

Review of **Diaspora & returns in fiction**, edited by Helen Cousins and Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo, *African Literature Today* 34, Suffolk, James Currey, 2016, 255 pp., ISBN 978-1-84701-148-0

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African Literature Today is a journal with a very specific format: it is published once a year in book form and it devotes each of its yearly issues to a particular theme. The 34th annual volume of this periodical, entitled *Diaspora & Returns in Fiction*, focuses on how the complex issue of return is addressed in novels from Africa or its diaspora. Guest edited by Helen Cousins and Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo, this volume comprises ten articles plus an editorial and an interview, which cover an impressive range of writers hailing from such countries as Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Zimbabwe, and Britain. The contributors to this Special Issue, six of whom work in African universities, provide a comprehensive coverage of what remains a major preoccupation of contemporary African fiction: the links binding African migrants to their homeland, especially from the perspective of a real, potential, or impossible journey back to the country where they – or, in the case of Black British writers, their parents – were born.

In their editorial, Cousins and Dodgson-Katiyo acknowledge the continued pervasiveness of the topic of return in African literature, while also considering the developments that this theme has witnessed over the years and the essential questions that it raises, not only regarding the tensions between tradition and modernity, but also about what qualifies as an African novel. In their conclusion, they note the great variety of returnee narratives, which makes it necessary to explore “precisely what ‘return’ and its associated term ‘home’ mean in contemporary times, and as expressed through fiction” (9–10). This is exactly what the contributors to *Diaspora & Returns in Fiction* do.

The first two essays deal with Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragments*. The first focuses on return as a “complex process” (13) involving alienation while the second examines the temporality of waiting at the heart of Armah’s text. The third contribution analyses Syl Cheney-Coker’s *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, a novel about the return of Black Loyalists to Africa, viewed in not only its physical but also its spiritual dimensions. A character from Nuruddin Farah’s *Links and Crossbones* is at the centre of the next article, which explores the particular connections between Somalia and its diaspora. The focus of the following two articles is not so much the return of migrants but the impossibility of ever going back to their

homeplace, respectively addressed through a discussion of Benjamin Kwakye's *The Other Crucifix* and Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. Pede Hollist's *So the Path Does Not Die* is at the centre of the next two pieces. The first studies the links between return and repetition while the second, which also covers Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, highlights the positive outcomes of return for the returnees' home societies. The eighth article looks at a series of affirmative Bildungsromane by Gambian writers with didactic intentions, while the ninth considers how the notion of home is constituted for characters stuck between England and Nigeria in fictions by Diana Evans, Bernardine Evaristo, and Helen Oyeyemi. The volume closes with an interview with Tendai Huchu, zooming in on the meaning of Zimbabweanness in the context of diaspora.

This rich, wide-ranging Special Issue leaves no doubt as to the significance of its central theme, which should be of great value to any scholars interested in African writing.