stevens. Freetown is populated by war veterans, former child soldiers, and the displaced, all of whom lack a sense of collective affiliation; the effect of losing a national sense of self is evident on Forna, whose identification as Sierra Leonean is tenuous at best.

As stories of displacement, exile, and return to war zones, these two memoirs operate as family stories that can supplement the lost sense of collectivity that these brutal civil wars have produced. The civil wars place belonging—especially a sense of citizenship—in question, as structures of family, government, and narratives of the self no longer hold stable meanings. Cooper's and Forna's returns, however, narratively recover some of this lost stability, as they both reconstruct their family stories in the face of conflict. Cooper, returning to find her lost adopted sister Eunice, literally reconnects what had been lost to her for decades when she finds Eunice and faces what happened to her family as the civil war broke out in 1980. Forna's project less literally reconnects

family members, as she researches and narrates the story of her father's political fall from grace and eventual execution. In the process, her memoir comes to terms with the conflict in Sierra Leone and how narrating her father's story can combat the affiliative disruption of such conflict. Citizenship is certainly in question for these two authors—"Liberia" and "Sierra Leone" cannot really mean much of anything in the face of such violence—yet these narratives of family are narrated to provide partially reparative accounts of West African belonging.

Helene Cooper accounts for herself in two narrative parts, as her memoir *The House at Sugar Beach* is divided between her life before they fled Liberia in May 1980 and after. Before, what Cooper terms "Part One of my life," is governed by the social demands of being a teenager in a Liberian society that "put on civilized airs" (150-57). While Cooper does not describe this portion of her life as idyllic, worry-free years of innocence, it is nonetheless a time in which being Liberian was definite. She is the daughter of John Lewis Cooper, Jr. and Calista Esmerelda Dennis Cooper, important because this ancestry dates back to the first ships that brought emigrants to Liberia in 1822. Cooper traces her family's history as part of Liberia's history, making claims about the special places of Coopers and Dennises in the country's past. In effect, Cooper recognizes her privilege, noting that her ancestors "handed down to me a one-in-a-million lottery ticket: birth into what passed for the landed gentry upper class of Africa's first independent country, Liberia" (29). In 1970s Liberia, when Cooper comes of age, this translates to elite schools, Michael Jackson albums, and a social hierarchy that normalizes prejudice against "native Liberians."⁴⁸ From the annual celebration of Matilda Newport

⁴⁸ The term "native Liberian" is somewhat misleading, as Cooper herself could be considered "native." Liberia is, after all, her place of birth. This term, however, is specific to those who are not descended from

Day⁴⁹ to the school's yearly organization of "Hick Day,"⁵⁰ the cultural fabric of Cooper's Liberia normalizes the superiority of this emigrant-descended community—called "Congo people" in Liberia—and makes being "Liberian" synonymous with living a comfortable lifestyle while overlooking the lower classes who make it possible.⁵¹ Although Cooper acknowledges this in the memoir itself, it is clear that recognizing such privilege was not part of her childhood sense of self, as their upper-class status is more generally acknowledged as a natural outgrowth of her important ancestry. In Liberia, a long sense of family history matters for determining who a person is and who she has the potential to become. This, in essence, is the governing principle of Part One of Cooper's life, up to May 1980 when the family left Liberia for the United States after Samuel Doe and nineteen soldiers invaded the Executive Mansion and disemboweled President William Tolbert, claiming a new leadership for the country.

Complicating this portrait of Liberia, however, is her family's adoption of a native Liberian girl, Eunice Bull, who lives with the family like a sister to Helene. The family cares for and educates Eunice, sending her to a different, less prestigious school than

the free blacks who settled Liberia with the American Colonization Society in 1820, who are known as Americo-Liberians or "Congo People" (see below). "Native Liberians" would include members of the Kpelle, Bassa, Grebo, Gio, and other ethnic groups, and they make up the vast majority of Liberia's population.

⁴⁹ Matilda Newport Day was an official holiday on December 1 in Liberia until the Doe coup in 1980. The day was meant to honor an early Americo-Liberian (Matilda Newport) who supposedly held off an attack from native Liberians in 1822, the first year of Monrovia's settlement. Liberian legend has it that Newport lit a cannon with her pipe and repelled the native attackers. Commemorating this day is clearly an indicator of the degree to which Americo-Liberians were normalized as heroic and civilized while native Liberians were seen as weak, backward, and cowardly. See Holsoe and Nyanseor.

⁵⁰ Hick Day was an annual festival at Cooper's elite school—the American Cooperative School—when the students were "supposed to dress like country hicks and do sponge throws and pie-eating contests" (158). While not necessarily mocking native Liberians, the festival's implications about Americo-Liberian sophistication and superiority are clear enough.

⁵¹ "Congo," according to Cooper, was initially a derogatory term for the Americo-Liberian settlers. It developed from the nineteenth century, after the British abolished the slave trade and their fleets patrolled the West African coast, seizing slave ships headed for the Americas. Many of these seized slaves were repatriated to Liberia or Sierra Leone, and many of them were from the Congo River basin. Cooper claims, "Because the newly freed captives were released in Liberia at the same time that the freed blacks arrived in Liberia from America, all newcomers became known as Congo People" (6).

Helene. The two live together like sisters, though, sharing in each other's social lives and living through all the baggage that comes with growing up. Yet, this relationship would forever change in 1980 as well—the Cooper family fled Liberia to the United States, leaving Eunice behind with her mother to finish her final year of high school. In the moment of departure, Cooper narrates her growing sense of self and her ignorance of the larger social and political forces that defined her version of Liberia:

For six years, Eunice had been my sister, a Bassa girl living in the same house with me, sleeping in the same room, sharing the same secrets. We were the same, yet we were different; had always been different. In my sheltered existence, I had never dug deep enough to wonder how much native Liberians resented us. [...] Did Eunice feel that way too? (188-89)

Thus, Part One of Cooper's memoir, and what she terms "Part One" of her life, ends with the disruption of her sense of self as a Liberian. The Doe coup and murder of Tolbert, combined with the public executions of high government commissioners like her Uncle Cecil, force Cooper to call into question the narratives she had associated with being "Liberian." And the coup affected Cooper specifically, as the most memorable and horrifying night of Part One involves Doe's soldiers visiting the Cooper home at Sugar Beach. The soldiers came to the house, threatened Cooper's family, and then gang-raped her mother, seemingly in a drunken act of social retribution. What had been essentially Liberian for Cooper—celebrations like Matilda Newport Day or having a family pew in church—become less natural after becoming the object of overt hatred, and that night directly leads to the family's departure to the United States. Looking back at her childhood, Cooper notes, "It never occurred to me at that time that all across Liberia, native Liberians were getting more and more upset about the things I took for granted; things that, for me, were as normal as the crow of the rooster every morning. This was

life in Liberia, and who questioned daily life?" (72-73). Departure and trauma effectively force these questions upon her, and as she narrates her development into a journalist, questions of Liberian belonging and her loss of a sister in Eunice, continue to animate her narrative of self.

Although much of *The House at Sugar Beach* is devoted to chronicling Cooper's career as a journalist for *The Wall Street Journal*, the emotional and narrative climax builds to her return to Liberia in 2003, after almost a decade of reporting on everything except the Liberian Civil War. Although Cooper admits to having spent little time concerning herself over the Liberian war in general, her narrative of this part of her life gives the sense that Liberia is never pushed too far into the background. As she moves onto the national stage for journalism, she comes to recognize that Liberia as an idea remains in the past: "Liberia wasn't a place where you lived, it was a place where you died. All 170 years of my history going back to Elijah Johnson and Randolph Cooper and those two ships that took them to West Africa had led me to this" (276). Stylistically, she characterizes her break from and yet continuing preoccupation with Liberia by juxtaposing her own headlines with those reporting on Liberia. Thus, "WHERE THERE ARE ANY LITTLE GIRLS THEY SHOULD BE RAPED" is set alongside Cooper's article, "MANY DOCTORS WHO TREAT TB FAIL TO FOLLOW GUIDELINES, STUDY FINDS" (288-89). She spins a narrative of her American reporting self based largely on what she did not think about through the 1990s, the bloodiest years of Liberia's conflict: "I did not think about Eunice, about whether she was managing to survive the madness coming out of Liberia. I did not think about whether soldiers in wedding gowns had raped or killed her, or whether she had food to eat, or clean water to

drink. I did not think about her” (294). In some senses, this stark admission is an act of confession and a request for forgiveness, yet these moments also indicate the extent to which Liberia ceased to supply a stable framework for affiliation. The anarchy of civil war effectively ended the nation’s ability to provide meaning as a citizen, as the passive entitlements of citizenship are no longer recognized, let alone guaranteed. In the end, though, Cooper recognizes the need to mend this break with Liberia and Eunice, and she returns to a war-wrecked country to repair the family ties that were broken in 1980.

The memoir’s final pages narrate this return as a series of losses and gains. Cooper is continually confronted with the loss of the national affiliation—one based on a classed sense of safety—that once defined her, yet in the face of these losses she narrates the gain of her family, together once again. The sense of loss begins on her journey from Robertsfield Airport to Monrovia’s city center, as she takes in the present, war-wrecked cityscape as a competing version of her childhood Monrovia. Along the way, physical markers of place are either entirely transformed or gone, so that Cooper loses what had defined this journey for her in childhood. The three-headed palm that marked the entry to her family’s Sugar Beach home is no longer there; her father’s gas station is now a police station marked by bullets; Paynesville Junction, the beginning of Monrovia’s “civilization” to Helene as a child, has a much different feel to the adult returnee: “It had heralded the beginning of Monrovia’s population center, with the bustling market across the junction and the two gas stations vying for business across the road from one another. But now there were no gas stations, just more squatters” (319). For Cooper, the ever-present squatters attest to the crisis of Liberia’s former citizens—they are left to fend for themselves, looting homes and businesses for whatever might be of use. They are,

essentially, in charge of their own daily survival and have replaced the social institutions that held Liberia together for Cooper's early years. Upon arriving in the city center, Cooper notes the contradictory feelings of coming home to a place that is unrecognizable: "I was home, and home was Hell" (321). Yet, for all that is lost—the physical markers of childhood experience, the feeling of being Liberian—Cooper gains a sense of self that is more concretely tied to the realities of contemporary Liberia. The city has been utterly transformed by decades of war, and Cooper finds a way to identify with it as a remnant of her past that signifies a present-day reality as well: "There was something else there, too. Pride. Not at what Monrovia had become, but at the fact that it was somehow still there, as proof that I came from somewhere" (321). In this moment of admitting that home is Hell, and that Hell somehow instills a sense of pride, Cooper begins to narrate a sense of collective identification that negotiates the past and present in complex ways. In effect, the city itself functions as a representation of where she comes from, but it also continually testifies to the kinds of social inequality that exploded just as she left the country. Cooper has gained a more complete sense of what it means to belong in Monrovia without recourse to the class structure that had underpinned those childhood experiences. In effect, her return begins the process of making a new kind of belonging that negotiates these temporalities.

Perhaps the most resonant and effective staging of this reconstructed family comes when Cooper visits her family's plot in Monrovia's cemetery, where she speaks with her late father and all of the Cooper and Johnson ancestors who had built Americo-Liberian culture beginning in 1820. As she reflects on her journey from "landed gentry upper-class" Liberian to international reporter, to returnee, Cooper begins to bring her

family and national histories together, incorporating ancestry with the post-coup realities of contemporary Liberia. The result is a sense of self that calls upon a long history of rootedness in Liberia while accommodating the fact that Liberia to all effects ceases to offer a sense of belonging for Cooper.

For all of the losses that Cooper experiences in Liberia's Civil War, this cemetery scene shows some drastic, non-national affiliative gains in the reconstruction of her family. The scene begins with her having been recognized by a complete stranger, the cemetery's caretaker, who asks without prompting, "Which branch of the Cooper family you from?" (335). Having already reunited with Eunice—and brought together one part of her family—Cooper's trip to the cemetery reconstructs her long family history as both part of the Liberian story and as less central to it than she had imagined as a child. In her youth, Liberia was mostly defined by her upper-class lifestyle; in return, that lifestyle is peripheral to the realities of life there. Yet, when encountering her dead ancestors in the family plot, she gains a new respect for the stability that identifying with her homeland can offer: "Had I really thought that I could just turn my back on Liberia? I could never leave. A part of me was buried here, would always be right here in the dirt of Palm Grove Cemetery" (336-37). While this moment initially reconnects Cooper to Liberia, it quickly becomes a statement about physical and personal placement in West Africa that is outside the typical realms of nationalism. Tellingly, she reconnects with "the dirt" and "the cement of Daddy's grave" rather than the idea of being Liberian, an almost elemental process of rejoining life in West Africa in non-national ways (337).

I see this moment at Palm Grove Cemetery as Cooper's clearest articulation of a "revenant citizenship," as she affiliates herself with the dead in hopes of coming to a new

form of belonging as Liberian. The belonging which this trip inspires has a vexed relationship to nationality, as she cannot really consider herself Liberian in a contemporary sense—she does not identify with the post-Tolbert version of her homeland and has no intention of staying in the country—yet she feels an intimate and deep-seated connection to her dead Cooper and Johnson ancestors. In particular, she notes the affective work of return when considering her own participation in the story of Liberia:

Tears rolled down my face [...] as I thought about the Coopers and the Dennises, and about how far I had come from that day in 1829 when Randolph Cooper and his three brothers walked off the good ship *Harriet* to start my father's line in Liberia, or that day in 1821 when Elijah Johnson walked off the ship *Elizabeth* to start my mother's line. (336)

The connection she makes here is to a Liberian past that is definitely over, and is certainly not the narrative of contemporary Liberia. The Coopers and the Dennises hold little meaning in a country that—at the time of Cooper's return—had not had electricity or running water for eleven years. Yet, she returns to Liberia and reclaims her family amidst this social disorder, claiming her right to affiliate with her homeland, even if fully participating in the national project is impossible.

There are clearly a number of competing factors in Cooper's brief cemetery account. Although she is recalling her lineage, it does not appear to be as a claim to a natural form of citizenship in Liberia. Similarly, although she notes "how far [she] had come," this does not seem to be a statement about her own modernity gained in diaspora. Rather, Cooper's feelings at Palm Grove speak a particular claim of filiation: she identifies with her returning ancestors, Randolph Cooper and Elijah Johnson, not to claim a long "Liberian" history and sense of self, but as a gesture that identifies with the unnatural aspects of these earlier returnees. In many ways, she identifies with their story

because they too made claims upon a portion of West Africa to which they had no “natural” rights, yet they too forged a kind of belonging despite a complex history. The “African past” to which Cooper testifies here is thus deeply complex, as is the notion of being Liberian. Rather than make a claim for Liberian identity in the present day, then, Cooper reclaims a family lineage that can negotiate the pre-Doe past and make sense of the present-day post-war country to which she returns. Of course, the sense of self that results is only partially healing—the dead cannot be brought back to life and the family cannot replace the nation exactly. But her moment of revenant citizenship speaks to a powerful mode of belonging that is alternative to the nation.

The negotiation of memory and present-day reality that features in her accounts of Monrovia as well as the visit to Palm Grove Cemetery continues when Cooper returns to the site of the most immediate and personal trauma, her family’s home at Sugar Beach. This physical return happens only after she has reunited with Eunice, a moment in which Cooper reconstructs part of the family that she had lost after they left Liberia in 1980. At this point, Eunice and Cooper had been out of touch for two decades, and the reunion is somewhat unnatural. No longer children, they cannot relate to one another in the ways they had when Helene was thirteen. But, they come together near the memoir’s conclusion to confront the place and moment that redefined their lives and what it meant to consider themselves Liberian. They return to Sugar Beach in order to finally come to terms with Cooper’s mother’s gang-rape and the turmoil that resulted. The narrative itself consistently points to finding Eunice as the key moment for building back some form of Liberian belonging, and to a certain extent this is true. Upon returning to Liberia, Cooper finds Eunice at the Firestone plantation, where she works during the week. The two

reunite with awkwardness, as Cooper struggles to ask the questions on her mind and Eunice tells of the strength and sacrifices required to survive the Liberian conflict. She reveals to Cooper that she had to send her son away from her in 1988, at the age of five, to ensure his safety and that she does not know where he is at this point. Eunice has also survived a bombing on the Firestone plantation, a two-year period of hiding in the rural areas of the country, and her experiences scraping by selling homemade soap on the side of the road. For Eunice, these experiences do not seem particularly troubling, and she does not mention struggling to process the trauma of 1980—she only tells Cooper that “God made it for [her] to stay here so [she] could be strong” (332).

Although her time with Eunice allows for Cooper to process all she had avoided while in the United States, this reunion among the living does not necessarily deliver a new sense of self. Cooper ends her narration of the initial reunion with an image of the two falling asleep: “I lay awake, listening to her breathing. I turned my face into my pillow so she wouldn’t hear me crying” (335). Finding Eunice certainly makes Cooper’s questions of Liberian belonging fresh and painful, but this reunion in itself does not go beyond catharsis. That work is done when the two return to Sugar Beach, where pre-Doe and post-war Liberian temporalities can finally be negotiated. In going to Sugar Beach, Cooper must confront that specific moment of violation in the context of the host of other memories that Sugar Beach holds. In the end, this return to her former home allows Cooper to gain a sense of self in which family, nation, and the political divisions made explicit in post-Tolbert Liberia intertwine.

In the years immediately following her flight from Liberia, Cooper can only imagine her homeland as it was pre-Doe, a world in which she had a certain social place

and point of view: “[Memories of Liberia were] filled with a deep-to-the-bone knowledge that I was somebody and I came from somewhere, a world that Elijah Johnson and Randolph Cooper and my ancestors had built from scratch through blood and sweat” (305). In fact, imagining the Liberia she had fled is almost impossible for Cooper at first: “I didn’t think about the post-April 12, 1980, Liberia, the one that we’d lived in for a month before running away. In my head, Liberia was the Liberia that I’d known before the coup” (305). Belonging within post-coup Liberia is unthinkable for Cooper, so she imagines her affiliation in the past only. But, as she and Eunice return to Sugar Beach in the memoir’s conclusion, Cooper confronts “the death of [her] childhood” (339). As she roams through the house with Eunice, they encounter a looted building where a number of Bassa families are squatting, and the mixture of this present reality and memories of her family cause Cooper to re-imagine her relationship to post-coup Liberia. Although she professes that the past holds stronger, that “the Sugar beach of [her] childhood” would prevail, Cooper also notes feeling an “odd mixture of sorrow and euphoria,” presumably at the collision of these two times in one place (344). In the end, she declares herself “ready” to move on from Sugar Beach, the implication being that she is prepared to think of herself and Liberia as whole in the present, even if only loosely and unaffiliated with the country’s official power structure.

The non-national modes of affiliation Cooper explores in return at the end of *The House at Sugar Beach* are ever-present in Aminatta Forna’s 2002 memoir, *The Devil That Danced on the Water*. The book narrates her difficult childhood between Sierra Leone and Britain, as she moves between the two while her father, Mohamed Forna, becomes involved in government affairs and then quickly falls out of favor with head of

state Siaka Stevens. Mohamed, who trained in Britain as a medical doctor in the late 1950s, returned to Sierra Leone with his Scottish wife and their three children in the mid-1960s. In Sierra Leone, they established a rural medical clinic in Koidu, and the political interests Mohamed developed abroad became more deeply entrenched as Albert Margai's Sierra Leone People's Party consolidated power and moved towards a one-party state. After involving himself in the African People's Congress (APC)—the opposition party led by Siaka Stevens—Mohamed was elected as a Member of Parliament by a landslide. Before he could take office, he and numerous APC members were imprisoned during an army coup in 1967. While many APC members planned a coup from exile in Guinea, a handful of junior military officers arrested their superiors in the “Privates Revolt” of April 1968, and Siaka Stevens and the APC took leadership of the state. Stevens named Mohamed Forna his minister of finance. He then moved towards a one-party state while simultaneously amassing international debts and overruling his finance minister. Mohamed resigned his post in protest and created the United Democratic Party. Although popular with the people of Sierra Leone, the party was persecuted by Stevens's government, and Forna eventually left politics after a three-year imprisonment without charges. Although he attempted to start his own business, Mohamed was still closely observed by the government and was arrested in connection to a “coup” attempt. The coup, along with Forna's relationship to it, was entirely fabricated, and his trial was merely an expression of “an entire order, in which everyone from judge to juror knew their role” (327). Forna and fourteen others were convicted of treason and hanged for their “crimes.”

While narrating these details of her father's life and career, Forna simultaneously recounts her present-day search for the truth behind the imprisonment and execution, and the narrative continually shifts between her reconstruction of the past and her present efforts to find out the truth about it. As a consequence, contemporary research challenges many of Forna's memories, and the two come together in a powerful account of her father's life and her own methods of coming to terms with that life and her own. Although the last time she saw her father was at ten years old in 1974, *The Devil* sifts through the difficulties of postcolonial Sierra Leone—where the Civil War was still taking place during the book's research—in order to reconstruct her family. Understanding her father, especially the difficult choices he made when entering and exiting politics, stands at the center of this project, and Forna suggests that in coming to terms with his life and ambitions, she can finally understand her own. It is only after working through what happened on July 19, 1974—when her father was hanged at Pademba Road Prison—that Forna can begin to sketch a more complete family portrait. Working through her family's difficult past also allows Forna to see where Africa itself fits within her chosen affiliations as a citizen of London with an extended family throughout Sierra Leone. Notably, Sierra Leone and its political climate are Forna's targets when looking for terms of affiliation; she does not attempt to place herself within a British narrative of belonging as well. Rather, this is a story about finding and narrating an African family as a model for belonging in contemporary Sierra Leone, where she cannot claim to be a citizen in any meaningful sense.

From the beginning of her memoir, Forna claims the importance of this research and writing as a technique for developing a sense of self that is rooted in Sierra Leone.

Initially, Forna recasts her father's legacy in the face of a harsh history of silence—his imprisonment and execution were rarely discussed in her own family or in the public sphere, and *The Devil* is an attempt to give narrative shape to what had previously been absent. The government's version of Mohamed Forna as traitor had essentially stripped him of official ties to Sierra Leone, and this version remained publicly unchallenged during and after Siaka Stevens's reign. However, as Forna indicates, *The Devil* gives narrative priority to what had previously been discussed only in piecemeal fashion:

All my life I have harboured memories, tried to piece together scraps of truth and make sense of fragmented images. For as long as I can remember my world was one of parallel realities. There were the official truths versus my private memories, the propaganda of history books against untold stories; there were judgments and then there were facts, adult stances and the clarity of the child's vision; their version, my version. (18)

These varying versions of her father's stories come together in *The Devil*, where each narrative strand is given consideration and weight as part of the larger portrait that Forna paints of Sierra Leone and her family. In writing against the dominant version of postcolonial nationalism, she fuses the familial and the national in quite a unique way. These fragmented images that make up her father's history reflect upon her own inability to identify completely with a Sierra Leonean past, for her private memories are everywhere counteracted by the public judgments placed upon her father. Forna notes, "So much of the past was covered in veils" (112). Pulling away those veils proves difficult work throughout her research, but it is always understood that returning to Sierra Leone and rebuilding the family she had lost in 1974 can provide a sense of self that the country itself is unable to provide.

Indeed, returning to Sierra Leone allows Forna to engage the very difficult question of personal affiliation and her place as a citizen: how can she identify as Sierra

Leonean when the country essentially stripped her father and his family of any meaningful way to participate as citizens? Part of Forna's project, then, is to reconstruct her father's life and death as the cornerstone of a family story that can offer a collective identity no longer available through the nation. In her return for research, Forna identifies that physical presence in Sierra Leone is enough to bring these questions to the forefront: "In Britain, living in a large, industrial city with home, career and friends, in a life I had created for myself, I rarely paused to question my identity any more. Out here, caught on a high wire between my past and my present, I had never felt less certain of who I had become" (356). Sierra Leone's rural and urban spaces are contrasted to her London life, where Forna is free to choose her present and keep the past behind her. In Sierra Leone, questions of her present identity are once again linked to understanding what happened in the past, implying that in order to reclaim a sense of kinship, Forna must reconstruct her father's death. Importantly, this quest is linked to a different sense of temporality, as the past and present are in uneven dialogue with one another in her return—the "high wire" she walks between the two attests to the infinite complexities inherent to this past and the impossibility of using it neatly.

Indeed, she works through this affectively charged past towards a surer knowledge of her father's death that can stabilize her own sense of self. After her discoveries, her new and more expansive sense of identity emerges as a slow but revealing process: "I knew it would take me many months to absorb all that I had learned. To begin to live with my new past. I had shed my old past, the one filled with unanswered questions, secrets and ghosts" (388). In one sense, understanding the circumstances of her father's death allows Forna to rethink her relationship to Sierra

Leone, as she no longer has to wonder who was responsible for her father's execution. She imagines a future in which she can return to Sierra Leone and no longer ask herself if each person from the past was involved in her father's death, thus avoiding "the feelings of incalculable despair the very thought [of returning] used to promote" (388). Forna's notion of a "new past" that emerges after knowledge of her father's execution is very much tied to the competing versions of a national past as well. No matter how difficult, the facts that Forna gathers lend wholeness to the story that was once defined by "secrets and ghosts," yet these facts effectively make the national past strange. When the official version of Sierra Leone's history no longer holds, new forms of belonging are needed to accommodate a "new past."

Although she admits to having spent hours with her siblings, quietly speculating about her father's past, it is always done in the midst of a more general family silence: "We rarely spoke of the past. In our teens and twenties Memuna and Sheka and I used to swap whatever information we had – information gathered from our compulsive rifling and eavesdropping: fragments of the truth. Even then we talked in secret, always in secret" (279). This culture of silence that descends on the family's past in some ways comforts, for without openly questioning their history, Forna and her siblings can avoid confronting its painfulness. Yet, the comfort that such silence offers is tenuous; the "fragments of truth" that define her relationship to her father only highlight the lack of stable identification Sierra Leone offers Forna. When she finally devotes herself to this research, Forna realizes that returning and rebuilding her family has the potential to disrupt the narrative she had come to accept about herself and Sierra Leone: "I had found a way to live with the past, and I was aware I was now jeopardising that" (308). Although

this moment initially implies that the loss of a past is a loss of the self, the ensuing narrative of family reconstruction through return shows that this past is based on a lack of identifiable conditions in Sierra Leone. As long as the past remains fragmentary, Forna and her family have no basis upon which they can claim connection to Sierra Leone.

Yet, Forna's struggles to identify with the country are not exclusive to the past, as the nation's ongoing Civil War places questions of belonging at the center of the present moment as well. As she returns to Freetown to investigate the final years of her father's life, Forna notes that the country—in the midst of civil war—holds little meaning for her and provides very little for those who live there permanently. In a sense, Sierra Leone is unknowable to Forna precisely because it lacks a stable national identity outside of senseless violence: "I had returned to a scorched country, where anarchy and a civil war fuelled by diamonds and fought by children had been a way of life for four years. [...] Sierra Leone to me was both utterly familiar and ineffably alien: I knew it but I could not claim to understand it" (271). As she returns to do her research, then, Forna is faced with the challenge of experiencing what it means to be Sierra Leonean when the terms for defining one's national affiliation have no bearing on the experience of living in the country. Practically speaking, the Freetown she enters has no government that can oversee life there and provide a sense of stability to Sierra Leoneans. Rather, the city is populated by UN soldiers, soldiers from the Sierra Leone Army, and countless refugees living in makeshift camps. She notes: "Sierra Leone had not experienced proper, working government for decades and finally descended into anarchy by the close of the twentieth century" (281). This anarchy is notably linked to the decline of any kind of public service that can provide a sense of democratic citizenship: "Blackouts became the norm rather

than the exception; the water from the taps trickled, slowed and dried; petrol was in short supply, abandoned cars littered the streets; bands of stray dogs feasted on growing mountains of uncollected household waste” (281-82). Just as Forna’s individual past leads her to question her affiliation with Sierra Leone, the country’s anarchic state puts questions of belonging and citizenship in the spotlight. Some of the most haunting episodes of this long conflict testify to the desire to either destroy or prevent social ties amongst Sierra Leoneans, as those in power focused their efforts on mining rights and the illegal distribution of diamonds.

One of the most chilling examples is the calculated efforts to dismantle families in service of diamond-fuelled violence. The heavy and tragic use of child soldiers in this conflict has been well documented as a tactic that capitalized on the mental pliability of children, as Jimmy Kandeh succinctly notes: “Children were targeted for the simple reason that they are easier to manipulate and more likely to follow orders” (174). I would add, however, that capturing children and turning them against their families also serves to break up the natural ties of filiation at a very basic level.⁵² And this severing of social bonds extends to the national level, where those who consider themselves Sierra Leonean have little to identify with as citizens. In effect, the populace can only draw a sense of belonging based on the shared experiences of destruction and war. Forna notes this obliquely when she witnesses a group of former child soldiers on the beach at sunset, as she has a drink with her husband: “We sat at a makeshift bar on the sand, watching a

⁵² Kandeh also notes other instances of family dismemberment, citing the specific example of Cecilia Caulker, an eighty-six year old widow who was captured and made to witness the mutilation of her son, Victor Caulker, who opposed the rebels: “She was forced to watch as soldiers sliced off the ears and other extremities of her son. Then, her son’s bleeding heart was shoved into her mouth. After soldiers decapitated the dead man, Mrs Caulker was ordered at gunpoint to take her dead son’s head to the charred remains of her house, which had been ransacked and torched by soldiers. There she was instructed to breast-feed the decapitated head” (172).

group of small boys playing in the sand. I had been charmed by their naked, abandoned play until I realised what they were doing. They were belly-crawling across the sand, executing perfect military movements” (290). The children Forna and her husband witness in this moment are completely devoid of collective identities outside the context of war—they are no longer children, members of a household, or even citizens participating in a shared national project. In short, Forna depicts them as the tragic effects of Sierra Leone’s anarchy. Just as Forna’s own family history mingles with the national past, her description of these children shows the slippage that always exists between the personal and national in this contemporary moment. When the “abandoned play” of the boys becomes “perfect military movements,” everyday, joyful activities disturbingly transform into matters of national politics and the nation’s meaning in general.

It is amidst this utter lack of structure that Forna narrates her reconstruction of her family. In the process of research, she comes in contact with many members of her extended family, deepening ties where she had long ago lost contact. It is telling that, upon arriving in Freetown, Forna begins her investigation by going to a government building in an attempt to obtain a copy of the court transcripts in her father’s trial. When asked why she is interested in the case, Forna replies, “It’s a family matter” (286). Indeed, the return to Freetown is a family matter for Forna—it is her chance to rebuild her family through this kind of intensive research—but family and nation are uniquely combined in this work, as the very personal loss of her father is also a matter of Sierra Leone’s political and public history. As she thinks through the experience of researching her father’s life, Forna ends with a reflection on the narrative itself. She notes, “I sat down in my London study and I began to write. His story. My story. Our story” (403).

The use of “our” to characterize the story, in the end, suggests that she sees this narrative as collective property, and the degree to which family history and Sierra Leonean politics mingle in this work suggests that this collective ought to be considered, at least partially, as an alternative to the void of identification when considering Sierra Leone’s place in her self conception.

The act of narrating her father’s death—as well as her own discovery of the truth about that death—promotes a positive form of belonging in Sierra Leone for Forna, but this belonging is crucially contrasted to the forms of identification offered by the contemporary nation. If the civil war has decimated any ability to identify as Sierra Leonean, Forna implies that living collectively in this time, in this place, requires reconstructing the past in order to see it differently. She makes the strong claim that rebuilding her father’s death allows her to see the contemporary suffering of those in Sierra Leone more clearly: “[I]f I was looking for the ultimate proof of guilt of the people who had been our enemies, then wasn’t it all around me: in the rebel war, [...] in the wanton destruction of a country’s future? I knew it would take me many months to absorb all that I had learned. Then begin to live with my new past” (388). Living with this new past—a past that has the potential to link her to contemporary Sierra Leoneans—is the most important project of the book. Reconstructing that past, and narrating a new portrait of her family, is the key link in coming to terms with what it means to identify with Sierra Leone. Her family’s individual history, she claims, is a link in a genealogy of Sierra Leonean civic and social collapse: “What happened to my family twenty-five years ago was just the beginning. The forces that set out to destroy us ended up destroying everything” (271).

Unlike Cooper, Forna does not have one single moment in which her revenant citizenship comes forth. Rather, the project of *The Devil That Danced on the Water* is to explicate this mode of belonging by making the nation as strange to her readers as it was to Forna as she returned. She consciously reorganizes her narrative of Sierra Leone, so that the “secrets and ghosts” that had once occupied that part of her past are reconsidered in light of the knowledge she gains (388). Notably, Forna uses similar language when describing her past and present attitudes towards Sierra Leone, as the past is filled with “secrets and ghosts,” while the present is populated by “living ghosts” (302). This points towards a revenant affiliation with Sierra Leone—as she resurrects the past and inflects it onto a nation in the midst of civil war, she navigates a mode of belonging in which she cannot be a participatory, rights-bearing citizen because her narrative of Sierra Leone rejects the nation as a legitimate guarantor of rights. The image of herself as a revenant, then, serves to characterize the mode of belonging available via the nation itself—rights can be neither claimed nor granted in the nation she describes.

In some senses, linking past injustices to the contemporary Civil War is a gesture towards identification with a Sierra Leonean diaspora. As a public rebuttal to Sierra Leone’s political past and present, the book officially speaks back to the corrupt regimes that ruled and continued to run the Sierra Leonean nation. In addition, the book has a wide audience on a global scale—it was a runner-up for Britain’s Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction in 2003 and received almost universally positive reviews—and in some senses produces a global public ready to speak back to these Sierra Leonean regimes of power. Yet, her narrative is so specifically rooted in the act of return that it is difficult to see this work as commenting upon international belonging over a particular way of being

Sierra Leonean today. She presents the past as almost infinitely complex, and in many ways it is completely unreliable as the basis for any thought-out form of contemporary belonging. But her act of return and the writing of her family's story into the national one makes for a compelling rethinking of belonging. In the next section, I explore the form of national participation that Forna's work—in conjunction with Cooper's memoir—puts forth as a productive belonging that temporally situates these West African nations in a postcolonial present rather than a shrouded and mystified past.

Coda: Returnees, Revenants, and Postcolonial Belonging

Complicating the narratives in this chapter is the doubled sense of return that is not explored in Forna's revision of Haley in chapter one or the Sierra Leonean novels of chapter two. In these memoirs, however, the early moments of return that often define Liberian and Sierra Leonean history are uncannily doubled, as the disenfranchised from the diaspora journey to West Africa in attempts to forge belonging in a strange yet familiar land. The original waves of returnees—to Sierra Leone in 1787 and 1792 and Liberia in the 1820s—were freed slaves or freeborn, yet they were largely animated by the desire to put that freedom to use. In chapter two, I briefly outline the founding of Freetown, Sierra Leone, especially the participation of 1792 Nova Scotian "returnees." Liberia's case is similar, as the colony was established by the American Colonization Society, a group of wealthy white citizens who had various motives for "repatriating" these former slaves. What I think is important for both nations is the extent to which these returnees themselves sought a space that would allow them to assert a political voice. Liberia's 1847 Declaration of Independence from the ACS testifies to this desire

when it characterizes the new nation as “an asylum from the most grinding oppression” (Armitage 221). Clearly, new forms of political belonging were the goal here as well as in Sierra Leone’s “Province of Freedom.”

In many ways, these contemporary memoirs of return tap into the national histories of “return” that date back to the founding of Liberia and Sierra Leone. If the original diasporic inhabitants of these nations were interested in finding a “natural” space for autonomous political assertion, both Forna and Cooper explore similar possibilities by returning to their respective homelands. Each nation should provide these returnees with the potential to express their citizenship and enjoy the rights that come with belonging to and participating in the national project. In their careful narratives of the past, both Forna and Cooper assert the familial and affective ties that bind them to Sierra Leone and Liberia, respectively. Ideally, their returns should reassert those ties and their national affiliations. Given the destinations involved, these meanings of “return” are certainly in play throughout both *The Devil That Danced on the Water* and *The House at Sugar Beach*. The difference, of course, between the early returnees to Sierra Leone and Liberia and these contemporary works is that the potential to build a political identity is no longer there for Forna and Cooper. Rather, they must sift through the wreckage of wars and negotiate belonging among the people who somehow managed to live through such conflicts. If narratives of “return” are largely relegated to the collective pasts of Sierra Leone and Liberia, what is at stake when these authors assert a form of belonging found upon return to the postcolonial nations they once called home? How do their returns matter for a postcolonial present in which the nation has essentially collapsed? No longer tied to the grand narratives of nation building, or to the fantasy of a blank African slate

for the enlightened returnee to write upon, these returns and the revenant citizenship they engender offer alternatives to the nationalism they so thoroughly critique.

Surely, Forna and Cooper do not invest in rebuilding a sense of nationalism that had collapsed during the decade of war in West Africa. Their narratives are critical of past nationalisms at almost every turn, and their journeys back to Sierra Leone and Liberia are directed towards understanding new forms of belonging that are in accordance with the new national situation they encounter. By taking narratives of return out of the national pasts and placing them in the center of postcolonial national distress, these authors make bold claims about the temporalities of belonging in these particular nations—“return” is no longer the cornerstone of the nation’s identity nor is it completely abandoned to the past, but it becomes a salient narrative for postcolonial belonging that eerily doubles the past and pushes towards a tenuous future. In other words, these returns make the nation and citizenship strange in productive, future-oriented ways.

I see these works in dialogue with the typical forms of postcolonial nationalism that seek to forge a collective identity after independence from formal colonization. Very often, the struggle for independence initially unites new nations as a whole, but that struggle often fails to hold sway as internal conflicts often arise. Joshua Forrest briefly characterizes postcolonial nationalism as having two distinct categories: those “that have been able to continue to forge nationalist unity and those nations marked by internal ethnic nationalist challenges” (33). He notes that the typical story of ethnic challenges—as in Rwanda, Somalia, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo—involves many ethnic political claimants and a centralized government that relies on an “exclusivist pattern of rule” (34). This would certainly seem to be the case for Liberia and Sierra Leone as well,

as the descendants of the original “returnees” held onto national political power until the end of the twentieth century, when the unrepresented majority violently rebelled against the status quo. Thus, the challenges to these particular postcolonial nationalisms were about the extent to which the elite classes—Americo-Liberians and Sierra Leonean Krios—could claim to speak for the nation at large. But when Cooper and Forna engage in their doubled returns, they also make a claim for the return narrative’s continuing place in the national narrative. Although the nationalisms built upon this “returnee” identity ultimately resulted in political chaos, these works subtly reinforce the notion that journeys “back” to Liberia and Sierra Leone still have a place in the conversation about what it means to be a citizen. In fact, these two works suggest that the kind of belonging available in both nations relies heavily on the collectivities they explore through return. I would argue that these collectivities are largely built upon the notion that a journey of return is not temporally situated in the past: it is neither comfortably positioned in the nation’s historical narrative nor does it comfortably place Liberia or Sierra Leone as part of an earlier historical moment. These two works narrate journeys to postcolonial nations and build a form of collectivity that speaks to the present, not to the age of slavery and abolition.

In complex ways, then, both Cooper and Forna speak to the temporalities of return that I have mapped throughout this project, as they use a seemingly historical mode of affiliation with West Africa to think about the contemporariness of these postcolonies. Although they engage the past and often seek to reconstruct that past, two details stand out. First, it is the very recent postcolonial past that they often attempt to reconstruct. Forna, in particular, focuses her work on the time of her father’s political

involvement with Siaka Stevens and the APC. And while she engages the earlier “returns” of Sierra Leone’s history, they are often shown to be background to the contemporary nation and its problems. Similarly, Cooper engages her family’s long history of return, with both families coming to Liberia in the 1820s, but she spends most of her narrative space telling her experiences in 1970s Liberia, during Doe’s 1980 coup, and then returning Monrovia in 2003. Again, the nation’s origins are important to Cooper, but as critical background rather than analytical focus.

The second manner in which these authors engage the temporalities of return is in their stories of diasporic belonging and the impulse to travel back to Sierra Leone and Liberia. Both authors initially seem to fulfill the role of modern diasporic Africans, as they leave their West African nations and pursue careers as journalists. The possibilities for both Forna and Cooper open up when they are educated and begin working in the West, and their eventual returns to Sierra Leone and Liberia are to wrecked countries that lack basic civic institutions. In short, these stories have the narrative skeletons of a back to Africa narrative that sees Africa as a general space on the margins of the modern world. Given the extreme and disturbing violence of these particular civil wars, Sierra Leone and Liberia were often characterized as bordering on sheer barbarism.⁵³ But these are not the characterizations that Forna and Cooper engage, as neither has time for the kinds of mystifications that characterize much international representation of African conflict. Rather, they engage the particulars their postcolonial nations and situate their returns in the postcolonial moment. What I call “diaspora modernity” in the introduction, where those in the diaspora are afforded a sense of modernity based on the experience of

⁵³ For example, see Bradshaw and his portrait of a former Liberian war criminal, Joshua Milton Blahyi, also known as General Butt Naked.

leaving while those in Africa are temporally situated forever in the past, is nowhere to be found in Forna and Cooper. Rather, their narratives of diaspora and their returns to West Africa are always about the very contemporary ways of living in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Going back, then, is a literal process of returning and assessing the contemporary nation, not seeking a previous moment that can heal wounds with fantasies of wholeness.

In these doubled returns, where a controversial national history is subtly deployed as a method for postcolonial belonging, the revenant is an important and apt vehicle for theorizing what kinds of belonging are possible. In both narratives, building a sense of self based partially on the presence of the dead is essential for the authors' discoveries of identity, which is, in turn, closely related to a sense of national identity. The figure of the revenant citizen, then, mimics the identity position of a returnee, as neither figure belongs in a full sense of the word. The returnee, now as in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has only a tenuous and highly abstract claim to belonging in a place that is politically and socially unfamiliar. Similarly, the revenant comes to the world of the living that is unfamiliar. A revenant citizen, in many ways, is a non-citizen, for what rights can exist for one who no longer technically belongs to the nation? Yet, there is a certain ambiguous form of belonging that exists for the revenant as well, as "returning" implies a renewal of ties and a rejuvenated desire to be part of a collective. The returnee and the revenant both complexly comment on citizenship, a form of belonging that is unavailable and largely undesired for Cooper and Forna in these postcolonial nations. These two ask to be acknowledged by the postcolonial nations but recognize that they cannot be part of them; they want to belong but cannot participate. As returnees—as revenant citizens—both Forna and Cooper demand for their presence to be recognized by

the postcolonial nation while knowing that their sense of self cannot come from that nation.

Chapter Four
Bearing Witness and White African Affiliation

War stories are a fragile genre, for they beg to be told over and over again, yet remain open to extreme misunderstanding by narrator and audience alike. When African war stories are translated across countries and continents in Western media outlets, they can become even more complex, as racial and cultural misunderstanding abound. In the contemporary, postcolonial moment, Africa's media presence is largely a record of atrocity. Usually covered by white journalists who travel the continent covering famine, disease, and war, African war reporting is a genre in itself. Aidan Hartley, a longtime African reporter for Reuters, sees the exceptional nature of reporting on Africa in the disconnect between the events and their representation: "News in sub-Saharan was like a tree that fell in the forest. It might pass unheard. Or it might take weeks to reach our ears" (117). In the delicate balance that is reporting on Africa, Hartley insists, "There was only one sure way of selling a story from Africa to an editor. [...] [A] quirky opening vignette, a twist of pathos, the exotic or the bizarre" (117). Trading in such "color" is a hallmark of contemporary global writing about Africa, and the journalistic reports from Reuters and other news agencies are some of the world's most prominent written records of Africa today. Thus, in a now well-known satire, Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina advises writers to represent Africa in nonspecific, stereotypical ways: "Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. [...] The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannahs and many other things, but your reader doesn't care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular." This kind of mainstream writing, Wainaina implies, insists upon what Jina Moore calls "a simplistic narrative [about] Africa and its possibilities."

Significantly, many of the major white news reporters about Africa are from Africa, and trading in such platitudes about the continent they consider themselves a part of is usually an unsavory part of the job description. But it is worth noting that they often do so in order to promote a much higher level of awareness about the continent they consider home.⁵⁴ The authors I discuss in this chapter all share this conflict of conscience, as they desire to represent their home continent faithfully and complexly, yet are limited by the particular constraints of their professional discourse. In this chapter, I look to the ways in which white African journalists—all of whom live and work around the globe but call Africa “home”—move between journalism and memoir to account for African conflict and their own conflicted belonging. I argue that these hybrid texts by Hartley, Alexandra Fuller, Peter Godwin and Rian Malan use return—either physically returning to a country, emotionally to a memory, or intellectually to history—to Africa to animate a distinct mode of war reportage that bears witness as the form of white African participation in postcolonial Africa. They thus narrate Africa as both outsiders and participants, though these authors remain painfully aware that their words border on narrative recolonization through the use of standard journalism.

One of this project’s key claims is that narratives of return as a whole produce a sense of African modernity that is often lost in narrative accounts of the continent. To be sure, narratives of witnessing conflict by black Africans and those more traditionally included in the postcolonial canon constitute an important archive of triumph, struggle,

⁵⁴ Rowan Emslie, for example, criticizes Wainaina’s satirical take on writing about Africa with his own satirical advice piece about satirical advice pieces for writing about Africa: “Mock the use of meaningless, fashionable buzzwords like ‘sustainability’ and ‘entrepreneurialism’. Deride the use of meaningful, fashionable buzzwords like ‘middle class’, ‘technology’ or ‘investment’. Laugh endlessly at anyone’s foolish use of geographical place names in the continent of Africa – everybody knows that if you’re talking about the ‘Nile’ or ‘Africa’ you’re basically an ignorant racist.” What is often interpreted as “color” in journalism about Africa, Emslie implies, does critical work that cannot be dismissed as perpetuating misconceptions about Africa as a whole.

failure, and messy entanglements in Africa's emergence from colonial rule. I focus on specifically white African returns to give shape to witnessing as a form of meaningful participation in postcolonial Africa for those who feel the pull of affiliation but do not quite belong. Chapter three addressed similar issues, especially in Cooper's memoir, where colonial history, and the complicity of the narrator with the social inequality are engaged on grounds similar to these white authors, especially Alexandra Fuller and Aidan Hartley. Cooper, however, cannot imagine a role for herself as a witness or as any other kind of participant in post-war nation-building, while these white memoirs of return build a belonging through acts of witnessing. These specific accounts make visible two of the main factors in how many African nations are conceived in contemporary global discourse: white Africans are the most obviously visible reminders of a colonial past, and white African journalism is some of the most globally visible writing about contemporary African violence and politics. The recurring acts of witnessing participate in the developing narrative of contemporary Africa yet problematically speak for—and assert narrative power over—those who have suffered.

All of these authors act as witnesses in and through their texts, an apt descriptor, as the figure of the witness stands both within and outside what is being testified to. Following the work of Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, and Ian Baucom, I look to “the witness” as a discourse “on and of the modern” (Baucom 179). The particular subjectivity at stake here I call the “yearning witness”—these authors feel the pull of affiliation and work to connect with Africa as witnesses to atrocity when the possibility of belonging has been foreclosed. While Baucom develops a notion of the “melancholy witness” as a “counterdiscourse” of a modernity defined by capital accumulation and

speculative finance, I see the testimonies of yearning witnesses as constitutive of a globalized, diasporic modernity in which Africa is positioned as forever in the past. At the same time, these works use such witnessing to explore the possibilities for belonging in a modern, globally resonant Africa as non-black community members.

To work through these affiliative troubles, these yearning witnesses must develop a mode of narration that positions Africa as globally relevant—even in problematic ways—and foregrounds questions of belonging. I chiefly examine these works in terms of their generic shuffling between journalism and memoir—this undecidability taps into the global literary demand for the quirky vignettes and twists of pathos that Hartley describes and offers the writer the opportunity to deliver his or her “confession” as a white African implicated in the colonial past.⁵⁵ Yet, I also claim that the narrative instability mimics the position of the witness itself—the narrative position gives an insider’s account of the events while remaining at a distance from them, often making the terms of African conflict strange and new in the process. In the end, while these works often produce the exoticized Africa expected by a Western readership, the very notion of bearing witness to these moments, and attempting to build one’s affiliation around them, explores one of the few forms of identification with Africa that allows for white African participation in the larger African collective, which is largely unavailable to these postcolonial subjects.

⁵⁵ The story of white settlers in Africa is one that captures the global imagination consistently. Early accounts of settler life, such as Isak Dinesen’s *Out of Africa* (1937), Beryl Markham’s *West With the Night* (1942), and Elspeth Huxley’s *The Flame Trees of Thika* (1959) remain popular today as romantic portraits of Africa that imply a continent frozen in the past. In more contemporary writing, the authors discussed in this chapter are globally popular and—especially in the case of Godwin and Malan—have become public personalities, especially as authorities on African politics. Stories of white African childhood—and, typically, the loss of the family farm—are still consistently written and purchased in the Western marketplace. Recent titles include: Wendy Kann, *Casting with a Fragile Thread* (2006); Lauren St. John, *Rainbow’s End* (2008); Douglas Rogers, *The Last Resort* (2009).

Alexandra Fuller and Peter Godwin both gained fame for their first books of life writing about the Rhodesian War, known as the Second Chimurenga by those fighting against the white Rhodesian minority.⁵⁶ Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* (2001) narrates her experiences growing up in Rhodesia as the white minority attempted to maintain social and political control as an independent nation, and it is told through the shifting perspective of a child coming to consciousness. Fuller's returns to "Rhodesia"—whether to the moment as in *Dogs* or to the place, as in her subsequent memoirs—work within established modes of narration while thinking through a present-day white African identity. Peter Godwin makes a similar move in his memoirs, beginning with *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996). Like Fuller, his first memoir recounts the experience of growing up in Rhodesia, but Godwin emphasizes the perspective of the participant, rather than the child-witness, as he was conscripted into the Rhodesian Forces at eighteen. His works as a whole typically explore the ways in which white consciousness worked and developed during the Chimurenga years and after independence, as he travels back to Zimbabwe frequently to report on its postcolonial violence. Both Godwin and Fuller combine their experiences of return with war narrative, either from the Second Chimurenga or its political aftermath. By portraying themselves as participants rather than observers of these wars, they narrate a modified confessional in which absolution is no longer the end goal. Rather, it is deferred in favor of complex and highly specific war narratives.

⁵⁶ "Chimurenga" is a Shona term usually interpreted as "revolutionary struggle." The struggle between Rhodesian settlers and indigenous black Africans for political control of the country was known as the Rhodesian War to most settlers and the Second Chimurenga to most freedom fighters. The First Chimurenga refers to the 1896-97 uprising of the Shona and Ndebele people against the colonial administration of the area by the British South Africa Company. Calling the Rhodesian War (1966-79) the "Second Chimurenga" clearly indicates the degree to which the non-settler population considered their struggle against colonialism to be ongoing. See Raftopoulos and Mlambo.

While both Godwin and Fuller explore the recent colonial past and its implications for postcolonial politics, Aidan Hartley's *The Zanzibar Chest* (2003) brings the longer colonial past together with some of the most famous moments of contemporary African violence: his narrative focuses on his methods of understanding Africa as a returnee-journalist, as a Kenyan, and as the son of a former colonial administrator/development worker. Beginning with the 1989 overthrow of the Sudanese government, Hartley's memoir covers his reporting on the major political events in Africa for over a decade, including the early 1990s conflict in Somalia and the 1994 Rwandan genocide. He critically uses the history of Empire to also generate complex narratives of war journalism, especially his account of Somalia. Just as Hartley explores these questions in terms of his family's presence in Kenya, Rian Malan's enormously popular and influential *My Traitor's Heart* (1990) thinks through this process in apartheid South Africa in 1985. Malan's narrative is strangely situated, as he both generates alternative perspectives on South African violence, yet relies upon colonial narrative staples in his final stance on white belonging in Africa. The memoir's conclusion, especially, indicates that Malan's return is a quest to find the expected. Rather than probe the white African past in order to build a future sense of affiliation, Malan discovers a "heart of darkness" in rural South Africa, a space without much of a past and almost no future to speak of. Pairing these two illuminates how both personal and public history come together for these journalists as they attempt to both frame African conflict for the world and understand their own places as witnesses to it. The instability of these white attempts to affiliate with "Africa" as witnesses indicates the precarious nature of such

belonging, where inclusion is desired but never quite attainable and Africa is written as a space of global resonance and perpetual black violence.

My focus on these particular white African texts, as opposed to the nonfiction of more canonical white Africans like J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, or Doris Lessing, stems from their use of journalism as a form of writing that addresses issues of black violence in globally legible ways. In particular, these works are more clearly about journeys “back” to Africa and how such return manifests itself in narratives of witnessing. While the works of these other white African writers is certainly a rich archive for white political engagement and witnessing, journalism—and the memoirs of journalists—are more circumscribed by convention and global resonance. Thus, when these works critically rethink belonging and witnessing violence, they do so in the context of journalism’s narrative standards.

Writing Rhodesia: The “Confessions” of Alexandra Fuller and Peter Godwin

Although they were grew up in then-Rhodesia just twelve years apart, Alexandra Fuller (b. 1969) and Peter Godwin (b. 1957) had very different experiences of the colony’s transition to an independent and minority-run nation and, eventually, the internationally recognized state of Zimbabwe. However, both share a commitment to writing about Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, and they both notably return to the area frequently as part of their journalistic and family duties. Godwin was born in the country’s eastern region, and most of his early childhood memories are of his family’s home in Silverstream, near the border with Mozambique. The son of a timber estate manager and a physician, Godwin grew up in relative security until he was conscripted to

fight in the Rhodesian War; he then left the country in 1977 to study law at Cambridge. After finishing his degree, Godwin studied at Oxford and returned to Zimbabwe in 1982, working as a journalist and human rights lawyer. His journalism, however, landed him in trouble with Zimbabwean authorities, especially his reports on newly elected President Robert Mugabe's systematic elimination of his main political opposition, the Ndebele supporters of Joshua Nkomo, a genocide later called Gukurahundi.⁵⁷ These reports shed light on violence that was not being discussed in Zimbabwe at the time, and Godwin was branded a traitor and forced to leave the country. He subsequently worked for the BBC in London, during which time he wrote his first book, *Mukiwa*, and then moved to New York. The exiled Godwin now frequently travels back to Zimbabwe to see family and friends as well as to report on the country's contemporary political turmoil. His books of life writing—which include *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* and *The Fear*—narrate these returns as part of his life's trajectory and his writing career. Indeed, returning to Zimbabwe is an essential element of Godwin's literary output.

Like Godwin, Alexandra Fuller came of age during the Rhodesian War. Her gender and age, however, make her participation in the war different from Godwin's combat-centered experiences. Fuller was born in England in 1969 to parents who had previously lived in Kenya and Rhodesia. Shortly after her birth, the family moved back to Rhodesia, first settling in the country's northern part and then moving to the Burma Valley, along the Mozambique border. Throughout the war, Fuller's parents struggled to

⁵⁷ "In the early 1980s, Matabeleland saw a series of dissident attacks, and the Zimbabwean government responded with force. In a parallel, undeclared conflict, Robert Mugabe deployed tactical force in Matabeleland against unarmed civilian supporters of his main political rival, Joshua Nkomo. This conflict was called "Gukurahundi," a Shona term meaning, "the rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains." Gukurahundi was mostly perpetrated by Mugabe's Fifth Brigade, a specialized force trained in North Korea. See Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, "Breaking the Silence" and "Report on the 1980s Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands."

maintain their farms and ranches, and they moved from one area of the country to another. Her mother and father moved to Malawi in 1982 and Zambia in 1983, and they now run a commercial fish farm in Zambia's Sole Valley. Fuller went to university in Scotland and Canada, returning to Zambia where she met and married Charlie Ross, an American river guide. In 1994, the two moved to Ross' home state of Wyoming, and Fuller continues to return to Zambia and Zimbabwe frequently. Like Godwin, her subsequent career as a writer involves returning to Southern Africa to mine the Rhodesian past and Zimbabwean present.

I look to these two authors, in part, because they so consistently emphasize their movements back to Africa, but also because they have gained such worldwide popularity and credibility as chroniclers of Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. As writers primarily concerned with representing African conflict, they creatively negotiate some of war reportage's generic limitations through their uses and modifications of the confessional form as a journalistic method. The white African confessional is a problematic genre, as it runs the risk of idealizing the colonial past and shrouding some of the very real power disparities in contemporary Africa, and both authors are guilty of this to certain extents. In their first works, especially, Fuller and Godwin narrate the Rhodesian war from their perspectives as child-witnesses, implying that they are less responsible than the adult participants, casting themselves as "innocents" and suggesting that they are now different people from the settler children they describe. Yet, in their emphases on return—both in their texts and in person—the distance between past and present selves is ultimately diminished, and I see this combination of return memoir and the confessional form as a way of narrating themselves and the Rhodesian war in ways that do not neatly divide the past and present.

In 2001, Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* was a popular success as an honest description of 1970s Rhodesia from a white child's point of view. *The New York Times* noted that the memoir's key feature is that it "does not judge, rationalize or explain her parents' commitment to white rule" (Kakutani). Rather, Fuller chooses to return to the Rhodesian War by writing a memoir from the child's perspective, with the attitudes and assumptions of her white Rhodesian parents as the background for the formative years of her girlhood.⁵⁸ Fuller's account most clearly enacts a sense of return in its narration, which is almost exclusively present-tense and puts a premium on representing particularly Rhodesian ways of speaking, seizing particular moments of the past without the explanatory benefit of hindsight, and placing the reader back in the past with her. Of course, this narrative tactic is also a standard of the confessional mode, where a child narrator is granted the authority to speak "honestly" because he or she is always already "granted absolution through the legal fiction that the child is not accountable, and the related fictional convention that children are 'innocent' in a generally unspecified sense" (Heyns 50). Fuller notably works within this confessional mode of narration, yet her insistence on her multiple returns to Zimbabwe and the war narratives these returns generate makes for a complicated confession. In the end, Fuller seeks narrative accumulation rather than absolution in her confessions. Typically, confession builds to a moment in which "the confessor, and society as a whole, are reassured that they can pass judgment in good conscience" (Brooks 6). Fuller's witnessed accounts, however, do not

⁵⁸ A brief note on the Second Chimurenga/Rhodesian War: On November 11, 1965, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith issued a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), declaring the colony's break from Britain but with the white minority still in power, going against British colonial policy of independence with racial or ethnic majority rule. UDI spawned the long war of independence that did not officially end until 1980 with the establishment of the internationally recognized Republic of Zimbabwe. Like Kenya's war of independence, the main issues were race and political power, but Rhodesia's UDI was notable in that it attempted to extend official, colonial-style racism into the postcolony with an official white minority rule, much like the apartheid regime of South Africa.

ask for this. In place of this moment of satisfaction, Fuller and her readership are given a complexly witnessed account of war, used as the basis for the “belonging” she yearns to find in Zimbabwe.

Fuller’s works are both return- and confession-centered in her use of the first person, present tense. In *Don’t Let’s Go*, Fuller speaks of Rhodesia as though it continues to exist, and the almost eternal present tense of the memoir adds to the feeling that Fuller’s narration is as close to an unmediated record of her child’s observations as readers are likely to see. In a jarring resurrection of the colonial past, she describes a map of Rhodesia—an historical artifact, to be sure—as an accurate representation of an ongoing reality: “(The map plunges from purple to pink then orange and yellow to indicate one’s descent into heat and flatness and malaria.) That valley, in the far east of the country, is the Burma Valley” (46). The choice to narrate the war, and the life that surrounded their Burma Valley ranch, in the present tense speaks to the emphasis Fuller places on returning to this moment in her text. Almost the entire narrative is built around bringing the reader to the moment as it happens, implying that the act of return matters for understanding both Fuller’s life and the historical circumstances in which her childhood developed.

Textual return to a time when the Fullers owned a farm in Rhodesia has other, more political implications as well. As both Ashleigh Harris and Tony da Silva have written, Fuller’s child narrator and her tale of dislocation obfuscate the racial history of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe by deploying a “discourse of victimhood” (Harris 117).⁵⁹ As a globally influential narrative of the Rhodesian War, *Don’t Let’s Go* also dangerously

⁵⁹ Harris and da Silva are among many who have commented on Fuller’s problematic affiliation with Rhodesia. This comes about most apparently in criticism of her second memoir, *Scribbling the Cat*, discussed below. See especially Dodgson-Katiyo, Giltz, and Seddon.

appropriates the story of Zimbabwean independence to feature white displacement. Da Silva rightly notes that, although the book critiques past racial inequalities in Rhodesia, the implicit narrative authority given Fuller by Western readers can “reclaim some of the influence [white settlers] once held over the telling of a national story and the making of cultural memory” (“Narrating” 472). In a sense, these critiques hinge on Fuller’s use of the confessional narrative. Harris and da Silva both take issue with the implication that young Alexandra—nicknamed Bobo by her parents—is seemingly innocent because she does not actively participate in the war and that writing her memoir will cleanse any wrongdoing by association. Indeed, the memoir puts distance between Fuller the writer and Bobo the participant through an implied epiphany, as the reader can recognize that the narrative voice does not still support and argue for a racist minority government. As an isolated document, *Don’t Let’s Go* performs some of the most characteristic aspects of confessional literature, especially in the kind of separation of the self that Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee describe: “The narrating self in [confessional] texts typically aims to effect a distance from an earlier, politically less enlightened or in other ways unacceptable, version of the self” (qtd. in Heyns 55). In delivering Bobo’s racist past to an audience invested in her story, these critics claim, Fuller can be seen as disavowing any continued commitment to white supremacy while asking to be forgiven and accepted as a member of a politically correct community of tolerance.⁶⁰

Critiquing *Don’t Let’s Go* in these terms can productively show the manner in which Fuller taps into a global demand for white confessional narratives of Africa. In

⁶⁰ The memoir’s persistent use of the present tense may undercut the extent to which Fuller “disavows” her past racist attitudes, but this narrative technique is generally taken as a method for delivering the immediacy of such attitudes through the eyes of a child. In this sense, the present tense indicates something more akin to a narrative innocence than a continued commitment to white supremacy.

addition, splitting Bobo the child and Alexandra the writer highlights a certain distance between an African past and a cosmopolitan present in the Western world. Indeed, the memoir ends with Fuller's marriage to an American tour guide and departure for Wyoming.⁶¹ The physical separation from Zimbabwe further emphasizes the psychic distance she puts between her present self and the "politically less enlightened" child of *Don't Let's Go*. However, such criticism does not lend itself to her subsequent books of life writing in which her physical and textual returns to Africa are foregrounded. These returns drastically revise the distancing effect in *Don't Let's Go*, as it is proximity and immersion in Africa that defines her subsequent autobiographical accounts. Both *Scribbling the Cat* and *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* feature returning throughout, either to earlier moments or to the Southern Africa of her childhood. Importantly, the books' focus on "return," provides a new lens for examining her relationship to her family's Rhodesian past and the nature of white belonging in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Her multiple movements to Africa throughout *Scribbling the Cat* and *Cocktail Hour* are physical and textual embodiments of the emotional returns of *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, and re-reading *Don't Let's Go* in light of this body of "return" literature emphasizes the ways in which Fuller's first book engages in and revises discourses of African conflict and war reportage through her acts of witnessing.

Seen as a return narrative, *Don't Let's Go* takes on a very different shape from the white confession that Harris and da Silva critique with such efficacy. Most of *Don't Let's Go* focuses on the Chimurenga years of Fuller's childhood, experienced variously at her family's farm and at boarding school in Harare, and the memoir's dialogue and

⁶¹ Given her candidness through her work, Fuller is surprisingly vague on the subject of her move. She claims that the decision to move to Wyoming was "difficult for both" partners but a decision that "was necessary for personal reasons" (Fuller, Interview by Larry Weissman).

descriptions are so steeped in the racist language of her family and friends that Fuller has no need to explain the attitudes that white Rhodesians took towards black Africans. In a postscript to the book, titled “My Africa,” Fuller writes that she considers herself an African but is “forced to acknowledge that almost half my life in Africa was realized in a bubble of Anglocentricity, as if black Africans *had* no culture worth noticing and as if they did not exist except servants and (more dangerously) as terrorists” (305). Thus, within the text proper, she self-consciously writes her Rhodesian past and the racist rhetoric without dilution or explanation. When Fuller sets scenes, she writes with seeming ease, “Dad is away in the bush, fighting gooks” (78-79). She can coolly rationalize the Rhodesian terminology for African farmhands (“The men—Dad’s ‘boys’—arrive on foot” [124]) by referring to them as “boys” and “men” in the same sentence, as if clarifying for the reader what the child instinctively knows. Her mother intimidates a group of squatters, yelling, “You fucking kaffirs! [...] Fucking, fucking kaffirs” (155). None of this language is rationalized, and the unexplained nature of this vocabulary lends the memoir its quality of return, where the reader is immersed in this Rhodesian world without mediation from the present-day perspective. Even through omission, by not incorporating black African voices in her work, Fuller consciously gives this sense of return to her childhood, where these voices were never explicitly acknowledged.

This is certainly not to say that Fuller avoids the psychic separation of confessional literature, but thinking of *Don't Let's Go* as a narrative of return reveals the generative aspects of Fuller's stylistic choices. As a work that primarily explores the Rhodesian War and its aftereffects, the proximity implied by return allows for Fuller to

avoid some of the tried-and-true methods of war reporting in Africa. Rather than exoticize African conflict and the race war in Rhodesia, she delves into the “cozy racism” that often goes unrecognized in narratives of the Chimurenga, and African wars of independence in general, to show the public and political effects of domestic racist attitudes (Le Seuer). One such moment comes when Fuller describes her first day of school. The narrative most literally returns to the past, describing a family photograph of the day (included at the beginning of the chapter as well): “Dad takes a photograph of us leaving the farm for my first day of big school in January 1977. Vanessa is almost as tall as Mum. I am holding the Uzi, pressing out my belly to help catch the weight of it. We are standing in front of Lucy, the mine-proofed Land Rover” (138). The photo is an uncomfortable document of both conflict preparation and a defining childhood moment, as her first day of boarding school is also a moment when the guns must be ready and land mines must be avoided. Fuller’s return to this familial moment makes war strange, presenting a narrative of violent conflict away from the battlefield, yet intimately tied to it.

This atypical mode of war reportage continues in Fuller’s follow-up work, *Scribbling the Cat*, when she again focuses on witnessing the Rhodesian War as central to white Zimbabwean belonging. Fuller depicts the war’s legacy as both obvious—after all, Rhodesia no longer exists—and as impenetrable. Her questions begin with her own father: although he participated in the war, he reveals that he didn’t actually believe in what he was fighting for. He fought because he was called up, and after further scrutiny, and his daughter’s insistence that he should talk about his experiences, he says, “Nothing to talk about” (34). Such silence is typical, at least in Fuller’s accounts of the war, where

just about any White male over a certain age that she meets has participated in the Rhodesian War, perhaps in addition to conflicts in South Africa and Mozambique. When she meets K, however, she finally finds a subject willing to discuss what happened.

At the heart of Fuller's travels with K is the idea that knowing K's story of the War will help to explain her own. Here, the textual return of *Don't Let's Go* is replaced by a more insistent return to specific places in person. She narrates *Scribbling the Cat* from an adult perspective, more explicitly assessing the Rhodesian War with hindsight. In fact, the book's major project is to witness and understand the aftereffects of this conflict on both active and passive participants, and return is figured as the vehicle for "find[ing] the answer to K and to the war and to the splinters in my own psyche" (215). By linking K's wartime experiences with her ambivalent inheritance of that conflict, Fuller implies that this historical experience is one that continues to shape collective identification for Whites in Southern Africa. At numerous points throughout *Scribbling the Cat*, she works to combine the experiences of witnessing, participating in, inheriting, and narrating the war.

This project comes through most clearly at the memoir's most emotional point. Having crossed into the heart of Zimbabwe, K begins to explain his wartime experiences in more detail, including the story he had never talked about before. As she leads into her narration of the story, Fuller clearly outlines the implications of it for her own sense of self. It begins with her desire to understand K and the cause for which he fought so dutifully: "I felt somehow that if I knew this one secret about K—this one, great, untold story—then everything else about him would become clear and I could label him and write him into coherence" (147-48). Notably, the outcome of understanding K is

narrative—knowing K means having a narrative code with which to identify him. The need to write K into coherence, to give his story definite shape and meaning, underlies the entire trip, and Fuller suggests a long chain of knowledge that might follow. To understand K would mean to understand the war, which in turn would increase her knowledge of the culture in which she came of age and, by extension her yearning to feel affiliation with Zimbabwe. But exorcising K's war demons means that the knowledge she seeks to gain will never be comforting. Fuller goes into this project knowing that she will inevitably find a cultural inheritance of racism and senseless violence rather than the belonging she might hope for.

Senseless violence is exactly what K's previously untold story reveals. After observing an unusual amount of activity among the women of a Zimbabwean village, K concluded that they were sheltering and feeding freedom fighters. Knowing well that he could track them using his military training and instincts, he opted to go to the village and interrogate the women instead. The goal, K claims, was to find out where the men were hiding in order to eliminate them. He describes the method of interrogation as "psychological," as he ordered that a sixteen-year-old girl be stripped and beaten in front of her mother and grandmother. When the girl refused to talk, he resorted to a form of waterboarding. Then, in a final attempt to extract information, K shoved a stick of hot porridge into her vagina. The girl later died.

K's telling of the story is filled with sentiments of regret, and it is clear that his version of events has the distancing intent of confession. Notably, Fuller's war narrative changes during *Scribbling the Cat* in a way that undoes the "innocent" child narrator in which *Don't Let's Go* was so invested:

And I thought, I *own* this now. This was *my* war too. I had been a small, smug white girl shouting, “We are all Rhodesians and we’ll fight through *thickandthin*.” I was every bit that woman’s murderer. Back then—during the war—I had waved encouragement at the troopies, a thin, childish arm high in the air in a salute of victory, when they dusted past us in their armored lorries with their guns to the ready. I said, “I had no idea....” But I did. I knew, without really being told out loud, what happened in the war and I knew it was as brutal and indefensible as what I had just heard from K. I just hadn’t wanted to know. (152)

Seen as a moment of war reportage, this account drastically changes the ways in which African conflicts are recorded. Fuller reflects on the Rhodesian war in ways that refuse to make a spectacle of black violence, as this story of white violence needs to be told and is done intimately and vividly here. In fact, her emphasis on the war’s emotional fractures place the conflict’s drama elsewhere, making the Rhodesian war about how to take responsibility for a collective state of mind rather than individual actions. As a child, she could not have altered atrocities like the ones K describes. But, as a member of the ruling, White Rhodesian class, she bears some responsibility for this kind of brutality. What this moment, and many others in Fuller’s war narratives, models is a kind of witness narrative that acknowledges complicity with racism as central to constructions of White Rhodesian identity. Although her father may believe there is nothing to discuss, Fuller’s narratives bring the causes and the aftermath of the Rhodesian War—even the belief that there is nothing to talk about—to the forefront. This technique, rooted in return, inhabits a very different narrative space than the confessional mode because it pushes for cohesion between the past and present selves rather than a divide.⁶² At the center of this particular work is the idea that war writing is necessarily a process of textual return in which the conflict can be made personal. In returning to the sites of conflict and analyzing its

⁶² In a 2011 interview, in fact, she notes, “If you plug [*Scribbling the Cat*] into a confessional model, I can imagine it would feel like a train wreck” (Le Seuer).

dynamics, Fuller can bear witness to war as a condition that remains long after the official dates of conflict.

For Fuller, an honest narrative takes the form of her modified war reportage which includes a constellation of historical and narrative factors: the political facts of anticolonial resistance to white Rhodesia; the everyday atrocity that accompanies a race war; Fuller's own memory of living in a war zone; the desire to comprehend the past and take responsibility for it; the effects of this past on her presently conceived identity; and how to best represent a past that has seemingly ended yet whose effects continue to reverberate. If her treatment of K's revelatory story is one method of combining the experiences of witnessing, participating in, and narrating the war, Fuller's narrative swells further with the addition of her own multiple returns for these travels. Returning to Africa allows Fuller to write an anatomy of white privilege, for she is in a position to rethink the terms of conflict that had seemed so natural to her as a child living in Rhodesia. In her case, the process of coming back to Africa in person offers perspective on her own narrative position. As a returnee, she assumes a slightly anthropological gaze at Southern African whiteness, noting that the differences between living in Africa and North America are almost elemental: "It should not be physically possible to get from the banks of the Pepani River to Wyoming in less than two days, because mentally and emotionally it is impossible. The shock is too much, the contrast too raw" (72). The act of moving between Africa and the United States heightens Fuller's awareness of what Africa is like and how the people there live their lives. But even more critically, it allows Fuller to understand the ways that White Africans have used and understood the ends of Empire as a basis for their self identifications. Her witnessed accounts are an attempt to

articulate a kind of belonging that critiques White histories of Africa and is based in the racist war through which they all must identify themselves.

Like Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, Peter Godwin's first memoir, *Mukiwa*, narrates a set of historical and personal circumstances from colonial Rhodesia and independent Zimbabwe, but his return to the Rhodesian war and the years following Zimbabwean independence resonate with a very different tone. Stylistically, Fuller chooses to display the omnipresent racist settler rhetoric of her childhood. By contrast, Godwin's narratives are less invested in portraying a toxic culture of Whiteness. His narratives emphasize the politics of White African history and belonging. Like Fuller's first book, Godwin's debut *Mukiwa* is a narrative of return to the past, but it also includes his return in-person to Zimbabwe after the country gained its independence. The majority of *Mukiwa* is spent recounting Godwin's education in the private schools of Rhodesia and his mandatory service in the Rhodesian police force during the war. As a reluctant officer in Matabeleland, Godwin focuses on developing working relationships with the locals living in the "Tribal Trust Lands." His narrative shows his own efforts at establishing a partnership with the black Africans of the area and the favorable response he receives. But, these moments are continually undermined by the poor, racially motivated decisions of his fellow white officers. By the end of his duty, Godwin can claim little, if any, progress in the area. After his mandatory service ends, Godwin leaves Rhodesia for university at Cambridge, returning once for his sister's funeral. The next trip home is to a different country altogether, as he settles into a variety of jobs in the new Zimbabwe.

The opening section of the memoir, which chronicles his home life and boarding school experiences, constructs the sense of an autobiographical subject that gradually

grows into a nuanced understanding of what Rhodesia's UDI and the war mean. Whereas Fuller shows how brutal and racist her childhood was, Godwin represents his Rhodesian youth as more idyllic and innocent. In some respects, these idyllic memories run the risk of idealizing Rhodesia and its race problems. The "innocent" narrator has an implicit license to focus on everyday white childhood activities rather than racial inequality, resulting in an early narrative that rarely registers racial tensions. Complex, black African points of view are omitted, Godwin claims, in an effort to avoid narratively colonizing the story of Zimbabwe's independence:

I am very conscious of whites writing for blacks. A lot of the best literature from South Africa and against apartheid comes from white authors. It's like we even steal their literature of suffering. It seems entirely inappropriate, and I'm sort of allergic to that, and it's why I stuck to my own experiences. (Wieners 31)

The pitfall of his racial ethics of narration, however, is its exclusive focus on whites and the implication that only white stories matter. At times, *Mukiwa* reads as a confessional that seeks to disavow the younger self and make claims for contemporary enlightenment. Godwin begins the book ignorant of the violence that claims his neighbor's life—he is more interested in the "terrific knife" that caused the murder—yet ends the memoir apologizing to a Filabusi man he had wrongly arrested during the Chimurenga (9, 414). Like Fuller's work, *Mukiwa*'s importance lies in the ways it transforms the confessional mode to produce a new method of war reportage, a project Godwin continues throughout his life writing on Africa. In a mixture of confessional narration and the stock moves of journalism, Godwin reports on the Rhodesian war and postcolonial Zimbabwe's conflicts as a witness: as one who both belongs and speaks from the outside.

Although *Mukiwa* is a memoir, it is primarily a book whose terms are set by war, so the public and private are bound together to an unusual degree. The early moments of home life, before and after Godwin becomes a boarder at Rhodesia's private schools, are interestingly devoid of wartime description yet peripherally concerned with the cultural (mis)translations that were of such importance in the Rhodesian war. *Mukiwa* makes the claim that identification with Rhodesia was a process of negotiating racial and cultural differences, and Godwin shows how these moments, rather than the officially sanctioned battles and fighting divisions, are so important to narrating the war itself. A primary example comes in Godwin's descriptions of the house cook, Knighty, who he acknowledges as both a "master brewer of the old traditional school" and "an ineffably bad cook" (32, 35). In both capacities Knighty is legendary: his homemade beer is "staggeringly potent," likely due to the unconventional flavoring of old car batteries, or freshly killed rodents and snakes; his meat rissoles and macaroni cheese, however, rarely come to the table fully cooked (33). Knighty's greatest culinary achievement, though, is the "potato bomb, one of the most exciting eating experiences of all time" (36). Godwin describes the dish as something more akin to an adventure rather than a meal:

From the outside it looked like a conventional mound of mashed potato [...] but inside was the gravy. I was always allowed to be first in, and the excitement was never knowing quite how far inside the gravy started. Because of the way that Knighty packed down the mashed potato mound, the gravy was stored under pressure and if you weren't extremely careful it could literally burst, splashing hot gravy all over the place to everyone's great amusement. (36)

Godwin's descriptions of the meal have the makings of a quirky vignette about growing up in Africa, and it clearly speaks to the book's Western reading public as a view inside a "non-Western" childhood. But Knighty's potato bomb is also about the ways in which

appearance and reality do not match. Although the potato mound seems “conventional,” it is a potentially hazardous endeavor, made more difficult by Knighty’s constantly evolving bomb designs: “It became a game between Knighty and me; he would constantly change his construction of the bomb, with dummy compartments and off-centre gravy cores to confuse me” (36). On one level, the potato bomb is a humorous childhood memory, but Godwin’s narration casually inserts the terms of war into the domestic sphere. What is usually off limits for the war narrative—life inside the home—is actually an early space of low-stakes warfare. In fact, Knighty’s concealment strategies serve as an analog of Godwin’s narrative strategies. The childhood idyll is not what it seems in *Mukiwa*, and by inserting wartime discourse into the domestic sphere, Godwin begins to assert a narrative position of being both simultaneously inside the situation and at an observational distance.

This narrative stance becomes more apparent when Godwin returns from university in Great Britain. He fashions himself as “returnee,” excited about the prospect of contributing to a Zimbabwean society built upon racial equality. Initially, he returns in order to perform research for his Oxford doctorate on the Rhodesian war, and Godwin captures the spirit of the newly independent nation as one that revels in possibility:

There were thousands, whites and blacks, who came back from abroad to take part in the bold new experiment, to help create a multiracial society that would be the envy of Africa. They called us “returnees” and we believed in the government’s policy of reconciliation—between races and between tribes. (327)

The immediately postcolonial moment is above all contradictory for Godwin. As an unwilling participant in the Rhodesian War, he never espoused a belief in white supremacy, yet he clearly benefited from having white skin. In returnee society, where

the black majority has control of the country, Godwin can revel in a culture where previously persecuted populations have gained access to power. Giving up political power, as a white man, does not mean giving up privilege, however, and Godwin's account of these early years conveys a sense of happiness about no longer bearing the white man's burden: "For the first time we were enjoying the country without a conscience. We were no longer in charge and, frankly, it was a relief" (328-29). As his research funding runs out, Godwin begins to supplement his income by working as a defense lawyer—for which he trained at Cambridge—and then as a journalist, professional positions that notably mix observation and participation. The initial return in *Mukiwa*, then, sets up a pattern for Godwin's career as a writer of Africa: he consistently returns in order to forge a participatory belonging premised upon his status as a witness, as both an insider and one who does not fully belong. While "journalist" and "lawyer" are certainly not synonymous with "witness," Godwin's journalism and memoirs take the ethical witnessing at the heart of these occupations and redefine his role as a yearning witness. While he reports on postcolonial Zimbabwe, Godwin attempts to forge a Zimbabwean sense of self as a witness. His memoirs attest to the notion that such witnessing often spectacularizes black violence while also exploring avenues for belonging in the contemporary Zimbabwean nation.

In his initial reports of the Gukurahundi, Godwin's status as witness is fully developed. Two years into independence, Mugabe's soldiers tortured, maimed, and murdered thousands in Matabeleland, many of whom were supporters of the opposition party. Their bodies were usually dumped in empty mine shafts or buried in mass graves, and most of the world knew nothing about it. By going into the region and reporting the

atrocities, Godwin took on an immense amount of risk, and his reports eventually alerted the world to the genocide and led to the government accusing him of treason. Anthony Chennells observes that Godwin's Gukurahundi reporting ultimately moves him towards a method of connecting himself to his homeland: "The final Matabeleland scenes refuse [Godwin] his right to detachment" (141). Chennells notes that the Matabeleland journalism ultimately severs Godwin from the ex-pat sentiments of "relief" at no longer being in charge.

Although the Gukurahundi reportage begins Godwin's attachment to Zimbabwe as a witness, this kind of participation also shows him replicating the spectacularized accounts of black violence that are a staple of white reporting on Africa. Although he notes that the cases of violence affected him as "real and personal" and "not just some tide of generic suffering," his reports on this tragedy are still standard journalistic accounts of racialized violence that are ready for global consumption (369). He writes as both a professional observer and as a participating witness, yearning for either a belonging that is not available to him or a postcolonial nation without such conflict. This ambivalent narrative stance colors the entire memoir—indeed, it is what makes Knighty's potato bomb so resonant—and it provides a template for the witnessing in his subsequent books on postcolonial Zimbabwe and its conflicts.

Godwin's two more recent works explicitly deal with the process of return and what bearing it has upon his desired affiliation with Zimbabwe, as he travels between his family in New York and his parents' home in Harare. *When A Crocodile Eats the Sun* is especially concerned with these multiple returns, as Godwin narrates the decline of the Zimbabwean state in the early 2000s and his attempts to care for his ageing parents who

insist on staying in Harare, despite their personal physical and economic collapses. *Crocodile* spans a time from 1996 to 2004, a period in which Mugabe began his policy of land redistribution for war veterans—groups of black men and women who made a claim to be veterans of the Rhodesian war. The land reformations were directed at white farm owners, most of whom had purchased the land legally after Zimbabwean independence. Although land reform was considered a minor issue among Zimbabweans (only 9 percent saw it as a priority in 2000, according to the Helen Suzman Foundation), Mugabe “choreographed a crisis” to paint the white Zimbabwean population as the heirs to the colonial exploitation the blacks fought against for independence (*Crocodile* 58-60). Godwin recounts the ways in which the “wovits”—so called because of how they pronounced “war vets”—would arrive on white-owned farms, refuse to leave, and eventually either force the owner off the land by making the land unworkable or by attacking the farm house. Thus, the climate to which Godwin re-returns (after his exile in the wake of the Gukurahundi) is already heavily saturated with racial discord. In the months leading into a public vote on Mugabe’s constitutional referendum that would extend his rule by twelve years, his party ran newspaper ads and supported news reports in which “white Zimbabweans were now referred to as the ‘nonindigenous,’ ‘Britain’s children,’ and even simply ‘the enemy’” (59). Clearly, it is a time in which questions of race and belonging are under public contestation, and *Crocodile* uses Godwin’s multiple movements to Zimbabwe as a conduit for rethinking his desired affiliations with the country of his birth.

With race and belonging at the forefront of the contemporary moment, Godwin’s memoirs suggest that the primary method for understanding his own Africanness is to

interrogate his own participation in Zimbabwe. This, of course, involves narrating from *Mukiwa's* point of view—from the position of the insider witness who remains outside. In his two later memoirs, Godwin more directly assumes the position of yearning witness, implying that being both inside and outside the situation is perhaps the most productive form of belonging available to white Africans who feel the pull of affiliation but do not quite belong. He certainly rejects the discourse of postcolonial white victimhood that results when white citizenship is curtailed, calling white Africans “that least defensible of constituencies, the unwronged” (128). “Unwronged” scorns narratives of victimhood that abound when white African citizenship is regulated, as in the case of farmers whose land had been “redistributed.” But it also indicates the kind of belonging that he himself occupies, where he maintains a presence in Zimbabwe as an observer while recording the ways in which others are wronged. In *The Fear*, his most recent work, Godwin comes to accept that a large part of his returns to Zimbabwe has to do with “bearing witness.” It is a phrase he does not take lightly, for he is conscious of the ways that white reporting on Africa can easily lapse into descriptions of the unparticular:

I shrink from generalizing what “they” have gone through, because it can feed into the sense that this is some un-differentiated, amorphous mass of Third World peasantry. Some generic, fungible frieze of suffering. One that animates briefly as you intersect with it, rubber-necking at it, a drive-by misery that disappears as you motor away over the horizon. And for the first time, in trying to work out why I am here, and whether it is constructive, doing what I am doing, I find myself settling on a phrase that I have always avoided, a description I had found pretentious, but that now seems oddly apt—*bearing witness*. (138)

As an account of the post-election violence of 2008, *The Fear* is most explicitly about bearing witness. It is a careful record of what ordinary men and women suffered for

voting against Mugabe.⁶³ Importantly, Godwin bears witness to the violence against black Zimbabweans, suggesting that the recent land redistribution—also discussed at length in *The Fear*—and these post-election terror campaigns ought to be understood as part of the same conversation. Yet, for as attached to and conscious of black Zimbabwean humanity as Godwin is, these memoirs are still written accounts of postcolonial violence in Africa by a white man. As such, almost by default, they resonate with and perpetuate stories of generic African suffering consumed by a global reading public.

The high levels of self-awareness with which both Fuller and Godwin write, especially the ways in which they understand their relationships to indigenous black Africans, make these memoirs compelling arenas for investigating the ways white African identities are constructed in terms of witnessing and participating in the postcolony. In contrast to the independence narratives often associated with postcolonial African literature, these white African memoirs of independence take an often contradictory stance towards independent Zimbabwe and its postcolonial society. In particular, these narrative returns by displaced white Africans to the moment of independence prove fertile ground for re-thinking white belonging. Although they are ultimately separated from, both Godwin and Fuller must also incorporate these histories of white violence as part of their identifications with Zimbabwe.

⁶³ In the 2008 elections, Morgan Tsvangirai, the representative of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) beat Mugabe despite poll rigging, intimidation, and fraud that virtually ensured a victory for Mugabe and his Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party. The MDC had mounted a challenge in 2000 as well, but the 2008 elections marked the first time that the people of Zimbabwe had overcome Mugabe’s political machine with enough force to undeniably vote for the opposition. Mugabe, however, contested the election and changed the results to show that Tsvangirai received less than the 50% necessary to win outright. This led to a runoff election, for which Mugabe ensured victory with force. Mugabe’s supporters and government forces intimidated and murdered thousands in what Godwin calls a “smart genocide” where “there’s no need to directly kill hundreds of thousands, if you can select and kill the right few thousand” (*The Fear* 109). *The Fear* documents this political intimidation and the “abuse on an industrial scale” that resulted from Mugabe’s grip on power (139).

The Family Histories of Aidan Hartley and Rian Malan

As a correspondent for Channel Four's *Unreported World* in Britain, Aidan Hartley now re-covers the ground he wrote about for over two decades as a reporter for Reuters in Africa. He frequently writes and reports on election violence in his native Kenya, where he still lives, or the fighting that has continued in Somalia since he first reported on it in 1991.⁶⁴ Having grown up in Kenya, and attended university at Oxford and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Hartley traveled to the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam as a stringer for London's *Financial Times*. He eventually became an Africa correspondent for the wire agency Reuters, covering the major Eastern and Southern African events of the 1990s, such as the Somali famine and civil war and the Rwandan genocide.

Having spent a significant amount of time covering Africa in the news, Hartley reflects on these seminal moments in contemporary African history in his 2003 memoir *The Zanzibar Chest*. The book records the business of reporting on Africa—a place that “had become a nasty, primitive joke in the papers” when Hartley began his career—and how his individual and family identification with Africa shapes how he writes about and lives in Kenya, which he considers his homeland (127). For Hartley, this process of affiliation involves working through his family's colonial history, his experiences as a journalist with Reuters, and his present-day work as a journalist and farmer on the

⁶⁴*Unreported World* is one of the longest running foreign affairs shows in the UK, and Hartley is a regular contributor. He frequently reports on African politics, among other things. “The Master Chef of Mogadishu,” for example, records Hartley's return to Mogadishu, Somalia, where he covered the Civil War in the early 1990s. The program presents the heroic actions of Ahmed Jama, a Somali chef who left his successful London restaurant to open a chain of restaurants in Mogadishu. His downtown restaurant has been the site of a suicide bombing, and Jama has received numerous death threats from Islamic radicals; yet he continues to run his restaurants to demonstrate the country's potential for future peace.

Laikipia plateau in central Kenya's Rift Valley. In his Postscript, Hartley notes these influences on his conception of self: "I am like my forefathers, who tried to conquer others only to be won over themselves" (476). Alternating between his own experiences reporting Africa and his family's history of colonial administration, *The Zanzibar Chest* draws a striking comparison between the journalist and the colonial administrator. He portrays himself as one who critiques the legacy of colonialism, even as he borders on recolonizing Africa textually as a white reporter of black violence.

As a document of witness to African conflict, *The Zanzibar Chest* hybridizes standard journalism to an unusual degree. The expectations of multinational publications are thoroughly explained in the memoir, and his journalistic accounts mostly adhere to these standards. The memoir of his family and his own life, on the other hand, cuts across these "factual" accounts to show how witnessing these contemporary conflicts, and bearing witness to the histories that produced them, influences his own affiliation with Kenya. Curiously, when Hartley narrates his family's colonial past, he focuses on the story of his father's close friend in the Middle East, Peter Davey. Near the end of his father's life, Hartley finds his father's papers in the chest of the book's title; at the bottom are his father's journals along with Davey's diary. Hartley's father and Davey served as administrators in Aden during and after World War II. The longer Davey lived in the Middle East, the more he began to live like those around him. He eventually converted to Islam and married an Arabian woman named Sheikha. After a confrontation with a local leader, the British authorities found an excuse to end the marriage and send Davey home for a time. Upon his return to Aden in 1947, Davey was transferred to Dhala where he took charge of a difficult civil unrest involving British support for an unpopular local

leader. As he involved himself in Dhala's problems, Davey became sympathetic to the area's rebelling factions, but his duties to the empire required that he arrest the rebel leader, Mohamed Awas. When he arrived, Awas attacked Davey, killing him with a dagger to the chest; Davey's guards quickly retaliated by shooting Awas and the slave who came to protect him.

In the sections of *The Zanzibar Chest* that narrate Davey's experiences, Hartley works his way through Davey's diaries while visiting some of the major sites of his father's and Davey's pasts. In despair because of his father's death, Hartley takes his mother's advice to follow Davey's story: "Davey's the golden thread leading you through all of this. Why not go to Aden? Follow the story?" (159). Hartley soon discovers that following the story means understanding the ends of the British Empire, as he meets with elderly colonials, "wading through the synaptic junk of sixty years" (175). Although stories of the empire's glory are widely available, he fears that Davey's experiences "might have sunk into the sands within the span of only the generation since the British had left [Aden]" (166). Recovering and understanding Davey's story—originally a task for understanding Hartley's late father—becomes a process by which he can also begin to think about the British presence overseas and what kinds of affiliations they enable and foreclose.⁶⁵ Clearly, Davey offers a complex study of the affiliations developed when one identifies with Britain and its (former) colonies equally, a situation which Hartley himself understands.

⁶⁵ Like Hartley and the other writers in this chapter, Davey has an interesting relationship to the term "British" himself. He was born in Arabia and spoke perfect Arabic, yet spent the majority of his childhood in Sussex, returning to Arabia in 1932 at age eighteen, eventually serving as an aide-de-camp for the British governor.

For Hartley, Davey's diaries become a vehicle for understanding himself as a confused subject of Britain. Kenya, he claims, is and will be his home; yet he also inevitably questions what kind of home Africa might be for a white descendant of colonial authority. Hartley identifies with them as ambivalent agents of colonialism, a manner in which he also understands his own profession as a journalist. He can imagine them in positive terms, yet Hartley ultimately resists the larger enterprise they involved themselves in. As he reads Davey's diary and revisits the main sites of his life, Hartley feels a connection to the past that he is attempting to recover:

I began to sense that the themes from past and present were playing alongside each other, as in a musical refrain I shared [Davey's] intimate thoughts, the loneliness of his life. The immediacy of his entries, describing events that day in the place where I now sat all those years later, gave me an intense sensation of physical proximity. (176)

In retracing Davey's life, Hartley also comes to terms with the ends of Britain's empire as part of his own story, with the imperial moment uncannily in proximity to the present. Hartley's father traveled to Dhala to investigate Davey's death and called in the Royal Air Force to demolish the fort Awas had built. When the fort was vacated, the British exploded it at the direction of Hartley's father. When he returns to Yemen for research into Davey's life, Hartley visits the ruins of this fort as well as the new village. Significantly, the past plays an important part in Hartley's interactions with the villagers, as he reveals his family's history in the area:

I told the group that it was my father who had destroyed their village. [...] There was a stunned silence. The seconds crept by. My heart beat faster. My vision narrowed to a tunnel. I experienced the strange sensation that my father and Davey were nearby. The decades peeled away for the villagers too. I know it. Then it was gone. (446)

His audience responds with laughter, asking if the British have any intention of returning to Yemen soon. This passage in which Hartley reveals his father's role in the fort's destruction suggests a particular desire to come to terms with the colonial past in Hartley's mind—but his confessional narrative is entirely misplaced. Admitting to the historical failures of colonialism does not produce the kind of emotionally satisfying results he might have desired. Hartley's admission about his father does not significantly alter either side's narrative of the colonial past, and this confession does nothing to promote a new future of healing, belonging, or mutual identification.

Rather than offer ineffective confessions, the majority of Hartley's narrative hybridizes his memoir of return to Africa and his work there as a correspondent in the 1990s. Beginning with his time as a stringer, Hartley narrates his coverage of Ethiopia's 1989 overthrow of Mengistu Haile Mariam, the destruction of Somalia by warlords in the early 1990s, and the 1994 Rwandan genocide, all of which are central to a contemporary negative image of Africa globally.⁶⁶ The decision to return as a journalist is one that Hartley makes based on his limited prospects in Africa as a participant. After attending SOAS, he is only interested in living in Africa, despite his father's imperial-minded advice to move to Canada, "where there's lots of space" (78). For Hartley, though, Canada is never an option: "I was looking for a home, not a Canada. And the only home I had ever really had was as a boy in Africa. [...] A lost time when the sun shone, before life grew complicated" (78). Although Kenya holds idyllic memories of his youth—and is similarly saturated with colonial-style fantasies of adventure and self-satisfaction—

⁶⁶ It bears noting that Hartley and Jonathan Clayton coined the term "warlords" in their coverage of Somalia: "Nothing like Somalia had ever happened before and at first we had no idea what to call the frightening new strongmen. After discussing revolutionary China, Jonathan and I decided to christen the Somali militia leaders 'warlords' and the name was taken up by everybody in the news business" (204).

Hartley is painfully aware of the differences between past and present-day Africa for white locals. He notes, “I had few choices about what I might do” (78). Having rejected running safaris, humanitarian work, and small-time manufacturing, Hartley decides that journalism offers the kind of engaged participation in Africa that he so desires:

Since I would live under a brutal dictatorship just about wherever I lived in Africa—and on account of my white skin, which disqualified me from participating in the politics of my own homeland—I must be blind to the corruption, killings, and general misrule. Alternatively, I might become a journalist and confront these things head on, which is what I decided to do. (79)

This moment of the memoir takes on multiple layers of significance, for it begins Hartley’s career as a journalist, but—like Godwin—it also closely ties his return to Kenya with an ethically driven sense of responsibility to address the problems of his homeland. His year at SOAS profoundly alters his perspective on the revolutionary leaders of Africa, especially Tanzania’s Julius Nyerere, who expropriated the Hartley family ranch in the early years of independence. SOAS teaches Hartley a different lesson about Nyerere: “I grew ashamed of my British colonial past and believed that the only way I might atone for my presence in Africa would be to openly confess the wrongdoings of my people and to rail against the continuing exploitation of the continent by the ‘rich world’” (83). In his rendering of this moment of return, then, Hartley addresses both the postcolonial moment of which he is a part and the colonial past that paved the way for his involvement in Africa in the first place. His theoretical reassessment of colonial exploitation is relatively straightforward, and he brings this historical specificity to the practice of witnessing postcolonial African conflict. Journalism—and his account of it in *The Zanzibar Chest*—gives Hartley an avenue for participating in contemporary Africa one who yearns for belonging. The resulting work, then, highlights his need to provide a

highly historicized version of postcolonial conflict that does justice to his homeland; yet it also adopts some of the narrative tropes that spectacularize such conflict for a Western readership.

In *The Zanzibar Chest*, Hartley's accounts of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the Somali Civil War that began in 1990 bend the genre of journalism to do the narrative work of a yearning witness. While the genocide in Rwanda greatly affects Hartley, it is his involvement in the Somalia story that most clearly reveals the ways in which he both witnesses African violence and identifies with the continent. His narrative of the Somali conflict is notable because of Hartley's vexed position as a reporter. To begin with, he positions his coverage of the war as something akin to colonizing the story for his own sense of adventure and self-satisfaction: "I had decided that what I was looking for was a war that I could call my own, a story that was mine, a complete experience that would define me as the son of my fathers and involve me as an insider, from the outbreak of hostilities to the victory parades and humiliation of the vanquished" (193). The dual position Hartley creates for himself is complicated, as he wishes to belong as an African insider and as a cosmopolitan authority reporting from an exotic dateline. He maneuvers between these poles in the same manner that he represents the story of his father and Davey: by using the colonial past as a critical starting point for a meaningful investigation of the present. In this, Hartley pushes the boundaries of war reportage, making bold claims about the colonial and Cold War pasts that are rarely included in Western media accounts of the Somali civil war.

Hartley was among the first to report on the destruction in Mogadishu and to raise awareness of the catastrophic famine that resulted from the actions of warlords like

Mohamed Farah Aydiid. But his particular account is especially invested in historicizing the violence and particularizing Somalia; thus, he presents the colonial and Cold War histories of Somalia as precursors to the violence that gained international attention in the early 1990s. Hartley writes that the colonial division of Africa's Horn is one factor in the rise of those like Aydiid: "We must share some of the blame for why Somalia became such a burned-out, smoking hole. [...] [W]hereas elsewhere in Africa frontiers tended to lump unrelated tribes together, such boundaries in this case scattered a people who had one common language, culture, and religion" (201). Hartley's gloss of the colonial past narrates a senseless precursor to senseless 1990s violence: the British, French, and Italians all grabbed pieces of the region for big-game hunting, imperial pride, and the desire to give each European citizen a banana a day, respectively. He notes the similarly destructive Western involvement during the Cold War, when General Mohamed Siad Barre aligned himself with the United States and then bankrupted his country by "plundering humanitarian aid deliveries" from the UN in the 1980s (203).

Hartley's challenge as a journalist, in covering both the war and the famine that it caused, "was to make audiences appreciate that naked, black, Muslim Africans were worth caring for" (241). The narrative challenge of *The Zanzibar Chest*, on the other hand, is to account for his reporting methods to distance himself from the kinds of spectacularizing Afro-pessimism he trades in as a witness to violence. It is hardly surprising, then, that *The Zanzibar Chest* harshly critiques U.S. intervention in Somalia, given some of his positive associations between the 1992 operation and his family's imperial history, and the ways that both failed to bring about new world orders: "To be truthful, I saw it as a new civilizing mission, similar to the imperialism of my British

forebears in that it would bring to an end starvation, war, and dictatorship and replace it with peace, justice, and proper government” (250). By May 1993, Hartley’s optimism about the war’s imminent end turned to disappointment, as he notes, “Somalia had moved into a completely new phase, but I wouldn’t say the U.S. Marines had ushered in a renaissance” (256). In the end, Hartley most strongly critiques the U.S. for their numerous attacks on civilian targets assumed to be housing warlords, which ultimately turned the majority of Somalis against all foreign presence.

The alternative narrative of African conflict he constructs, at times, is self-serving, and he tends to glorify the colonial past in somewhat discomfiting ways. For a writer so attuned to nuance and history in his analysis of how Somalia suffered because of imperialisms, his reverence for British imperialism as a “civilizing mission” seems contradictory. Indeed, for all of his concern with breaking away from stereotypes in terms of his memoir’s content, the form remains saddled to some of the tired clichés of African reportage. Hartley’s reporters are a hypermasculine group, where women often participate but are not necessarily accepted as social equals, and a good many pages are spent recounting the other hallmark of white writing about Africa—his sexual exploits in foreign lands. Yet, in some respects, these contradictory elements—the replication of colonial cliché alongside postcolonial political critique—are the hallmarks of the new kind of African conflict narrative for white African authors I am charting here.

Such complex and competing affiliations make *The Zanzibar Chest* one of the more intriguing representations of white African identity, for Hartley is able to maintain almost dueling senses of self. And all of this present-day affiliative complexity is mediated through an understanding of history that acknowledges and works through a

colonial perspective that he does not endorse. Yet he also acknowledges his emotional attachment to this history. In the end, as a gesture of coming to terms with both his career as a professional witness and his father's as a white administrator in the Empire, Hartley sees his personal stories and his professional narratives of Africa as compatible and mutually sustaining:

We are living out the consequences of history, but at the same time each generation must learn the lessons of experience for itself. [...] I was the son who grew up loving Africa because of his father. I loved it and wanted it to love me back. In witnessing the suffering and beauty of Africa's story, I have finally become a tiny part of its fabric. (471)

Being a part of the African fabric, for Hartley, is premised upon having witnessed and testified to so much atrocity. In fact, such witnessing is a deliberate tactic in an effort to feel such a connection to a larger African collective in which he cannot imagine belonging in conventional postcolonial terms. He suggests that this is the only option available to him as he yearns for acceptance, but even this final portrait of himself is problematically bound by clichéd images of white Africa. As the boy who loved Africa too much to stay away, Hartley forges his place in the collective even as he remains at a distance from it.

Hartley self-identifies with Kenya, just as Fuller and Godwin understood themselves as Zimbabweans and former Rhodesians. Kenya and Rhodesia are two African countries with histories of settler colonialism, but the white population in both countries was a very small percentage of the national census. By contrast, South Africa's long and complex past of settler colonialism features a more visible white presence, and in the final years of apartheid rule and resistance to it, white representations of South African conflict are certainly varied. Perhaps no document enacts this variability—and

has had international visibility—like *My Traitor's Heart*, the narrative of return by Afrikaaner journalist Rian Malan in 1985.

As the descendant of a famous family of Afrikaners, Rian Malan claims a special ability to narrate the structure and effects of apartheid for white and black South Africans. Beginning with the first member of his family to arrive in the Cape of Good Hope, in 1688, Malan briefly traces his genealogy through Dawid Malan, his eighteenth century ancestor, all the way to Daniel Francois Malan—an architect of apartheid—and General Magnus Malan, apartheid-era South Africa's Minister of Defense. With such a family history, Malan feels almost destined to be related to the structure of racism built into South Africa's political and social life. Like the other texts in this chapter, *My Traitor's Heart* reveals the ways in which its author broke with the cozy racism of white settler culture, advocating against apartheid and its injustices. In service of his political ideals, Malan dabbles in “black culture”—an ambiguous idea, Malan jokes, that he and his friends superficially adopted “in much the same way that [they] got into bell-bottom pants” (56). After working as a crime reporter for the Johannesburg *Star*, Malan flees South Africa to avoid compulsory military service, spending the next eight years mostly in Los Angeles. In 1985, as images of South Africa proliferate in the American media, Malan returns home, with the idea of writing a book about his family's history and “to seek a resolution of the paradox of [his] South African life” (103).

Like *The Zanzibar Chest*, Malan's return to South Africa is as invested in narrating the political climate to which he returns as it is rethinking his own sense of self as a returnee. He spends the majority of *My Traitor's Heart* reconstructing and commenting upon “tales of the way we killed one another” (103). Some of his examples

focus on interracial brutality, as in the accounts of the white police murder of thirteen-year-old choirboy Moses Mope; the lynching of Dennis Mosheshwe by white farmers; or the killing spree of the “Hammerman” Simon Mpungose, who, armed with a hammer, murdered a number of whites in their Empangeni homes. Other “tales of ordinary murder” include violence between revolutionary followers of the African National Congress and the Black Consciousness followers of Steve Biko. Malan’s intent, it seems, is to unsettle the master narrative of apartheid as the interpretive key to violence in South Africa. Instead, he inserts uncertain micro-narratives of violence which apartheid fails to fully explain. Near the end of this section of the memoir, Malan addresses his reader:

Am I upsetting you, my friend? Good. Do you want to argue? Do you want to tell me about the evil of apartheid? Do you want to talk about democracy and the allied civil and human rights that fall under the umbra of its name? Okay. Let’s open my bulging files of tales of ordinary murder. You choose your weapons and I’ll choose mine, and we’ll annihilate the certainties in one another’s brains. (330)

Malan consistently puts these varying types of violence together as a narrative indicator of his own uncertainty about late apartheid and transition South Africa, but it is important to note, however, that Malan’s work is generally critical across racial lines. Even if apartheid racism fails to explain South African violence completely, Malan acknowledges and critiques the supremacist attitudes of the white South Africans he profiles. Lumping these crimes together as “ordinary murder” is an ambiguous critical move, however, as it both attests to the normalization of violence in the white supremacist state and equates this organized and socially endorsed violence with a black man’s seemingly random murders of white farmers. The certainty with which Malan begins his investigations quickly collapses into an overwhelming lack of understanding.

Glen Retief succinctly summarizes Malan's narrative techniques for each of these "ordinary murders": "The consistent pattern is the sincere attempt to understand the motives of the killers, followed by the dismissal of all conventional progressive and sociological explanations and the resort to tropes of mysteriousness, cultural otherness, and inscrutability" (234). The book's treatment of the "Hammerman," Simon Mpungose, is a telling example of this pattern as well as Malan's narrative strategies for delivering an uncertain account of South African violence. His descriptions and interpretations of Mpungose's murders and trial display Malan's yearning to participate in the public spectacle of racial violence through acts of witnessing. To chronicle and then assess Mpungose's actions, Malan must account for two hundred years of racism, bear witness to its contemporary effects, and craft a narrative that asserts his own insider status while remaining at a comfortable distance.

Initially, Malan assumes the murders to be motivated by racial hatred, that they are a response to living as a victim of apartheid racism. While this is partially the case, the special circumstances surrounding Mpungose—he is directly descended from an incestuous relationship, which, in Malan's account, is a transgression that haunts the participants as well as their descendants—lend another point of view on the murders as well as issues of racial understanding in a South African context. Malan spends three chapters on Mpungose: the first outlines the crimes and Mpungose's testimony at the trial that followed; the second chapter offers a less obvious interpretation of the crimes and trial; the third and final portion relates these proceedings with the lessons he took away from Simon Mpungose's story. As a whole, the three-chapter section reads like a piece of investigative journalism, where the goal is to bring to light the gaps in the popular

understanding of Mpungose's story. Unlike some of the other war reportage I have examined in this chapter, Malan takes on a number of narrative styles, often sounding more like "true crime" than standard journalism or memoir. The narrative itself employs various techniques to plot the investigation and discovery and involve the reader in both condemning apartheid racism and diminishing its importance in this instance of violence.

The first chapter of this sequence is an episodic retelling of the murders Mpungose committed and the trial that followed his arrest. Malan tries on a number of narrative styles throughout, beginning with his decision to address the reader as an accompanying witness, or as a tour director guiding the reader through a South Africa he knows intimately: "Take my hand, and let's fly like gods to where it happened. Let's swoop down on the Indian Ocean port of Durban and race north along the torrid coastal lowlands, over gleaming seaside mansions and palm-fringed resorts, over the Tugela River, and into Zululand" (181). After this sweeping journey across South Africa, Malan begins narrating in free indirect discourse, taking his reader into the minds of the ruling white planter class in Empangeni. Of the "good old days," Malan writes: "In those days, the Zulus knew their place and kept to it, scurrying around on the periphery of white lives, bearing gin and tonics, responding to bells, cutting cane, and minding children" (183). This narration extends for most of the first of these three chapters, and it effectively makes the Mpungose story about white terror and the absolute shock to the planters' assumptions about their Zulu workers caused by the murders. Much like Fuller's first memoir, Malan's narrative style here effectively normalizes the racism of this class of South Africans by blurring the lines between Malan the narrator and his subjects, as the racially charged sentiments are narratively on par with Malan's more

prosaic descriptions of the area and its inhabitants. The narrative then changes again to a more journalistic account of the trial, with Malan narrating the events and Mpungose's testimony. Finally, the chapter ends with Malan's lament about Simon and his death, offering an initial interpretation of what these events mean: "[I]t struck me as a remarkable parable of life in a country where blacks were being kept down lest they leap up and slit white throats. [...] If you treat a black man that way, he will indeed leap up and drive a hammer into your brain. That seemed to be Simon's message" (204).

The second segment of this section shows Malan investigating Simon Mpungose's background in order to understand how he became "the Hammerman." The style is more uniform throughout the section, filtered through Malan as a journalist and the discoveries he makes while investigating. Significantly, he finds that Simon's story is entangled with culturally specific ways of knowing the world, a subtlety that is completely lost in his murder trial. Malan soon recognizes that Simon is the descendant of an incestuous relationship, and the price he and his relatives have to pay for this social transgression is cultural isolation. Using this new evidence as an interpretive lens for the murders and trial, Malan sees that Mpungose's actions and testimony belong to "a parallel world, a kingdom of unconquered consciousness that had somehow proved invulnerable to the white man's guns, his corruptive culture, and his truculent missionary faith" (222). Malan's problem with his initial assessment of Mpungose—that his murders are inspired by apartheid racism—is that it is a lazy, almost automatic interpretation that does not recognize the cultural specifics of Zulu life, where the descendants of an incestuous relationship are ostracized from the beginning. In a moving moment, Malan recognizes: "I was deaf in Simon's language, and blind in his culture" (224). At the end

of the section, the culturally specific reading of Simon that Malan offers leads him into uncertainty rather than interpretive clarity.

These first two chapters of the Hammerman section indicate the extent to which Malan sees himself as a witness to and participant in apartheid violence. In fact, he adopts the position of the witness as the only acceptable form of identification with apartheid South Africa, as it allows him to participate in constructing these various racialized cultures where he cannot fully belong. The yearning to find belonging via witnessing comes across throughout this section, either in laments about misunderstanding Simon's language or in trying on the attitudes of white settlers. Such narrative techniques highlight his status as a participatory, yearning witness, and he carries these strategies through the sequence's final chapter.

This final chapter remains as uncertain and ambiguous as the first two, as Malan applies the lesson of Simon Mpungose to his own point of view as a white South African. The narrative in this portion lingers on a photograph from his childhood and some brief encounters with what might vaguely be called "African spirituality." Concerning how he and other white South Africans recognize the spiritual practices of black South Africans, Malan notes, "Our eyes are sealed by cataracts against which our white brains project their chosen preconceptions of Africa and Africans. Some whites see danger, some savagery, some see victims, and some see revolutionary heroes. Very few of us see clearly" (227). The implication is, of course, that Malan now sees clearly—at least as clearly as he is able—and that this clarity of vision is linked to his status as a witness. He ends the chapter with the lessons he learned from the Hammerman. Unsurprisingly, they are about untranslatable cultural divides and blurry notions of black and white South

African cultures: “In my time, in my country, white men assumed that they were the center of the black universe—that they had subjugated the dreams and psyches of Africans, along with their bodies. It simply wasn’t true. That is what Simon taught me” (235). This suggests that racist state policies are not the center of the black universe and cannot be the only interpretive method when it comes to black violence. Although it has different political results, this point of view, like the other white returnees discussed in this chapter, fashions a different mode of narrating African conflict that is the hallmark of yearning witness testimony. It makes the conflict strange yet replicates the key, accepted narrative terms of Africa—that Africans are different and unknowable and violent—for a global reading audience.

I outline the Hammerman section of *My Traitor’s Heart* because it offers a condensed example of the book’s organizing logic and narrative technique. Although the work is an investigation of apartheid racism and its cultural expressions, large portions show these to be inadequate terms of interpretation. The Hammerman section briefly acknowledges that apartheid must have played some part in Mpungose’s motive, but the explanatory power rests on specifically Zulu ways of living and their effects on Simon. The sheer number of narrative forms that Malan tries on in the Hammerman story suggests the proliferating interpretations that come when apartheid is no longer the only framework for understanding this violence. In many respects, this is a bold and generative move to make, and Malan is convincing in his point that there are other salient cultural explanations for the violence that pervades late-apartheid and transition-era South Africa. However, following Retief’s analysis, I would claim that Malan’s recurring “tropes of mysteriousness, cultural otherness, and inscrutability” chiefly serve to displace

apartheid with a different master narrative of South African violence (234). One of the major problems with this shift in interpretive frameworks comes in the memoir's final portion, when Malan relates another micro-narrative of South Africa.

The final section of *My Traitor's Heart* narrates Malan's journey to Msinga, the rural town in which Neil and Creina Alcock settled a farming community with the goal of producing sustainable agriculture that could be maintained and profited upon by mostly black African families. The Alcocks themselves lived on around \$50 per month and had a style of life that resembled the Africans with whom they worked. Clearly, the Alcocks live admirable, morally informed lives. Neil began his career as an activist by selling his surplus milk to local black Africans at cost, a decision that contradicted the national policy of dumping excess milk in order to maintain higher prices. In Msinga, they withstood droughts and floods in the name of developing agriculture, a project that largely failed for a number of complex reasons. As the memoir's final set piece, the story of the Alcocks becomes a moment to emphasize the untenability of apartheid as the only explanation for African conflict. Again, Malan uses a highly circumscribed subject to make the claim that any attempt at definite understanding in South Africa is naïve. Tellingly, Malan leaves the cultural specifics out of this final section, placing the Alcocks in a generic African farm where everyone else is generically black.

But the any-Africa narrative conclusion begins within a very specific national history. When he travels to Msinga, Malan endeavors to find "a way to live in this strange country—for an alternative, if one existed, to the law of Dawid Malan" (343). The story of Dawid Malan, Rian Malan's ancestor, constitutes the beginning of the memoir, when Malan recounts how Dawid ran away from Cape Town society to live with a black

woman named Sara, an act almost unheard of in 1788. Twenty-seven years later, Dawid returned to Cape Town without Sara, espousing a fierce brand of racial hatred. Malan is unable to understand what happened in those years of exile, but the story speaks to him of South Africa's strange history of racism: "It seems to me, looking back on history, that all of South Africa's agony is rooted in Dawid Malan's ancient act of self-blinding" (28). In traveling to Msinga, then, Rian Malan already endows the Alcocks, and their story, with a mythical presence that can counteract the hatred and violence the rest of the memoir has chronicled thus far. Yet, the narrative template is one that strangely repeats the imperial framework, as Dawid Malan, Neil Alcock, and Creina Alcock become the protagonists in tales of whites whose "love" for black Africans goes wrong.

As Glen Retief rightly points out, Malan's final section plays out some of the themes from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, albeit with a different ending, as black South Africans are shown to be incomprehensible, violent, and unworthy of narrative voice. Indeed, one of Malan's final sections is preceded by an epigraph from Conrad about arriving in the heart of darkness.⁶⁷ In marrying an imperial novel—even one as debated as Conrad's—with a contemporary account of racial violence, Malan effectively decontextualizes the violence he narrates, making the story about a legible form of violence between whites and blacks by using the generic conventions that have long defined Africa for Western reading audiences.⁶⁸ Retief aptly describes the implications of

⁶⁷ "We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there" (Malan 394; Conrad 35).

⁶⁸ Taiwo Osinubi claims that Malan reveals the complexities of coming to terms with apartheid violence by "exploiting narrative conventions that otherwise remain in tune with dominant circuits of transmission and cultural traffic" (123). But the question remains as to why Malan effectively denies cultural agency to black South Africans by using a particularly imperial narrative to do this work.

ending the narrative with Creina Alcock's pronouncements of love for Africa and Africans:

[T]he triumph of the Alcocks' love is exactly that—a triumph of *their* love in bringing them acceptance in Africa, not a real mutual victory of everyone together against the evil in the human heart. In *My Traitor's Heart*, the only choices that matter are those of white people: to love or hate, to be transformed by Africa or not be transformed. Black South Africans, unfortunately, remain the objects of this existential dilemma, to be reformed by miraculous love or repressed by old-style iron-fistedness. (242, emphasis original)

As Retief implies, the book's final section is troubling because of the kind of white collectivity that it theorizes. If the predominant mode of belonging as a white African is "the law of Dawid Malan," the alternative he presents from Creina Alcock is still premised upon a certain amount of distance from an unchanging black South Africa. Like Conrad's Marlow, Malan travels into an Africa in which time and history cease.

This is not to claim that Malan is ignorant of his historical circumstances. Rather, his presentation of Neil and Creina Alcock, by all accounts the memoir's final say on how to live in "this strange place," collapses any historical specificity in service of heavy ethical claims that transform Africa from a place to an idea. Africa, as a space of danger and darkness, fundamentally transforms well-meaning white people into unenlightened barbarians. He begins by transforming Creina's story into his own guiding narrative of South African whiteness, that of Dawid Malan: "It was August 1985, almost two centuries since Dawid Malan crossed the Great Fish River. Like him, Creina entered Africa an enlightened creature. Her head was full of reason and rationality, of D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot. She was a gentle person, moved easily to tears" (406-7). The comparison continues, as Creina briefly succumbs to the inherent violence of the world she lives in, deciding to slaughter her neighbor's cattle after they repeatedly allow it to

graze on her farmland: “She had always tried to love, but now it was time to kill” (407). And with a final, brutal lesson to all whites who claim a love for the African continent, Malan gives his readers the moral of Creina Alcock’s life in South Africa: “If you loved you were vulnerable, and if you were vulnerable you were weak, and if you were weak in Africa, you got fucked, and fucked again, and again, until you could no longer stand it” (408). Her very personal difficulties living and working in Msinga become a parable about white African belonging and inscrutable, unchanging black brutality, where one commits to either exterminating all the brutes or fostering a willingness to love. Either way, there seems little “hope of reconciliation [...] in such a place” (365). Creina’s failure to forge a unity between black and white South Africans is hardly surprising, as she undertakes this task during apartheid. But Malan’s omission of these specifics in service of claims about Africa in general take his narrative approach in the Hammerman section to its most extreme. Rather than suggest alternatives to apartheid as the framework for interpreting South African violence, Malan’s emphasis on inter-cultural uncertainty now becomes the only valid mode of interpreting race relations for the continent as a whole. Creina’s white liberalism is something that Malan clearly admires. But what makes her good—the desire to understand and work across racial lines—is also, Malan suggests, what makes her stupid and vulnerable. This particular project is seen as futile, but generically so. Malan claims that it is an African failure, not one specific to the Alcocks, Msinga or even South Africa. By stretching his moral about cultural untranslatability to the entire continent, Malan can narrate an African memoir of conflict that appeals to the Western reading taste for the exotic and bizarre.

In the concluding pages of the memoir, Malan expands upon his understanding of himself and the book he has written, which is decidedly not the family history he originally proposed to write: “So I threw away the book that was to be and set out to confront this thing in a place where I knew it lay—in myself. I have told you several murder stories, but the true subject of this narrative has been the divided state of my own heart” (412). This post-imperial white identity crisis is common to all of the white writers in this chapter, and while all of these authors have navigated the global demand for this genre, Malan seems to have particularly embraced his role as a public personality and emblem of postcolonial African whiteness.⁶⁹ As a version of the yearning witness narrative I have charted here, *My Traitor’s Heart* is certainly the least resistant to older, more globally accepted narratives of unchanging black African violence, and the text trades in these stock descriptions frequently. Problematically, the book is also a globally influential narrative of apartheid, as it appeared “at a point when the western world want[ed] to hear about this riddle-filled South Africa, a South Africa that is both suicidal and yet full of the paradoxes that make it familiar to any Western country” (Fish 101). As Patrick Fish has it, the world desires to hear exactly the fraught story of South Africa that Malan delivers as the other side to the narrative of the rainbow nation’s emergence.⁷⁰ To

⁶⁹ Indeed, Malan is often seen as an authority on African politics in general, even if his stances on some of Africa’s most controversial issues are idiosyncratic, at best. In his review of *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*, Malan’s collection of journalism, Tim Adams claims: “Most great journalists are contrarians of one kind or another, but it would be hard to find a writer more heroically committed to that particular archetype than the 58-year-old Malan. Thus, in the name of truth, he makes the case for FW de Klerk as the true hero of 1994 and he dwells on the flaws in character and policy of Nelson Mandela; he devotes several years to disproving official Aids figures – not to argue them up, but to show them to be wilfully [sic] exaggerated to support UN policy. And along the way he convinces you that he does this not as a political but a journalistic act – he is fated to set the record straight.” See Malan, “F.W. de Klerk” and “Africa isn’t dying of Aids.”

⁷⁰ Laura Chrisman makes a similar argument when analyzes the book cover’s blurbs by Salman Rushdie and John LeCarré. She sees these comments as indicators of the ways that contemporary England builds a post-imperial subject that is characterized “by its superior knowledge of the futility” of “anti-racist transformation” (118-19). Her general argument is that metropolitan publishing blurbs of South African

achieve these in-demand narrative ends, Malan creates a knowing, Western self to ironically and self-consciously negotiate the “howling ambiguities” that haunt his brain (334). One consequence of Malan’s narration, then, is that he foregrounds his own unreliability by repeatedly calling a stable narrative voice into question. In the end, Malan can only speculate about himself: “I am not sure I’m any of the men I have pretended to be” (410). With such repeated presentations of the self at the forefront in this memoir, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand the kind of white self—individual and collective—Malan understands to exist in South Africa, if one exists at all.

Conclusion

The emphasis on meaningful participation in postcolonial Africa through witnessing in these white memoirs of return offers a vital perspective on the forms of belonging available to non-blacks who feel the pull of affiliation with African homelands. In this chapter, I have traced the emergence of a white narrative of return that foregrounds this particular kind of belonging as a yearning witness—as one who feels that desire to belong but remains outside the greater African collective. As narratives of return, these white memoirs do the same cultural work as the diasporic returns examined in other chapters, as they critically reassess the temporalities of Africa in a genre that produces ideas about the continent in highly visible and globalized manner.

The global visibility of these memoirs is one of their defining features, as a global readership has given white journalistic accounts of Africa an implicit narrative authority

books tap into a spirit of “imperial kinship” while allowing readers to feel as though they no longer have “responsibility for South Africa’s oppressive social structure” (116). Chrisman specifically focuses on South Africa as a space in which post-imperial Englishness is negotiated and literature from South Africa as a venue for metropolitan publishing houses to textually frame its former empire and produce national subjectivity.

over African stories. What narratively defines these yearning witnesses is the kind of journalism that combines memoir and witnessed “factual” accounts, a hybridized genre that positions the continent itself as both a contemporary, globally resonant space of affiliation and as a cultural artifact forever stuck in the pre-modern past. In all of these texts, the key terms of journalistic discourse—the quirky vignettes, twists of pathos, the exotic, romantic, and evocative—are endlessly called upon to make sense of what often seems senseless. They are the narrative lifelines that connect each author’s experiences to a global readership’s expectations. They often maintain the status quo, placing Africa as an unchanging artifact of tribal conflict and brutality. In short, these works narratively recolonize stories of black Africans through the tried-and-true tropes of writing on Africa, leaving the narrative import with the dynamic white subject of the memoir. Yet, the witnessed accounts of African conflict hybridized in these texts make the temporalities of conflict new and strange at the same time. The deferred confessions of Fuller and Godwin make the Second Chimurenga a conflict that begins much earlier than 1964 and lingers into the present. The imperial family histories in Hartley and Malan shed light on long colonial histories as precursors to the often-spectacularized violence of contemporary journalism. Conflict that is so often depicted in a vacuum—the Somali civil war, the Rhodesian War, or apartheid racism—is contextualized and made new in these works for a global audience grown used to the tropes of standard journalism. In this sense, the yearning witnesses of white African memoir represent a constituent discourse of modernity, as they both replicate and revise imagined versions of an atavistic African continent.

Conclusion: Literature of Return and the Global Future

Throughout this dissertation, I have traced the temporalization of a continent in narratives of “return” to Africa and how the time and place of transnational belonging is being rewritten. The idea of return, I have argued, is an important critical motif for understanding the place of Africa and particular African locations as modern spaces in the contemporary world; this, despite the almost overwhelming global tendency to think of Africa and Africans as remnants of the past. In this conclusion, I want to consider two moments in which African spaces are considered in temporal terms to question the role of “return” in the future of Africa as a global space.

The first moment is from African-Canadian/Trinidadian Dionne Brand, whose *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001) assesses her experience as a descendant of slaves and the cultural void suggested by the idea of Africa. Brand considers Africa’s place in the diasporic imagination as symbolically placed in the past because of the tragic history of the slave trade: “Very few family stories, few personal stories have survived among the millions of descendants of the trade. Africa is therefore a place strictly of the imagination—what is imagined therefore is a gauzy, elliptical, generalized, vague narrative of a place” (25). Brand’s meditations on slavery and its aftereffects show the psychic distance between contemporary Africans and those in the diaspora, and in this particular passage, that distance is conveyed through time. “Africa”—as “gauzy” and “elliptical”—vaguely signifies a place without time, or at least a place out of step with diaspora time. For Brand, Africa and its place in the world are defined by context, not content, as she does not engage the place itself but its cultural significance for the diaspora. *A Map to the Door of No Return* accounts for the difficult nature of connecting

across the diaspora, when so much of daily life is defined by a real sense of loss, and in her honest portrayal of this state, Brand's foreclosure of diasporic return discourse places Africa in the past as part of a symbolic and painful process.

The second moment I want to consider—a reflection on the process of “return” that I briefly consider in chapter four as part of my discussion of Alexandra Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat*—has entirely different historical and cultural reference points. Fuller is more engaged with Africa as a contemporary space in her work, yet she still positions life there as inherently different from the United States in terms of time. She writes: “It should not be physically possible to get from the banks of the Pepani River to Wyoming in less than two days, because mentally and emotionally it is impossible. The shock is too much, the contrast too raw” (72). While this certainly explains how Fuller herself shifts her attention in journeys between the two locations, her description begs the question of what, exactly, is “too raw” in this contrast. She further suggests that the ease of life in Wyoming, the “push-button life” in the first world, is irreconcilable with the way her parents and K live in Zambia (73). These thoughts on “modern” life in the United States suggests a temporal disparity between the U.S. and Africa, and Fuller makes the very familiar implication that life in Africa is somehow slower and therefore less “modern.” In fact, the part of herself she considers African cannot accommodate the quick convenience of life in the West. Fuller claims, “I disentangled myself from my history, one sticky thread at a time” (73). In short, her history—as one born and raised in Southern Africa, who witnessed the violent creation of Zimbabwe and chronicled the aftereffects of postcolonial warfare on those who participated—is temporally incompatible with the “insultingly frivolous” life of “innocent deluded self-

congratulation that goes with living in such a fat, sweet country [as the United States]” (72). In her movements back and forth, then, Fuller produces a very recognizable vision of African life as temporally behind and experientially slower than the rest of the world, yet the movement itself suggests that—at least for Fuller—Africa and the modern world are thoroughly entangled and somewhat coeval. To be sure, Fuller shows a messy relationship between Africa and the United States, and this particular passage shows how temporally confusing the journey of “return” can truly be—it is a jarring experience to belong to two different temporalities. And part of the lesson of these returns is that, on some level, the temporal disparity is not as it seems.

These two moments—speaking from two historically disparate engagements with the idea of Africa—speak to the global positioning of the continent that “return” enables. Coded as a journey “back,” return can often convey the sense that African locations are more in sync with the past, or—more dangerously—with ancient, traditional, or pre-modern ways of life. Yet, the actual journey of return necessarily means coming to terms with Africa’s contemporariness, as the returnee always encounters an unignorable modernity. When global discourse largely considers Africa to be an historical artifact, then, return becomes a valuable tool for gauging the continent’s role in the global present and future.

However, the more powerful parts of the globe have instilled the sense that Africa remains marginal to the present in political and economic realms. The continent has been disenfranchised in a very real, yet relatively unnoticed way. One need only observe Nigeria’s oil culture—where “Niger Delta communities have suffered the equivalent of an Exxon-Valdez sized spill annually for half a century”—to see that while many African

nations exist in the global world of today, it would be a stretch to say they belong (Nixon 274). The uneven power relations between the oil-consuming nations and the African ones supplying these resources are exercised largely outside the view of global media. In many respects, the narratives of return I examine here attest to the continent's lack of belonging in the world order, even while looking to possible avenues for seeing Africa's coevalness. In the same vein, my suggestion has been that possible alternative ways of knowing African locations are available through these narratives of return. Changing the ways in which Africa is imagined globally—a project that all of these return narratives have done to some extent—opens up different futures for the entire continent. If the global imagination considers cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, citizenship, and witnessing as not only possible but debated and contested in Africa, the possibilities for cultural and economic exchange change drastically. If the entire continent is seen as part of the modern world rather than “one long night of savagery” that remains in the past, future engagements with Africa will be free to engage the continent on equal and more productive grounds (Achebe, “The Novelist” 45).

Throughout these chapters, one of the main ways that this archive of return literature has engaged questions of belonging and rethought potential futures is through extended discussions of the dead and the reborn. While the figure of the revenant stands at the center of my analysis in chapter three, each of this project's key texts in some way uses a version of the revenant to represent pasts that refuse to remain there. In all of these chapters, multiple pasts that have seemingly ended are made to live again and suggestively affect the present.

In the case of Haley and those who adapted his method, specific pasts are continually resurrected as stories that haunt the present day. Haley's own treatment of his family's pre-slave past suggestively condenses many West African cultures in a cosmopolitan vision that looks beyond the United States, and the authors who work within this method—Hartman, Forna, Evans, Oyeyemi, and Awoonor—all make similar (if alternatively directed) moves away from the nation-state towards a complex and international treatment of specific slave- and colonial-centered pasts. Similarly, the narratives of Sierra Leone in chapter two show a historically real moment of mass return as a process for reckoning with contemporary multicultural concerns. Hill and Cheney-Coker both suggest the need to acknowledge the multiple and overlapping histories of Sierra Leone's national narrative as ways of thinking through contemporary belonging between cultures in Canada and Sierra Leone. In bringing this story to the forefront, rather than relegating it to an historical moment in the Age of Revolution, these authors let the Black Loyalists live again in the contemporary world.

The narratives by Forna and Cooper in chapter three both explicitly tackle notions of "revenge," as their personal returns to Sierra Leone and Liberia double those nations' histories of "return." Unlike her fictional return narrative examined in chapter one, Forna's memoir engages Sierra Leone's contemporary Civil War in terms of personal belonging, as she focuses on her own methods of securing a sense of self when the nation can no longer provide feelings of citizenship. Similarly, Cooper engages the long-dead returnee ancestors in her family while trying to piece together her own Liberian narrative after the Civil War. The final chapter rewrites much more contemporary pasts that have either been cycled out of the news or narratively combined

with other postcolonial violence in an undifferentiated mass. The white African authors of these memoirs—Fuller, Godwin, Hartley, and Malan—all work to bring these specific pasts into light, as part of an effort to historicize these moments as well as theorize their own subjectivities as witnesses to violence. In the end, they represent these postcolonial moments of African violence in particularized narratives that suggest longer and more temporally complex visions of postcolonial history than are typically afforded.

Taken as a whole, this particular archive of return literature suggests that African-based pasts—whether historical moments of capture and slavery or very recent postcolonial violence—are not yet over. The thematic revenance highlighted throughout this project underscores this notion of an unending past a past that is alive?, as the distance between pasts and futures are continually negotiated. Time and again, when a past is invoked in these works, the discourse of return makes that past strange and new: pre-slave African cultures are invested with a sense of modernity, historical memory becomes spiritual, national narratives of violence are eerily doubled, and the politics of representation demand a new enunciating position for the witness to trauma. These contemporary returnees forge new narrative and temporal links between African-based collective identification and the experience of modernity.

To conclude, I would like to make a return of my own: to Barack Obama. Rather than reassess his 2009 trip to Ghana, however, I want to draw attention to his return memoir, *Dreams from My Father*. That the United States is currently in the second term of a black president who wrote a version of a return memoir is in itself remarkable and perhaps indicates the degree to which return narratives matter for the contemporary globalized moment. In his first trip to Kenya, after his father's death, Obama attempts to

reconcile his imagined homeland—and the father through which he imagined it—with the people he meets and his experiences there. In a pivotal moment, he reflects on the Kenya of his return, not the vague idea of it he grew up with:

I feel my father's presence as Auma and I walk through the busy street. I see him in the schoolboys who run past us, their lean, black legs moving like piston rods between blue shorts and oversized shoes. I hear him in the laughter of the pair of university students who sip sweet, creamed tea and eat samosas in a dimly lit teahouse. I smell him in the cigarette smoke of the businessman who covers one ear and shouts into a pay phone; in the sweat of the day laborer who loads gravel into a wheelbarrow, his face and bare chest covered with dust. The Old Man's here, I think, although he doesn't say anything to me. He's here, asking me to understand. (323)

The experience Obama describes in this passage steadily moves from affective to affiliative ties with Africa. While he initially presents this connection as sensory, the passage moves to a reasoned attachment to Kenya, one based upon “understanding” rather than the physical sensations of sight, sound, or smell. This moment of reasoned affiliation comes with a more specific knowledge of contemporary Kenya and its culture rather than the generic Africa he imagines before return, and the understanding to which he comes is of a modern Africa that is very much a part of the contemporary world. History and the past clearly matter for his return narrative, but this passage suggests that they point one toward present and future connections to Africa. These pasts are certainly not all Africa has to offer. The literary returns I have mapped here, in fact, suggest that Africa's place in the world is vitally linked to the present and future.

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. "The Novelist as Teacher." *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. New York: Anchor, 1990. 40-46. Print.
- . *Things Fall Apart*. 1959. New York: Anchor, 1994. Print.
- Adams, Russell L. "An Analysis of the Roots Phenomenon in the Context of American Racial Conservatism." *Presence Africaine: Revue Culturelle du Monde Noir/Cultural Review of the Negro World* 116 (1980): 125-140. Print.
- Adams, Tim. Rev. of *The Lion Sleeps Tonight and Other Stories of Africa*, by Rian Malan. *The Observer (UK)* 2 March 2013. Web. 10 April 2013.
- Adejumobi, Said. "Citizenship, Rights, and the Problem of Conflicts and Civil Wars in Africa." *Human Rights Quarterly* 23.1 (2001): 148-70. Web. 28 December 2013.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 2006. Print.
- "African Nova Scotians: in the Age of Slavery and Abolition." *Nova Scotia Archives*. Province of Nova Scotia, 3 January 2006. Web. 13 February 2013.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York: Zone Books, 1999. Print.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.
- . "Spiritual Realism." *The Nation* 3 August 1992: 146-148. Print.
- Armah, Ayi Kwei. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1969. Print.
- . *Fragments*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. Print.
- . *The Healers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1979. Print.
- . *Two Thousand Seasons*. 1976. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1979. Print.
- Armitage, David. *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.
- Awoonor, Kofi N. *Comes the Voyager At Last: A Tale of Return to Africa*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992. Print.
- . *This Earth, My Brother*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1972. Print.

- Baubock, Rainer. "Studying Citizenship Constellations." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36.5 (2010): 847-59. Web. 18 December 2013.
- Baucom, Ian. *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005. Print.
- Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2007. Print.
- Bertinetti, Paolo. "Reality and Magic in Syl Cheney-Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*." *Coterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 1999. 197-207. Print.
- Boehmer, Elleke. "Achebe and His Influence in Some Contemporary African Writing." *Interventions* 11.2 (2009): 141-153. Print.
- Bradshaw, Steve. "Warlord's quest for forgiveness." *BBC World News*. BBC, 26 August 2008. Web. 26 March 2014.
- Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001. Print.
- Brooks, Peter. *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000. Print.
- Brown, Wendy. "Politics without Banisters: Genealogical Politics in Nietzsche and Foucault." *Politics Out of History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001. 91-120. Print.
- . "Subjects of Tolerance: Why We Are Civilized and They Are the Barbarians." *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006. 149-75. Print.
- Calhoun, Craig J. "The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 (2002): 869-97. Print.
- Campbell, James T. *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005*. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Cartwright, Keith. "Reading Roots—from Sunjata to Kunta Kinte and Milkman Dead." *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 43 (1995): 31-51. Print.

- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation. "Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980-1988." April 1999. PDF file.
- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe. "Report on the 1980s Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands." March 1997. PDF file.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000. Print.
- Cheney-Coker, Syl. *Concerto for an Exile: Poems*. London: Heinemann, 1973. Print.
- . *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*. Oxford; Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann, 1990. Print.
- Chennells, Anthony. "Self-representation and national memory: white autobiographies in Zimbabwe." *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture*. Ed. Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac. Harare, Zimbabwe: Weaver, 2005. 131-44. Print.
- Chrisman, Laura. *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003. Print.
- Cole, Teju. "Letter from Nairobi: 'I Will Say It Before Death Comes.'" *Page-Turner Blog*. The New Yorker, 26 Sept. 2013. Web. 1 Nov. 2013.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness: An Aut horitative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. 4th ed. Ed. Paul B. Armstrong. New York: Norton, 2006. Print.
- Cooper, Brenda. "Cultural Identity, Cultural Studies in Africa and the Representation of the Middle Passage." *Transgressing Boundaries: New Directions in the Study of Culture in Africa*. Rondebosch, South Africa; Athens, OH: U of Cape Town P, 1996. 164-183. Print.
- . *Magical Realism in West African Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Cooper, Helene. *The House at Sugar Beach: In Search of a Lost African Childhood*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008. Print.
- Crichton, Michael. *Congo*. New York: Ballantine, 1980. Print.
- da Silva, Tony Simoes. "The Language of Recognition: Carolyn Slaughter and Alexandra Fuller." *The Unsociable Sociability of Women's Lifewriting*. Ed. Anne Collett and Louise D'Arcens. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 204-20. Print.

- . "Narrating a White Africa: Autobiography, race and history." *Third World Quarterly* 26.3 (2005): 471-78. Web. 15 March 2013.
- Degadjor, Mac-Jordan. "Obama in Ghana – A View From Accra." *Accra Conscious Blog*. Accra Conscious Blog, 11 July 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2014.
- Delany, Martin R. "*Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party.*" *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Coloured People of the United States and Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*. New York: Humanity Books, 2004. Print.
- Denning, Michael. *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*. New York: Verso, 2004. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing." *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham UP, 2005. 65-96. Print.
- Dinesen, Isak. *Out of Africa*. 1937. New York: Vintage, 1985. Print.
- Dodgson-Katiyo, Pauline. "In the Enemy's Camp: Women Representing Male Violence in Zimbabwe's Wars." *Shared Waters: Soundings in Postcolonial Literatures*. Ed. Stella Borg Barthet. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009. 61-74. Print.
- Emslie, Rowan. "#184 Satirical posts about how not to write about Africa (and other places and things)." *StuffExpatriateWorkersLike*. StuffExpatriateWorkersLike, 26 Nov. 2012. Web. 29 April 2013.
- Evans, Diana. *26a*. New York: William Morrow, 2005. Print.
- Falconbridge, Anna Maria, Alexander Falconbridge, and Christopher Fyfe. *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone During the Years 1791, 1792, 1793; The Journal of Isaac Dubois*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2000. Print.
- Ferguson, James. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006. Print.
- Fish, Patrick. "Malan, the Movie: The BBC Version of Rian Malan's 'My Traitor's Heart.'" *South African Theater Journal* 5.1 (1991): 98-108. Print.
- Fishbein, Leslie. "Roots: Docudrama and the Interpretation of History." *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1999. 271-295. Print.
- Forna, Aminatta. *Ancestor Stones*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006. Print.

- . *The Devil That Danced on the Water: A Daughter's Quest*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2002. Print.
- Forna, Aminatta, and Valeriu Nicolae. "Memory and Forgetting." *Index on Censorship* 35.2 (2006): 74-81. *MAS Ultra - School Edition*. Web. 19 Dec. 2012.
- Forrest, Joshua B. "Nationalism in Postcolonial States." *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*. Ed. Lowell W. Barrington. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2006. 33-45. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984. 76-100. Print.
- Frey, Sylvia R. *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age*. Princeton UP, 1992. Print.
- Fuller, Alexandra. *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness*. New York: Penguin, 2011. Print.
- . *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood*. New York: Random House, 2003. Print.
- . Interview by Larry Weissman. *Bold Type*. Bold Type, n.d. Web. 25 July 2013.
- . *Scribbling the Cat: Travels with an African Soldier*. New York: Penguin, 2004. Print.
- Fyfe, Christopher. *A History of Sierra Leone*. London: Oxford UP, 1963. Print.
- . *A Short History of Sierra Leone*. London: Longman, 1979. Print.
- Fyle, C. Magbaily. *Historical Dictionary of Sierra Leone: New Edition*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006. Print.
- Gagiano, Annie. "Women Writing Nationhood Differently: Affiliative Critique in Novels by Fornas, Atta, and Farah." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 44.1 (2013): 45-72. Print.
- García Márquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. 1967. New York: Harper and Row, 1970. Print.
- Gberie, Lansana. *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2005. Print.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993. Print.

- Giltz, Michael. "Quibbling with Fuller's *Scribbling*." Rev. of *Scribbling the Cat*, by Alexandra Fuller. *USA Today* 28 June 2004. Web. 22 April 2013.
- Godwin, Peter. *The Fear: Robert Mugabe and the Martyrdom of Zimbabwe*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011. Print.
- . *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1997. Print.
- . *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun: A Memoir of Africa*. New York: Back Bay, 2006. Print.
- Habermas, Jurgen. *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*. Trans. Max Pensky. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001. Print.
- Haley, Alex. Notes and sources. MS.1888, Box 29. University of Tennessee Libraries, Knoxville, Special Collections.
- . *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. New York: Dell, 1977. Print.
- . Search for Roots notes and manuscript chapters. 1978-1979. MS.1888, Box 34. University of Tennessee Libraries, Knoxville, Special Collections.
- Haley, Alex, and David Stevens. *Alex Haley's Queen*. New York: Avon, 1993. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. 392-403. Print.
- Harris, Ashleigh. "Writing Home: Inscriptions of Whiteness/Descriptions of Belonging in White Zimbabwean Memoir/Autobiography." *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture*. Ed. Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac. Harare, Zimbabwe: Weaver, 2005. 103-17. Print.
- Hartley, Aidan. *The Zanzibar Chest: A Story of Life, Love, and Death in Foreign Lands*. New York: Riverhead, 2003. Print.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007. Print.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.
- . *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*. New York: Columbia UP, 2009. Print.
- Heyns, Michiel. "The Whole Country's Truth: Confession and Narrative in Recent White South African Writing." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 46.1 (2000): 42-66. Print.

- Hill, Lawrence. *Any Known Blood*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2008. Print.
- . *Some Great Thing*. Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2009. Print.
- . *Someone Knows My Name*. New York: Norton, 2007. Print.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29.1 (2008): 103-28. Print.
- Hodges, Graham Russell. *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile After the American Revolution*. New York: Garland, 1996. Print.
- Hoffman, Danny. *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011. Print.
- Holsoe, Svend E. "Matilda Newport: The Power of a Liberian Invented Tradition." *Liberian Studies Journal* (2007): 84-93. Web. 29 December 2013.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001. Print.
- Huntzicker, William. "Alex Haley's *Roots*: The Fiction of Fact." *Memory and Myth: The Civil War in Fiction and Film from Uncle Tom's Cabin to Cold Mountain*. Ed. David S. Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Roy Morris, Jr. Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 2007. 269-80. Print.
- Huxley, Elspeth. *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood*. 1959. New York: Penguin, 2000. Print.
- Kakutani, Michiko. Rev. of *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, by Alexandra Fuller. *New York Times* 21 Dec. 2001. Web. 1 March 2013.
- Kandeh, Jimmy. *Coups from Below: Armed Subalterns and State Power in West Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Print.
- Kann, Wendy. *Casting With a Fragile Thread: A Story of Sisters and Africa*. New York: Picador, 2007. Print.
- Kant, Immanuel. "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch." *Political Writings*. Ed. H.S. Reiss. New York: Cambridge UP, 2003. 93-130. Print.
- Keizer, Arlene R. *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery*. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell UP, 2004. Print.

- Krampe, Christian J. "Inserting Trauma into the Canadian Collective Memory: Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* and Selected African-Canadian Poetry." *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* 29.1 (2009): 62–83. Print.
- Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.
- Kymlicka, Will, and Wayne Norman. "Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory." *Ethics* 104.2 (1994): 352-81. Web. 18 December 2013.
- Le Sueur, James Dean. "Alexandra Fuller Interviewed by James Dean Le Sueur." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 22 Sept. 2011. Web. 15 July 2013.
- Malan, Rian. "Africa isn't dying of Aids." *The Spectator (UK)* 13 December 2003. Web. 10 April 2013.
- . "F.W. de Klerk: a hero of our time." *The Spectator (UK)* 3 February 2010. Web. 10 April 2013.
- . *My Traitor's Heart: Blood and Bad Dreams: A South African Explores the Madness in His Country, His Tribe and Himself*. London: Vintage, 1990. Print.
- Marable, Manning. *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*. New York: Penguin, 2011. Kindle ebook file.
- Markham, Beryl. *West With the Night*. 1942. New York: North Point Press, 2001. Print.
- "The Master Chef of Mogadishu." *Unreported World*. Channel 4 (UK). 23 Nov. 2012. Television.
- McClintock, Anne. "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family." *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer 1993): 61-80. Web. 27 March 2014.
- McKoy, Sheila Smith. "'This Unity of Spilt Blood': Tracing Remnant Consciousness in Kofi Awoonor's *Comes the Voyager At Last*." *Research in African Literatures* 33.2 (2002): 194-209. Print.
- Mehta, Uday S. "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion." *Politics and Society* 18.4 (1990): 427-54. Web. 3 February 2014.
- Meredith, Martin. *Born in Africa: The Quest for the Origins of Human Life*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2011. Print.

- Miller, Nancy K. "Memoirs of Return: Saidiya Hartman, Eva Hoffman, and Daniel Mendelsohn in Conversation with Nancy K. Miller." *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*. Ed. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. 107-123. Print.
- Mills, Gary B., and Elizabeth Shown Mills. "Roots and the New Faction: A Legitimate Tool for Clio?" *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89.1 (1981): 3-26. Print.
- Moore, David Chioni. "Revisiting a Silenced Giant – Alex Haley's *Roots*: A Bibliographic Essay, and Research Report on the Haley Archives at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville." *Resources for American Literary Study* 22.2 (1996): 195–249. Print.
- Moore, Jina. "The White Correspondent's Burden: We Need to Tell the Story of Africa Differently." *Boston Review*. Boston Review, 2 Aug. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2013.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. New York: Vintage, 2004. Print.
- Nash, Gary B. *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*. New York: Viking, 2005. Print.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011.
- Nobile, Philip. "Uncovering Roots." *Village Voice* 23 February 1993: 31–38. Print.
- Nussbaum, Martha. "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." *For Love of Country?* Ed. Martha Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen. Boston: Beacon, 2002. 3-20. Print.
- Nyanseor, Siahyonkron. "Putting the Matilda Newport Myth to Rest – Part I." *The Perspective*. ThePerspective.org, 1 December 2003. Web. 29 December 2013.
- . "Putting the Matilda Newport Myth to Rest – Part II." *The Perspective*. ThePerspective.org, 7 January 2004. Web. 29 December 2013.
- Obama, Barack. *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. 1995. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004. Print.
- . "Remarks by the President to the Ghanaian Parliament." *WhiteHouse.gov*. White House Office of the Press Secretary, 11 July 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2014.
- "Obama's Ghana trip sends message across Africa." *CNN.com*. CNN, 10 July 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2014.
- Oliver, Kelly. "Witnessing and Testimony." *parallax* 10.1 (2004): 79-88. Web. 10 March 2014.

- Orbe, Mark P., and Karen E. Strother. "Signifying the Tragic Mulatto: A Semiotic Analysis of *Alex Haley's Queen*." *The Howard Journal of Communications* 7 (1996): 113-126. Print.
- Osinubi, Taiwo Adetunji. "Abusive Narratives: Antjie Krog, Rian Malan, and the Transmission of Violence." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28.1 (2008): 109-23. Web. 1 April 2013.
- Ottaway, Mark. "Tangled Roots: Doubts Raised Over Story of the Big TV Slave Saga." *Sunday Times (London)*. 10 Apr. 1977: 1, 17, 21. Print.
- Oyeyemi, Helen. *The Icarus Girl*. London: Bloomsbury, 2005. Print.
- Pierre, Jemima. *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2013. Print.
- Piot, Charles. "Atlantic Aporias: Africa and Gilroy's Black Atlantic." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.1 (2001): 155-70. Print.
- . *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010. Print.
- Pollack, Sidney, dir. *Out of Africa*. Universal, 1985. Film.
- Pybus, Cassandra. *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty*. Boston: Beacon, 2006. Print.
- Quarles, Benjamin. *The Negro in the American Revolution*. New York: Norton, 1973. Print.
- Raftopoulos, Brian, and A.S. Mlambo, eds. *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Weaver, 2009. Print.
- Retief, Glen. "Heartfelt Horrors: Africa, racial difference and the quest for moral enlightenment in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart*." *Conradiana* 36.3 (2004): 225-43. Web. 1 April 2013.
- Rogers, Douglas. *The Last Resort: A Memoir of Mischief and Mayhem on a Family Farm in Africa*. New York: Broadway, 2010. Print.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1998. Print.
- Sagawa, Jessie. "Projecting History Honestly: An Interview with Lawrence Hill." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Etudes en Littérature Canadienne* 33.1 (2008): 307-322. Print.

- Said, Edward. *The World, The Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983. Print.
- Saunders, Patricia J. "Fugitive Dreams of Diaspora: Conversations with Saidiya Hartman." *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 6.1 (2008): n. pag. Web. 26 Jan. 2013.
- Schama, Simon. *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution*. New York: Ecco, 2006. Print.
- Schramm, Katharina. *African Homecoming: Pan-African Ideology and Contested Heritage*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010. Print.
- Seddon, Deborah. "'The Story That Follows Is True': Secret Stealing and the Habits of Entitlement." *Scrutiny 2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 10.1 (2005): 86-96. Print.
- Sissako, Abderrahmane, dir. *Bamako*. New Yorker Films, 2006. Film.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Rethinking Comparativism." *New Literary History* 40 (2009): 609-26. Web. 6 March. 2014.
- Stiglitz, Joseph E. *Globalization and Its Discontents*. New York: Norton, 2003. Print.
- St John, Lauren. *Rainbow's End: A Memoir of Childhood, War, and an African Farm*. New York: Scribner, 2008. Print.
- Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition." *Multiculturalism*. Ed. Amy Gutmann. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994. 25-73. Print.
- Thornton, John K. "War, the State, and Religious Norms in 'Coromantee' Thought: The Ideology of an African American Nation." *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*. Ed. Robert Blair St. George. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2000. Print. 181-200.
- Virgo, Clement. "Where We Need 'The Book of Negroes'." *Maclean's* 124.8 (2011): 77. Print.
- Wainaina, Binyavanga. "How to Write about Africa." *Granta* 92 (2005): n. pag. Web. 19 Apr. 2013.
- Walker, James W. St. G. *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992. Print.

- Walkowitz, Rebecca. *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006. Print.
- Wenzel, Jennifer. *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009. Print.
- Wieners, Brad. "In and Out of Africa." *San Francisco Review* 21.4 (1996): 30-31, 33. Print.
- Wiley, Bell I., ed. *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869*. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1980. Print.
- Williams, Linda. "Home Sweet Africa: Alex Haley's and TV's *Roots*." *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001. 220-251. Print.
- Wilson, Ellen Gibson. *The Loyal Blacks*. New York: Putnam, 1976. Print.
- Wright, Derek. "Kofi Awoonor, *Comes the Voyager at Last*." *The International Fiction Review* 20.2 (1993): 154-55. Print.
- Wright, Michelle M. "Black in Time: Exploring New Ontologies, New Dimensions, New Epistemologies of the African Diaspora." *Transforming Anthropology* 18.1 (2010): 70-73. Print.
- Wright, Richard. "*Black Power: A Record of Reaction in a Land of Pathos*." *Black Power: Three Books from Exile*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008. Print.
- X, Malcolm, and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine, 1992. Print.
- Yorke, Stephanie. "The Slave Narrative Tradition in Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Etudes en Littérature Canadienne* 35.2 (2010): 129-44. Print.